

March 28, 2004

Esteemed Friend:

Your last letter, which I read at great length on various occasions made me very happy. For me it is proof of the profound reality of the Cuban experience, and I will try to respond to it, and at the same time link my response to the ideas that concluded my last letter. I wrote that every democrat and opposition figure to a totalitarian regime should act as if the regime were going to change tomorrow. Believe me, this come from hard-won experience.

The intrinsic movements of a society controlled by a totalitarian government cannot be seen from the outside, so long as those in power are watching, rather they camouflage reality in their wake, not only from their citizens, but from themselves as well. It is therefore difficult to tell which might be the last drop in the cup of patience of the Cuban people. Nevertheless the existence of a well-structured opposition is encouraging, despite being persecuted and humiliated. It is in this way that the number of signatures for the Varela Project has served to give much hope. Also, in the case that the regime comes to feel itself shoved into a corner, in a few days, membership in the ranks of the opposition will swell from hundreds to thousands. The moment and the speed with which social fears will be overcome will be determined by the conditions of the moment: Concurrence among the members of the opposition, as far as the regime is capable of repressing it, as well as the focus of the international community.

You mention in your writing that the repression is not aimed at preventing change, whose arrival is widely awaited, as much as going against a peaceful change. I understand then that the threat of a peaceful change represents for the regime, the worst possible vision of the future. And so I should ask: Why? According to what I know of communism, it happens this way due to the fact that the system in its entirety sustains itself on the idea of a perpetual threat, against which it is necessary to –also maintain itself perpetually, - in a state of alert. The sensation of being under threat leads the leaders to believe that they have the ease of (...) This vicious cycle is the cause of the easy manipulation of public opinion. The idea that some historic events can have a place outside of the boundaries of a permanent revolution, outside of the boundaries of this perpetual sensation of fear, would be the negation of the base upon which the Cuban regime stands.

Considering the brave Varela Project, primarily because the regime does not consider it criminal, and exposes it because it bases itself on the current constitution. Every time a larger number of Cubans shows that the only menace is the existence of totalitarian system, and shows the people another way (...) Of course the regime strains itself in advance so as to evoke a sensation of being threatened, and at all costs, will use this to corral society at large. As time goes on, the numbers of those who only pretend their loyalties to the regime will grow. Many of those whom today live by the party line will cede as soon as they are asked to do so. Finally, only the most fanatical will still be loyal, those who are the most useless when the time comes to make important decisions. The opposition should know how to win over of the apostates to the regime, because winning their loyalties will be the last blow to the regime.

Sooner or later the day will come in which the real opposition will be the focus of the discourse on the future of Cuba. The details of how the days of the repressive regime will end will be critical for the development and the positioning of the opposition during these negotiations. Nevertheless, solid organization as well as clearly postulated and easy-to-identify-with ideas will be decisive.

New leaders are usually put to the test numerous times. One test for example might be dealing with the yearning for revenge. In their effort to clean house, they may yearn for revenge. Furthermore, some people with tragic fates, those who failed during the totalitarian period. And so from today it is necessary to think about reconciliation with the past. Collective forgiveness, just as the People's tribunals of punishment do not lead to good ends but rather, serve to enflame passions, social divisions, and escalating violence on one hand, and frustrations due to the fact that those at fault continue to occupy positions of power on the other. Founding a legitimate judicial system may find an obstacle in the fact there are no independent judges; you may only find at your disposal, those judges who were part of the totalitarian machine, and who practiced anti-democratic practices. This will be like dancing on the edge of a knife blade.

After the regime change, a many of the opposition's representatives will find themselves relegated to the political shadows by those who, (...) if, despite being in decisive moments, will know how to use social passions, to amass illegitimate social merits. It is a law that rules during all revolutions, and it would be quite unusual if in Cuba it did not happen this way. In any case, in the future, the representatives of the new regime shall be equally blamed and criticized for their acts, and frequently by people who do nothing.

Dearest friend, it does not seem to me that the world considers the Cubans capable of executing political change, as you have written in your letter. If the world doubts, it is a signal that (...). And that is not good. But surely you are aware that it is not possible to export freedom. Furthermore, the value of freedom consists precisely in that every individual, every society can dream and act for themselves. And if I write act and not just dream, it is because I see it as a long process. We should all aspire to freedom, even those of us who have already built reasonable functional democratic institutions. I would like to assure you that those countries in that have fresh experience with totalitarianism, the Cuban dissident movement will always be understood. We will continue to support, and I have confidence that the Czech chancery will include this support in its proposal to the European Union, to which the Czech Republic will ascend on May 1st.

I would like to close my letter by reminding that the last few months have borne witness to another peaceful and pacific regime change. I am referring to the case of Georgia, a country that for various decades was part of the Soviet empire. Although its evolution during these last ten years differs from the static nature of the Cuban regime, it fills me with joy that another pacific regime change has taken place.

I anxiously wait the day we can meet.

Sincerely yours;

Vaclav Havel