

THE GIANT WITH SEVEN-LEAGUE BOOTS (PART I)

I learned it from Aristotle, the most famous philosopher in the history of mankind.

Human beings are capable of working either the most wonderful deeds or the worst inequities.

Their amazing intelligence enables them to use the inalterable laws of nature to do right or wrong.

Back in the days when our armed struggle was developing in the mountains of Cuba, in the great Mexican nation –seen by all Cubans as something of their own-, being less experienced that I am right now, I lived through an ephemeral but unforgettable period of time during which all wonders concentrated in a single place of the Earth.

I would not be able to find the proper way or words to describe my impressions as has been done by a Mexican who is –no wonder- the best authorized person to speak about the tragedy of that country, since he was elected Governor of the very important electoral district of Mexico City, the capital of the Republic of Mexico. During the last elections in 2006 he ran as a candidate of the “Coalición para el bien de todos” (Coalition for the wellbeing of all).

He ran for elections and scored a majority vote against the PAN’s candidate, but the empire prevented him from taking office.

As every other political leader, I knew the way in which Washington had designed the ideas of the “neoliberalism” sold to Latin American countries and others from the Third World as the quintessence of political democracy and economic development; but I never had a very clear idea of the way in which the empire used that doctrine to destroy and devour the wealth of a most important country with abundant natural resources, whose heroic people created a culture of their own even before the pre-Christian era, more than two thousand years ago.

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a person whom I never talked to or had any friendly relation with, is the author of a small book that has just been published, and I thank him for his brilliant description about what is going on in that sister nation. The book is entitled “La mafia que se adueñó de México...y el 2012” (The mafia that took over Mexico...and the year 2012”.

The book reached my hands four days ago, on August 7 in the afternoon, after I returned from my meeting with the deputies to the Cuban National People’s Power Assembly. I read it with great interest. It describes the way in which the United States devours, bite after bite, a sister nation of this hemisphere. The US had already grabbed more than fifty per cent of its territory, took hold of the biggest mines of the finest gold and the oil wealth that has been intensively exploited for more than a century, from which they still extract almost three million barrels per day. I skip any reference to the huge exploitation of gas, about which I have no data.

In Chapter 1 the author explains the very weird phenomenon whereby railway transportation, which was created during the days of Benito Juarez, when the first Mexico City – Veracruz stretch was opened, has disappeared in Mexico.

Under the Porfirio Diaz administration, railways were expanded by more than 20 000 kilometers, an effort that was later on significantly strengthened by the Mexican Revolution.

Today, there is a railway that “goes from Chihuahua to Los Mochis, in Sinaloa. In the twinkling of an

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eye, technocrats did away with the illusions entertained by the 19th century liberals who thought railway transportation was the ideal way to bring about progress in Mexico”, explains Lopez Obrador in his book.

“The inauguration of Fox as President of the Republic only served to revamp the old regime and continue with the same corruption. This was in fact the six year period of gatopardism, a maneuver whereby, in all appearances, everything changes so that everything remains the same. Even before his inauguration as President, Fox had yielded to international financial agencies and, obviously, continued to serve the country’s magnates. Besides, he not only kept the economic policy unchanged, but also relied on the same group of technocrats that had been active since the days of Salinas.”

A few pages on the author points out: “...today, almost all banking institutions are owned by foreigners. They don’t grant credits to promote the country’s development; they invest in government bonds, charge the highest interest rates in the world, get fabulous profits and are a main source of transfer of resources to their respective headquarters in Spain, the United States and England.”

“Under Fox, the assets of the nation and the people continued to be given away to private individuals, both nationals and foreigners [...] Under Fox, there was no limit to the distribution of the national territory for the exploitation of gold, silver and copper [...] The Law on Mining was modified with the aim of granting unique prospecting and exploitation franchises which will remain valid for a period of up to 50 years, a term that could be further extended [...] Until December 2008, 24 816 396 hectares had been franchised, which accounts for 12 per cent of the national territory, an area as big as the state of Chihuahua, the biggest in the country.”

The data offered by Lopez Obrador at the end of Chapter 1 are truly amazing and surprising even to those who have the worst opinion about neoliberalism.

Regarding Fox government he asserts: “...in 2005, under Foxism, the Law on Income Taxes was again modified so that, once again, the big corporations could be granted 100 per cent of benefits. For a better understanding of what all this means, we should bear in mind that in 2008, according to official figures, 400 big monopolies whose profits had reached 5 trillion pesos –according to official figures– which amounts to more than a half of the GDP of that year, only paid 1.7 per cent of the income tax and the corporate tax single rate.”

“Besides, under the Fox government tax refunds in favor of the so-called big taxpayers reached its peak and, obviously, both the PRI and the PAN governments have been trying to justify this fiscal canonry using the fallacy of investments promotion. If only this were true, in the last 27 years we would have had an economic growth instead of the paralysis that has prevailed. Likewise it is possible to prove that tax refunds are higher than the increase of private investments. Only from 2001 to 2005, while private investments increased by 279 billion pesos, tax refunds reached 604 billion. That is, the figure was more than doubled. Corruption in the power elite is so official that the IFAI (the Federal Institute of Access to Public Information) resolved that the names of the companies which in 2005 happened to be benefited by SAT (Tax Administration Service) through the multimillion tax refunds should remain secret for a period of 12 years –until 2019.”

Those were the exact words pronounced by Carlos Ahumada when he was arrested in Cuba for violating our laws. Lopez Obrador knows about this because we sent him the minutes together with the deported Carlos Ahumada on April 28 of 2004.

This event was no doubt the biggest political fraud in the history of the Americas. There are a few more issues that I would like to clarify with absolute precision.

In same Chapter 1, under the title “Los Amos de Mexico” (The masters of Mexico), Lopez Obrador writes as follows: “During the time I served as Head of Government of the city of Mexico (2000-2005), I met almost all members of that elite...”

I also share Lopez Obrador opinion about Carlos Slim. I knew him too. He always visited me when I traveled to Mexico and he visited me once in Cuba. He presented me with a TV set -the latest model of the times- which I kept in my home until hardly one year ago. He did not intend to bribe me. Neither had I ever asked him any favor. Despite being the richest of them all, with a fortune that amounts to more than 60 billion dollars, he is an intelligent man who knows every secret about the stock markets and the mechanisms of the capitalist system.

There were always multimillionaires, with or without Salinas, with or without Fox, although, of course, they would have never been so many as they were under the mafia that took over Mexico. Lopez Obrador referred to all of them in his book and identified the power of the mafia that took over his country.

Chapter 2 is entitled "Abandono, corrupción y pobreza" (Neglect, corruption and poverty). He includes the GDP figures of all countries of the world during the period 1982-2009. He refers with admiration to China's GDP: 10.1. What is more, he includes in a separate paragraph that country's GDP in 2009. He points out as follows: "...and to top it all, [that year] Mexico ranked the last among all countries of the American continent and, incredible as it may seem, we ranked below Haiti."

"Technocrats have acted as fundamentalists. They not only attacked the orthodoxy of international financial agencies, but turned their recommendations into an ideology."

"Rural Mexico has been the most affected by the so-called neoliberal policies. The state of neglect in the countryside is dramatic. I still remember that Pedro Aspe, the Secretary of Finance under the Salinas government, boasted that the promotion of productive activities in the agricultural sector was of no importance because in a globalized world it was far more economic to buy abroad what we consume."

"The neoliberal policies implemented in the countryside have caused a serious productive backwardness in the agricultural sector in relation to the population growth. From the three-year period 1980-1982 to the three-year period 2007-2009, the agricultural, forestry and fishery GDP per inhabitant was reduced by 15.2 per cent. In other words, while the total foodstuffs production increased at an annual rate of 1.5 per cent, during the period of reference the population of the country grew at a rate of 1.7 per cent per annum."

"As from 1996, oil production continued to grow until it reached the record figure of 1.231 145 billion barrels. From 1996 to 2004 the exports of crude oil increased from 563 to 683 million barrels per year. This increase coincided with the overexploitation by the Cantarell complex, whose production from 2000 to 2004 increased from 47 to 61 per cent of the national output, thus becoming the most productive oil field in history."

"While oil extraction was on the increase, proven oil reserves dramatically decreased. In 1982 these amounted to 48.300 billion barrels; however, in 2009 this figure decreased to 10 billion. Only during the Fox government one third of the proven oil reserves was consumed."

"This absurd technocratic policy also damaged oil refining, gas production and the petrochemical industry. The enterprises linked to these activities were deprived from the resources required for their expansion and modernization. No new refinery has been built in the country since 1979.

Recently, as a result of our actions, Calderon was forced to announce he would build one. However, two years have elapsed since he made this announcement and not a single brick has been laid down."

"At the same time, the reference price established was the one fixed in the United States, which is the most expensive in the world. It is for this reason that we have become a gas importing country."

"As for the petrochemical industry, given the lack of investments and the state of neglect, the only thing

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they did was to reduce 'the losses' of petrochemical complexes by shutting down some production lines."

"...the huge business and financial corporations have decided to confiscate all PEMEX revenues. From 2000 to 2009 this company's accrued sales amounted to 8.841 trillion dollars. It paid 6.185 trillion dollars in taxes, that is, a figure equivalent to 70 per cent of its sales. [...] Direct public investments in PEMEX (without including the debt) amounted to 437 billion pesos, which accounts for 5 per cent of all its sales."

"Obviously, after the adoption of the neoliberal policy, the energy sector became closely linked to foreign interests. During this period, the possibility to incorporate this sector and use it as a lever to boost national development was farther away. All neoliberal governments have defended the idea and the purpose of privatizing both the electrical and oil industries."

"We do not accept any occupation of our territory. Mexico should keep on being a free, independent and sovereign country. We do not want to become a colony."

"... This time I concluded by reminding them of something that was once said by General Lazaro Cardenas del Rio: 'Any government or private individual that gives away its national resources to foreign companies is a traitor to its own country'. Unfortunately, in present times corruption is stronger than patriotism."

"One of the most profitable businesses rendering benefits to both officials and contractors has been the purchase of gas from foreign companies. Therefore, technocrats have never really cared about extracting gas or prevent it from being wasted. Mexico is the oil producing country that burns the highest amount of gas into the atmosphere."

"In these days, what people are most concerned about is the lack of jobs. Unemployment is alarming. Backwardness has been growing at an exponential rate. It has been estimated that every year one million youths enter the labor market, and the new jobs that have been created in the formal economy barely cover 25 per cent of the demand."

"Those who have managed to keep their jobs do not earn enough to satisfy their basic needs. A research report issued by the Center for Multidisciplinary Analyses of the School of Economics of UNAM states that 17 776 000 persons who are paid less than two minimum salaries and account for 41 per cent of the economically active population, do not earn enough to purchase a food basket considered as appropriate, taking into account nutritional, cultural and economic aspects."

"As for education, backwardness is astonishing: the figure of persons 15 years old or more who have not completed primary education amounts to 34 per cent. Illiteracy amounts to 9.46 per cent, but in those states with a higher level of marginalization such as Oaxaca, Guerrero and Chiapas it can reach 23 per cent."

"In Mexico, only two out of 10 youths have access to higher education -which accounts for 20 per cent. UNESCO established 40 to 50 per cent as a benchmark for this education level."

"In February 2010, Dr. Jose Narro Robles, Rector of UNAM, reported that out of the 115 736 students who took the entrance examination, only 10 350 were selected -which accounted for 8.9 per cent.

"During the last 20 years, as a result of the neglect of higher education by the State, private schools enrollment increased from 16 to 37 per cent."

In Chapter 3 Lopez Obrador states as follows: "...The oligarchy, the mafia of power, felt threatened and did not care about destroying the little that had been built to establish democracy in Mexico."

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"Time and facts have shown that fraud caused huge damage: it hurt the feelings of millions of Mexicans; undermined the institutions; totally degraded the so-called political society..."

"Today, March 9 of 2009, here in Tamazula, Durango, where the first president of Mexico, Guadalupe Victoria, was born, I conclude my tour around the 2 038 municipalities of the country governed by a party structure. Now I need to go to the 418 indigenous habits and customs municipalities of the state of Oaxaca, which I will visit during the last four-month period of this year."

"During 430 days we drove down 148 173 kilometers of paved and earth roads to reach the most isolated villages of Mexico."

"The lack of infrastructure and basic services in the municipalities is notorious. The capital cities of 108 municipalities out of the 1 038 I visited did not have paved roads. In this regard the most backward state is Oaxaca: out of the 152 municipalities governed by a party structure, 36 have no paved roads. Following Oaxaca is the state of Puebla, with 15. There, as well as in the mountainous region of the state of Guerrero, I was able to see not only the poor condition of roads. I also saw that the new roads, those that are under construction, are of such poor quality that within one year at the very latest they will become earth roads again."

"It is irrational to consume so much Coca-Cola or its equivalent..."

"I believe that the consumption of this soft drink, which has been estimated in one million liters per day, is mainly due to publicity and, in certain regions, this has become a habit that gives persons a certain rank in a hierarchy."

"It is indispensable to replace the current economic policy which has rendered no results, even from a quantitative point of view. Mexico is among the countries with the lowest growth rate in recent years."

It is necessary to change the way politics are made. This lofty profession has been completely perverted. Today, politics are a synonym of deceit, shady deals within the elite and corruption. Legislators, leaders and public officials are alienated from the feelings of the people. The idea that politics is only a business of politicians and not everybody's business continues to prevail."

The transformation that the country requires not only should pursue economic growth, democracy, development and wellbeing. It should also mean -first and foremost- the materialization of a new trend of thought based on the culture of our people, its vocation to work and its immense kindness, with the addition of values such as tolerance, respect for diversity and the protection of the environment."

"In March of 2009 I concluded my tour around the 2 038 municipalities governed by a party structure. For that reason I drafted a text called 'El pais desde abajo: Apuntes de mi gira por Mexico' (The country from below: Notes about my tour around Mexico). On November 20, I concluded my visit to the 418 indigenous habits and customs municipalities of the state of Oaxaca..."

"The people of Oaxaca have been able to survive thanks to its own culture. It has been the source of their working mysticism, their talent and their strong family and community bonds. Their attachment to the land helps them to maintain a self-consumption economy based on the production of corn, beans, poultry, coffee, and the exploitation of forests, the creation of hand-woven mats and hats, the making of craftworks and other activities. Their creativity and workforce is highly appreciated in all cities of the country, in the agricultural fields of the North as well as abroad. In the United States the mixtecos have really earned the fame of being the best workers in the world."

"As a result of the Government's neglect, Oaxaca is the state with the highest poverty and marginalization rates in the whole country. Nowadays this is being all the more felt. We could start from the fact that persons have three main sources of survival: the self-consumption economy, the government assistance and the remittances sent by Mexican emigrants. In the first case, the most

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important thing is the production of corn. That blessed plant is what ensures that there would be no lack of basic foodstuffs such as, among others, the tortilla, complemented by beans, chilies and nopal, which helps to palliate hunger. However, in 2009, due to a delay in rainfalls, the corn crops were lost, which made it necessary to buy corn."

"Finally, remittances are the third source of income -which in 2009 decreased by almost 18 per cent due to the economic crisis affecting the United States and our country. In 2008 Oaxaca received 1.456 billion dollars in remittances and in 2009 it has been estimated that hardly 1.194 billion dollars were received."

"It broke my heart to see some men crying while they described to me how difficult this situation was for them and the state of neglect they suffer."

"In the field of health, neglect was also a constant feature. There are municipalities where there are no doctors and even when there are first level clinics in the capital cities of the municipalities, doctors only work from Monday thru Friday and there is lack of medicines everywhere."

"Regarding education, despite the efforts by both pupils and teachers, there is remarkable backwardness. Schools are neglected. Their roofs are in a very poor condition. Classrooms lack blackboards and students' desks; some of them have been built using precarious materials. The most regrettable thing of all is that many children and teenagers walk up to two hours to attend school and almost all of them go without having breakfast."

"I for one have been labeled as messianic and insane. And here I open a parenthesis to express that I recently took part in a series of lectures at Colegio de Mexico, and the historian Lorenzo Meyer asked me if I intended to do something to counteract the attacks against me, because if back in 2006 I was linked to Chavez, whom I have not even met as yet, it would not be farfetched to think that, previous to the presidential elections of 2012, they could go as far as comparing me to Osama Bin Laden."

"The campaign against us went to such extremes that many believed the rumors asserting that I have quite a lot of money and own luxurious residences inside the country and abroad. Some people, blinded by their right-wing views, and others, fully and openly manipulated, refuse to accept the fact that I am not corrupt and that I struggle for ideals and principles, which I believe are the most important thing in my life."

"However, despite the attempts to destroy us, I take pride in saying they have not succeeded in doing so, nor they will, not only because of our moral authority, but because the men and women who take part in this struggle feel a deep love for our peers. Over and above any aforethought malice and against all odds we strongly believe in the construction of a more just, humane and egalitarian society."

In that last Chapter, Lopez Obrador lists up ten goals which summarize his political ideas:

"1. To recover the State and put it to the service of the people and the nation.

"2. To democratize the mass media.

"3. To create a new economy.

"4. To combat monopolist practices.

"5. To abolish fiscal privileges.

"6. To exercise politics as an ethical imperative and implement republican austerity.

"7. To strengthen the energy sector.

"8. To achieve food sovereignty.

"9. To establish a welfare state.

"10. To promote a new trend of thought."

And then he wonders: "What shall we do with the mafia?"

"...Our question about what we shall do with the mafia, or rather, what we shall do with the oligarchs, points to a different direction and is based on our belief that the main problem of Mexico is precisely the predominance of a handful of persons who hold power and are the ones who bear responsibility for the current national tragedy. And, obviously, if we are all committed to establish democracy and transform the country, it is better that everybody knows as from now what we would do with the oligarchs after the triumph of our cause."

"...Unfortunately, greed and the desire of making money no matter the cost without any sort of moral scruples have been the feelings that have prevailed in the country. That is to say, the culture of treating others very badly and the maxim that states that "there is no progress without cheating" still prevail.

The author concludes in page 205 with the following words:

"Thus, a process to revolutionize peoples' awareness in order to build a new Republic is moving on. That is a lofty task. Nothing in the public arena could be more important than achieving the rebirth of Mexico. No other action will provide more satisfaction than struggling for the wellbeing of others. Living with courage and having the good fortune of making history are a source of pride."

His book is a courageous and irrefutable denunciation against the mafia that took over Mexico.

1. There is no reference to the fact that a colossal drug market has been created in the United States, and its military industry supplies the most sophisticated weapons, which have turned Mexico into the first victim of a bloody war in which more than 5 thousand Mexican youths are dying every year. I understand, though, that a man who ceaselessly travels around the most isolated municipalities of the country could not address that problem. Nevertheless, I for one think it is my duty to remind the Mexican people that this problem adds up to the events discussed in the courageous denunciation launched by Lopez Obrador.

2. There is no reference either to the fact that climate change has become a colossal risk that endangers the survival of the human species, which is already creating very serious problems such as the one currently affecting Russia, where the number of victims of the heat and the smoke coming from the fires in the forests and the peat have more than doubled the number of persons requiring funeral services in Moscow and other cities. Mexico is precisely the country where the next Climate Change Summit and many other related activities will take place.

3. The author makes no reference whatsoever to the imminent risk of a nuclear war that could make our species disappear. However, it is only fair to mention that on May 24 of 2010, when Lopez Obrador concluded his book, the UN Security Council had not adopted Resolution 1929 of June 9 of 2010 ordering the inspection of Iranian merchant vessels, thus creating a situation it can no longer escape from.

However, Lopez Obrador will be the person with the highest political and moral authority by the time when the system -and the empire with it- collapses. His contribution to the struggle aimed at preventing President Obama from unleashing this war would be of great value.

To be continued tomorrow.

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Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.comandanteenjefe.org>)

Fidel Castro Ruz
August 11, 2010
9:53 p.m.

Date:

11/08/2010

Source URL: <http://www.comandanteenjefe.org/en/articulos/giant-seven-league-boots-part-i?page=0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C12%2C0%2C0%2C0>