

Is it possible to meld the best of capitalism and socialism?

Enrique Ubieta, editor of the journals **Cuba Socialista** and **La Calle del medio**, talked with **Cubadebate** about political centrism, neo-annexation, and the permanent clash between socialism and capitalism, as conflicting systems - all important issues in the ideological struggle underway around the world today

José Raúl Concepción

• WHEN the world had two political poles, a statement that sounded obvious was sometimes made: "Let's unite the best of capitalism and socialism in a single system." If both have their defects and virtues, why not just discard what doesn't work? The idea is attractive, it would be an idyllic society. But what prevents this? Why are we still talking about socialism and capitalism? Behind the apparently self-evident concept lies another: you can't extract the best of capitalism as if it were a damaged spot on a piece of fruit. The virtues of this system are based on its defects.

The idea cannot deliver what it promises, and the same options remain in place. We maintain a way of life that damages every corner of the planet or we seek an alternative to solve the problem at its roots.

In politics, as in life, trying to find a middle ground is tricky. But those who prefer to straddle the fence exist.

Cubadebate talked about political centrism with the Cuban intellectual, Enrique Ubieta, who responds to simple questions with dissertations on the history, relevance, and possible implementation of a "third way" in Cuba.

Is it possible for centrism to represent the best of both capitalism and socialism?

Capitalism is not the sum of its negative and positive components, of elements that can be saved or discarded. It is a system, that at one point was revolutionary and today is not. It engulfs and links everything: advanced technology, the most sophisticated wealth, and the most absolute poverty. The elements that contribute to greater productivity are the same ones that alienate human labor. Those that generate wealth for a few, produce poverty for the majority, on the national and international level. Establishing such a goal seems fallacious to me. The "best of capitalism" doesn't exist, as if it could be cleaned up, as if a good capitalism were feasible. There are very bad versions, like fascism and neoliberalism, but I am not aware of any good version. Capitalism is always savage.

On the other hand, socialism, as opposed to capitalism, is not an organic total, a reality already constructed, but rather a path that cannot, all at once, leave behind the system it is trying to replace. We try this and that, we adopt new structures, advance and retreat, eliminate what doesn't work, correct errors over and over again - a path to another world, in the middle of the jungle, because capitalism is a hegemonic system. What characterizes it is its expressed, conscious intention, to replace capitalism.

Does a center exist? On what principles is it founded? In the capitalist electoral system, a left and a right

supposedly exist, but this left - with social democracy as its ideological framework, which was Marxist in its origins, and sought to reform capitalism until it gradually disappeared - functions today within the system and has rejected Marxism. This left differentiates itself from conservative parties with its social policies and its non-prejudiced understanding of diversity. The centrist formula functions within the capitalist system as an electoral option. The voter is managed like a customer since elections function like a market, and are full of right wing parties and left wing parties that alternate in office, but implement similar policies, and thus the system constructs a false "third way."

But real alternatives are not within a system, they are counterpoised. They are capitalism or socialism. A center does not exist; there is no neutral ground between the two systems. Social democracy places itself within capitalism, but pretends to be a center, attempting what I have described as impossible, taking the best from both systems. In reality, it proposes an alternative method, not a fundamental change. Beyond a few isolated cases, like what Olof Palme could have been in Sweden, in a very rich country, which even without colonies, as part of the capitalist system benefited from the colonial and neo-colonial system.

Social democracy which appeared to triumph, made no sense when the Soviet Union collapsed and the socialist camp disappeared. Not even in Sweden could it be maintained. (Olof Palme was assassinated). Since then, the system has no need for it, and it needs to remake itself. The third way of Tony Blair is a center that has moved to the right, accepting and implementing neoliberal policies, allying itself with imperialism in its wars of conquest. The history of social democracy is essentially European.

What role do centrist politics play in Cuba?

In reality, what is this center? It is a political orientation that appropriates elements of revolutionary discourse, adopts a reformist position, and in the end, brakes, detains, and creates obstacles to the development of a true revolution.

In other cases, as in ours, centrists attempt to use the political culture of the left that exists within Cuban society, because you can't get anywhere here with an ultra right wing discourse, trying to win adherents. You need to use what the people interpret as fair, and with this left wing discourse begin to introduce capitalism through the back door. This is the role the center would have within a society like the Cuban.

Using different terminology in different contexts, positions similar to centrism have been present in Cuban history since the autonomy tendency attempted to derail the independence revolution of 1895...



Enrique Ubieta explains the history and implications of centrist politics in Cuba.

Why do you think there is a kind of resurgence of centrism in Cuba today?

In Cuban history, there is a very clear dividing line between tendencies, between reformist and revolutionary forces. This is a longstanding discussion in the history of Marxism, but today I will just refer to the Cuban tradition.

Reformism is represented by autonomism and annexationism. There are writers who insist on saying that annexationism aspired to a radical solution to win independence from Spain. In this case, the term "radical" is misused, because the roots of the problem were not addressed. Being annexed by the United States was a radical solution in appearances only, since advocates intended to protect the privileges of a social class here, avoid the economic damage of a longer independence war, and maintain the status quo via domination by another power which would guarantee order.

The two tendencies, annexationism and reformism, had as a basic premise an absolute lack of confidence in the people - the fear of "the mulatto horde," as the autonomists said.

Sell-out reformism has existed throughout the history of Cuba, into our times; it has not disappeared. The Revolution of 1959 swept it away as a real political option, but the class struggle has not vanished. If the bourgeoisie, or those who aspire to be, attempt to retake power in Cuba, that is the class that has been created outside of the country or that which could be gestating within, it is going to need an outside force to back it.

There will not be an autonomous capitalism in Cuba; it doesn't exist anywhere in the world, much less in a

small, underdeveloped country. Cuban capitalism, as in the past, can only be semi-colonial or neo-colonial. The only way the bourgeoisie could retake and maintain power in Cuba is by way of an external power. That is the only option to multiply their capital, and we already know that the bourgeoisie's homeland is capital.

Today a situation exists that favors this kind of centrist tactics, promoted in Cuba from the North. The generation that made the Revolution is ending its historic-biological cycle. Some 80% of Cubans never lived under capitalism. Just imagine. Cuba is a country trying to build a society different from one which the people have never experienced. This is a period of change and new, previously rejected elements are being introduced in the conception of the socio-economic model. It is within this context that pro-capitalist forces construct their pseudo-revolutionary discourse, only for show, attempting to link up with changes underway in the country.

Does the updating of Cuba's economic, social model have any relation to centrism?

It does not. I'll appeal to concepts I found in the philosophy of Argentine Arturo Andrés Roig. It is imperative to differentiate two planes: discourse and discourse directionality, meaning and direction. I recall that when I studied the decade of the 1920s, I noticed that Juan Marinello and Jorge Mañach said almost the same things. They addressed very similar concepts, because they were intellectuals and part of the vanguard of Cuban thought and art. But if you follow the course of their lives, you understand that those words with similar meanings had very different intentions. Marinello joined the Communist Party and Mañach founded a party with pseudo-fascist tendencies. One fought for social justice and socialism, while the other longed, too late, to become the ideologue of a national bourgeoisie which no longer existed. I don't believe that this rupture was only the result of a later evolution; it was already implicit in the differing historical directionality of their discourses.

It is absolutely imperative to differentiate directionality, today more than ever, because we live in a very contaminated, promiscuous linguistic environment, in a global society which has assimilated the discourse and traditional gestures of the left, especially since WWII. The class struggle is covered up, and we must unmask our interlocutors.

What do the Guidelines propose? Seeking an alternative route of our own to advance toward socialism, since no universal model exists, and every country, every historical moment, is specific. Cuban socialism means a Cuban path toward a society that is different from capitalism, in a hostile world, facing poverty, an implacable blockade, and with few natural



resources, except for the knowledge of its citizens.

This is Cuba's real situation. We propose to maintain and expand the social justice we have achieved, and to do so, we must revitalize our productive forces. We therefore establish limits on the accumulation of wealth and property, and we are concerned about the mechanisms used to enforce these limits. On the contrary, centrists, with language similar to ours, suggest that we have abandoned the idea of social justice, but demand more profound changes that would lead to the dismantling of the minimum achieved in terms of justice. The "deepening" demanded by centrists, from both the economic and political point of view, is a return to capitalism. Divergent, critical opinions can and must be heard, but they must all be directed in the same direction, toward the same horizon.

When someone says that socialism has not been able to eradicate corruption or prostitution, it saddens me, because it's true. But at the same time, one should ask: What would capitalism do about this? Make it worse. When the accusation is not directed toward strengthening the system we have in the country - the only one which can correct its defects, deficiencies, and errors - but rather toward its destruction, the criticism is counterrevolutionary.

Because everything we do will not be fine. We are going to make mistakes, of this we can be sure. One who moves forward makes mistakes. What's important is to have the capacity to rectify and be clear about the direction of what we are doing, why we are doing it. If at some moment we lose our way, we will need to check the compass. May everything we can do now, and what we

discuss, be marked by the clarification of what we want and where we are headed.

Is it possible to be both centrist and at the same time revolutionary?

Absolutely not. A reformist is not a revolutionary. Which doesn't mean that a revolutionary can't make reforms. Revolutionaries made the land reform, the urban reform... Being a reformist is something else.

Reformists believe in statistics, in the exhaustive descriptions of their environment that ends up making it incomprehensible. A minimal description of this room's walls does not allow us to understand where we are, because this room is located in a building, in a city, in a country. That is, in order to be useful, the description presupposes a broader perspective. To be a revolutionary one must take the flight of a condor, which is what Martí demanded.

Reformists are descriptive; they believe that reality is limited to what can be seen and touched - that is why they are confused and fail. In politics, a reformist can only sum up the social environment's four visible elements. The revolutionary adds a fifth subjective element, that cannot be detected in plain sight - an element reformists do not take into account, because they have no confidence in the people. We can summarize this fifth element recalling the historic reunion in Cinco Palmas of the eight survivors of the *Granma* expedition. In Raúl's words, "He (Fidel) embraced me and the first thing he did was ask how many rifles I had, after that the famous phrase: Now, yes, we have won the war!" This is leaping over the abyss, as Martí said.

This is what differentiates a revolutionary from a reformist. And a centrist



DILBERT REYES

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is worse than a reformist, because in a certain way, he is a fake.

In the European tradition, all this conceptual, theoretical, political drama that has been concocted since the 19th century gives these debates some weight. In Cuba the underlying foundations of these debates are revealed much more clearly. And all of this talk of melding capitalism with socialism, trying

to stay on a revolutionary plane of discourse, but in practice counter-revolutionary, in one way or another, from my point of view, is also evidence of a certain level of cowardice, of inability to fight for something you believe in. These people believe in a project that is opposed to ours, but don't have enough political strength, or the courage, to say so openly. **(Cubadebate) •**

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