

The Secret Summit

Neither represented nor excommunicated, only today could I learn what was discussed at the Summit of Port of Spain. They led us all to entertain hopes that the meeting would not be secret, but those running the show deprived us of such an interesting intellectual exercise. We shall get to know the substance but not the tone of voice, the look in the eyes or the facial look that can be a reflection of a person's ideas, ethic and character. A Secret Summit is worse than a silent movie. For a few minutes the television showed some images. There was a gentleman on Obama's left whom I could not identify clearly as he laid his hand on Obama's shoulder, like an eight-year-old boy on a classmate in the front row. Then, another member of his entourage standing beside him interrupted the president of the United States for a dialogue; those coming up to address him had the appearance of an oligarchy that never knew what hunger is and who expect to find in Obama's powerful nation the shield that will protect the system from the fearsome social changes.

Up to that moment, a bizarre atmosphere prevailed at the Summit.

The artistic function arranged by the host was really spectacular. I have seldom seen something like it; perhaps never. A good announcer, apparently a Trinitarian, had proudly said that it was unique.

It was a feast of culture and luxury. I meditated about it. I calculated the cost of all that and suddenly I realized that no other country in the Caribbean could afford such a display, that the venue of the summit is very wealthy, a sort of United States surrounded by small poor countries. Could Haiti with its exuberant culture or Jamaica, Granada, Dominica, Guyana, Belize or any other have hosted such a luxurious summit? Their beaches may be wonderful but they are not surrounded by the towers that distinguish the Trinitarian landscape and accumulate with that non-renewable raw material the enormous resources that sustain today the riches of that country. Almost every other island in the Caribbean community located to the north of this is directly battered by the hurricanes of increasing intensity that hit our sister islands of the Caribbean region every year.

Did anyone in that meeting remember that Obama promised to invest as much money as necessary to make the United States self-reliant in fuel? Such a policy would directly affect many of the States taking part in the meeting since they will not have access to the technologies and the huge investments required to work on that area or any other.

Something really impressed me as the summit unfolded until today, Saturday, April 18, at 11:47 a.m. when I am writing these lines: Daniel Ortega's remarks. I had promised myself not to publish anything until next Monday, April 20, but rather to observe the developments in the celebrated summit.

It was not the economist, the scientist, the intellectual or the poet speaking; Daniel did not choose an elaborate language to impress his audience. He spoke as the president of one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere, as a revolutionary combatant, on behalf of a group of Central American nations and the Dominican Republic which is a partner of SICA (Central American Integration System).

It would suffice to be one of the hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans who learned how to read and write in the first stage of the Sandinista Revolution, when the illiteracy rate was reduced from 60 to 12 percent, or again when Daniel received power in 2008 as the illiteracy rate had increased to 35 percent.

His remarks extended for nearly 50 minutes. He spoke slowly and calm, but the reproduction of the full text would make this Reflection too extensive.

I shall summarize his statement using his own words for each of the basic ideas he expressed. I will avoid the use of suspension points and use inverted commas only when Daniel quotes other people or institutions.

Nicaragua appealed to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. It filed a lawsuit against the war policy, the terrorist policy implemented by President Ronald Reagan on behalf of the United States.

Our crime: we had freed ourselves from Anastasio Somoza's tyranny imposed through the intervention of the Yankee troops in Nicaragua.

From the past century, Central America has been shaken by the expansionist policies, the war policies that brought the Central Americans together to defeat them.

These were followed by interventions extending from the year 1912 to 1932, which resulted in the imposition of the Somozas' tyranny equipped, funded and defended by American leaders.

I had the opportunity of meeting President Reagan during the war; we shook hands and I asked him to stop the war against Nicaragua.

I had the opportunity of meeting President Carter and when he told me that "now that the Nicaraguan people had got rid of the Somoza tyranny it was time for Nicaragua to change" I said to him: No, Nicaragua does not have to change, you have to change. Nicaragua has never invaded the United States; Nicaragua has not planted mines in the U.S. harbors; Nicaragua has not thrown a stone against the American nation; Nicaragua has not imposed governments on the United States; you are the ones who should change and not the Nicaraguans.

As the war was still going on, I had the chance to meet the then recently inaugurated President of the United States George Bush, senior. In the year 1989, at a gathering in Costa Rica, we sat facing each other, President Bush and me, and he said: "The press has come here because they want to see a fight between the president of the United States and the president of Nicaragua, and we have made an effort not to oblige them."

Nicaragua was still fighting the war imposed by the United States. The International Court of Justice in The Hague decided on the lawsuit filed by Nicaragua and passed sentence. It clearly stated that "the United States should cease every military action, the mining of the harbors and the funding of the war; that it should indicate where the mines had been planted since it refused to provide that information;" it also ordered the U.S. government to compensate Nicaragua for the trade and economic blockade imposed on that nation.

We are waging a struggle in Nicaragua, Central America and Latin America to eradicate illiteracy with the generous and unconditional solidarity of the fraternal Cuban people, of Fidel who promoted such literacy campaigns in solidarity with our peoples, and of President Raul Castro who has continued these programs for the benefit of all of the Latin American and Caribbean peoples.

Later, the Bolivarian people of Venezuela and its President Hugo Chavez Frias joined in this effort with a generous spirit.

Most of the presidents and heads of government of Latin America and the Caribbean are here today; also the President of the United States and the Primer Minister of Canada. But there are two notable absentees: one is Cuba, whose only crime has been to fight for the peoples' sovereignty and independence; to give solidarity, unconditionally, to our peoples. That's why it is sanctioned, that's why it is punished; that's why it is excluded. That's why I do not feel comfortable today in this Summit; I cannot feel comfortable in this Summit. I am embarrassed to be attending this summit in the absence of Cuba.

Another country is not present here because unlike Cuba, which is an independent and supportive nation, that other people is still submitted to colonialist policies: I mean the fraternal people of Puerto Rico.

We are working to build a great alliance, a great unity of Latin American and Caribbean peoples. The day will come when the Puerto Rican people is also a part of that great alliance.

In the 1950s racial discrimination was institutionalized, it was part of the American way of life, part of the American democracy: black people could not walk into white people's restaurants or white people's bars. The children of black families could not attend the white children schools. In order to turn down the wall of racial discrimination it was necessary --and this President Obama knows better than we do--Martin Luther King, jr, said: "I have a dream." The dream became a reality and the wall of racial discrimination collapsed in the United States of America, thanks to the struggle of that people.

This meeting, this gathering is opening exactly the same day that the invasion of Cuba started in 1961. Talking with the President of Cuba Raul Castro, he gave me some data: "Daniel, President Obama was born on August 4, 1961; he was three and a half months when we attained victory in Playa Giron on April that year. Obviously he is not accountable for that historic event. The bombings on April 15; the proclamation of socialism by Fidel during the funeral of the victims on the 16th; the invasion on the 17th; on the 18th, the battle goes on and victory is attained on the 19th, before 72 hours had passed. Raul." (On his return from Cumana, Raul related to me that in a note he wrote for Daniel he made a quick calculation and was wrong to assert that Obama was three and a half months at the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion, when he should have said that Obama was born three and a half months later; that it was his [Raul's] mistake.)

That is history. In the year 2002, also in the month of April, on the 11th, a coup d'etat was dealt to murder an elected president in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. President Hugo Chavez was seized; the order to murder him had been issued. When the puppet regime took over, the U.S. government through its spokesman recognized the putschers and offered them support. We are right to say that that is not history; such violent events against the institutions of a people, of a progressive, supportive and revolutionary nation took place hardly seven years ago.

I think that the time I'm taking is shorter than the three hours I had to wait at the airport inside the plane.

The freedom of expression must apply to the big ones and the little ones: Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic as an associate. The territorial area is 355,617.5 square miles. The population is a little more than 41.7 million.

We are asking that all immigrants in the United States receive the TPS, but the causes of migration are the underdevelopment and poverty of our Central American peoples.

The only way to stop that flow of emigrants to the United States is not building a fence or reinforcing military surveillance along the border.

The United States needs the Central American labor force, as it needs the Mexican labor force. Then, when the supply of that labor force is higher than the demand of the U.S. economy, repressive policies come into play, while funds should be contributed without political strings attached, without the conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund.

We have the ungrateful task of protecting the U.S. borders due to drug abuse.

Just in Nicaragua, the national police impounded over 360 tons of cocaine last year. That, at a market price in the United States, would certainly amount to more than 1 billion dollars.

How much does the United States provide Nicaragua for guarding its borders? It provides 1,200,000 dollars.

It's not fair, it's not equitable, it's not ethical. It is not moral that the G-20 continues to make the great decisions; the time has come for the G-192, that is, for all countries in the United Nations to make them.

Those who have had dealings with the IMF are perfectly aware of what the Fund has meant, of the social, agricultural and productive programs that have been cut off to obtain resources to pay back the debt, a debt imposed by the rules established by global capitalism. It has only been an instrument setting forth and developing colonialist, neocolonialist and imperialist policies from the metropolises.

Mahatma Gandhi, who waged a heroic struggle against England for the independence of India, said that England had used one-fourth of the resources of the planet to reach its current state of development. So, what resources would India need to attain a similar condition? Now, in this 21st century, and since the end of the 20th century, it was not only England but every developed capitalist country that established their hegemony at the expense of the destruction of the planet and the human species, imposing the consumerist patterns of their model.

The only way to save the planet, and the sustainable development of mankind with it, will be to lay the foundations of a new international economic order, a new socio-economic and political model which is truly fair, supportive and democratic.

There is the project known as PETROCARIBE and there is ALBA –most of the Caribbean nations are members of PETROCARIBE, but there are also members of SICA which belong to PETROCARIBE: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Panama.

“The heads of State and Government of Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela, members of ALBA, consider that the draft Declaration of the Fifth Summit of the Americas is insufficient and unacceptable for the following reasons:

(He goes on to read the ALBA Declaration on the document proposed for the Summit of the Americas.)

“It does not respond to the issue of the Global Economic Crisis, even though that is the greatest challenge faced by mankind in decades.

“It unjustifiably excludes Cuba without mentioning the general consensus in the region to condemn the blockade and the attempts to constantly isolate its people and government in a criminal fashion.

“What we are experiencing is a structural and systemic global economic crisis and not just another cyclic crisis.

“The environmental crisis has been caused by capitalism which had subordinated the necessary conditions for life on the planet to the predominance of markets and profits.

To avoid this outcome it is necessary to develop an alternative model to the capitalist system. A system in harmony with our Mother Earth and not one that plunders its natural resources; a system of cultural diversity and not of crushing cultures and imposing cultural values and life styles that have nothing to do with the realities of our countries; a system of peace based on social justice and not on imperialist wars and policies; a system that does not reduce them to simple consumers or merchandise.

Regarding the U.S. blockade on Cuba and the exclusion of this country from the Summit of the Americas, the member countries of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) reiterate the Declaration adopted last December 16, 2008, by all of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on the necessity to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on Cuba by the United States of America, including the implementation of the so-called Helms-

Burton Act, widely known to all.

In my country, Nicaragua, the governments that preceded me strictly enforced the neoliberal policies, that is, from 1990, when the Sandinista Front left the government, until January 10, 2007, when the Sandinista Front returned to government; they enforced them for 16 years.

As the Nicaraguan Revolution triumphed in 1979, it found that the tyrannies and governments that had been imposed and sustained in Nicaragua by the U.S. administrations, the self-defined democratic governments, had left Nicaragua with 60 percent illiteracy.

Our first big battle was to eradicate illiteracy. We undertook that battle and reduced illiteracy to 11.5 or 12 percent. We couldn't go further because we were imposed a war policy by the Reagan administration.

We left the government in 1990 with 12.5 percent illiteracy in the country and on January 2007 we received back the country with 35 percent illiteracy.

This data have not been made up by the government; they have been released by agencies specialized in education and culture.

That is the result of the neoliberalism applied in Nicaragua; the result of privatizations in Nicaragua where healthcare and education were privatized and the poor were left out. For others it was a good change because they amassed fortunes; the model has proven successful to concentrate riches and extend poverty. It is a great concentrator of riches and a great multiplier of poverty and destitution.

It is an ethical problem, a moral problem, and the future lies on it; not only the future of the most impoverished countries --as the five countries of Latin America and the Caribbean I have mentioned--that have little else to lose other than our shackles, if there is not a change of ethics, a change of moral, a change of values that will enable us to be really sustainable.

It is no longer a matter of ideology, it's not a political issue; it's a matter of survival. And this applies to all, from the G-20 to the G-5 who are the most impoverished in Latin America and the Caribbean.

I think that this crisis that is affecting the world today and that is leading to discussions, debates, and to a search for solutions we should approach it bearing in mind that the current development model is no longer possible, no longer sustainable.

The only way to save us all is to change the model.

Thank you, very much.

Daniel's phrases at the opening session of the Summit were like a bell tolling for a centuries-old policy that until a few months ago was applied to the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is 19:58 hours. I have just listened to the words of President Hugo Chavez. Apparently, Venezolana de Television introduced a camera in the "Secret Summit" and carried some of his words. Yesterday we saw him graciously return Obama's gesture as he walked up to greet him, unquestionably a clever gesture of the United States president.

This time Chavez stood up from his chair, walked to Obama's seat at the head of a rectangular hall near Michelle Bachelet, and presented him with the well known book by Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de America Latina*, systematically updated by the author. I simply mentioned the time it was when I listened to him.

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Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.comandanteenjefe.info>)

It is announced that the Summit will be closed tomorrow at noon.

The United States president has been very active. According to press reports he has not only taken part in the plenary session of the Summit but also met with every regional subgroup.

His predecessor went to bed early and slept for many hours. Seemingly, Obama works hard and sleeps little.

Today, the 19th, at 11:57 hours, I don't see anything new. The CNN news channel has no fresh news. The clock struck 12 when the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago stood on the rostrum. I prepare to listen to him, and then I perceive some strange signals. Manning's face looks tense. Later, Obama speaks and takes some questions from the press; I find him gruff although calm. I was surprised that a press conference was organized with several leaders without the participation of any of those who disagreed with the document.

Manning had said before that the document had been elaborated two years back when there was not a deep economic crisis; therefore, the current issues had not been properly examined. Of course, I thought, McCain was not there; surely the OAS, Leonel and the Dominican Republic remembered the name of the military commander of the invaders in 1965 and the 50 thousand troops that occupied the country to prevent the return of Juan Bosch who was not a Marxist-Leninist.

The leaders in the press conference were the Prime Minister of Canada, certainly a rightist and the only one who had been rude to Cuba; Mexican President Felipe Calderon; Martin Torrijos from Panama and, naturally, Patrick Manning. The Caribbean and the two Latin American leaders were respectful to Cuba; none of them attacked it, and they had expressed their opposition to the blockade.

Obama spoke of the United States military power, which could be of assistance in the fight on organized crime, and of the significance of the U.S. market. He also admitted that the programs carried forward by the government of Cuba, such as sending groups of doctors to countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, could be more effective than Washington's military power to gain influence in the region.

We, the Cubans do not do it to gain influence; it's a tradition that was born in Algeria in 1963, when that country was fighting French colonialism, and we have later done likewise in scores of Third World countries.

He was gruff and elusive with regards to the blockade in his interview with the press; but he is already born and he will be 48 years next August 4.

Nine days later, that same month, I will be 83, almost twice his age, but now I have much more time to think. I wish to remind him of a basic ethical principle with respect to Cuba: there is no excuse for any injustice, any crime to last, regardless of time; the cruel blockade on the Cuban people takes lives and causes suffering; it also affects the economy of the nation and limits its possibilities to cooperate with healthcare, education and sports services, with energy saving and with the protection of the environment in many poor countries of the world.

Fidel Castro Ruz

April 19, 2009

2:32 p.m.

Date:

19/04/2009

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Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.comandanteenjefe.info>)

Source URL: <http://www.comandanteenjefe.info/en/articulos/secret-summit?page=0%2C3%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C2%2C0%2C0%2C2>