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Cuba

The case of the young artist Abel Lescay in Cuba

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The July 11 demonstrations signified a great change for Cuba. For the first time since 1959, Cubans took to the streets in different provinces of the country for many reasons, but above all because of the popular discontent generated by the economic crisis and the management of the bureaucracy.

While it is true that U.S. sanctions affect the economy, when analyzing Cuba one cannot overlook the bureaucratic phenomenon and the lack of popular participation in politics. Dissent is strongly punished and the government showed signs of this on July 11. Its reaction to any kind of dissent, even from the left, is to label citizens as “counterrevolutionaries”, “politically confused” or “mercenaries paid by the U.S. government”.

The Archipelago phenomenon was an example of this. This is a platform that after the events of 11-J sought to establish a national dialogue, beyond ideological conditioning, and called for a peaceful march on November 15. This political project was showing signs of support to the right wing through public projections and the positioning of some of its members.

What is remarkable in itself, in the case of this analysis, is not Archipelago, but the treatment given by the government to this type of dissent. Once again, the media was used, without the right to reply, to demean in every possible way the main organizers and try to prove their links with the U.S. government. The march was disavowed under the allegation that socialism is constitutionally irrevocable and that the intentions of this protest were to overthrow it.

However, one of the most worrying issues is that during the weekend of the march, one of the darkest chapters in Cuba's history was repeated on a massive scale: the “acts of repudiation” returned, events organized by the political power to attack the most private space of those who dissent: the family, the home, with shouts, insults and all kinds of verbal violence.

Imagine waking up with a mob of people in front of your house shouting “counterrevolutionary” and even more, with a political event organized at your door, in your neighborhood, in front of your children and parents. This was something common and shameful in the Cuba of the 1980s, something that has been discussed many times, something that many Cubans are ashamed of, and which is repeated today, with the stridency of social networks.

In this context, the government intends to avoid denouncing a crucial issue: Cuba is opening itself to the liberalization of a state-centered economy. The “monetary order”, a measure announced to face the crisis, which since before Covid-19 was remarkable, came at a time of scarcity and with nuances that were not at all advantageous for the people. It is, in fact, an economic segregation that has led Cubans to despair due to the lack of basic products and inflation.

The ordinance eliminated the CUC, the hard currency circulating in Cuba since 1994, the middle of the Special Period, to make way for the Moneda Libremente Convertible (MLC), as well as any international currency highly traded on the black market.

When announcing the “Ordering Task”, Minister of Economy Alejandro Gil assured that along with the MLC stores, the rest of the stores would continue to sell all kinds of necessary products in Cuban pesos, since the purpose of the new stores was precisely to collect foreign currency to supply sales in Cuban pesos. In practice this has not

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happened. The stores to which Cubans who do not have MLCs have access are out of stock and there are fewer and fewer of them every day. Obtaining basic products is an odyssey and in spite of the increase in salaries, money is not enough because the inflationary process is enormous.

It is not surprising then that in the face of such a situation, aggravated by Covid-19, the impossibility of dissent and popular participation and the repetitive political discourse that Cuban leaders crudely handle in the media to legitimize the process, people took to the streets.

The word "left" is taboo in Cuba. A large part of the population assumes that the government's discourse and practices are socialist or leftist. This is a dissatisfied citizenry, with very little political preparation, because the curricula from an early age are focused on political indoctrination at the convenience of power, and not on the development of knowledge and reasoning in conditions of freedom.

It is no accident then that on July 11 people took to the streets. They were not mercenaries, they were not confused beings. They were exhausted people responding to objective contradictions.

That day, people opposed to leftist ideas took to the streets, yes, but also the working and marginalized people, the people the left should represent, the social bases the left should reach out to. On that day government supporters, young people of the so-called "official left", people privileged by the system for the most part, also came out.

In the midst of the chaos, violence from both sides surfaced. They were unarmed demonstrators against all the repressive bodies of the State and those other privileged or old uncritical defenders, armed with sticks and backed by the police.

The Cuban government faced a great crisis of governability, and it would be unfair not to take into account in this analysis the exhaustive US anti-communist propaganda, which from the social networks has penetrated deeply into the Cuban imaginary. But the internal causes of the social outbreak are there, latent in the daily life of the citizens of this island. These causes remain unresolved and are getting worse every day, due to what July 11 meant for the demonstrators and their families.

To date, the working group on politically motivated detentions of the Cuban civil society platform Justicia 11J has documented 1,271 detentions in connection with the social outburst. Of these people, at least 659 are still in detention. It has been verified that forty-two have been sentenced to imprisonment in summary trials and eight in ordinary trials. The prosecution's request is already known for 269 persons who are awaiting between one and thirty years' imprisonment.

The figure of "sedition" has been used to impose sanctions on at least 122 people, according to this platform which has been in charge of counting and bringing to light the situation of those involved, due to the fact that there are no official figures available.

July 11 was the highest point of repression of dissent in Cuba. Historically, there was systematic harassment by State Security agencies of those who dissented across the political spectrum; there were also documented cases of expulsions from places of study or work for ideological reasons and many other similar evidences. Nevertheless, on July 11, repression was exercised on the bodies of the demonstrators.

Such is the case of the young musician and poet Abel Lescay, who after demonstrating in the city of Bejucal was arrested that night at his home. This process is particular, because he was taken to the police station naked and

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suffered Covid-19 during the arrest. He acted peacefully, he did not damage any kind of property, in spite of which the prosecution accuses him of the following charges: contempt of the basic figure, contempt of the aggravated figure and disorderly conduct. For all of them they request a seven-year prison sentence.

Lescay is a student of the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) and could lose his career if convicted. He will be tried on December 5 and 6 at the Mayabeque Provincial Court.

Cases like this happen in Cuba these days, absurd and inconceivable situations. When I talk about these issues with members of the left in other countries, it is unheard of that someone should be sentenced to such a punishment for going out to exercise the right to demonstrate. "If that were the case, we would all be in jail forever," an Argentine friend told me.

I write these lines full of fear, even knowing what they mean in terms of repercussions for a militant of the alternative left who lives and works in Cuba. I write these lines because the main dichotomy of a leftist militant in Cuba is to be clear about who she is facing and in what context. While we have as socialists the mission to fight against imperialism in the world, while these words could be instrumentalized for other causes, in Cuba we can no longer be silent, because it is about the lives of many. It is about the right to dissent and to exist with dignity.

I call on the international left militancy and those who read this text not to hesitate to investigate and support the cause of the political prisoners in Cuba. I call for international solidarity with Abel Lescay, because only in this way will we be heard. The left, in spite of its nuances and differences, must think of itself as one in the world in the face of this type of outrage. We cannot think of the oppressor only as a bourgeois, the bureaucracy also oppresses. I never tire of saying it: "Socialism yes, Repression no".

Source: Translated by [Oakland Socialist](#) from [Movimiento Socialista de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores de la República Dominicana](#).

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