

The Regime Tightens Its Grip and Biden Relaxes Restrictions

Javier Prada | martes, 17 de mayo, 2022 10:27 am



HAVANA, Cuba. - Sunday, we woke up to the news -not a surprise to us- that the People's Power National Assembly had approved unanimously the new Penal Code. The document is so noxious to civil liberties, so dictatorial in its essence and objectives, that one cannot understand the measures announced by the Biden administration to allegedly help the Cuban people to pursue their dreams of freedom.

Once again, the United States loosens the noose around the dictatorship's neck. Our "long-time enemy" will respond with money, with lots of money, to the pressure strategies that ever since the time of Fidel Castro the communists have utilized to force the White House into negotiating. Thawing without the hullabaloo, without a presidential visit, without the Tampa Bay Rays or a speech at Havana's Gran Teatro, or meetings with chosen self-employed entrepreneurs.

The iceberg has begun to melt in silence, with the renewal of the Family Reunification Program, and the resumption of flights from the United States to other Cuban cities in addition to Havana. As if this were not enough, president Joe Biden will eliminate restrictions imposed on remittances by the Trump

administration and will allow U.S. citizens to visit Cuba to restart people-to-people contact and academic research.

That is how “our enemy” rewards the regime that gave orders to “go out and fight the people” against its own people on July 11, 2021; the same regime that still holds hundreds of political prisoners in jail; the same regime that just approved a Penal Code that criminalizes freedom of expression, the right to political activism, and the right to a free press. Money, lots of money for a dictatorship that not only upholds the death penalty, but also includes it as punishment in more than twenty categories of offence in the newly-approved Penal Code, justifying its validity by alluding to the “hostile policies” of the United States toward Cuba.

Strange, indeed, this hostility that translates into generous concessions which are incompatible with the deplorable state of democracy in Cuba. The grand prize for the regime that is preventing more than 200 Cubans from leaving the country, the same regime that so arrogantly forbade curator and activist Anamely Ramos from returning home to Cuba last February. The jackpot for the same regime that supports Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; that has loaded with spies the academic panels at the Latin American Studies Association (LASA, by its Spanish acronym); the same regime that in recent days lied at the United Nations when it affirmed that military conscription in Cuba is voluntary.

The White House has stated that its new assistance will help the private sector, and it’s not difficult to imagine that we are talking about the same “window-dressing entrepreneurs” the regime sold Obama as Cuba’s civil society and independent actors of the national economy. The agents and front-men of the regime must already be very well-positioned to absorb all possible monies once the avalanche of dollars begins, because the money for investments and a percentage of the remittances will end up where they’ve always ended up, without a doubt.

No one knows the name of the U.S. entity that has been privileged with the only license issued by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC, by its English acronym) since 1960 to invest in Cuba. Allegedly, financing would go to a private Cuban business whose identity is still unknown; but no self-employed entrepreneur who is not very well connected to the government elite will get a slice of this pie, and that is a fact that’s well known to the White House.

It's disappointing to watch as history repeats itself; but to watch the U.S. government act in such splendid manner at this time, amidst a rising wave of repression against civil society not seen in decades, is, at the very least, inexplicable. And the Cuban people? Oh, they are there, self-destructing themselves and withstanding more hardship each day while the Minister of the Economy talks about the possibility of a third exchange rate for "economic actors", even those that report losses. Cubans are screwed: they, who work and get paid a salary in national currency, will have to wait until there is sufficient convertible hard currency for them to access that commercial network.

One thing is certain: the U.S. is a problem for Cuba, not because of the non-existent blockade, but because of the volatility of its policies which are dependent on who is occupying the Oval Office. The U.S.-Cuba differendum is a joke. The interests of each side are reconciled behind closed doors to the pleasure of the dictatorship while it -the dictatorship- prostitutes itself in the diplomatic front. In the meantime, it milks the Biden administration dry and signs agreements so that Putin, the invader, can send Cuba canned meat, dairy products and other minutiae to keep the average Cuban busy and state security agents fat.

The regime has the law and its constitution on its side; soon it will also have U.S. dollars by the billions it so much desires. If with this move by the U.S. government the Cuban people fail to understand that freedom is solely in their hands, then they start preparing their necks for an even-more asphyxiating yoke. Dictatorships are not overthrown with money. But if money reaches the dictatorship just when it has approved a Stalinist penal code, then it becomes clear that the free world supports its conduct.

ARTÍCULO DE OPINIÓN

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