



"In a wide and strange world like ours, it is difficult to propose optimism as an option. To renounce it, however, is to fall into a paralysis that achieves nothing." (Source: Alma Mater)

Link to Original: <https://cubaheute.de/2023/01/06/die-fundamente-der-hoffnung/>

The foundations of hope

A difficult year for Cuba has come to an end, and a new 2023 full of uncertainty, hope and the burden of a still ongoing crisis is breaking out on the island. The magazine of the FEU student association, "Alma Mater", reflects on the socio-political panorama at the turn of the year in a thoughtful snapshot entitled "[Los fundamentos de la esperanza](#)", The Foundations of Hope. The text, published on 26 December, appears below in unabridged English translation (form the German translation posted on the Cuba Heute site above):

The year 2022 was a bad one; one of those turns of the sun that are particularly painful. It might have been assumed that after the terrible 2021 it would get better, but another fate was ours and everyday life remained almost unchanged in its harshness. It is true that the pandemic subsided - bless the vaccines, our scientists who created them and the political will that made them possible - but the rest of life was determined not to show its friendlier face.

We lived through the traumatic experience of the Saratoga explosion and just a few weeks later we collided with the hellish landscape of the terrible fire that ravaged the Matanzas supertanker base. To top it all off, the cyclonic season decided to screw things up and the powerful Ian ruled -for too many hours- over the western part of the island, with the consequent aftermath of the devastation that still survives today. The vagaries of fate conspired against the Cubans and hit us so hard that we

even lost some of our brothers and sisters in the process. If anything exists up there, it's been assailing us.

At the same time, not casual elements put in check the resistance and resilience of the inhabitants of this land. Mr. Biden continued to disguise himself as Trump and moved little in relation to his policy of suffocation. The effects of Covid have continued to affect the international economy and this has closed the door to the recovery we need. Tourists are not arriving in the necessary numbers and that is like depriving us of oxygen. Moreover, the world is suffering from the imbalances inherent in a war that has had the disastrous result of unleashing an inflationary spiral that has an impact on those crazy prices that assault us on every street corner. The situation of these 365 days that are about to come to an end has not been bad, but rather very bad.

There is more to add to the above. The convergence of the difficulties of recent years, the war they are waging against us and palpable planning errors led the national electricity system to a situation of near collapse that manifested itself in the reign of the cruel monarch that is the blackout. People were forced to reinvent their lives and adapt them to the moments when electricity provided company. The long hours away from "the light" were the breeding ground for social protest, a phenomenon that must be understood as absolutely legitimate.

Other demons were also present in this closing year. The shortage of supplies made endless queues a part of our lives and allowed the consolidation of a whole criminal apparatus that even went so far as to dress up as an official one. For months, citizens demanded a different distribution system for products and received, in many cases, the classic response of a deaf ear. Likewise, bureaucracy, insensitivity and apathy have been at work in the government administration, adding further pressure to the boiler; all this in the context of a disorderly economy that, in line with the dollar and the euro, has made daily life very difficult for the ordinary mortals who make up the majority of the population.

In the context of a country in crisis - yes, that is the word that defines us, crisis - **many Cubans have decided to try their luck in other countries in this world. The always dangerous sea and the now famous "route of the volcanoes" that culminates with the crossing of the Rio Bravo were, for those who undertook the heartbreaking enterprise of emigrating, the main ways to reach a future of dreams that they did not visualise in Cuba. This year's sad bloodletting has taken away thousands of fellow citizens in whom the future of their homeland also lay.** Some will emphasise the siren songs, the migratory privileges and the all-out war that is leading us astray; in my case, I prefer to insist on how much we have failed to do here to make people fall in love with a collective project in which the many individual dreams can find crystallisation.

Religious fundamentalism and the secular patriarchal prejudices of which we are still prisoners have also shown their hairy ears in recent months. Both - together with those who insist on defining everything promoted by the government as evil - joined forces in order to prevent the victory of that bid for rights that is the Family Code. They were defeated by a society that has undeniably changed, but



its clear manifestation forces us to be vigilant, especially if we take into account the experiences that have materialised in our region.

Likewise, the elections of a few weeks ago confirmed that abstention is already a major electoral factor and that this is an expression of the erosion of consensus that must be dealt with intelligently if socialism is to be an option capable of successfully rearticulating itself and prevailing. Anyone who triumphantly reads the latest electoral results, including those of the referendum on the Family Code, will only be displaying that unproductive companion of the road that is stupidity.

Of course, the year that is almost over was also an expression of good things. We are here and that is already a major merit, but there is no doubt that the bad and the ugly reigned supreme. We thought it would be better and it didn't work out. The responsibility lies with the circumstances, but also with ourselves. Resolving what is in our hands will be the key to 2023 and always will be the key.

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The starting point for improvement is to understand that you are wrong. **Any self-satisfied discourse inhibits the necessary take-off of the strength that allows us to change.** Avoiding tackling the problems and the permanent search for excuses are practices that distance solutions, while at the same time shattering the political capital that one possesses. Although valid exercises in self-critical analysis can be identified on the part of actors in our political-institutional field, there are still views that are based on the non-recognition of the tense situation in which we live. If you want an example, consider, as a simple example, the discourse of some government officials and our political and mass organisations.

Once the problem has been defined, it is time for action. And it is then that the crossroads appear; on the one hand, the road that has been trodden so many times and on the other, the new possible itinerary, the path that is only an outline, but which contains - despite the risks - the real possibility of changing things for the better. Betting on the new path is synonymous with political imagination and an expression of a quality that is less common than one might think: a sense of the historical moment. It is worth noting, moreover, that the path of experimentation would not be taken blindly, since **for more than a decade we have been reaching a consensus as a country - as evidenced by three Party congresses, a constitution and the multiple consultation processes that have developed around them - on a road map that defines a socialism capable of preserving its essence and at the same time being different as its destiny. This other socialism needs to prove its validity as a vehicle and platform for prosperity.** It is not the time to wait for a future as elusive as the horizon. The better future has to become the present. Of course, there is no magic wand to solve the problems, but the time for waiting is running out, especially for the new generations who are already political actors demanding, with increasing energy, the realisation of their dreams.

It is an objective fact that the paths to be adopted for the revitalisation of the economy contain elements that contribute to social polarisation. In short, they create a bourgeoisie for which a proletarian class works. This new asymmetry adds to those already visible within the highly stratified economy and together they challenge in practice the egalitarian ideal that is at the foundation of the revolutionary project. Tackling the most painful manifestations of this process and guaranteeing protection for those who do not benefit from the reforms is another important challenge. This has the tactical connotation of preserving consensus in the short and medium term and in the longer term the strategic sense of being the support for the full articulation of an anti-capitalist society.

Efficient politics also means mastering the keys to the communicative processes. After Fidel's withdrawal from the front line of public exposure, we have been almost completely orphaned in this respect. Improvisation, bungling and the repetition of outdated schemes are commonplace. One after another, one blunder after another, and with them we give fuel to an industry of memes in which much more than the everlasting humour of Cubans is expressed. Those who don't like us wait for our mistakes in communication and we often put them on a silver platter. There is a lack of council and a lack of understanding that effectiveness in the field of communication has a lot to do with science. At the same time, it is also important not to forget the aesthetisation of the contemporary world and the influence of this on politics. Confusing aesthetics with banality and cheap marketing leads to underestimating resources that the centres of power of capitalism understand as a vital tool for the exercise of hegemony.

It is not possible to summon the citizenry to the complex battle for socialism without the value of exemplary leaders and their connection with the daily struggles of ordinary people. As long as people identify a sector of the civil service as a privileged caste, distant and indifferent to the daily problems of ordinary citizens, the erosion and fracturing of consensus will become more acute. Being alienated from pernicious egalitarianism does not imply accepting asymmetries that are incompatible with the socialist ideal. In this area we have gone too far backwards and the costs are there, visible in the comments that any neighbourhood resident makes, from some exhausting queue, with respect to those who hold quotas of institutional power. This leader-managed divorce was disastrous in more temperate realities which, in another historical period, were the geographic space of political projects with which we identified.

No lesser challenge is the dialogue with the plurality that we are now. This nation is a diverse chorus that has understood itself as such. Multiple voices claim their spaces and postulate different models of a country. Some of the projects are convergent, while others are antagonistic. The better Cuba that should be Cuba will be born from the articulation of an inclusive framework capable of integrating all possible sensibilities. For this reason, it is necessary to naturalise dissent and strengthen citizen participation in decision-making, within the framework of a patriotic option that places national sovereignty and social justice as its flags.

In the realm of hegemony, the battle for hegemony is a major one, and what can be identified as the original project of Cuban socialism is not in optimal shape. Even for some sectors of the population this has become categorically blurred, at the rate of the deterioration of historical achievements, the substantive hollowing out of practices that had prevailed for decades, the bureaucratisation of structures that should have been agile, the accumulation of unresolved problems, the exhaustion that is implied by the permanent state of external harassment, of corruption that dismantles the values that pointed to a different world, and of the inability of the new leadership to efficiently manage the reality of the country and from such an achievement to connect symbolically with the citizenry. The exercise of hegemony requires different ideological formulas and involves guaranteeing - in the concrete events of life - fundamental transformations that articulate with the horizon of satisfaction of the great majorities, in the broad arc that goes from the material to the spiritual.



Cuba needs hope, the strength that emanates from its condition as a platform that invites us to move forward. In a wide and alien world like ours, it is difficult to propose optimism as an option. However, to renounce it is to plunge us into a paralysis that brings nothing. This nation has demonstrated its ability to reinvent itself, its eagerness to overcome adverse conditions and to look confidently to the future. We are at one of those turning points in history, at a true watershed that will define our 21st century. The core of ideas that drove the popular struggles of the last century and embodied the best of the ideology of the Cuban Revolution - the challenge to social inequalities as a path towards the achievement of the full dignity of individuals - is facing the hostility of an external power that does not tolerate the challenge it embodies on this island, internal right-wing tendencies that relativise essential notions such as national sovereignty and social justice, and those forces that - although they claim to represent the social change that has taken place since 1959 - are merely the beneficiaries of a status quo that is alien to the well-being of the majority. To rekindle hope requires the articulation - and here it is worth remembering Gramsci - of a new historical bloc that manages to express, in the face of the current century, our people's will for plenitude.[1]

[1] *Two people close to me questioned the existence of this text. One told me that I was repeating my usual reflections and that there was nothing new in these words. Perhaps he was right, and novelty is conspicuous by its absence in the lines that the reader is devouring at this moment. However, I believe it is healthy to exorcise the demons one carries inside. My other interlocutor, from the tragedy of having stopped believing, questioned every time my words outlined the commitment to that project that has come to be called socialism. From the act of feeling out of the game, he contributed to me - caustically - the lucidity of his criticisms and the idea that, perhaps, this is an outdated text, written from and for a place that no longer exists.*

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Translation: *Cuba Heute*. Emphasis by the author.

