

THE MEETING WITH BARBARA LEE AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE BLACK CAUCUS

The morning was stormy, damp and cold. Strong winds were blowing and the sky was dark. This was no spring day, not warm.

Barbara wanted to visit the Latin American School of Medicine where 114 young Americans are dedicated to studying medicine.

The official plane that had brought them to Cuba had pushed forward their trip by 24 hours and it would be leaving at two in the afternoon of Tuesday, instead of on Wednesday.

I did not attempt to meet with all of them since I don't have enough room for the seven of them, plus the translator and the minister accompanying them. I asked that she visit me with two other legislators, as assigned by the group. Thus I was able to meet with her again.

On this occasion, circumstances had changed considerably. The Legislative Black Caucus represents a sector that carries a lot of weight in the United States.

The long struggle for equality and justice was illuminated by the life and example of Martin Luther King whose thinking and work today enthralls millions of people in the world and who was the reason, in my view, why a black citizen, at a moment of deep crisis, reached the U.S. presidency.

As a result, a new meeting with the Black Caucus would take on, for me personally, a special significance. I learned about their stay in Cuba from the comrades who looked after them during their visit, the basic ideas of the congressional organization and the opinions held by its members.

Raul had also communicated to me the magnificent impression they had made on him during his meeting with them which had extended for almost four hours last night, on Monday.

When Barbara Lee arrived at the house, accompanied by Bobby Rush, Democratic Congressman for Illinois, and Laura Richardson, Congresswoman for California, together with José Miyar Barrueco, the Minister of CITMA, who for many years was secretary of the Council of State, it was 11:35 a.m.; the skies had cleared and radiant sunshine filled the courtyard. I was really happy to see Barbara once again and to have the possibility of personally greeting Bobby and Laura, two people whose names were by now familiar because of their words spoken at the meetings with Raul, Alarcón, Bruno, Miyar and the relatives of the Cuban Five.

Their meeting with me lasted 1 hour and forty-five minutes, by the clock; in reality, it took half a minute if I were to judge by the speed with which it took place and my desires to listen to them.

I briefly told them about my experiences during two years and seven months of medical care and the activities to which I now dedicate myself. I explained to them all I have learned in this period of enforced confinement, especially my great interest in all that is happening in the world and especially in the United States, collecting news and concentrating on study. I recalled that I had invited them so I could listen to them and I began to forget what most interested me: to hear their opinions. Their interest and the depth with which they were expressing their points of view, the sincerity and warmth of their simple and profound words were comforting. The three of them were reflecting transparency, pride in their work, their organization, their struggle and their country. It is clear that they know Obama and they radiate confidence, certitude and sympathy with him.

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Barbara is proud of presiding over the Black Caucus, of participating actively in her country's politics with new verve and optimism, of her son who had not yet been born at the time of the Cuban revolution, and of her five grandchildren. She had cast her sole vote against Bush's genocidal war in Iraq. It was unbeatable proof of political courage. She deserves every honor.

She particularly remembers Dellums who brought her to Cuba for the first time when she was his assistant and they spent many hours conversing with me on a cay. He is no longer a legislator, she tells me, but a mayor in Oakland, looking after a population of 400,000 inhabitants; she also tells me about the former congresswoman who visited Cuba with Dellums and who is now 98 years old and sends warm greetings.

Laura is California congresswoman for Long Beach and she speaks with special pride about the California port which, she says, "is the third in the world". In truth I couldn't hold back my desire to joke and bearing in mind that she is an active defender of the environment I told her: "Laura, if the Antarctic polar ice cap melts, your third port in the world will be underwater". In the ambience created there, she wasn't upset in the least and she continued telling me interesting things.

Rush spoke next; he is the oldest and most experienced of the legislators and he was a radical activist in his youth. His life has been a never-ending crescendo of political and human knowledge. He is member of the Trade and Energy Committee and of the Communications and Internet Sub-Committee. I listened to him without interrupting for a period of 15 or 20 minutes. He explained that in his youth he read the works of important modern revolutionary thinkers who were the starting point for his later political maturity through observation and meditation about what was happening in his country and in the world. He mentioned Mandela, Che and other extraordinary persons by name, people who sacrificed themselves for others. As a general characteristic among the leaders of the Black Caucus, he quotes verses from the Bible like Martin Luther King used to do, backing up his points of view. "The word justice is mentioned in the Bible two thousand times, almost as many times as the word love", he tells me. He spoke of his health, the battles he has waged to preserve it and to survive from cancer.

He personally knows Obama, having dealt with him closely for years, at times even as an adversary; he expressed a high and sincere concept of him; he describes him as an honest and good person who wants to help the American people.

He expressed admiration for the health services provided in Cuba for the people and for the research centers that are dedicated to the war against disease.

I could listen to him for hours as a never-ending fountain of knowledge and maturity.

I asked him about the meaning of his statement: "Obama can improve relations with Cuba, but Cuba should help Obama". We have never been aggressors nor do we threaten the United States. Cuba would not have the possibility to take the initiative. From the beginning we had had the certainty that his words were sincere and we said it publicly before and after his election. At the same time we expressed the opinion that, in the United States, the objective realities were more powerful than Obama's sincere intentions.

Finally, I asked him about which of the books published in English in the U.S. about Martin Luther King were the best and whether they were translated into Spanish. The three of them spoke to me about Taylor Bretch's trilogy, as the most interesting among them, and of: "Letters from Birmingham Jail". They were not sure about their translation into Spanish and they promised to send me the pertinent material.

It was an excellent meeting.

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