

### CUBA'S SELF-CRITICISM

The National Directorate of the UJC (Communist Youth League) agreed to communicate the following measure as it was concluding its strategy: "Last Saturday, July 7, the National Bureau of the Communist Youth decided to tighten up the plan for the mobilization of forces of the Student Work Brigades (BET), guided by the principle of using students for tasks of a social and recreational nature, in numbers adjusted to a necessary minimum and within municipalities where they reside, in order to avoid relying on transportation.

"That decision was discussed on the same day with the National General Staff of the BET, made up of student organizations and bodies belonging to the Central State Administration, and also with the directorates of the Communist Youth in all the provinces.

"The idea of making a more rational use of the mobilized forces was emphasized; also, saving material resources, especially fuel, and the fact that the students should be using their time consolidating their knowledge, incorporating reading habits and discussing subjects of great importance.

"As a result of the decisions adopted, only 200,000 of the originally planned 600,000 students will be mobilized in July and August. Mobilizations to the agricultural fields or schools in the countryside will not take place, since their locations imply the use of transportation and other logistical services.

"This year the call will be made for only 7 days of work related to the tasks included in the Energy Revolution, together with the social workers, such as training the community to improve their energy saving habits, delivering the domestic appliances that have not been distributed, and visiting a number of families who, having received and taken on the pertinent obligations, have yet to complete their payments.

"They will also be participating in the Anti-Mosquito Campaign in order to prevent a return of dengue fever, and in primary and secondary health care, supporting polyclinics and hospitals.

"Promoting cultural, recreational and sports activities in the communities will be another of the tasks occupying the members of the Student Work Brigades.

"The UJC will promote study and discussion among the mobilized young people and among the rest of the youth."

I can certainly congratulate the National Directorate of the Communist Youth League, and also the people in charge of the Organization and Ideology Departments of the Party who were consulted about this and who wholeheartedly supported this measure.

Physical labor on its own does not generate conscience. Every worker is different. Their temperament, their physique, their spirit, the kind of work they do, the toughness of their work, the conditions under which they labor -under a scorching sun or in an air-conditioned room-, whether it is piecework or is salaried, whether the worker is disciplined or not, whether they have command of all their mental capacities or suffer from some disability, the schools they attended, teachers they had, whether the activity is a professional one or not, whether the worker is from the country or from the city. Something else very important: whether the worker handles or distributes goods or services of some kind, who the bosses are, what image they project, how they speak, the way they look at things. I could fill pages

talking about the individual differences of every worker. Therefore, what the people in our country need most is knowledge, if what we want to do is create conscience.

Martí's precept about the importance of linking education and work in the formation of man, led us in the past to promote the participation of university students and even students from the middle level education in physical labor. At first, this was an inescapable necessity. We had to fill the vacuum left by those who abandoned the sugar cane fields en masse as soon as other work opportunities appeared. The average level of knowledge was very low, even after the literacy campaign, the massive surge in primary education and later at the junior high school level. Our youth understood this and contributed their efforts with discipline and enthusiasm.

Nowadays we have taken higher education to the masses, beginning with the physicians and educators and continuing with the social workers, those in the field of computer science, the art instructors, in the universalization of university courses for a wide variety of degree courses. We have to make the brain cells work if we want to build consciences, so necessary in today's complex world.

The purpose of studying for one or two weeks, and this year it will only be for 7 days, with proper materials that will be supplied, will generate a feeling of satisfaction in time well spent and the conscience that our society urgently needs.

Throughout the entire year we must keep ourselves informed about essential matters and about the details of what is happening in Cuba and in the rest of the world.

On specific economic matters, I think that in every country, most people are unaware of everything. It is inescapable to know why the cost of oil is climbing; last Monday the price reached 77 dollars a barrel. Why the prices of foods are increasing, such as wheat and others which must be imported because of climate related problems; if the cause of their increase is permanent or short-lived.

Not all workers receive the incentive of convertible pesos, a practice that became generalized in a large number of companies during the Special Period, without always fulfilling the minimum committed requirements. Not everybody receives convertible currency from abroad, something which is not illegal but which at times creates irritating inequalities and privileges in a country that does its utmost to supply vital services free of charge to the entire population. I do not mention the juicy profits being made by those who transport people clandestinely, nor the way they would fool us by changing the US bills into other currencies in order to avoid our response measures against the dollar.

The real and visible lack of equality and the lack of pertinent information gives way to critical opinions, especially in the neediest sectors.

In Cuba, without a doubt, those who some way or another receive convertible pesos –even though in these cases the sums are limited –or those receiving currency from abroad, also acquire free essential social services, food, medicines and other goods at extremely low subsidized prices. However we are strictly fulfilling our financial obligations precisely because we are not a consumer society. We need serious, brave and conscientious managers.

Those using up gasoline all over the place with our current fleet of vehicles of all kinds; those who forget that the prices of food increase sharply and that raw materials for agriculture and industry, many of whose products are distributed to all at subsidized prices, must be acquired at market prices; those that forget that the country has the sacred duty to struggle until our last drop of blood and must spend money for raw materials and defensive measures faced with an enemy who is permanently on guard, they can compromise the independence and life of Cuba. We cannot fool around with that!

I was horrified when a few days ago I heard a distinguished bureaucrat exclaim on TV that now that the Special Period was over, we would be sending more and more delegations each year to such and such activities.

Where did this genius come from? I wondered. Perhaps it is a donation sent us by Sancho Panza from his Isle of Barataria.

In Cuba, the Special Period has abated; but the world has fallen prey to a very special period, and we must wait to see how it will come out in the end. Billions of dollars are wasted in fuel. Not just as professional wastrels, that's a natural tendency, but also out of necessity to exchange thousands of ancient Soviet motors, from a time when there was gasoline aplenty, for Chinese motors that are very thrifty and have reasonable credit facilities. This program has fallen behind.

In the world economy, metals, just like oil, rise above their historical parameters, but they also plummet abruptly.

Of course, no one can remedy, in a short time, the need for oil in personal and public transportation and for agricultural or construction equipment. In developed countries everything is mechanized. Travelers describe how they see building after building, of all kinds, rising up, and that the pace does not stop, day or night. Cities are becoming gigantic. There are constantly more millions of people who need drinking water, vegetables, fruits and protein foods that have had to be produced and supplied by others often after traversing great distances. Furthermore, they need highways with three or four lanes in both directions, bridges, expensive works of engineering. The least of accidents, a simple sideways brush between two vehicles, will paralyze everything. Public expenditures are greater every day and development assistance has decreased.

Worst of all, for every thousand people there are more than 500 private automobiles. In the United States that number reaches almost a thousand. People live or work at great distances. Everybody has their own garage. Every workplace has its own parking lot. There are not enough oil refineries. Many of them need to be expanded and also new plants must be constructed. The raw material for a refinery is oil; the heavier it is the more we need and for a long time now there have been no great oilfields of light oil coming to light. A strike in Nigeria, the war in Iraq, the threats to Iran, the old political conflicts in Europe, a tidal wave, a hurricane, all of these send prices sky high. The old and the new big consumers are always demanding more millions of barrels per day. Of course, new nuclear plants are growing at the same time. I am not discussing now the environmental or climate effects or dangers, but the uncertainties that they unleash upon the real economy.

After spending a mountain of gold to destroy Vietnam, Nixon replaced gold with paper bills, with hardly anyone noticing the consequences. The United States' technological development was such, as was its capacity to produce industrial and agricultural merchandise, especially its enormous military powerhouse, that the replacement of gold by paper did not constitute a tragedy. Inflation of more than 10 % was produced, and it was controlled. This was followed by the United States military build-up voted in with papers, at the end of the Cold War, and the victory of the consumer society which dazzles nations with its orgy of apparent wellbeing. The empire acquired a large part of the world's wealth with paper, imposing their United States laws there, scorning the sovereignty of nations.

The dollar went along progressively losing its value until it reached less than 6 percent of what its value had been in the 70's. Experts are puzzled about the new phenomena. Nobody is sure about what is going to happen.

Do we have reasons to delve more deeply into these subjects, or not?

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