

Ideas Cannot be Killed

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There is a fatalist vision circulating among people struggling for democracy in Cuba. Although this is a vision I do not agree with, I would like to dedicate a paragraph to it. This fatalist vision says that freedom will only come to Cuba after the death of the tyrant Fidel Castro.

I would like to remind you that in the 1980s we saw the entire socialist regime of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as unassailable and insurmountable; we saw these regimes as perennial totalitarianism, fortresses of rock. We believed they would be there to stay for ever, as if it were almost eternal.

The problem didn't seem to be whether the socialist regimes would fall, but whether they would fail in their attempts to extend themselves all over the world, and thus terminating freedom. But suddenly they fell disintegrated.

Soviet-style communism collapsed and we almost did not notice it. It was much weaker than we assumed. I am convinced that the same is happening with Castro's regime; convinced that its foundations are much weaker, thinner and more squalid than we are aware of.

One can restrict freedom, one can limit freedom to a minimum, but freedom always escapes. When freedom does escape, it does so with such force that it destroys the walls of any totalitarianism.

To summarize, I hope that we will soon be able to walk in the streets of Havana or Santiago de Cuba and that we will breathe the same air of freedom that we are able to breathe in Prague today.

I have to stress my immense satisfaction to be able to participate in the ICDC Summit in Prague. As one educated in the ideals of freedom, in the philosophy of freedom, I am happy to be part of this great adventure, I am happy to take part in the great challenge to uproot, as former Prime Minister Aznar said, the last despot of the West. That education in the ideas of freedom that I received led to me to question and never to accept any justification of military authoritarianism in Argentina, but it also immunized me against the virus of leftist totalitarianism that, fomented by Castro under the mythical flag of El Che, seized the hearts and minds of an entire generation of Argentine youth during the 1970s.

To justify the guerrilla movements in Argentina simply because they represented the natural right of resistance to the oppression of perfidious military regimes, is at least a distorted vision of history. Montoneros and other groups took up arms during the Peronist government elected in 1973 by an overwhelming majority. They did not fight for democracy, as that idyllic vision wants to teach us now; what they sought was the restoration of the Socialist Homeland. Fidel Castro was its mentor, the person who encouraged and instigated them. Castro militarily prepared and trained many of them in the island. The greatest prize of the Montoneros' kidnappings was the case of the Born brothers, given in custody to Castro, who on the other hand never wanted to return them. Therefore, I have always accused Castro of being the main accomplice in an irony of history, the same Castro who had sent young Argentines to engage in an armed struggle for the enthronement of a socialist utopia, was the one that later saw to it that Cuba, in international forums, voted against condemnations of the Argentine military regimes for their human rights violations.

I have always been conscious of the fact that the Castro regime completely denies, suppresses, and eliminates the fundamental political freedoms of the Cuban people. I am also aware that the regime constantly violates fundamental individual rights and I realized that something needed to be done. I could-n't find a channel for my participation until I established contact with the CADAL foundation, the Center for the Opening of Latin

America (Centro para la Apertura de América Latina), the mentor of which is Gabriel Salvia.

Through this contact we began to present our projects to the Argentinean Parliament. Our projects include protesting against the limitations of the freedom of the press, remembering with pain and grief the tenth anniversary of the sinking of the tugboat on March 13 by Cuban warships that killed almost forty Cubans, and working intensely to collect signatures in order to make our embassy in Cuba open its doors to Cuban dissidents.

Invited by CADAL, I went to Mexico City, and together with other members of the International Parliamentary Committee for the Defense of Cuban Democracy (especially with Mexican parliamentarians), we carried out a symbolic act on behalf of Cuban prisoners of conscience.

In my case, I decide to adopt Ivan Hernandez Carrillo, a man of color who was imprisoned for twenty five years for the terrible sin of expressing his ideas and exercising his right of 'reunion and association.'

In Mexico City I met members of another magnificent association devoted to the promotion of human rights in Cuba and that helps those who bravely defy the Cuban regime, the Directorate. There I came to know the President of the Cuban National Democratic Board (Directorio Nacional Democrático Cubano) Javier de Céspedes. While we were driving in a taxi, he told me about his clandestine visit to Cuba. He remembered that during the last day of his visit he was sitting on a bench under a tree on a square there, and I remember his tears when he was thought back to that occasion.

I noticed that for those of us who love freedom, who love the West, and who love Latin America, there are few causes at this moment in the world as noble as the defense of freedom in Cuba.

When I see these people, Orlando Gutiérrez, Javier de Céspedes, and other exiles, working for freedom, I can't stop remembering other great exiles of my country, Argentina, in the nineteenth century. I see them working and I remember something that former President Havel said. He said that "the most important time is post-Castroism and that it is necessary to prepare for that time."

I remember a great Argentinean exile Juan Bautista Alberdi who, in his exile to Valparaíso, wrote a book called 'The Base and the Starting Points for the Organization of the Republic of Argentina'. This practically, in 1853, became the National Constitution of Argentina that was not only a hymn to freedom but also, as it was prepared from exile, a model of federal development in freedom, which made possible Argentina's fifty or sixty year miracle growth of freedom and prosperity. This is the Argentina that we are missing today.

When I see them working, I also can't stop remembering another great exile, a giant of Argentinean literature and politics, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. While he was in exile in Chile, addressing the tyrant Rosas, he wrote on a rock in the Andean mountains, "you barbarian, ideas cannot be killed!" I believe that what the exiles and all the dissidents in Cuba do everyday is to inscribe in the heart of Castro the above phrase.

Barbarian! Ideas cannot be killed!