

Joining Forces: Mobilizing Political and Intellectual Elites

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I would like to tell you why many of us have become members of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba. The causes are, in this case, multiple, but I want to remind you of two events in my life which were of the kind that stay imprinted in the memory and the heart. The first took place when many of us, including Jaime Trobo, at the time a youth leader, fought the dictatorship, which thankfully was quite brief. This dictatorship prohibited us to speak our minds in our own country, we were not allowed to listen to certain kinds of music, to meet friends, and we experienced life in semi-illegality, arrest and imprisonment. We took heart from hearing any news coming from the outside world, as we thought it meant that somebody on the outside cared about what was going on. Because of this we distributed papers, audio recordings of speeches and public proclamations; we took refuge in party music and history; and despite the fact so much time has passed since, it was the nicest period of our lives as we were all young. For me, the least I could do was to make sure that someone who was far worse off than myself, whose circumstances were far more painful, would know that somebody lit a candle in his name.

All of this is not new. In 1988 we visited a Jewish group in Montevideo in order to ask about Jewish dissidents from the Soviet Union, and I adopted one man named Isaac Latinsky. I was a Senator at the time, so I wrote a letter to Mr. Gorbachev. It seemed that the whole mechanism was quite efficient: when I left the letter at the Embassy television crews were already there, and after a couple of days I received an answer from Mr. Gorbachev's office. The answer was that Mr. Latinsky had left Saint Petersburg with his daughter, who is approximately the same same age as my son Juan Jose. Of course he didn't return to Israel, but rather he went to California. What was important was the fact that he was eventually allowed to leave the place where he had been held against his will. In other words, what we did was the least anybody could do. Therefore we are now united here around Carlos Montaner, the great fighter who educated and mobilized us in relation to the issue of Cuba, through both his own behaviour and his writing.

I am here to speak about the need to mobilize political and intellectual world leaders. Let us not be over-ambitious and concentrate on our own region as we are fighting a system that has gone through many years of leftist communist solidarity. Intellectuals almost everywhere boast about being progressive and they tend to come up with questions that are quite rebellious. This tendency has repeated itself throughout history; that is to say, that a person who has attained a certain level of intellectual reflection thinks freely and also enjoys expressing himself freely. But ever since the installation of the Soviet Union in Russia, the intellectual movement to defend the Soviet Union has become one of the most effective mechanisms to distort public opinion and has, in many aspects, preceded the machinery driven by Goebles. Since 1917 the whole system has had just one goal: the defence of the Bolshevik revolution and the creation of propaganda the communist paradise. Here we are talking of a movement, an organization that is eighty years old. We all have seen this mechanism at work spread through the entire world. It stumbled slightly during the entente between I believe that networks of intellectuals, actors, singers, and journalists are very influential; they can apply subtle pressure, the effects of which cannot be doubted. In our political party, there are popular singers who, to their great detriment, are not being invited to certain events. The fact that they aren't considered part of the officially recognized musicians, results in their not being able to earn a living. They are just as good singers as other official groups, perhaps even better. One may think that this is not important, but Pancho Ponce de León, Carlos Fozatti Suárez de Lima, Eustaquio Sosa, the people who we all know and love cannot

improve their living standards because of these decisions. And this does not only apply to singers of popular music, but rather also affects literary and theatre critics, and those people who attend seminars which are supposed to be the place of opinion-making but at which the participating “intellectuals” are usually ideologically slanted.

The events of 1959, so eloquently recalled by Patricio Aylwin, created a huge shift within this scheme, which, as we all know, works in this way. At the time I was only eighteen, yet the events of that year are still emotional for me: the descent from the Sierra Maestra and the beginning of the so-called Cuban Revolution. This was where all the general enthusiasm arose, but when Castro talks of his Marxism-Leninism, one must remember that it was his voice which cried “defamation!” when accused of being a communist. On the recording he went on to say, “I have been, I am and I will always be a Marxist-Leninist“. But once he took off his mask, since the discovery of his real position and real agenda, everything went back to the same network, and suddenly Cubans were once more exposed. I am recounting this so that we know what we are fighting against: this is history, it is powerful and it still bears fruit.

We shall never see any condemnation of leftist regimes, and if we do see condemnation of right-wing regimes, let us recognise it as such. We must confess that amongst intellectuals and even amongst political parties, a certain kind of double standard is being applied. However, if this is our point of departure, we have to adopt a similar way of doing things. This cannot be done from one day to the next, nor can it be achieved by Our-Fathers or Hail-Marys. What we need are huge investments of money and time, awards and nominations, projects such as Casa America, positive and negative theatre reviews and more. We are at psychological war, we are fighting ideologies of the highest level — professionals who have so far been successful. We must admit this, because it is the point we have to start from.

Of course, this position, so close to the one adopted by Mr. Castro, has provoked a lot of disagreement, because we have only been learning the truth little by little. Believe me, to see and hear the applause that Mr. Castro received in the Argentinean parliament on the day when President Kirchner was inaugurated disappointed us all. Whilst sitting one day with Doctor Sanguinetti, he expressed that the situation makes one feel desperate. When Mr. Castro entered the place into which people are elected in free elections, thanks to proportional representation and a guaranteed right to vote, and when the exact same people who embody these rights gave this relic a standing ovation, it made you realise the enormity of the task ahead because the appeal of this comrade is so huge throughout the entire world. When my wife visited Thailand, one day she entered a small shop, and a portrait of Che Guevara was posted on the wall. She asked the clerk who it was, but the clerk didn't know who, only that it was a hero. What marketing skills! It is a face, painted in two colours only, you just use some paint and it stays forever. Is that now impressive? In Thailand, a clerk did not even know the name of this citizen of Córdoba who has become a Cuban hero, but she did know that he was a hero. We should not underestimate the task that lies ahead.

Jaime Trobo, whose virtues I can mention while he himself cannot, proposed the creation of a joint Commission for Human Rights of the Latin-American Parliament. However, the meeting which was to take place in Havana was eventually not allowed to take place. I believe that this is the type of activity in which we need to engage ourselves in addition to those amongst intellectuals, writers and journalists. It will be difficult, but I believe in the denunciation of the double standard, because even to the most naive of people it must seem strange if someone takes two opposing Our party's (the National Party) position has remained the same: to always act in accordance with our tradition of non-intervention and with our tradition of respect toward sovereignty. Nevertheless, our party has taken the position of supporting Cuban dissidents. Together with Mr. Trobo, MP, we have introduced the decisions agreed upon in the ICDC Summit in September to our party and we shall try to introduce them for discussion in Congress and Senate. To be honest, we must admit that the position of the United States rarely helps the intellectual world. That is to say that Fidel Castro has been very good at using the anti-Americanism which, coming from the very South of the continent, we do not share but which we nevertheless understand. For a citizen of Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic or Guatemala, this is a question of great intensity, and Fidel Castro knows how to use these feelings. That is why we consider the embargo a mistake; if it is not altogether a mistake, it is an approach that hasn't had any results for forty years and that therefore should be changed. Our party is planning the presentation of Raul Rivera's book in Montevideo. The presentation itself is an important event, as it is very important that we can introduce someone who

has honestly spoken his mind. There are people who are never going to be honest to themselves, but if we succeed in reducing this number, I believe that we will fulfil the task given to — and happily received by — us at the September ICDC Summit.

Events such as the Ibero-American Summit (November 2004) and the Prague ICDC Summit (September 2004) provide us with the attention of the television, the news and the direct attention of the people. In my opinion, we must take advantage of such opportunities. For some of us, at certain periods of our lives, when we wanted to vote we were denied the possibility. Yet we know that in the end we succeeded to cast our votes thanks to courage and great sacrifice, as well as the assistance of public opinion. We want to see free elections take place in Cuba, and we are going to see them. We do not want to wait a long time in order to see a new Cuban President elected by the people and his or her party (or political faction) identification is not important. It is not this which concerns us, rather it is the Cuban people. We have enough work to do concerning our own internal political situation before we begin to worry about others. On the other hand, we do want to live long enough to see and greet someone other than the “comandante” as “Mr. President” in Havana. Viva Cuba Libre!

