

AN EPIPHANY GIFT

The wires made the announcement ahead of time. On January 6th we learned of Bush's trip to the Middle East, just as soon as his very Christian Christmas holiday break was over. He would be going to Muslim territory, lands having a different religion and culture from that of the Europeans, who converted to Christianity, declared war on the infidels, in the 11th century A.D.

The Christians themselves killed each other, both for religious reasons and national interests. It seemed that everything had been overcome by history. Religious beliefs remained that should be respected, the same as their legends and traditions, whether Christian or otherwise. On this side of the Atlantic, as in many parts of the world, children anxiously awaited every 6th of January, gathering enough hay for the camels bringing the Three Wise Men. I also shared in these hopes during the early years of my life, asking those three fortunate Wise Men for the impossible, with the same wishful thinking that some compatriots expect miracles from our determined and dignified Revolution.

I am not physically apt to speak directly to the citizens of the municipality where I was nominated for our elections next Sunday. I do what I can: I write. For me, this is a new experience: writing is not the same as speaking. Today, that I have more time to inform myself and to meditate about what I see, I have barely enough time to write.

One always expects good tidings; bad tidings tend to surprise and demoralize us. Being prepared for the worst is the only way to be prepared for the best.

It seems unreal to see Bush, the conqueror of other peoples' raw materials and energy resources, setting out guidelines for the world careless about how many hundreds of thousands or millions of people die or how many clandestine prisons and torture centers must be created to attain his objectives. "Sixty or more corners of the world" must expect pre-emptive attacks. Let us not shut our eyes; Cuba is one of those dark corners. The head of the empire said that in just so many words and I have warned the international community of this on more than one occasion.

In Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates, a few miles from Iran, AP says that "The President of the United States, George W. Bush said Sunday that Iran is threatening the security of the world, and that the United States and Arab allies must join together to confront the danger before it's too late.

"Bush has accused the Teheran government of funding terrorists, undermining stability in Lebanon, and sending weapons to the Taliban, the Afghan religious militia. He added that Iran is trying to intimidate its neighbors with alarming rhetoric, defying the United Nations and destabilizing the region as a whole by refusing to be open about its nuclear program."

"Iranian actions threaten the security of nations everywhere' Bush said. Therefore, the United States is strengthening our long-range commitments to security with our friends in the Persian Gulf and calling on our friends to confront this danger."

"Bush spoke at the Emirates Palace Hotel, built at a cost of 3 billion dollars, and where a suite costs 2,450 dollars a night. It is one kilometer from end to end and has a 1.3 kilometer white sand beach. According to Steven Pike, spokesman of the US Embassy in the United Arab Emirates, every grain of sand on this beach was imported from Algeria."

The entire world knows that he wants war against Iran, it is his war. Furthermore, he promises that U.S. troops will remain in Iraq for at least 10 more years.

What is worse is that the main candidates of the two parties in line to succeed him are incapable of remedying this. Not one of them dares to even slightly contest this imperial practice, which is based on the excuse of fighting terrorism, an evil engendered by the system itself and its colossal and unsustainable consumerism, while striving for the impossible: sustained growth, full employment and no inflation.

These were not the dreams of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Abraham Lincoln; nor were they the dreams of those great dreamers throughout humanity's turbulent history.

Whoever has the time to read and analyze the news coming in on the Internet, cable and in books, can ascertain the contradictions to which the world has been driven.

In an article run by El País, a widely read Spanish newspaper, the subject of the prices of food and fuel are dealt with. Signed by Paul Kennedy, professor of history and director of International Security Studies at Yale University and one of the country's most influential intellectuals, the article states that "oil is the greatest element of dependency for the United States in terms of external forces."

"By the mid-18th century, Great Britain had the largest shipbuilding industry in the world. Yet, as its yards were launching hundreds if not thousands of sailing ships each year, certain English inventors were creating the magic of the steam engine, which used vast amounts of energy secured in the especially bituminous depots of South Wales. The steam and coal engine carried the British Empire onward for another 150 years."

Later on he indicates the point of view that is most interesting for us: the ever-greater interconnection between oil and foods. The reasons are well-known: the enormous energy demands of the large Asian economies and the inability of the wealthiest countries –the United States, Japan and Europe– to reduce their consumption.

"But global soy bean demand is also spiraling upward, again, chiefly due to the rising consumption in Asia; China's tens of millions of pigs devour an awful amount of soy bean meal in a year. The soy bean futures prices are 80 percent higher this year (December 2007) than last (2006)."

"No one can be certain of that, but the continued increases in overall world population, and the surge in real incomes for more than two billion people over the recent past, will surely translate into ever-greater demand for the world's protein: for more beef, more pork, more chicken, more fish, and thus for more grains to feed them."

The Yale professor might as well have added: more eggs and more milk, since their production requires considerable amounts of fodder. But a little later, he alludes to an article published in The Economist, the main newspaper of European finance, describing it as "highly detailed, impressive and very scary"; it is entitled "The End of Cheap Food". "That magazine began its food-price index way back in 1845. The price index is higher today than in anytime in its entire 162 years."

Brazil, which is now self-reliant in fuel and has abundant reserves, will doubtlessly escape this dilemma. Stretching on a plateau at 300 to 900 meters altitude, it is 77 times bigger than Cuba. This sister republic enjoys 3 different climates. Almost every food can be grown there. It is no hit by tropical hurricanes. Together with Argentina, they could save the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, including Mexico, although they could never guarantee security for them because they are at the mercy of an empire which will not allow that union.

Writing, as many people know, is an instrument of expression that lacks speed, tone and the intonation of spoken language, and it doesn't use gestures. It also takes several times our scarce available time. Writing has the advantage that it can be done at any time, day or night, but one doesn't know who will read it; very few can resist the temptation to improve it, to include what was not said or to cross out

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what was said; sometimes one has the urge to throw it all in the waste basket since you don't have the interlocutor there in front of you. All my life I have transmitted ideas about events as I was seeing them, from the darkest ignorance until today when I have more time available and I have the possibility of observing the crimes being committed against our planet and our species.

To the youngest of our revolutionaries, in particular, I recommend to be extremely demanding with themselves and to observe an iron-clad discipline. They should avoid being ambitious for power, presumptuous or boasters. They should be watchful about bureaucratic methods and mechanisms and avoid succumbing to simple slogans. They should recognize bureaucratic procedure for the worst obstacle they are and use science and computation without falling prey to the excessively technical and unintelligible jargon of the elitist specialists. They should always be hungry for knowledge; and perseverance, and both physical and mental exercises should be part of their lives.

In this new era in which we live, capitalism is not even a useful instrument. It is like a tree with rotten roots, from whence only the worst forms of individualism, corruption and inequality sprout. Nor should we give away anything to those who could be producing and who don't produce, or who produce very little. Reward the merits of those who work with their hands or their minds.

Just as we have universalized higher education, we must also universalize simple physical labor; it helps us to at least carry out a part of the infinite investments demanded by everyone, as if there was an enormous reserve of money and labor force. Be especially wary of those inventing State enterprises with just any excuse and then managing the easy profits as if they had been capitalists all their lives, sowing egoism and privileges.

Until we become aware of such realities, no effort can be made, as Martí would have said, to "timely prevent" that the empire which he saw surging up, living as he did in its entrails, may destroy the future of humanity.

We must be dialectic and creative. There is no other possible alternative.

We are grateful for Bush playing his part as one of the Wise Men, visiting the place where the son of the carpenter Joseph was born, if truly someone knows where the exact spot of that humble crib is, where the Nazarene was born. The leader of the empire bears the gift, this time, of tens of billions of dollars to the Arab countries to buy weapons that come from the industrial-military complex; and at the same time, two dollars for every one supplied to them to arm the state of Israel, where the United Nations agency which tackles the subject assures us that 3.5 million Palestinians have been deprived of their rights or expelled from their territory.

His obsessive instrument is to threaten the world with nuclear war. Only he is capable of bearing this Epiphany Gift.

Fidel Castro Ruz

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