

We are All Fidel

By: Enrique Ubieta Gómez / Special for CubaSi
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The man is not more than 40 years old. He approaches me and repeats a phrase that the networks echoed from Miami with the intention of inoculating it into the bloodstream of Cuban society: “the system does not work.” He says it as if the evidence of the fact were incontestable. We remained several days without electricity (four, five, six days, depending on the area of Havana), after Hurricane Rafael hit Artemisa from south to north, and its winds destroyed homes, crops and work centers in that province and knocked down several trees and electric poles in the capital. Added to this natural fact, preceded by another hurricane in the east of the country, is the insufficient availability of fuel and spare parts for our aging thermoelectric plants, preventing the country from accessing sources of financing. “Don’t talk to me about the blockade,” he kept on his attack. What do you mean when you talk about the system? I ask patiently, even though I know what that word means. In just a few years, those behind his gaze, and his provoked desperation, have moved their slogan in the desired direction: first they referred to the “model,” now they speak of the “system.” A subtle, but definitive change. They try to avoid the defining words: socialism or capitalism. And he gets tangled up in a mess when answering, jumping around so as not to step on any definition, he is a Cuban Cantinflas, although he finally gives himself away when he mentions, without specifying, political changes.

Although he did not want me to talk to him about what happens in other countries, an intelligent reader will understand that if we propose a “change of system,” we should at least know how it behaves in nearby countries. I will not describe the situation in Ecuador or the Dominican Republic, both with long daily blackouts. I will only refer to Puerto Rico, the Caribbean colony of the United States—for whose freedom José Martí also fought—, which handed over the generation and distribution of electricity to the private Canadian company Luma. I am not talking about a blockade in any case, not because my interlocutor asked for it, but because none of those countries has been blockaded. Infobae, an Argentine media outlet, specifies: “The constant blackouts that have occurred on the island since Luma began working in Puerto Rico in June 2021 and the increases in the bill despite the power outages are some of the causes that have generated discontent among the population.”

But a few days ago a weird natural event also occurred in the Valencian Community of the Spanish State, in the Europe of developed capitalism: intense rains caused floods never seen before. There were no evacuees, no one

thought of it; nor was there immediate state aid. Business owners had demanded that their workers go to their jobs. So far, 223 people have died and more than 1,000 are missing. In the western provinces of Cuba, the poor island of blocked socialism, where Hurricane Rafael would pass, thousands of its most vulnerable inhabitants were evacuated. Schools and state institutions were adapted to house, feed and provide medical care, all free of charge, to families who had to leave their homes in peril. Friends and relatives with more enduring homes sheltered their compatriots. We still had the pain of the seven deaths from the recent Hurricane Oscar. But in this one there were no deaths, even though the hurricane had a category three.

While I was talking to the man who wanted a “change of system”, the strong winds and rains were moving away from the Cuban coasts, and in many blocks of the city neighbors went out with machetes, brooms and sacks to get ahead of the work of the specialized brigade as much as possible, and to pick up the smallest or weakest branches from each fallen tree. But he did not intend to help, he was waiting for the State to take care of everything. Brigades from other provinces were mobilized towards the western zone, just as they had done before in the east of the country. They are brigades of technicians, workers, soldiers, who also lost property in these days, and who also have no electricity in their homes. Singers, theater artists, comedians, poets, traveled to the most affected places to give their spirituality to those who had lost their material goods. The people and their leaders were mobilized. The unity of these people, their solidarity, is what saves us.

In a workplace in my neighborhood there's a photo of Fidel in the rain, next to the people, during one of the frequent hurricanes that hit us; that photo reminds us of the model of action that our leaders follow and that the people always expect from them. An elderly woman who passed by me had whispered: “We miss Fidel.” Before sitting down to write my weekly column, I wanted to reread his last words at a public event, spoken at the closing of the 7th Party Congress: “It's a superhuman effort, comrades, to lead any people in times of crisis” – he began by saying, and concluded – “Our turn will come for all of us, but the ideas of the Cuban communists will remain as proof that on this planet, if we work with fervor and dignity, we can produce the material and cultural goods that human beings need, and we must fight tirelessly to obtain them. We must convey to our brothers in Latin America and around the world that the Cuban people will win.” “We miss Fidel,” I thought then, it may be a demobilizing trap that the networks also sell us, aimed at those of us who follow and will follow the ideals he defended. A trap that aims to devalue those who lead us today. I prefer the phrase that the people raised, in a giant and heartfelt chorus, on the day of his farewell: “I am Fidel.” Post-Castro Cuba by Ares, the great Cuban cartoonist: we are all Fidel, because we follow and will follow his ideals, because despite all difficulties, we will win. No sir, this system is the only one that works, because it's the one that has concrete human beings at the center of its attention.

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