

Most important today is to resist being discouraged

A conversation with Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto Jiménez, reminds us, "The battle of consciousness and ideas must be won," in a world in which some insist that revolutionary thinking belongs in a museum

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• CARACAS.- The great battle underway today on a global level is taking place in the minds of each and everyone of us, rather than in specific physical locations. Revolutionaries, warriors of ideas, are not lacking; but the forces are dispersed in the face of a powerful, compact bloc of mass media which looks to turn human beings into captives of their emotions, disconnected from their ability to think.

It is not fortuitous that this past November 20, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro called for a communication revolution, one that includes traditional media, social networks, streets, and walls, inviting us to assume the intense, necessary task of progressive thinking.

It was precisely this urgent work which was discussed by the Network of Intellectuals, Artists, and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity during its 15th Encounter held here March 6-7, with more than 60 thinkers from Venezuela and other countries in attendance.

The gathering, entitled "Emancipatory communication or colonized homelands," took place in Marshall of Ayacucho Hall in the Casa Amarilla, and made clear that thinking from a humanist point of view exists in this world, but must be coordinated and become more agile in defending the peoples' truths.

Just minutes prior to the meeting's second day, Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto Jiménez dedicated a few minutes to a dialogue with this reporter, and spoke of the times in which we live, insisting on the importance of the fight for critical, revolutionary thinking, saying, "The battle of consciousness and ideas must be won."

You have commented during this meeting that the left has not constructed a paradigm, in terms of communication, which could provide an alternative in the face of right wing media hegemony. Would you share some reflections on this issue.

Intellectuals from Venezuela and other countries have spoken here about this traditional weak point of the left, in the sense of being able to create a kind of paradigm, in terms of communication, that could be effective in the face of the lying, defamatory machine - to which we could add any number of adjectives - but which is undoubtedly effective in domesticating consciousness, dampening critical thinking, imposing on the people, for example, candidates who offer villas and castles, but later betray them.

That's why we see everyday people voting against their own interests - everyday people voting

against their country's future, against conquests won. These are chilling things that are related to the world in which we live today, in which a few media corporations control everything.

There has been talk during this workshop of the role of social networks, of how even in electoral processes, those targeted for messages are very clearly defined, based on the great data base these social networks provide, from which psychological profiles are created and different messages crafted for each one of these persons. That is to say, this is where the machinery of manipulation and trickery is, an issue that has been constantly raised in discussions within the Network in Defense of Humanity.

I recalled a panel that was held at the Cuartel de la Montaña, in December of 2004, when Chávez called on us to take the offensive, and he called on us create a breach in the media wall. From that discussion, the idea emerged for **teleSUR**, which has had so much success and been so important. Since that era, we have been talking about the machinery of manipulation. But I would say that, today, the concentration of the media, the use of people's unconscious reflexes, has grown to an almost Orwellian level - thinking about that famous book of George Orwell, **1984**, in which he talks of a policed world. We are facing a tremendous challenge and most important is trying to create this new paradigm, which must be participative, because it must be the revolutionary people, using social networks, who resist being hypnotized, being driven like a herd from one place to another. And at the same time, we must be able to generate content. We must be critical with respect to the system, and at the same time proactive.

Circumstances have changed dramatically since 2004. The difficulties, as you say, have increased...

Fidel, Chávez, founded so many extraordinary things. Then Evo, Correa, Daniel, the ALBA joined in. The Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) was defeated in Mar del Plata - a truly glorious moment for the left in Our America. Néstor Kirchner participated in the defeat of the FTAA, and later so did Cristina. It was a significant moment. In Brazil, the Workers' Party (PT) was in power; it was a time that really awakened many hopes, that made Latin America a pole.

We see now how there is talk of a pendulum. One of the most sinister things one can do is accept the idea that there was a pendulum swing toward the left, and now a swing to the reactionary right is coming. It's

crazy, because history does not move by way of pendulum swings. History is made by men, women, peoples, and I think what is most important is to put an end to the demoralization, the discouragement, the concern among progressive forces - stop the idea that what is happening now is fate, that neoliberal ideas can survive another ten years, instead of going to the ideas of Bolívar, José Martí, of Fidel, Chávez, of the Cuban Revolution and the Latin American Revolution.

Everything that happens is inevitably affected by our ability to communicate in an effective manner, in a serious, profound manner.

How can the left meet this challenge, continue the struggle, not be discouraged?

Participants in this 15th Network meeting unanimously agree on the need to leave here with agreement on concrete steps, an action plan.

One of the tasks the Network could undertake is linking the nuclei of cultural resistance, the alternative media, radio, the work of digital guerillas in social networks. There are many people who have not allowed themselves to be defeated, and are fighting for emancipation, against the neoliberal offensive, but they are not linked up.

I think the Network must take on the task of attempting to link these forces, so that people understand we are facing a global struggle, and that the little wars at a local level are not going to resolve the problem, even though victories may be won at this local level.

The idea of ethical monitoring of the media is important. During this workshop, one participant spoke about the slander of Fidel that appeared in **Forbes** magazine - according to which the leader of Cuban Revolution had amassed a huge fortune, and was among the richest leaders in the world. I told this speaker that Fidel said something tremendous on Cuban television, in front of many compañeros: that if they showed him just one scrap of evidence, he would resign immediately. This reply was never published by **Forbes**.

The mass media lies, and if there is a reply, they never accept the fact that they lied, and the lie continues floating about. It's Goebbels' theory: repeat and repeat a lie until it becomes true. This is the philosophy of all the mass media at this time.

There has been talk in this forum about what Venezuela did with the *guarimbas* (violent street protests), of how they circulated pictures of acts of violence, of throat slashings, of beatings which never occurred and were attributed to the police and the Bolivarian government, supposedly taking place during confrontations with opposition demonstrators.

MIGUEL FERNÁNDEZ



Minister of Culture Abel Prieto.

That is to say they are constantly disseminating slanderous lies. Well, there is talk of post-truth politics, of totally invented events meant to create destabilization, which suddenly go viral on social networks, so people believe them.

The situation is terrible. The mass media has trained a massive group of people, mostly young who are very aware of what is going on, of what is moving around the web, and who are very credulous. That is why I believe that the other thing we need to do is to promote the critical study of these communications phenomena, especially among adolescents.

The use of intelligence must be promoted. Let us recall what Fidel said many times: They want to dismantle our ability to think. This is the great project: that the people don't think; that the people don't critically examine the lies that are everywhere.

Something else which has been discussed during these hours is that which is customarily referred to as the training of young cadres, revolutionary cadres. In this regard, the issue of new technologies must be included, the necessity of knowing how to use them, the issue of the battle of ideas on social networks.

During these times, we can ask a question: Are we going to allow the thinking of Fidel, allow generations in Cuba and Latin America, to be seen as something archaeological, something of the past? Are Venezuelans going to let the thinking of Chávez be put away in a museum, as something that happened but has no relevance? I think this depends a great deal on us. •