

A NUCLEAR STRIKE

It is not an overstatement. This is the general expression of many compatriots. It is the impression of the Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General of the Alvaro Lopez Miera, an experienced career soldier, when he saw in the Isla de la Juventud the twisted steel towers, the shattered houses and the devastation everywhere.

"It has been a hard blow; I could not even imagine it," said in a hoarse voice, hurt by the effort but steady and resolute, Ana Isa Delgado, the Party Secretary and President of the Defense Council in that important municipality. "I had never seen anything like it in the fifty years I've lived here!" said an astonished resident. A young soldier getting off an amphibious car shouted: "We shall prove our will to give up our lives for the people!"

In Herradura, Army Corps General Leopoldo Cintra Frias, looking around him at a devastated area, shared his admiration and amazement for the people's courage when he expressed: "This is like a nuclear explosion." He was rather close to witnessing one of these in Southeast Angola, if the South African racists had decided to use on the Cuban-Angolan forces one of seven such bombs they had received from the United States government. However, this was a calculated risk; therefore, the most convenient tactics had been adopted.

Polo was in the area accompanied by Olga Lidia Tapia, Party Secretary and President of the Defense Council in the province, who never doubted for a second the results of the efforts and determination of her compatriots.

I dare say in full honesty that the pictures and film showed on national television on Sunday reminded me of the desolation I saw when I visited Hiroshima, the city that was the victim of the first nuclear strike in August 1945.

There is reason to assert that a hurricane can display a great energy, perhaps equaling thousands of nuclear weapons like those used against the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It would be worthwhile for a Cuban physicist or mathematician to make the relevant calculations and then a comprehensible presentation.

Now the battle consists in feeding the victims of the hurricane. The difficulty is not in reestablishing energy as soon as possible. The problem in the Isla de la Juventud is that out of 16 bakeries, all of them equipped with electric ovens and power generators, only two could be immediately operational; the buildings had been severely damaged. They needed to receive bread or crackers. At the moment, they require an enormous amount of roofing and other material to repair the houses. And the Isla de la Juventud is separated from the main island by the sea. It's not enough to fill up trucks with food and material to send them there.

Our military has sent there specialized personnel in the area of airfields and land and air transportation. Now, thanks to the sets of power generators, the planes can land at the island's airport day and night. It is their mission to help the people while avoiding any wastage of resources, and they will act with the same spirit in the places swept away in Pinar del Rio. Every institution has received their missions; they are all important. But the goods do not come out of the blue and sharing implies making sacrifices. Let's not forget this in a few days.

These adverse events should serve to make us work more efficiently every day and to make a more rational and fair use of every piece of material. We must fight our own shallowness and selfishness. One hundred million dollars mean only nine dollars per capita and we need much more. We need 30 times, 40 times that figure only to alleviate our most basic needs. Such effort shall come from our people's work. Nobody will do it for us.

Obviously, our capacity to disseminate news has multiplied and our educated people have higher schooling levels.

Kcho, the painter, went by plane to the Isla de la Juventud, his birthplace, and from there he sent us a letter about the high moral of his compatriots. I'm quoting several paragraphs:

"Dear Fidel:

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"Since my arrival in the island, when I could see with my own eyes and feel with my entire body what's going on here, I felt it was important to get in touch with Richard to let you know of the appalling situation the special municipality was going through.

"I can't find the words to relate to you what I saw yesterday in the Isla de la Juventud. In my 38 years of life I had never seen anything like it and the people I talked to in my territory had never seen anything worse; it's incredible how their moral is so high...many have lost their homes and most have seen their belongings, beds, mattresses, TV sets, refrigerators, etc. ruined. Most of the population is in this situation. It has been estimated that of the 25 thousand houses in the island --and this isn't yet the final figure-- some 20 thousand have been affected one way or another, and that half of these 20 thousand lack any roofing or have been totally destroyed."

"...the brigade of 52 linemen from Camaguey, which had worked until 3:00 a.m., again resumed their work at 6:30 a.m. and in very high spirit; they are expecting another group of some 60 men who will be coming from Holguin...

"...there are still many problems waiting to be solved, such as houses that were shattered by hurricane Michelle in 2001.

"There are serious problems with foodstuff...At the moment the island is like a prison, precisely because it's an island, even though the flights have been resumed...Money is of no consequence here since there is nothing you can buy with it anywhere.

"At the moment, human solidarity is the most important thing. The people's moral is high but that will not last forever; it will be necessary to solve some things in the next few days. As the energy services are reestablished, it would be necessary to set up information centers where the people can gather to know what's going on in the country and the municipality, or even to listen to music or spend some time together.

"At present, the territory is 'a theater of military operations during a truce', where people are still happy because they could save their lives and not thinking much about having lost their belongings; they are trying to save what's left and adjusting to that new situation but with the passing of days their moral could decline and they could feel depressed.

"...the conditions of the hospital are subhuman and only the will and convictions of revolutionary men and women make it work.

"The people from this island are revolutionary and combative and everybody is working intensively (patients, relatives and medical personnel). The 32 patients requiring hemodialysis --each accompanied by a relative and nurses-- arrived in the capital yesterday at approximately 4:00 p.m.. They had spent 48 hours without treatment but they were still doing well.

"The people here keep their moral high and are happy with the work being done by the corresponding institutions and with the fact that not a human life was lost, neither in Pinar del Rio nor in the Isla de la Juventud or Matanzas.

"I think that much working time and resources will be required for the island to be what it was before, just as if it were a province, because now everything is devastated."

Kcho forwarded with his letter eloquent photos of the devastation. On the envelop he drew the silhouette of the Isla de la Juventud and a Cuban flag fluttering in the wind.

The excellent painters who used to accompany our battles of ideas could now portray the episode and encourage our people in their epic struggle.

Orfilio Pelaez described for us in Granma a hurricane that hit in 1846 with a minimum record pressure of 916 hPa registered by equipment. That happened 162 years ago, when there was no radio, television, movies, Internet and other media which sometimes clash creating chaos in our minds.

The population of Cuba at that time was at least 12 times smaller. Based on slave and endured labor, the country was for a good part of that century a major exporter of sugar and coffee. People did not retire then, life expectancy was much lower, and the diseases of older age were almost unknown, the same as massive education whose development demands so many minds and so much work. The natural resources were abundant. The hurricanes, although damaging, did not cause a national catastrophe, and the climate changes, rather distant, were not even discussed.

On the Granma of today, Tuesday, the same journalist has related the exploits of our people in their efforts to recuperate and to advance in the last few years. As for Rubiera, the scientist, during his tour of Pinar del Rio he observed with great attention to detail, among the ruins of the Meteorology Institute in Paso Real de San Diego, the equipment that measured the speed of the winds registering 212.5 miles

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when it was torn down by strong gusts of wind. It has been announced that he will be taking part in the Roundtable today. He has a theory to explain what happened. On the other hand, Juan Varela has reported on the damages to the largest agricultural farm in Guira de Melena, Provincia Habana. This farm was expected to produce this year about 140,000 tons of root vegetables, green vegetables and grains. In my view, and at the international prices, the losses in terms of work hours, food products, farming and irrigation gear, fuels and other spending can be rated in the millions in that enterprise only. However, the most impressive event, on account of the human drama portrayed, was reported by journalist Alfonso Nacianceno and photographer Juvenal Balan: the odyssey of the five crew members of the Langostero 100 from Batabano in Provincia Habana. These workers had been timely ordered back to port as every other fisherman's boat, but as fate would have it they were delayed. On Saturday, as the hurricane was quickly advancing, communication with them was lost. I had said in two previous reflections: "We're lucky to have a Revolution! No one will be abandoned to their fate."

On Saturday, almost at midnight, I learned of the lack of communication with the fishing boat. Raul had given me news of the situation. He trusted the experience of the fishermen to deal with storms and hurricanes. He told me that at dawn he would be sending the necessary means to find them. The search started as soon as the weather improved; 36 boats, three helicopters and two planes were involved for almost two days. The fishermen's boat was nowhere to be found; however, the castaways were found. They tell an incredible story; those who are familiar with the sea know what it means to spend endless hours grabbing an oar and then a buoy.

The revolutionary miracle happened and the fishermen were rescued.

But we cannot entertain illusions; this hurricane has left behind one hundred thousand houses affected to a higher or lesser degree and the almost complete loss of things necessary after the tragedy, as Kcho has explained in his letter.

How many safe, hurricane-proof houses Cuba needs? No less than 1.5 million houses for 3.5 million people. Let's make the estimate of the international cost of such investments according to the available world data.

A family in Europe must pay at least 100 thousand dollars, plus interests, for which they contribute 700 dollars monthly of their income for 15 years. Ten billion dollars is the approximate cost of 100 thousand houses for an average family in the developed countries, which are the ones who determine the prices of industrial and food products in the world. To this we must add the cost of the affected social facilities that must be rebuilt, the economic facilities and those required for development.

The resources, I repeat, will only come from our labors. While the new generations carry out this task, the men and women living in this country are called upon to display the solidarity, the courage and the fighting spirit shown by the comrades from Pinar del Rio and the Isla de la Juventud.

At this moment, in the second half of the year, the empire is taking a difficult test which involves its capacity to face up to the challenges brought about by its lifestyle at the expense of the rest of the peoples. Now they need to change the skipper.

Bush and Cheney have almost been marginalized from the Republican's campaign for they are considered warmongers and undesirable. What is at stake, though, is not a change of system but rather how to preserve it at a lower cost.

The developed imperialism will end up killing all those who try to enter its territory to become endured laborers and to share in its consumption. It's already doing it. It's huge the chauvinism and egotism generated by that system.

We are aware of that and we shall continue to develop solidarity, our mainstay resource both inside and outside our homeland.

Fidel Castro Ruz

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