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Cuba

# The single party system faced with the crisis

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**A political party that governs alone, does not compete with another organization, and does not have to run in an election to be in power, would seem to have a great advantage. Paradoxically, that privilege is, at the same time, its greatest weakness.**

Not having to negotiate power, taking it for granted that it will not be disputed, leads politically to a harmful attitude that assumes any hint of social pressure is unacceptable. When it occurs, the consequent reaction shows absolute ineptitude covered with recklessness.

This authoritarian perspective is also strengthened by the teleological, mechanistic and anti-Marxist approach to history which assumes that the socialist revolution, once victorious, cannot go backwards. This extreme optimism closes off the possibility of any process of successful improvement or reform.

The collapse of the socialist camp shattered many constitutions that declared it irreversible. It is not the text in a legal treaty that counts, but the involvement of the people who find in that system the embodiment of their aspirations and who can modify it with that objective in mind.

The pressure of the majorities from below is what has made political systems evolve from ancient times until today. In the one-party model of bureaucratic socialism, the real and spontaneous participation of the citizenry in political activity is not allowed. This discriminatory condition explains why, faced with the July 11 social protests, the Party reacted with brutality, in an authoritarian way rather than politically.

The lesson of thirty years ago was not learned in Cuba. In 2002, more than ten years after the disintegration of the USSR, a constitutional article declared socialism was irreversible, while the 2019 Constitution established that the Party is the "superior leading force of society and the State (...)". From the top of that kind of watchtower, the Party should have been in a better position to see that the conditions for a social explosion existed in Cuba. But not only was it not, but it has also demonstrated its incapacity to interpret the true causes of the conflict and to act according

## The real causes of 11-J

The internal contradictions of social processes are the fundamental and determining factors. This principle of materialist dialectics is not applied by the Party in spite of its declared Marxist affiliation. Therefore, in the face of the social unrest, it has preferred to stick to a narrative that explains the facts based solely on external factors, real but not determinant: the pressures of the US blockade on Cuba, a soft coup, a fourth generation war.

Up to now, there has not been a deep and self-critical analysis by the Party and its responsibility for the crisis. If there were, they would have accepted that none of the key proposals that in recent times created hope for changes to transform socialism from above came to very much. They were:

1. A reform process announced in 2007, fourteen years ago now, which promised - clarifying that it would do so "without haste" - "structural and conceptual changes" that we are still waiting for in the Cuban economy. And I say in the economy because the reform process never included the political dimension.

2. A Constitution approved in 2019 that, despite the debate it raised and the level of expectations for the inclusion of the concept of a Socialist State of Law, did not allow any approach aimed at the transformation of the political system.

3. Three Party Congresses: the 6th, 7th and 8th, which during three decades, actually engaged less and less with the idea of reforming the model. In the last one, a little more than three months ago, a bucket of cold water was basically poured over the people, by perpetuating the thesis of immobility and not addressing the serious social and political problems that had generated concern, not only among the youth but also in society as a whole.

A socialist system that cannot be influenced from below is an impossibility, and ours is trapped in a flagrant contradiction: we have approved a Constitution that is not viable. One part of it tends to sustain a situation of violation of liberties -especially in its Article 5 which declares the superiority of the single Party- while another part recognizes such rights and liberties in a Socialist State of Law.

No exclusively economic reformist process is feasible, because when the citizenry is not actively involved in controlling the direction, results and speed of the transformations. So changes run the risk of being dismantled or slowed down. Cuba has been no exception. The bureaucracy has become a "class for itself" within society and hinders changes and reforms that, although it accepts on paper, it has slowed down in practice.

A great unresolved conflict wherever bureaucratic socialism was established, is that of converting state property into true social property. This aspiration has been utopian due to the lack of democratization, the failures of citizen participation in economic decisions and the fact that the unions are no longer organizations that defend the interests of workers.

The arrogant attitude of the Party is typical of a political model that failed. In February 1989, the Soviet magazine Sputnik devoted an issue to the stasis or inertia that characterized the period of Leonid Brezhnev, there they asked these questions:

"Should the Party leadership become a special organ of power, which is above all other organs? If the Central Committee is a special organ of power, how do we control it? Can its decisions be protested as unconstitutional? Who is responsible in the event of failure of a decreed measure? If this superior organ in fact directs the country, should not then all the people elect it?".

In this political model the Party is selective, a "vanguard", and not a popular party open to all, so that if it declares itself as a force Superior to society it also sets itself above the people. For this not to be so, the people should be able to elect those who head the Party, and this is not allowed. If it is over and above everybody, and it is not "an electoral party", it is out of the people's control. That political model is the one that must be changed.

The younger sectors have no memory of the initial and most successful stages of social policy brought about by the revolutionary process. To them, the revolutionary epic, the evident transformations and the benefits of the first decades have little impact.

They have known the last thirty years, with its legacy of poverty, a sustained increase in inequality, failed life prospects and the anticipation of emigration at ever-younger ages. The arrival of the Internet has coordinated them as a generation, allowing them to contrast opinions, build virtual spaces for participation, which the political model denies them, and generate actions.

So we must recognize that the main contradictions that led to the 11th July protests are eminently political. The demands were not only for food and medicine or against the power cuts. These may have been the catalyst, but the "freedom" slogans that swept the island indicate the demand of the citizens to be recognized in a political process that has ignored them up to now

The party was totally disorientated by the 11th July events. This was shown by:

- the brutal scenes of repression against the demonstrators;
- the declarations calling for violence by the newly appointed first secretary of the Party - later toned down;
- an urgent meeting of the Political Bureau the day after the events -of which nothing has been revealed;
- and the usual organised acts of revolutionary reaffirmation almost a week later.

However, although it never acknowledges or apologizes, it knows that it made a very costly mistake.

Voices have been raised from sectors of the left and some prestigious figures and organizations, demanding respect for the political rights of peaceful demonstration and for freedom of expression in Cuba. Several governments, and the European Union as a bloc, have criticized the violent repression, which is certainly unconstitutional.

Palliative measures to alleviate the dramatic situation of shortages are already beginning to be taken: an increase, from this month until December, of rice, a staple food in the standard food basket; free distribution of products donated to Cuba (grains, pasta, sugar, and in some cases oil and meat products); a price reduction of some services of Etecsa, the communications monopoly.

In addition, long-standing requests have now been approved that would have served to mitigate the crisis much earlier: import of food and medicines without restrictions and free of customs charges; credit sales in stores. Others may be announced in the coming days.

There is no doubt that the situation will be somewhat alleviated, but the Party must be very aware that none of these decisions will solve the Cuban dilemma which is, as I have already stated, of a political nature.

Perhaps they believe that by applying these palliatives they are discovering a new politics. They are wrong. Thousands of years ago, the Latin poet Juvenal, in his Satire X, eternalized a phrase that designated the practice of the rulers of his time: "Bread and circuses". It was the plan of Roman politicians to win over the urban plebs in exchange for wheat and entertainments so that they would lose their critical spirit, feeling satisfied by the false generosity of the rulers...

In Cuba we need bread and circuses, we are a suffering people, but - above all - we need to govern from below. We need to be the Senate, since our Senate has disappeared from the political scene. There is not a single statement from any member of the National Assembly of People's Power as such, in spite of the seriousness of the violent acts against a part of the people they are supposed to represent.

They have violated the legislative schedule saying it is impossible to meet in the middle of a pandemic. However, under the same conditions, the Party held its 8th congress and, after July 11, massive activities were organised in support of the government in all the provinces.

There has not yet been an official pronouncement from the Party leadership analyzing the facts, offering exact figures of the cities and towns involved, participants in the protests, people arrested and prosecuted. It was of no use to the single Party to have analyzed in the Political Bureau, a few days before the 8th Congress, a report entitled: "Study of the socio-political climate of Cuban society". They understood nothing of that climate, or those who wrote the report did not portray reality.

## The single party system faced with the crisis

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Single Party bureaucratic socialism creates a kind of political demon that escapes the rule of law, since it places itself above it, accentuates political extremism and separates itself from the citizenry. So far all models with these characteristics, far from leading to a socialist society, have disguised a state capitalism with features of corruption and elitism.

It is time to debate this and organize ourselves to change it. It is possible now. As the president of the People's Supreme Court declared to the international press, in Cuba the Constitution guarantees the right to peaceful demonstration.

*30 July 2021*

*Translated from [La Joven Cuba](#).*

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