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Venezuela

Our Chavez

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Although the end was expected hope always remained. Many voices asked “that he would stay because we need him”. It did not happen and sadness overwhelms millions faced with the inevitable. Somebody indispensable has gone away and no tribute will compensate for the loss. Each commemoration chooses a profile: the leader, the communicator, the tribune, the volcano of energy, the bold one. But some tributes dissolve his salutary legacy of socialism and the ALBA.

Chavez questioned capitalism and recovered an emancipatory project that seemed buried. He took up censored concepts, remembered the forgotten Marxists, denounced the bourgeoisie and declared his admiration for Cuba. He transmitted ideas of social equality and real democracy that caused an earthquake in the consciousness of the oppressed. He defended the dignity and the rights of the humble. He asked us to imagine a society without exploitation, competition, or profit.

This dimension is not uncomfortable for those who favour “serious capitalism”. Also it bothers the sectarians, irritated by anybody who veers off the track of their prescriptions. They object to the distance between the project and its concretion, as if they had shown some capacity to shorten that breach. Chavez rescued socialism from the history books, to again locate it among the possibilities of the future.

He showed that this horizon is compatible in Latin America with revolutionary patriotism. He followed the trajectory of the anti-imperialist soldier who radicalized, converging with the social struggles. And he achieved a synergy with his people and a continental impact, which Torrijos or Velazco Alvarado had never obtained.

It is necessary to be careful in making analogies with Peronism. It is certain that he led the same irruption of silenced majorities and the same achieving of social conquests. But Chavez followed a road totally opposed to the conservative order. For that reason he never availed of regressive apparatuses such as “justicialismo”. Instead of confronting the mobilized youth he invoked the Patria Socialista.

Chavez impelled regional integration, but did not idealize businesses and company profits. He accepted them as a given of the present scene and conceived them as instruments of recovery of sovereignty. His project was the ALBA: unity by means of cooperation. He began with the interchange of oil for teachers with Cuba and ended up supporting countless campaigns of solidarity with the abandoned ones of Haiti, the destitute of Central America and the needy of Bolivia. These initiatives were interpreted as “petro-diplomacy manoeuvres” by those who only conceive of actions as guided by greed.

The ALBA attempts another Latin American construction, with less bureaucrats and more social movements. Chavez conceived of it as drawing from the experience of Bolivar. If the War of Independence expanded to release the enslaved and eliminate servitudes, the present battle against the empire demands greater intervention from the popular subjects. In the preparation of that confrontation, he did not abstain from denunciations of the US superpower.

Latin America has lost the radical voice that was raised in all the forums, to pave an anti-imperialist strategy. A great regional emptiness has been created that does not have any substitute (at the moment). Those who discuss whether Cristina or Dilma have enough charisma to replace him forget the content of the vacant leadership. The comandante spoke the plain truth because he did not fear to defy the powerful. For that reason he made fun of the Yankee diplomats and the little European princelings who tried to silence him.

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Chavez knew how to combine consistency with intelligence in the evaluation of the relationship of forces. That capacity was very visible in the last period, when he delegated the government, forging a team, positioning Maduro and weakening Capriles. Thus he dealt with the power vacuum that the right had so much longed for. But he accelerated his own end, with the energies expended in the electoral campaign.

The result of those elections has been indigestible for those guardians of the republican order who serve the powerful. They question the terrible authoritarian, who won 13 crystalline elections and the frightful censor, who was always being insulted by the mass media. The debate over deepening or congealing the Venezuelan process has become more uncertain. There is a daily tension with bureaucrats who use the Bolivarian guise to enrich themselves, recreating exporter-rentier and unproductive consumption. Blocking the construction of an industrial economy, efficient and self-sufficient in food. Accumulating fortunes through oil fund currencies, increasing the fiscal deficit and preserving the cycle of devaluation.

Meanwhile many opponents now recognize the great change in the distribution of oil revenues. Accepting that these resources were usefully channelled into food, education, health and housing. Never explaining why no previous president materialized that transformation.

The gains made are obvious and very significant. But they are not enough and could be lost if the radicalization of the economic process is postponed. There is no longer a conductor and it is time to form a more collective leadership elected by the rank and file. This is made possible by the unexpected nature of historical processes. Ten years ago, for example, nobody imagined the turn that would be made by the Bolivarian movement.

Chavez enters history through the front door to occupy a place together with Che. Guevara was the symbol of an ascendant revolution that raised high expectations of the immediate expansion of socialism. Chavez appeared in another context. He expressed the rebellions that shook South America at the beginning of the 21st century and embodied the victories over neoliberalism. Two outstanding figures for two moments of the same journey towards equality, justice and emancipation.