

THE CONVERSATION WITH CHÁVEZ

Last November 15, I referred to a third reflection on the Latin American Summit which, as I then wrote, "I have yet to publish". It strikes me as timely, however, to do so before the referendum of December 2.

In this reflection, written on the 13th, I pointed out the following:

Yesterday, the Cuban people had the opportunity to hear Chávez speak on the Round Table program. I phoned him when he said that Fidel was a man who was out of this world, that, on April 11, 2002, he spoke with him, when all official lines of communication were tapped, over a phone located in his kitchen.

I was at a meeting with the President of the Basque Country the day of the coup. Events succeeded each other restlessly. That fateful afternoon, several of the people there, who were willing to die next to Chávez, had used the same phone to say goodbye. I remember exactly what I told him that night when I asked him not sacrifice himself: that Allende could not rely on a single soldier to fight back and that he, on the other hand, could rely on thousands.

In our telephone conversation during the Peoples' Summit function, I tried to add that to sacrifice oneself so as not to fall prisoner —a choice I once faced and something I nearly decided, again, before reaching the mountains— was a way of dying with dignity. I had said the same thing he had: that Allende had died fighting.

Calixto García Íñiguez, one of the most glorious generals of our wars of independence, survived a gunshot to his chin, aimed at his head. His mother, who had refused to believe her son had been taken prisoner, on finding out the whole truth, exclaimed with pride: that's my boy!

That was what I wanted to convey to him over the cell phone without amplifier, held, this time, by Lage, Secretary of the Executive Committee of Cuba's Council of Ministers. Chávez could barely hear what I was saying, the same as when the King of Spain abruptly ordered him to keep quiet.

It was at that moment that Evo arrived at the function. He is a genuine Aymara native, who also spoke there, as Daniel did, and in whose face Chávez wisely discerned Maya features.

I agree with what he said, that I am a strange blend of races. I have Taino, Canary Island, Celtic and who knows what other bloods in me.

I was anxious to hear the three of them speak again. Before they spoke, I said: "I salute the thousands of Chileans who died fighting the dictatorship imperialism imposed on them!" And I concluded my remarks proclaiming, next to Chávez, Bolívar's, Che Guvera's and Cuba's slogan of: "Homeland, socialism or death! We shall overcome!"

Yesterday, Monday the 12th, over a notorious private Venezuelan television station at the empire's service, I heard a declaration and speech which had been prepared, from beginning to end, by the US embassy. How empty and ridiculous it all sounded in comparison to Chávez's vibrant speech at the Summit debate!

Long live the courageous people who cast off the oppressor's yoke!

Long live Hugo Rafael Chávez!

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