

A Tournament of Rascals and Scammers

written by Luis Cino | miércoles, 11 de enero, 2023 11:23 am



HAVANA, Cuba. - We Cubans were always famous for being likeable, friendly, noble, generous, and hospitable, and we bragged proudly about it. If once we were all those things, we are becoming less and less all those nice things. The hardships of daily life under the inept and failed “Castro Continuity” regime have changed us for the worst.

It may be hard to admit it, but to a larger or lesser degree, beaten as we are by unfavorable circumstances, we have become sullen, frustrated, rude, inconsiderate lying, opportunist, cynical, calculating, self-serving and violence-prone human beings.

The grave crisis of the last two years, caused by the immense failure of the “economic reorganization” implemented amidst the pandemic, seems to have brought out the worst in us: ambition, hypocrisy, egotism, envy, slander, rancor and aggressiveness.

To corroborate this, one need only watch the behavior of people on any waiting line: to purchase food items or to get into a crowded bus that took over an hour to come. One has to witness how, without thinking twice, people push each other, curse and insult each other and often start a fist fight.

And still, official discourse calls for people's solidarity and asks people to "think along country lines."

Each day there are less honest people in Cuba. Sales people, whether store clerks, bakery personnel, farmer's market attendants or street vendors, will figure out a way to rob you or your money by charging more, as if prices weren't already high enough. It doesn't matter that each day products are of a lesser quality.

It has become a habit for vendors to "fix" their scales in order to increase their profit even more, or to alter their products by adding water to milk, yogurt or rum, or mixing tomato sauce with beets and pumpkin, or using less sugar on sweets and juices. They mix coffee with larger amounts of chick peas, a practice learnt from the State; and prepare fritters and "ground beef" with God only knows what actual ingredients.

One has to be very careful when choosing a plumber or a mason to fix something in your home. They always charge more money, and their finished product is shabby. In general, they fake their skills, and are careless and in a hurry to finish the job, take your money and disappear.

I know a family that had to hire three different plumbers in order to fix a clogged toilet. Between pipes, parts, cement, sand and labor, they invested over 50,000 Cuban pesos. Still the problem was not totally fixed: half of the floor was destroyed and left unrepaired, and although the toilet flushes, the solid waste flushes out to the street while folks wait for Havana Water and Sewer to come and connect the drain line to the wastewater line.

As far as inspectors go, like with any legal transaction, one has to resign to the idea that in most cases, one will have to bribe them, or wait to be extorted. If you achieve some degree of prosperity, you should care that neighbors don't notice because that will annoy them and make them jealous; they will become your enemies, and if they cannot benefit somehow from your progress, they will make your life impossible with their gossip or turn you over to the police at the slightest infraction.

Some Cubans who reside abroad and have returned home to visit their families talk about being constantly harassed by overly servile and self-pitying people who seek to take advantage of them, and extort money or gifts from them.

If you happen to be a tourist, never trust taxi drivers, nor the authenticity of cigars they try to sell you; much less trust the young men and women who tell you they are crazy in love with you, even though you may be twice their age.

In Cuba, we are in the midst of a tournament of rascals, crooks and scammers that multiply on a daily basis and make us be constantly on the alert in order to not fall prey to their scams. You have to be especially careful of pickpockets on public transport so they don't steel your money, your cell phone or anything of value from your pocket or your purse. And what can I say about thefts at homes or hold-ups in the middle of the street!

To live like this, assuming that decency and decorum are forever lost, is sad and depressing. Even if it's not a consolation, on the contrary, we are reaching the point where we'll have to accept as true the old adage that states that in an environment where one struggles to survive, it's difficult to find decent people.

ARTÍCULO DE OPINIÓN

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