

Toward a new social and political model for Cuba

BY ROBERTO VEIGA GONZÁLEZ

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INTRODUCTION

Cuba needs to recreate itself, that is, it must create a new socio-political-economic-cultural-legal model. To do so will require the chiseling of existing institutions and the creation of new ones. It is also essential to promote spirituality and a culture of values and respect, magnanimity and “Cuban” style, peace and justice, freedom and fraternity, capable of bringing out a robust and creative civil society. This, of course, will be difficult to achieve without a methodology characterized by harmony and the rule of law. Many are the changes we have to make if we are to achieve this purpose. This paper will present my opinion on some of these reforms. These conditions, as we can all see, have not yet crystallized and this endangers the safety of the present and future of the nation.

I. IMMIGRATION

One of the most serious challenges facing the Cuban nation is the issue of migration. The stability in this area depends largely on the resolution of the conflict between the government of Cuba and the United States, since that nation is the recipient of the vast majority of domestic migration. However, it should be noted that the main challenge in the search for a fair solution to this situation is deciding that the majority of Cuban immigrants go from their condition of exiles, that is, of *quasi* banished nationals who have lost their rights in Cuba, to a status of emigrant, of nationals living abroad, who retain at home all their citizens’ rights.

In this regard, it would be essential that Cubans living abroad could enjoy the universe of their rights in Cuba. These should include the possibility to interact extensively with the family and participate in the economic and cultural life of the island, and in all of the country’s social and political activities, but always through entities located in Cuba, since no State should be forced to accept the direct participation of an association that cannot be subject to current local legislation. This, of course, would require the State to guarantee the required spaces.

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In addition to this, it will be necessary to ensure the ease of entering and leaving the country without having to request authorization. Some argue that the Government will continue to limit the entry of politically disaffected Cubans, when it is believed that they may undertake or have engaged in activities contrary to government policy. Those who support this restriction, argue that free entry of nationals living abroad may facilitate the penetration of opponents of the Cuban government, willing to commit unethical acts against it. This claim, which is not complete false, is enough to support a general restriction covering all who have been politically active. This could only be legitimate specifically against those who have committed, objectively, civic acts in their “political efforts” against the government, which would, in turn, require the definition by consensus of what attitudes are considered civic and which are not.

II. THE ECONOMY

The economy is another of the great challenges we face. Currently we suffer a significant economic crisis, in part because of the global crisis that has reduced revenues. But our crisis is also the result of a poor economic system that fails to generate wealth and has led to wages without real value, and from the dual currency (an international exchange value within the country, and another currency with national circulation and low value), among other ills.

Reversing this problem would involve an effort to insert our economy into international structures, at least as much as possible. However, for this, and in the benefit of the country, it is essential to renew the Cuban economic model.

Our economy must accept the much needed market system, but of course it must be oriented towards social development, and the recognition of private property, with a fair degree of public commitment. The state has to be aware that although it has to participate in the economy, it should not replace the economic subject, i.e. the citizen or the associations of economically active citizens. The State must also understand that its role is to guide, encourage, assist, integrate, supply, limit and even punish, but never to assume directly the management and administration of all areas of the economy. The state should not assume the functions that belong, in essence, to the intermediate bodies. The state should not do everything (Stalinist mode), or fail to do everything (like the extreme neo liberalism), but *help to make virtuous companies*.

The state must understand that only as an exception should it take over the direct management of companies, in case of activities that hold great importance for the economy, when no private activity is available to fulfill this need, such as the construction of roads and bridges, or when it is clearly inconvenient or dangerous to leave them in private hands, either by the concentration of economic power in their hands, or for macro economic reasons, unless these dangers can be avoided with proper management.

The types of property that could coexist in Cuba would be: *public collective*, without the monopoly in their administration and disposition; *individual* and *collective* (e.g, cooperatives, family owned, corporations), or *mixed*. Property rights, I repeat, in all forms must have a social function. The social function of private property is fulfilled by the wages received by the workers and the profits that can increase their income, participation in profits earned by funds invested, and the use of some of them in reinvestments that will increase employment and production; as well as the taxes from that economic activity which contribute to the common good.

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At some point, when progress towards greater social and political harmony among all components of the Cuban nation is achieved, it will be necessary to face an eminently necessary economic issue, which is also social and political. The issue, which is particularly sensitive, relates to the private property that has been nationalized. Some of those affected plan to waive their right to claim their rights, in order to facilitate future possibilities. Others want a full refund and compensation if it has been held by the State. Both ideals of justice expressed higher desires. But the highest law, as an old sentence states, could produce the greatest damage. Some of the best thinkers have always held that to practice justice is the required minimum standard. In this sense it will be wise to seek a compromise, where every Cuban may win something, although not always in the desired magnitude. It would also be unfair to implement a solution that would mortgage the future of the Cuban people and the State.

III. CULTURE

Culture also challenges us. Although many experts have talked about it extensively, I will certainly offer some opinions that I consider important. Our country has made a huge effort to raise the cultural level of the population and much has been achieved, particularly in education. However, certain behaviors are often unrelated to the level of education attained.

In recent years there has been a growing number of Cubans who live in a kind of alienation or who degrade their moral behavior. This is caused by certain foreign influences, but also by hopelessness and banality that a very large portion of society lives in. The attenuation of this unfortunate reality, that we cannot accept, requires certain economic and political renewal, as well as cultural and spiritual changes.

To seek these changes it will be necessary to strengthen mechanisms to promote the combined initiative of society as a whole, and of each of its members, so that in this way the inescapable cultural enterprise required by the country becomes feasible, offering greater effectiveness and legitimacy. However, even if the cultural field is open to individual citizens, it will also be necessary to direct the ethical activity towards a task that promotes virtue and brotherhood, and the widening of a movement to think of Cuba “as Cubans”.

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Thus, it may be possible to expand the creativity of Cubans and their proper ethical orientation. But it would also be possible to achieve the necessary purification and reorientation of all the mental images (personal, family, social and national) that now coexist in Cuban society, which generally differ from the images forged over the past 50 years, with a strong influence from the government, with all the negative consequences that this mismatch can cause.

IV. EDUCATION

Education is widespread and generally good teaching programs are offered, but it has deteriorated in recent years due to progressive neglect of the teaching staff, especially at the primary, secondary and pre-university levels. It is necessary to redeploy educational under new pillars and to promote a competent teaching staff, a larger and more diverse education programs, especially in the humanities, and to offer a larger margin of academic freedom.

With regards to academic freedom, Felix Varela, father of Cuban culture, believed that the general education plan should not be uniform, because that meant that everyone had to agree on a same ideas, without differences. That, he argued, would take away the freedom of thought. He stated that men could be easier

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distinguished by their ideas rather than by their faces. Variety of thoughts can never affect a nation, and can only help decorate it. Therefore, he proposed that the curriculums should be adapted by teachers according to the circumstances and with prudence grounded in practical knowledge. This, he emphasized, should specially apply at college level.

Also, it would be appropriate for the various state and social institutions, to develop, with all the necessary legal guarantees and privileges, educational work additional to that offered by the national education system, and designed to help increase the educational level and cultural development of the population. The Catholic Church does a quite a bit in this direction, with all its centers and spaces for training, which gives a Christian education a humanism founded in Christianity, as well as practical instruction in many subjects, always with the aim of seeking the professional and human growth of the person created in the image and likeness of God.

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V. SOCIAL MEDIA

Also the media should expand its work towards cultural progress. This will require the direct participation of citizens and the organizations and institutions to which they belong, where they are members and from where they have to project, in order to achieve greater cultural interaction among all members of society, and further public discussion about all issues that may concern the public.

VI. SPIRITUALITY

The current Cuban Constitution, as amended in 1992, in its Article 8 endorses religious freedom. In practice, the authorities tend to understand it as the right of the individual faced with society and the State, for self-determination in finding and adopting religious truth, and to adjust its individual behavior and social and moral precepts. Religious freedom is often understood as a framework where each church is, or claims to be, the true church, and may require the display of certain social conducts: doctrinal, cultural and moral adopting at the same time, in relation to other churches, an attitude of respect and recognition, that does not mean, in any way, the acceptance of doctrines that are contrary to their own beliefs.

However, this is often not clear, because in Cuba the concept of religious freedom has not been analyzed and political and legal awareness have not been raised in due proportion. A clear meaning has yet to be given to the term. With regards to the Catholic Church, this would be possible through the construction of a kind of consensual legal agreement that ensures the spiritual and pastoral activity of the Church, which should be guaranteed by the same state, and in turn, to ensure adherence to a fair order, which is the framework where the Church has to exercise its mission, and therefore contribute to the common good.

This possible legal agreement may open the way to a new form of the State in its regulations of legal relations of the other churches and religions, not by a law that would harmonize all religions almost numerically, but through agreements with each of them, which would always be in proportion to the nature and weight of each. In this case, in relation to the Catholic Church since the Apostolic See has a sovereign status and is subject of international law, such an agreement would have to be a treaty between two subjects of international law, with a higher range of legal framework than Cuban legislation and giving the same level to Church and State.

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VII. RECONCILIATION

The possible solution to these challenges will depend to some extent on the ability that we have to reconcile the Cuban nation, considering as citizens all those born on the island who feel as Cubans, whether residing in Cuba or abroad. This involves healing, to some extent, all the resentment held by both parties and the wiliness to avoid more harm. In this regard, we must find a way to get a positive relationship in spite of the many grievances.

Some say that pride, arrogance, vested interests, would not allow many, including the key players of each of the parties, to assume such an attitude of humility and to listen to what is needed for renewal. This is true, and if this happens it would prevent a proper communion among new generations of Cubans, when the generations responsible for the current situation are physically gone, which would prevent many nationals from enjoying a harmonious and prosperous society, and would place on the backs of the younger generations a growing number of evils that would also prevent them from achieving the desired nation, placing the solution of the problem in the very distant future.

Those of us who are conscious of the urgency that demands reconciliation among all Cubans must work hard, since nothing will be achieved unless all sectors are sensitized and everyone is willing to assume a role, either as emigrant, simple citizen, or just as someone who thinks otherwise politically, a convinced revolutionary, or a member of government. The challenge of the latter should be high in achieving reconciliation and communion among all Cubans, because the authorities have to be the greatest guarantors of this longing, in any nation in the world. However, in Cuba the state is a party to the conflict, since it is identified with only one of the nation's political projects and is responsible for old and new causes that may hamper reconciliation efforts.

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Therefore, reconciliation in Cuba will depend largely on the willingness of the State to move from a position as one of the parties, to a position as moderator and guarantor of the diversity that exists or might exist as personal subjectivity continues to grow. In this regard, it is necessary that all who hold power and those who support them, work to promote reconciliation, through systematic and gradual inclusion of all in a growing process of national communion. It will also be essential that all parties give up the intention to criminally punish opponents who commit unlawful acts, if they are willing to strengthen the harmony of the present and future of the nation. Faced with a proposal of this nature, I admit, many may question where would then justice rest in relation to the damage caused. And they are right. However, I would say that the only real possibility of justice at our fingertips is the commitment and agreement to build together a better Cuba. The other, dreaming of a vindictive justice, is paralyzing and it would consume us and we would lose the opportunity to grow as a nation.

VIII. POLICY

In order to achieve reconciliation it will be essential to incorporate a political activity that demonstrates renewed political foundations and the route to achieve it. For such an enterprise we would have to work to expand the consideration, obedience and adherence to a social program that respect the Constitution, since that is really the axis around which national life gravitates.

In this regard, we should resume the constitutional reform process that began in 1992 and which could be the beginning of a constitutional improvement, that can raise the text to a level that can match the most complete doctrinal works, without implying the acceptance of selfish and materialistic liberalism, and where sovereignty actually rests with the citizens who control financial power.

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In this effort we will have to shape the universe of rights guaranteed by the Constitution, and create mechanisms for the people to demand and control their exercise. Equally inescapable is the growth toward more democratic government structures, more balanced, where authorities are supervised and rotate in their positions. Also, for the above to succeed, it would be mandatory to reflect on the institutional nature of social organizations, and to provide that they be structured from the bottom up, and that they become entities that offer to citizens the possibility to relate in society and influence the State and the government.

However, the greatest political challenge for us Cubans to move towards a better society will be the incorporation of a new political conduct, mature, able to recognize the opposition as neighbors and partners, based on the willingness to accept the legitimacy of all opinions and shared reflection, in order to work together and reach consensus. Unfortunately, these attitudes do not prevail in the political environment of the island and the exiles.

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IX. PROPOSAL FROM THE PUBLICATION *ESPACIO LAICAL*

Amid these circumstances our publication *Espacio Laical* continues to propose, for those who have the generosity or are ready to reach it, this new approach to Cuban politics, marked by the **encounter and transparency, dialogue and consensus**. The country that we propose must be built on freedom and plurality, but also on fraternity, or at least respect, and justice. We emphasize the need to promote these categories (freedom and plurality, fraternity and justice) and to achieve an intrinsic relationship between these pairs, because only sustained by them we will get a great nation that is prosperous and balanced, both materially and spiritually. Based on this feasible ideal, which we can reach, our team proposes the construction of Casa Cuba, that beautiful metaphor Cubans increasingly support.

CONCLUSION

So far I have presented some of the social challenges of my country, as well as certain criteria, very personal, but inspired by the social teaching of the Church, about how to evolve these realities. With views like these we try to participate in a social dialogue that attempts to cut through Cuban issues. However, I must point out, I'm willing to accept the criteria from the general consensus, which will always be the result of a genuine process of dialogue and consensus, even if some or many of those considerations may disagree with my views.

However, I want to emphasize, the greatest challenge at this time is not dialogue, which certainly needs to be expanded and deepened. The major challenge now is the dialogue that may produce agendas and projects that can interact with society and influence the State and the government, so that their suggestions may become political decisions and we can build the country we want.

ROBERTO VEIGA GONZÁLEZ

Matanzas, Cuba. 1964, Juris Doctor. Currently editor of the Habana publication *Espacio Laical*, professor of the Seminary *San Carlos y San Ambrosio* of Habana, responsible for the Justice and Peace Committee in the Archdiocese of Habana, and Notary Public for the Ecclesiastic Tribunal.