

THE TIME HAS COME TO DO SOMETHING

I shall relate a bit of history.

When the Spanish “discovered” us five hundred years ago, the estimated population on the Island was no more than 200,000 inhabitants who were living in harmony with nature. Their main sources of food came from the rivers, lakes and seas rich in protein; they were also carrying out a rudimentary form of agriculture that supplied them with calories, vitamins, mineral salts and fibre.

In some regions of Cuba they still have the custom of making “casabe”, a kind of bread made from casaba. Certain fruits and small wild animals rounded off their diets. They used to concoct a beverage with fermented products and they brought to world culture the rather unhealthy habit of smoking.

The current population of Cuba is possibly 60 times greater than the one existing then. Although the Spanish mixed with the native population, they practically exterminated them by making them work in the fields as semi-slaves and by the search for gold in the river sands.

The native population was replaced by the importing of Africans captured by force and enslaved, a cruel practice that was applied during centuries.

Of great importance for our existence were the eating habits that were created. We were turned into consumers of pork, beef, lamb, milk, cheese and other by-products; wheat, oats, barley, chickpeas, kidney beans, peas and other legumes coming from different climates.

Originally we had corn and sugar cane was introduced among the calorie-rich plants.

Coffee was brought in by the conquistadors from Africa; cacao was possibly brought from Mexico. Both of these, along with sugar, tobacco and other tropical products became enormous sources of resources for the metropolis after the slave rebellion in Haiti that occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The slave-based production system lasted in fact until the transfer of Cuban sovereignty by Spanish colonialism to the United States, in a bloody and extraordinary war where Spain had been defeated by the Cubans.

When the Revolution triumphed in 1959, our island was a true Yankee colony. The United States had duped and disarmed our Liberation Army. One couldn't speak of developed agriculture, but of immense plantations exploited on the base of manual and animal labour that in general used neither fertilizers nor machinery. The great sugar mills belonged to the Americans. Several of them had more than one hundred thousand hectares; others were tens of thousands of hectares in size. All together there were more than 150 sugar mills, including those belonging to Cubans; they were working less than four months a year.

The US received Cuban sugar during two great world wars, and had conceded a sales quota on its markets to our country, tied in with commercial commitments and limitations on our agricultural production, despite the fact that sugar was in part produced by them. Other decisive branches of the economy such as the ports and the oil refineries were American property. Their companies possessed huge ships, industrial centres, mines, docks, maritime and rail lines along with public services as vital as the electric and telephone systems.

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For those who want to understand, that's all you need.

In spite of the fact that the necessities of rice, corn, fats, grains and other food production were important, the United States was imposing determinate limits on everything that was in competition with its own domestic production, including the subsidized sugar beet.

Of course, in terms of food production it is a real fact that within the geographical limits of a small, rainy and hurricane-beset tropical country bereft of machinery, dams, irrigation systems and adequate equipment, Cuba could not have the resources, nor did it have the conditions to compete with the American mechanized productions of soy, sunflower, corn, legumes and rice. Some of these, such as wheat and barley could not be grown in our country.

It is a fact that the Cuban Revolution has not enjoyed a moment of peace. The Agrarian Reform had barely been passed, before the five-month mark of the revolutionary triumph had been reached and the programs of sabotage, fires, obstruction and the use of harmful chemical measures were begun against our country. These even came to include pests to attack vital productions and even human health.

By underestimating our people and their decision to fight for their rights and their independence, they committed an error.

Of course, none of us at that time possessed the experience collected during many years; we were taking off from fair ideas and a revolutionary conception. Perhaps the main error of idealism that was committed, was to think that in the world there was a determinate amount of justice and respect for the rights of peoples when, certainly, it didn't exist at all. Nevertheless, the decision to fight wouldn't depend on this.

The first task taking up our efforts was to prepare for the struggle that was coming up.

Experience acquired in the heroic battle against Batista's tyranny showed that the enemy, no matter what his strength, could not defeat the Cuban people.

The country's preparation for the struggle turned into the people's main effort, and it took us to episodes that were as decisive as the battle against the mercenary invasion promoted by the United States in April of 1961, the landing at the Bay of Pigs escorted by the US Marines and Yankee planes.

Unable to resign themselves to the independence and exercise of the sovereign rights of Cuba, the government of that country adopted the decision to invade our territory. The USSR had absolutely nothing to do with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. The Revolution did not assume a socialist nature because of support from the USSR; it was the other way around: support from the USSR was produced by the socialist nature of the Cuban Revolution. To such a degree, that when the USSR disappears, Cuba keeps on being socialist.

By some means, the USSR learned that Kennedy would try to use Cuba with the same method that they had applied in Hungary. That led to the errors committed by Khrushchev in regards to the October Crisis that I saw the need to criticize. But it was not only Khrushchev who made a mistake, so did Kennedy. Cuba had nothing to do with the history of Hungary, and the USSR had nothing to do with the Revolution in Cuba. This was the sole and exclusive fruit of the struggle of our people. Khrushchev merely made the brotherly gesture of sending weapons to Cuba when it was being threatened by the invasion that was organized, trained, armed and transported by the United States. Without the weapons sent to Cuba, our people would have defeated the mercenary forces as it had defeated Batista's army and occupied all the military equipment it possessed: 100,000 weapons. If the direct invasion of the United States against Cuba had occurred, our people would have been fighting right up to the present time against its soldiers, who would surely have had to fight against millions of Latin Americans. The US had committed the greatest mistake in all its history and perhaps the USSR would still be in existence today.

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Hours prior to the invasion, after the cunning attack on our air force bases by US planes painted with Cuban insignia, the socialist nature of our Revolution was declared. The Cuban people fought for socialism in that battle that passed into history as the first victory against imperialism in the Americas.

Ten US presidents have come and gone, the eleventh is now passing through and the Socialist Revolution is standing firm. Also coming and going were all the governments that were accomplices to the crimes of the United States against Cuba, and our Revolution is standing firm. The USSR has disappeared and the Revolution moved forward. It didn't take place with the permission of the United States; instead it is being submitted to a cruel and merciless blockade; with terrorist acts that took the lives or injured thousands of people, whose authors today enjoy total impunity; anti-terrorist Cuban fighters are condemned to life sentences; a so-called Cuban Adjustment Act concedes entry, residence and employment in the United States. Cuba is the only country in the world whose citizens have that privilege, one that is denied to Haitians after the earthquake that killed more than 300,000 persons and the rest of the citizens in the hemisphere, those being persecuted and expelled by the empire. Nevertheless, the Cuban Revolution stands firm.

Cuba is the only country on the planet that cannot be visited by US citizens; but Cuba exists and stands firm, only 90 miles away from the United States, fighting its heroic fight.

We, the Cuban revolutionaries, have committed errors, and we shall go on making mistakes, but never shall we make the mistake of being traitors.

Never have we chosen illegality, lies, demagoguery, duping the people, pretence, hypocrisy, opportunism, bribery, the total lack of ethics, abuses of power, including crime and repugnant tortures which, with obvious albeit doubtlessly worthy exceptions, have characterized the conduct of the presidents of the United States.

At this moment, humankind is facing serious problems without precedent. The worst is that to a large degree the solutions shall depend upon the richest and most developed countries, the countries that shall reach a situation which they are really in no condition to face unless the world they have been trying to mould for their egoistic interests crumbles around them and which inevitably leads to disaster.

I am not speaking about wars, whose risks and consequences have been transmitted by wise and brilliant people, including many Americans.

I am referring to the food crisis originating in the economic facts and the climatic changes that are apparently now irreversible as a consequence of the actions of man, but which, at any rate, human minds are under the obligation to face in a hurry. For years, which was really time lost, the matter was being talked about. But the country which emits the greatest amount of polluting gases in the world, the United States, was regularly ignoring world opinion. Leaving protocol and the other customary stupidities of the men of state in consumer societies to one side, things that the influence of the media usually bewildered them with once they came into power, the reality is that they didn't pay any attention to the matter. An alcoholic, whose problems were widely known, and I don't need to name him, imposed his line of thinking upon the international community.

The problems have suddenly taken shape now, through the phenomena that are being repeated on every continent: heat waves, forest fires, losses of harvests in Russia, with many victims; climate changes in China, excessive rainfalls or droughts, progressive losses of water reserves in the Himalayas threatening India, China, Pakistan and other countries; excessive rainfall in Australia that have flooded almost a million square kilometres; unusually harsh and unseasonable cold waves in Europe that have considerable impact on agriculture; droughts in Canada; unusual cold waves there and in the US; unprecedented rain in Colombia affecting millions of farming land; never-before seen rainfall in Venezuela; catastrophes caused by excessive rain in the great cities of Brazil and droughts in the South. There is practically no region in the world where such events have not taken place.

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Productions of wheat, soya, corn, rice and other numerous grains and legumes that make up the food base of the world – whose population today according to calculations totals almost 6.9 billion inhabitants, now coming close to the new figure of 7 billion, and where more than one billion are suffering from hunger and malnutrition – are being seriously affected by climate changes, creating a very serious problem in the world. When reserves have not been totally recovered or just partially in some items, a serious threat is now creating problems and destabilization in many States.

More than 80 countries, all of them in the Third World, already having difficult problems of their own, are being threatened with real famines.

I shall limit myself to quote these statements and reports, in a summary fashion, which have been published in the last few days:

“The UN is warning about the risk of a new food crisis.

“January 11, 2011 (AFP)”

“‘We are facing a very tense situation’...” FAO corroborates.

“Some 80 countries are facing a shortage of food...”

“The global rate of prices for basic agricultural products (grains, meat, sugar, oleaginous and dairy products) is currently at its highest level since FAO began to use that index rate 20 years ago.”

“UNITED NATIONS, January (IPS),”

“The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), with headquarters in Rome, last week alerted that world prices for rice, wheat, sugar, barley and meat [...] would undergo significant increases in 2011...”

“PARIS, January 10 (Reuters) - President Nicolas Sarkozy of France shall be taking his campaign to confront the high global food prices to Washington this week ...”

“Basel (Switzerland), January 10 (EFE).- The president of the Central European Bank (BCE), Jean Claude Trichet, spokesperson for the governors of the central banks of the Group of 10 (G-10), today cautioned about the strong rise in food prices and the inflationist threat in emerging economies.”

“The World Bank fears a crisis in the price of foods, January 15 (BBC)

“The president of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, told the BBC that the crisis would be deeper than that of 2008.”

“MEXICO DF, January 7 (Reuters)”

“The annual rhythm of inflation for foods has increased threefold in Mexico in November as compared to two months ago...”

“Washington, January 18 (EFE)

“The climate change will aggravate the lack of foods, according to a study.”

“‘Since more than 20 years ago, scientists have been alerting about the impact of climate change, but nothing is changing other than the increase in emissions that cause global warming’, Liliana Hisas, executive director of the US affiliate of this organization told EFE.

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“Osvaldo Canziani, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 and scientific advisor for the report, indicated that ‘in the entire world meteorological episodes and extreme climatic conditions are being recorded, and increases in average surface temperatures are exacerbating the intensity of these episodes’.”

“(Reuters) January 18, Algeria is buying wheat to avoid shortages and unrest.

“The State grain agency of Algeria has bought around 1 million tons of wheat in the last two weeks to avoid shortages in the case of unrest, a Ministry of Agriculture source informed Reuters.

“(Reuters) January 18, Wheat shows a strong gain in Chicago after Algerian purchases.”

“The Economist, January 18, 2011

“World alert due to food prices”

“Among the main causes are the floods and droughts caused by climatic changes, the use of foods to manufacture bio-fuels and speculation in commodities prices.”

The problems are dramatically serious. However, all is not lost.

Current calculated wheat production reached almost 650 million tons.

That of corn surpasses that amount and nears 770 million tons.

Soy could come close to 260 million tons; of this the US calculates 92 million and Brazil 77 million. They are the two greatest producers.

The general data on grains and legumes available in 2011 are well-known.

The first matter to be resolved by the world community would be to choose between foods and bio-fuels. Brazil, a developing country, shall of course have to be compensated.

If the millions of tons of soy and corn being invested into bio-fuels are routed towards the production of foods, the unusual rise in prices would cease and the world`s scientists would be able to propose formulae that might in some way or other halt and even reverse the situation.

We have lost too much time. The time has come to do something now.

Fidel Castro Ruz
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