

Fidel and Democracy

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02/12/2017



When I write democracy I do not refer to the concept and the dominant practice in the “western” world.

There, candidates, all millionaires or rich people, are periodically chosen by the political parties to strive for the posts of the popular election. Campaigns cost fortunes and offer candidates commercially. When an alternative option arises, they try to stop it through fierce media campaigns combined with electoral fraud. Moreover, that democracy admitted that elected heads of state such as Mel Zelaya, in Honduras; Fernando Lugo, in Paraguay; and Dilma Rousseff, in Brazil, were overthrown with new variables of coups d'état. Without forgetting the failed coup attempts against Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa. Nor should we forget the continued and permanent coup against Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela.

I do not refer to that democracy without people, but to the one that is practiced in other countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba, called dictatorial or totalitarian. But I will focus on Cuba now, on its peculiar democracy with people, alive and direct, practiced by Fidel Castro and Cuba's revolutionary leadership right since the triumph of the Revolution. A democracy exercised amidst long

years of terrorist campaigns of the CIA, serious biological warfare actions, invasions and threats of invasion and a tight economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by United States. I prefer to call it economic war, because it lasts almost 60 years now and its declared aim has always been to make Cuba surrender by hunger, although it hasn't accomplished it. But it has been a serious obstacle to the economic development of the island and has had and has high costs in human suffering.

Fidel's democracy has consisted in governing with the people and for the people, in listening to their opinions on the most important economic and political issues as long as circumstances have allowed it. And also, since the approval of the new Constitution in 1976 by more than 97 percent of the voters on a turnout of 98 percent, in periodic elections for bodies of municipal, provincial and national governments.

Precisely, on November 26, a day after the first anniversary of Fidel's passing to eternity, more than 7,600,000 voters, equivalent to 85.94 percent of the electoral roll, cast their vote in the elections of delegates to the Municipal Assemblies of People's Power on the island. Taking in account the valid votes, which represent 91.7 percent of the total, one can assert that at least this figure of electors voted for the candidates of the Revolution. Last week, I already explained that the neighbors are the ones who choose the candidates and decide who to vote for later.

But democracy in Cuba, although it is not perfect, hit by incomprehension of bureaucrats and material limitations from the blockade and mistakes, is much more than the Election Day. It's impossible to list the ingredients of Cuban democracy in this space.

But I take two examples. Firstly, the cultural and educational revolution started with the same revolutionary war and continued with the extraordinary National Literacy Campaign, which eradicated illiteracy in one year through an exemplary and mass participation of the people and, especially, the students. 100,000 youngsters, scattered throughout plains and mountains, cohabited with the illiterate in their houses. Literates learned, but maybe, their literacy teachers learned more. The literacy campaign gave a huge boost to the creation of the prestigious educational system of Cuba.

Why don't neoliberal governments eradicate illiteracy or boost free and universal public education systems as Cuba has done? Is it even possible to talk about democracy with ignorant and marginalized peoples? I often listened to Fidel reflecting on those questions, even during the preps of Operation "Yes, I Can" that eradicated illiteracy in Venezuela and Bolivia and has taught millions in the world how to read and write.

Another outstanding example of participatory and protagonistic democracy is the serious and organized consultation to the people on the documents of the latest Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and the substantial changes in the economic and social politics of the country since 1992, systematic and contrasting practice with the one pushed by neoliberal governments that have imposed their structural “reforms” through manipulation, force and deception.

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