“My bet is on the future”

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The important academician, educator, is absolutely confident that a future Cuba will be better. In his view, the key of our strength relies on the tradition of our thought, the education of the people, and a “youth open to face every challenge”. Before the scenario of the relations between Cuba and the U.S., Torres Cuevas affirms that victory depends “not just on the struggle, but a wise struggle”.

Eduardo Torres Cuevas is a lesson himself. He is the kind of men who believe a dialogue is always a lesson. His thought, his figure, recall those great Cuban educators he always quotes in frequent celebrations. The concern for Cuba converges very much in the minds of Torres Cuevas and his predecessors.

It was the key to open this interview: “Tell us about Cuba”, **Juventud Rebelde** proposed. He agreed in the first try. “Let me see what to answer so it can be newsworthy to **Juventud Rebelde**”, he answered with modesty. And then, I started my long questionnaire, which he devoured “in a minute”.

He heads the National Library Jose Marti since 2007 and we went there. We proposed him an exchange: our questions —which are similar to those other Cuban citizens have— in exchange for his wise answers.

Then, next to the two million documents treasured in our larger library, we just talked about the relations between Cuba and the U.S. in the most natural of ways, as if he were not a Historical

Science Ph., or Numerary Member of the Cuban Academy of the Language, or National Award of History and Social Science and Humanities, or chairman of the Academy of Cuba’s History.

-On December 17th, amid the impact caused by the beginning of normalization of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States, you said the rules of the game change now. But the game does not change. In your view, are Cubans prepared to notice the “new rules”, then play, and win with all of them?

-We are ready to win any game. We are successful veterans in political games. We are now facing something that has been in the agenda of certain liberal sectors of the U.S., seeking to influence Cuba’s development, in one way or another, and to penetrate the Cuban Revolution.

“We are able to face any challenge. And I confirm it because of the general education given to the Cuban people. There are deep cultural roots and deep consciousness of who we are. We have to deal with a different scenario, which means dialogue, not direct confrontation. This is a field of wisdom.”

“This country has graduated more than one million university students and its population is well educated in different areas. Because of our culture and roots, our language to the population is more understandable than others that can be originated from other countries, especially from the U.S.

“Both Cuba and the U.S. enriched their cultures thanks to a relationship of mutual influence since their origins. In that sense, we would take profit of a space in which we could learn more about them, not only in regard to positive things for us, but also in the ins and outs of the American society”.

-Barack Obama is a politician with renewable rhetorical resources. However, he did not hesitate to affirm, two days after the announcements, that he would use “sticks and carrots” to trigger the changes the U.S. wants inside the Cuban society, country, and culture. These are not good words. Isn’t it better to be more cautious?

-Well, there is an old theory regarding the U.S.: the use of apples, and gunboats. If gunboats are not efficient, then they use the apples. And gunboats did work where apples do not. Gunboats have never entered Cuba, but they are reflected in the blockade. It is time now for the apples, which is the policy of slow introduction in the political environment.

“It is nothing new. There was a time where Franklin Delano Roosevelt used the Good Neighbor policy; they were “the good guys”. It is the best way to cause changes from within. It is clear to me that this political change has the same goal, no matter the President. It is Obama today. It was Clinton some years ago and Carter prior to Clinton…all of them with the apples’ theory.

“Our country is ready. We still have the founding fathers of the Revolution. But we also have a young, skilled generation who has lived both, the best and the worst. This young generation suffered the Special Period, which was a tough experience, and young people have grown. Our youth is able to face any challenge in any field of life.

“Obama did nothing else but stating his goals. We cannot forget the target is to destroy the Revolution, change the country and make Cuba manipulable”.

-Almost 200 years after that theory of Cuba being a ripe fruit, we are still here alive near

the powerful neighbor. Would the U.S. mature?

-We cannot forget that the U.S. is a very pragmatic country and that’s their most important philosophical concept —they even dominate Europe thanks to such pragmatism. American policy will always be pragmatic: to move their pieces and think about strategies according to circumstances.

“The real issue is to see what the U.S. interests in Latin America are. We cannot leave out Cuba. The U.S. needs to change its policy if it wants any credibility. I do not see any difference in the final goal, which is to influence Latin America.

-Obama has recognized that the prior policy "has failed." It has not worked for what? What potential would have this "new policy" for their interests? It would seem that, today, Martí would warn "plan against plan."

-Exactly. The statement is not accidental. They have their think tanks and studies. To me, right now there’s some kind of study on the failure and why the failure. Obama does not apply a theory that has not been supported by North American politicians and intellectuals. What really happens is they never could lobby against the blockade. Hence his steps have been taken as an act of political courage.

"I think he will convince many people and even the North American extreme right, and more specifically the Cuban-American will keep their opinion but will appeal to other media. There will be another sort of confrontation, a struggle for influencing in the Cuban public opinion and presenting a new "face" of the United States -not only for Cuba, but for all Latin America showing them as a country capable of dialogue and respect.

"They are political. The conflict with Venezuela is not casual. For historical reasons, they "loosen" the hand on one side and "squeeze" it on the other. Now is Venezuela the target for the "hard" hand and for us the "ripe fruit". The ripe fruit never fell on U.S. territory, but that does not mean they would give up that policy. They may think the problem was they rushed and the fruit was not ripe "yet" therefore what is needed is more time. Maybe they think sprinkling now certain fertilizers it can ripen faster. "

-Doctor, almost everyone applauds the steps undertaken. This piece of news has brought great excitement to the world, but history forces us to keep in Cuba deep-rooted preventions which are worthless elsewhere. If the blockade still exist, if Guantánamo is still there, if counterrevolution is encouraged and there are many pending compensations ... should our struggle wane? What must we do now?

We have witnessed the beginning of a process. Neither political scientists nor historians are futurists; is not easy to tell what will happen and how it will happen, but there are principles that hold no argument: Cuba has fought for its sovereignty, first against the remnants of the Spanish Empire and later when we saw the birth of North America as an empire.

"When I have seen the things that have happened elsewhere, I think it’s very unlikely to happen here, because no one knows better North Americans than Cubans, and no one knows Cubans better than North Americans.

"Our strength lies in keeping what has always endured. Cuba has developed its own thinking for over two and a half centuries which allows us to understand ourselves but it also gives us permanent interchangeable theoretical bases in the field of sciences, politics ... We have a large tradition of thinking, just like they have.

"We have to spread the awareness of our own thinking as an expression of a culture born on the base. For me, culture is a people’s way of being and doing, the way of thinking, relating, saying ... Therein lies the historical strength that led Cuba to produce in two centuries, two extraordinary men, leaders of movement that transcended the country and show universal thoughts: Martí and Fidel. "

-How important you give, for future times, our balance between openness and resistance?

-An interrelation of cultures took place in Cuba, therefore we have a very open culture which is in itself universal and carries the elements of great thinkers since Felix Varela until those thinkers nowadays. There is a deep thinking of ourselves; now, we must take it to the memory of the young. A book of Fernando Ortiz it doesn’t have to be popular, but we must write from that knowledge for all audiences. That is the role of the journalist, writer ... whether we have to develop new ideas for the present.

"We must not fear the opening because the times of interrelated world are coming. I see the opening far beyond the political arena; I see the cultural and human panorama. And we need to know where the resistance points are: the defense of our traditions, our social processes and what an essentially ethical and human revolution gave to our people. These are the elements to defend at all costs because it’s what has made us a different people; neither better nor worse, different because we were raised with a deep humanistic tradition.

"In **Socialism and Man in Cuba**, Che writes:" At the risk of looking ridiculous, the Revolution is a work of endless love. "Martí also said when he assessed us as a nation and said: "Homeland is a sweet union and comforting of love and hopes." We can’t kill hope, we must make them grow.

"The world that opens offers absolutely more possibilities; now, we should be clear about what we can’t lose: our identity, our independence, and sovereignty. I am sure the future Cuba will be better than any previous one".

-Often obscured by conflicts, there are common points between Cuba and the United States. You have explained, for example, economic and human assistance of Cuba to the

independence of the Thirteen Colonies. It is known Martí’s admiration for the strength of that people and Cuba’s sympathies for the fighters of civil rights in the United States, where the Cuban Five found great friends. What historical symbols do you see as potential for loving us as people?

- 'I think the hiatus of relationships, the blockade, etc., harmed us, but it also harmed them too, among other things because there was always a people-to-people relationship essentially healthy. Let’s not think of the marine or those images that represented the empire; let’s think of the North American people who fought for the social rights of minorities, let’s consider the people sensitive to good causes, the people who dance with our music and make us dance with theirs, let’s think how nice it would be to grow from a relationship that has always existed.

"How many North Americans came, got married, made a home and stayed here? There is the case of the famous Hemingway, who chose his Cojimar, rather than "the great Habana", to live under our sun and air.

"I recently reread Guy Perez-Cisneros's work that the average Cuban, just for having them does not appreciate: the air, the sun, the color, the brightness of Cuba become visible when you look up at other skies. The great nostalgia is born from that. The Cuban nostalgia is always extraordinarily strong; nobody forgets his "Cuban side", although he lived in total disaster. Even that disaster leaves nostalgia because it's a whole environment.

"We can approach people to people, advantageously for us. I do not see the opening as a threat, but we must work very hard for people to know who they are and what we stand for. There are all kinds of flags around and the Cuban flag appears everywhere, even though the Law establishes that should not be used in certain things. It’s the spontaneous response. My son proudly wears, on his neck, a Cuban flag made of beads.

"I always remember a phrase of Antonio Gramsci. When everyone was sure socialism was inevitable, he clarified: "No, the only thing predictable is the struggle." Laws may be there, but if men do not fight... our experience as people tells us that victory depends not only on the fight, but a smart fight. "

—How should respectable historians of Cuba and the United States face the complex mission of approaching the common truth of their current and past bilateral acts, which is supposed to be the real history?

—Look, I have just published a book by US historian Markus Rediker entitled **El Barco de Esclavos (The Slave Ship)**. A human story. He used a source we did not have here. As soon as I saw his book, I asked him: “Do you allow me to publish it?”, and he generously said yes. I warned him that I could not pay him and he answered that it did not matter: He would pay up his ticket to come to the presentation in Havana.

«For the history of Cuba there are important sources in United States that we do not have here, and there are in Cuba important sources for the history of these relationships, which they do not have there. There will always be disagreements and purposes –because naivety does not work

here and every specialist has his pre-judgments”—but there will be contact points too. Debate enriches us.

«We need a lot from the methods that US science has achieved. On the other hand, I believe in Cuban science and in the tremendous quality that my colleagues have, not only those established but those that are emerging as well.

«I have been teaching at the University of Havana for 45 years and I can assure you that there are brilliant persons in every group that arrives. The capacity of analysis of a group of young people who are going to build our immediate vanguard is excellent. The academic exchange will never be negative because, in addition, neither party is interested that it is».

—Doctor, with the current historical components, what lies ahead, in its development, full understanding and growth, for Cubaness, a process very studied by you? Is Cubaness more challenged today?

—Cubaness is a living entity and, as such, it exchanges elements constantly, but what it does not exchange is its essence. With its essence, every epoch provides it with new signs and makes it grow, improve and acquire new elements.

«It is like a tree. I always comment that culture comes from crop, and crop means to plow the field, to sow the seed. There are people who say: the “root”; no, it is not “the root”. “The seed”, no, it is not the seed. The fruit key is the field. Just as you plow, take care of the seed, sow…strong roots will grow. Of course, you must choose good seeds.

«Cubaness has been so. We have had extraordinary cultivators, from Félix Varela to José Martí, Fernando Ortiz and Fidel, at different times of a field. Starting from the concept that Cubaness is the quality of the Cuban thing and that “ajiaco” (stew) defined by Don Fernando, we must understand that taste can always be enriched. There is no unique formula from an epoch for that “stew”: it gives the possibility to add things. The fact is that Cubaness, as a living organism, will be what we can be able to do with it. But we must also know what, in the root of the Cuban thing, could wither the fruit or tear down the tree.

«José Antonio Saco used to say: “Cuba will always exist, but I want a Cuban Cuba and not English-speaking”. Let all good thing we can add come, but the root and the field must be Cuban.

«There is much debate over the homeland. Homeland is the feminine of patrius in Latin, meaning “father”; therefore, homeland is the “mother”. We are children of the mother country. They do not have that word in English but “motherland”, and Bolivians talk about the Pachamama (Mother Earth). The Homeland is our Pachamama. We cannot forget that the Homeland is the mother who raised us and gave us all the siblings who make up the great Cuban family».

—In Cuba there are dissimilar ways to interpret the current situation. There are those who fear, however, there is progress in a rapprochement sought by both parties and there is no –making an abstraction of “equivalences”– cessation of the Cuban Revolutionary Party nor the closure of Patria (Homeland) newspaper, today’s Liberating Army does not deactivate and no Platt Amendment comes into force; on the contrary, we fight against that bosom of theirs meant by the Guantánamo Naval Base. We are stronger, but there are risks… What to bet, on trust or danger?

—I do not find it contradictory. Confidence in how the United States is going to relate with us or how we are able to approach the new situation with intelligence? I have absolute confidence in our conditions to approach this epoch.

«On the other hand, it would be naive not to be aware of the dangers, because they are not a few and because our resources are unbalanced compared to theirs. Dangers are real, dormant, and there is an old saying, which says that in politics, naivety is a sin. Being naive about what US sectors opposed to Cuba could do would be a parricide sin.

«We must be optimistic because the possibilities that are opening are much more favorable for development. There’s the “game”: there is danger and we must have confidence in ourselves.

«Fear at this time? In the 1940s and 1950s there was much debate over the influence of the United States in Cuba and, however, there was a Revolution, whose bases followed a deep defense project of the national values, rooted in justice. We must have confidence in ourselves and awareness of the dangers. What to bet on? I bet on the future.

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