

The tragedy threatening our species



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(Taken from Granma)

I cannot speak as an economist or a scientist. I simply speak as a politician who wishes to unravel the economists' and scientists' arguments one way or another. I also try to sense the motivations of each one of those who make statements on these matters. Just twenty-two years ago, here in Havana, we had a great number of meetings with political, union, peasant and student leaders invited to our country as representatives of these sectors. They all agreed that the most important problem at that time was the enormous foreign debt accumulated by the nations of Latin America in 1985. That debt amounted to 350 billion dollars. The dollar then had a higher purchasing power than it does today.

A copy of the outcome of those meetings was sent to all the world governments, of course with some exceptions, because it might have seemed insulting. At that time, the petrodollars had flooded the market and the large transnational banks were virtually demanding that the countries accept high loans. Needless to say, the people responsible for the economy had taken on those commitments without consulting anybody. That period coincided with the presence of the most repressive and bloody governments this continent has ever suffered, installed by imperialism. Large sums were spent on weapons, luxuries and consumer goods. The subsequent debt grew to 800 billion dollars while today's catastrophic dangers were being hatched, the dangers that weigh upon a population that doubled in just two decades and along with it, the number of those condemned to a life of extreme poverty. Today, in the Latin American region, the difference between the most favored population and the one with the lowest income is the greatest in the world.

Many years before the subjects of today's debates were center stage, the struggles of the Third World focused on equally agonizing problems like the unequal exchange. Year after year it was discovered that the price of the industrialized nations' exports, usually manufactured with our raw materials, would unilaterally grow while our basic exports remained unchanged. The price of coffee and cacao, just to mention two examples, was approximately 2,000 dollars a ton. A cup of coffee or a chocolate milkshake could be bought in cities like New York for a few cents; today, these cost several dollars, perhaps 30 or 40 times what they cost back then. Today, the purchase of a tractor, a truck or medical equipment require several times the volume of products that was needed to import them back then; jute, henequen and other Third World produced fibers that were substituted by synthetic ones succumbed to the same fate. In the meantime, tanned hides, rubber and natural fibers used in many textiles were being replaced by synthetic materials derived from the sophisticated petrochemical industry while sugar prices hit rock bottom, crushed by the large subsidies granted by the industrialized countries to their agricultural sector.

The former colonies or neocolonies that had been promised a glowing future after World War II had not yet awakened from the Bretton Woods dream. From top to bottom, the system had been designed for exploitation and plundering.

When consciousness was beginning to be roused, the other extremely adverse factors had not yet surfaced, such as the undreamed-of squandering of energy that industrialized countries had fallen prey to. They were paying less than two dollars a barrel of oil. The source of fuel, with the exception of the United States where it was very abundant, was basically in Third World countries, chiefly in the Middle East but also in Mexico, Venezuela, and later in Africa. But not all of the countries that by virtue of yet another white lie classified as "developing countries" were oil producers, since 82 of them are among the poorest and as a rule they must import oil. A terrible situation awaits them if food stuffs are to be transformed into biofuels or agrifuels, as the peasant and native movements in our region prefer to call them.

Thirty years ago, the idea of global warming hanging over our species' life like a sword of Damocles was not even known by the immense majority of the inhabitants of our planet; even today there is great ignorance and confusion about these issues. If we listen to the spokesmen of the transnationals and their media, we are living in the best of all possible worlds: an economy ruled by the market, plus transnational capital, plus sophisticated technology equals a constant growth of productivity, higher GDP, higher living standards and every dream of the human species come true; the state should not interfere with anything, it should not even exist, other than as an instrument of the large financial capital.

But reality is hard-headed. Germany, one of the most highly industrialized countries in the world, loses sleep over its 10 percent unemployment. The toughest and least attractive jobs are taken by immigrants who, desperate in their growing poverty, break into industrialized Europe through any possible chink. Apparently, nobody is taking note of the number of inhabitants on our planet, growing precisely in the undeveloped countries.

More than 700 representatives of social organizations have just been meeting in Havana to discuss various issues raised in this reflection. Many of them set out their

points of view and left indelible impressions on us. There is plenty of material to reflect upon as well as new events happening every day.

Even now, as a consequence of liberating a terrorist monster, two young men, who were fulfilling their legal duty in the Active Military Service, anxious to taste consumerism in the United States, hijacked a bus, crashed through one of the doors of the domestic flights terminal at the airport, drove up to a civilian aircraft and got on board with their hostages, demanding to be taken to the United States. A few days earlier, they had killed a soldier, who was standing guard, to steal two automatic weapons, and in the plane they fired four shots that killed a brave officer who, unarmed and held hostage in the bus, had attempted to prevent the plane's hijacking. The impunity and the material gains that have rewarded any violent action against Cuba during the last half-century encourage such events. It had been many months since we had such an incident. All it needed was setting a notorious terrorist free and once again death come calling at our door. The perpetrators have not gone on trial yet because, in the course of events, both were wounded; one of them was shot by the other as he fired inside the plane, while they were struggling with the heroic army officer. Now, many people abroad are waiting for the reaction of our Courts and of the Council of State, while our people here are deeply outraged with these events. We really need a large dose of calmness and sangfroid to confront these problems.

The apocalyptic head of the empire declared more than five years ago that the United States armed forces had to be on the ready to make pre-emptive attacks on 60 or more countries in the world; nothing less than one third of the international community. Apparently, he is not satisfied with the death, the torture and the uprooting of millions of people to seize their natural resources and the product of their labors.

Meanwhile, the impressive international meeting that just concluded in Havana reaffirmed my personal conviction: every evil idea must be submitted to devastating criticism, avoiding any concession.

Fidel Castro Ruz

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