

## LULA (PART FOUR AND LAST)

I would not like to abuse of the readers patience or the exceptional opportunity Lula offered me to exchange ideas when we met. That is why I said that this will be the fourth and last reflection on his visit.

When I talked to him about Venezuela, he told me: We intend to cooperate with President Chávez. We both have an agreement. Every year I will travel twice to Caracas and he will travel twice to Brazil so that no differences could set in between us; and in case there happens to be any, we could settle it right away. Venezuela doesn't need any money, he said, because it has many resources, but it needs time and infrastructure".

I told him I was very happy to know what his stand was regarding that country, because we were very thankful to that sister nation for the agreements signed that ensured to us a steady supply of fuel.

I cannot forget that, after the coup on April 2002, the slogan upheld by those who ousted the government was: "not a single drop of oil to Cuba any more". We became an additional reason for the imperialism to try to blow up the Venezuelan economy, although that was what they really intended to do since Chávez was sworn in as President over the moribund Constitution of the Fourth Republic, which he legally and democratically transformed into the Fifth Republic later on.

When the price of oil abruptly increased and it became real difficult to buy it, Chávez maintained and even increased our oil supplies. After the signing of the ALBA agreements in Havana on December 14, 2004, these agreements still provide honorable and beneficial conditions for both countries. Almost 40,000 selfless Cuban specialists, most of them doctors, are working in Venezuela. Their knowledge, and particularly their internationalist example, is contributing to training the Venezuelans who will replace them.

I explained to him that Cuba had friendly relations with all Latin American and Caribbean countries, whether right-wing or left-wing. We have been following that policy for long and we will never change it; we are ready to support any action in favor of promoting peace among peoples. This is a thorny and difficult issue, but we will continue to persevere in it.

Lula expressed again his respect and deep love for Cuba and its leaders. He immediately added that he felt proud for what was going on in Latin America and once again reaffirmed that it was here in Havana that we decided to create the Sao Paulo Forum and unite all the Latin American left-wing, which is taking power in almost every country.

This time I reminded him of what Martí taught us about all glories in this world, when he said that all of them fit into a kernel of corn. Lula added: "I tell everybody that in the conversations I had with you, you never gave any advice that would go against what was legal. You always advised me not to make too many enemies at the same time. And that is what's making things move forward."

Almost immediately he added that Brazil, a big country with resources, had to help Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Paraguay.

"I have just visited Central America. Never had a Brazilian President been to a country from that region to discuss cooperation projects."

Then I asked him: "Do you remember, Lula, what I told you at that informal and familiar dinner you

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offered to our delegation the day after your inauguration, on January 2003? None of the children of the poor people who voted for you will ever be an executive of the big state enterprises of Brazil; university studies are here very expensive!"

In this regard, Lula explains the following: "We are building 214 technical and professional schools; we are also building 13 new federal universities and 48 campuses."

I then asked him: "Those will be free of charge, won't they?"

He was quick to respond: "We have created a program and we have already included 460,000 youths from the periphery, poor people who used to attend public schools, so that they could study at the university. The right-wing accused me of trying to lower the level of education; two years after, 14 courses went under scrutiny: the best students were those from the periphery. We are creating another program that includes 18 students as an average, with which the number of university students will be increased to 250,000."

He said to me that Brazil's commercial relations with Latin America were bigger compared to those it had with the United States. I continued to explain to him that we will certainly establish close relations between our two countries, not only as friends, but also as partners in important areas, that I needed to know the thinking of the Brazilian leaders, since we were going to be partners in strategic areas, and as a rule we always lived up to our economic commitments.

We talked about other important issues, the issues on which we agreed and those on which we don't, as tactfully as possible.

I talked to him about several other regions, the Caribbean among them and about the forms of cooperation that we had developed with them.

Lula told me that Brazil should be more proactive towards cooperating with the poorest peoples. He has acquired new responsibilities; Brazil is the richest country in the whole region.

I talked to him, of course, about the climate change, and the little attention paid by a great number of leaders of the industrialized world to this issue.

When I spoke with him on January 15 in the afternoon, I could not make reference to the article that would be published only three days later, written by Stephen Leahy from Toronto. This article announces a new book by Lester Brown called Mobilizing to Save Civilization.

"The crisis is extremely serious and urgent and requires from all nations an effort to mobilize just as was done during World War II (1939-1945)" -wrote Lester Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute, a Washington D.C. based research organization.

"Climate change is happening much faster than scientists expected, and the planet will inevitably suffer a temperature increase of at least two degrees", Brown said to IPS, "which would definitely place us in the danger zone."

"None of the presidential candidates in the US elections" -to be held on the first Tuesday of November-- "has referred to the urgent problem of climate change.

"The greenhouse gas emissions, which are in part responsible for global warming, should be reduced by 80 per cent by the year 2020."

This is a far more ambitious goal as the one suggested by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which in 2007 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize together with former U.S. vice-president Al Gore, who recommended a 25 to 40 per cent reduction of the emission levels of 1990,

according to the cable news.

Brown considers that the data used by the IPCC are outdated, since they were published two years ago. More recent studies indicate that climate change is speeding up, he said.

While he is confident that the IPCC will modify that recommendation in its next report, he pointed out that it would not be released before five or six years. "Too late, we have to act now", Brown reaffirmed.

Brown' Plan B 3.0 recommends some measures to reach an 80 per cent reduction in the emissions, which are strongly based on the efficient use of energy, the use of renewable sources of energy, and the expansion of the planet trees "shield".

"Eolic energy can cover 40 per cent of the world's demand with the installation of 1.5 million new 2 megawatt wind turbines. Although the figure may seem too high, the world manufactures 65 million motorcars every year.

A more efficient lighting system could reduce the world's electricity consumption by 12 per cent.

"In the United States, business and residential buildings account for 40 per cent of carbon emissions. The next step should be to resort to non-polluting electricity generation for heating, cooling, and lighting private homes.

The use of bio-fuels from grains such as corn and soy, are pushing for an increase in the prices of these foodstuffs that may lead to a food scarcity that could be disastrous for the poor peoples of the world.

"The annual addition of 70 million persons to the world's population is concentrated in countries whose water reserves are depleting, wells are going dry, forest areas are reducing, soils are degrading, and grazing lands are turning into deserts.

"Year after year, the number of 'failing states' increases, which constitutes an 'early warning of the fall of a civilization', Brown stated.

"The increase in the price of oil should add to the list of problems. Rich countries will have all they need, while poor countries should reduce consumption.

"Population growth and poverty demand special attention from the developed world.

"Time is our most scarce resource", the famous scientist concluded.

There can be no clearer way to describe the danger that lingers upon humankind.

But that was not the only news published after my meeting with Lula. Hardly two days ago, an editorial published by The New York Times, anathematizing and pulling to pieces the speech delivered by Bush before Congress, expressed this idea on a single line: "Horrible dangers awaits the civilized world".

China, whose territorial area is 87 times our island's, with 117 times more population than Cuba, has just been hit by an unusual cold wave which affected Shanghai, the most developed area, as well as the southern and central regions of that huge country. Authorities report about the emergency broadcast by western international news agencies -AFP, AP, EFE, DPA, and ANSA, among others: "Heavy snows have forced the shutting down of thermo-power stations and the reduction by a half of coal reserves, the main source of energy of the country, which has created a serious energy crisis".

"...in the most affected area -a 7 percent total energy loss- power stations have stopped operating, according to the Energy Commission.

“Ninety stations, which produce an additional 10 per cent thermo-power, could be shut down in the next days if conditions do not improve...”

“Coal reserves have been reduced by more than a half, authorities reported.

“The main problem is transportation. More than half of the existing trains are devoted to the transportation of coal. The paralysis of the railway network has caused many problems, said Wang Zheming, an expert of the State Security Commission.

“Wang remembered that these days coal transportation is facing the competition of passenger’s transportation, since as a result of New Year’s celebrations there is a railway transportation exodus of almost 180 million people in hardly a month.

“For China it is difficult to resort to another source of energy. The ideal source would be natural gas, but reserves are not enough yet, the expert said.”

We should also take into account that in recent months, the Yang-Tze river basin as well as other central and southern areas suffered the worst drought in half a century, which affected hydro-power generation.

“Heavy snows will continue to fall in the next three days,” according to the Chinese Association of Meteorology.

“The whole country has mobilized to cope with the emergency. In the city of Nanjing, 250,000 people were assigned to remove snow from the streets.”

These news refer to “460,000 soldiers from the People’s Liberation Army, deployed in the Chinese provinces, to help millions of people unsheltered who were affected by the lowest temperatures ever recorded in recent times, and to one million law enforcement agents to help re-establish traffic and services.

“The Ministry of Health sent 15,000 doctors to assist the victims.

“In the city of Canton Prime Minister Wen Jiabao addressed a crowd of travelers whose trains were paralyzed.

“An estimated 80 million people have been affected. Damages caused to agriculture and food production are being assessed.”

BBC World reports as follows: “The Chinese government reported that a severe drought led to the most severe drop ever recorded in 142 years of the water level in one part of the Yang-Tze River, the biggest in the country.

“In the port city of Hankou, in the center of the country, water levels decreased by 13.98 m in early January, something which had not been seen since 1866, according to local media.”

The cold wave was approaching Vietnam carrying unusually low temperatures.

Such news will give you an idea of the consequences of climate change, which scientists worry so much about. The two examples I have referred to are revolutionary countries, perfectly well organized, with great human and economic strength, where all resources are immediately put to the service of the people. Here we are not talking about hungry crowds abandoned to their own fate.

On the other hand, a news published by Reuters on January 29 states that “France is planning to modify its bio-fuels consumption policy, due to certain doubts that exist regarding the impact of the so called

“green fuels” on the environment’, as reported on Tuesday by the State Secretary for the Environment.

“France has become one of the biggest bio-fuels manufacturers in Europe, after adopting an ambiguous policy that anticipates in two years the European Union goal of mixing bio-fuels with standard fuels.

“In order to achieve its fuels mixing goals...France established a system of quotas that enjoy reduced tariffs, so that they could be competitive as compared to standard fuels.

“That policy encouraged many companies to invest in this sector and build ethanol and bio-diesel manufacturing plants all over the country”.

All that I have just explained, whose main concepts were already foreseen, is a sum total of recent events. Most certainly, under such circumstances, these events will require Brazil, a country that fortunately has not been affected by these huge climate calamities, to take significant steps in its commercial and investment policy. As from now, its international impact is growing bigger.

Obviously, there are a number of factors that makes the situation of the planet all the more complex. We could list several of them:

1. Growth in the consumption of oil, a non-renewable and polluting product, due to the squandering of consumption societies.
2. Scarcity of food due to several causes, among them, the exponential population and animal growth which turn into increasingly demanded proteins.
3. Overexploitation of the seas and the pollution of marine species due to chemical wastes dumping by industries which are incompatible with life.
4. The macabre idea of turning foodstuffs into fuels for leisure and luxury.
5. Inability of the dominant economic system to make a rational and efficient use of science and technology to combat pests and diseases which attack humans, animals and the crops that feed them. Biotechnology transforms genes, and transnationals manufacture and use their products; they maximize their profits by resorting to publicity, with no guarantees for those who consume such products and depriving those who need them the most from having access to them. Among those products, there are the very new nano-technological molecules –the term is relatively new-- which are disorderly making their way using the same mechanisms.
6. The need to have rational family and society growth plans, away from hegemonic desires or power lust.
7. The almost total absence of education in topics which are decisive for life, even in nations with the highest educational levels.
8. The real dangers posed by mass destruction weapons in the hands of irresponsible people, which were described by The New York Times, one of the most influential newspapers in the United States, as horrifying dangers.

Is there any remedy for these dangers? Yes: knowing them and confronting them. How? These would be purely theoretical answers. Let readers to find those by themselves, specially the youngest boys and girls, as it is usually said now, in order not to appear as discriminating against women. Do not hope to become first a Head of State.

Did or didn't have I several topics to talk about with Lula? It was impossible to talk to him about everything. This way it is easier to discuss the news that arrived after his visit.

I reminded him that I was trying to recover from two accidents: the one in Villa Clara and the illness that came about after my last trip to Argentina.

Almost at the end of his visit he told me: “You are invited to go to Brazil this year”. Thanks, I answered,

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at least in my thoughts I will be there.

Finally he told me: I will tell your comrades and friends in Brazil that you are very well.

We walked together to the exit. The meeting was really worthwhile.

**Fidel Castro Ruz**

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