

Now Stupidity Succeeds the Crime

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A ndalusian poet Luis Cernuda penned the Alexandrian verse that gave this article its title. He was alluding to the assassination of poet García Lorca, which was perpetrated by Franco supporters, and to the false claims of his literary contemporaries excusing his murder. All the articles and declarations the official Cuban press has made regarding the death of political prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo are deserving of the same Alexandrian verse.

First, they insist on refusing to acknowledge his condition as a political prisoner, or that his self-imposed hunger strike was a political action, about the only thing someone deprived of his rights and freedom can do. None of the regime's spokespersons bothered to present evidence against him. According to Ubieta Gómez, was jailed in 2003 because of 'public disorderliness,' but it was really his protest against a wave of arbitrary arrests and sentencings during the Black Spring. Even if he were imprisoned for a common crime, becoming a prisoner of conscience while incarcerated is not unusual or new. It brings to mind well known predecessors like Malcolm X, and the "Castristas," a name given to followers of Fidel Castro like Commander Raúl Menéndez Tomasevich.

When the European Parliament passed a condemnatory declaration, the island's government called it "anti-Cuban." It was not a statement condemning that they had left Zapata to die, but a new, collective assault on Cuban sov-

ereignty. This is how the authorities hide behind patriotism, in order to avoid blame. Any observer of Cuban affairs knows to whom the blame for this goes, just as in the tragic case of the March 13th tugboat incident, and the downing of the small planes piloted by Brothers to the Rescue.

Another explanation meant to reduce the venom surrounding the handling of this Cuban prisoner—a very cleverer one—was using the presence of Cuban doctors in other countries. Zapata's crime was protesting against the totalitarian chaos in which we have come to live in this once hope-inspiring Revolution, an unforgiveable action in Cuba. The naked emperor of the fabled tale would have arrested any honest, vocal child who 'exposed' him, and all his family.

This allegation reflects the regime's schizophrenia; its generosity is ultimately a very calculated political investment meant to reap benefits at moments precisely like these, when its credibility is suffering.

Even if the small, governing elite always makes the decisions, its spokespersons make an effort to obfuscate all this in a rhetorical fog, ensuring that these leaders are not held responsible for their acts. We do not know who gave the final order that caused the sinking of the "March 13th" tugboat, which was carrying defenseless mothers and children. We never will. When its ability to repress is at stake, mercy has no value whatsoever. This explains the *modus operandi* that was employed against



Orlando Zapata Tamayo's funeral

Zapata Tamayo, a helpless man who could ultimately only hurt himself.

Our aged regime's obvious inability to deal with this Cuban man's protest shows just how impoverished our *caudillos* have become. Used to leading without reproach, these leaders now lack resources other than the tricks they used cunningly against the hijackers of the Regla ferryboat, including a fake copy of *Granma*, 'the newspaper that never lies'—in the words of its 'owner-in-chief.'

On "Round Table," a Cuban TV show, discussion of Zapata's death was unavoidable. It was approached from an exclusively medical point of view. Health professionals whose impossible mission was the prolonging of Zapata Tamayo's life, after a fast of over two months, presented testimonials. Missing were any by his jailers, who for many weeks remained indifferent to his demands. I would like to have seen their faces, and heard them justify the unjustifiable. They did not, because they are part of the regime's evil face, the same one that earlier seemed to embody the ideals of

José Martí, and that today allowed the death of an honorable Cuban.

There is one detail that should be duly noted; this is the first time in 50 years* that death was not on Fidel Castro's side. Up till now, he had used it with fearsome cunning, to put an end to his enemies, and to show his inflexible determination. Perhaps Zapata Tamayo's absolute sacrifice marks a significant event in our long-lived history of corpses and flowers.

* There are ten cases of the deaths of political prisoners in Cuba prior to that of Orlando Zapata Tamayo. These are documented in the *Archivo de Cuba*, under the direction of Mary Werlau. To find the archive, visit <http://cubaarchive.org/home/index.php>

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