

A Death and its Dignity

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The international condemnation of the Cuban government, for its indolence in dealing with the 86-day long hunger strike that caused prisoner of conscience Orlando Zapata Tamayo's death, signals the retreat of a propaganda machine that has always been unscrupulous when it comes to defending the Revolution's interests.

The expert nature of the Cuban state's manipulative workings has always been very successful at mounting damaging counteroffensives. Yet, the ethically corrupt and unprincipled people in power who use these slanderous tricks and other forms of manipulation have not been able—this time—to stall the gigantic wave of rejection that Orlando Zapata Tamayo's death has brought about.

Their virulent attacks on this movement, which now exceeds the demands for justice for the innocent victims of the March 13th tugboat, the Brothers to the Rescue planes, and three young black men who were executed for trying to hijack a launch, are evidence of the fact that the Cuban state is afraid. The Cuban government is livid as a result of the thousands of voices that are calling for an end to the violation of human rights. As usual, in response, it resorts to slanderous and disqualifying insults about its victim.

The first step in its slanderous campaign against Zapata Tamayo appeared in *Granma*

(the island's official newspaper). It characterized him as a "common prisoner," someone who had already accumulated a series of criminal offenses on his rap sheet. Then, it published that he "had been manipulated, and in some way convinced to destroy himself, in order to satisfy foreign political exigencies." In other words, these foreign interests had turned him into a martyr of the counterrevolution.

The State denies having incarcerated Zapata Tamayo on March 18th, 2003, during his hunger strike, which nearly coincided with its jailing of 75 peaceful dissident, journalists, librarians and independent unionist victims during the Black Spring, all of whom received very lengthy prison sentences. In addition, it claims that Zapata was incapable of having his own opinion, and that he had to have been manipulated by others whose goal it was to use his death as a banner.

These informational lies to which the Cuban authorities have us so accustomed, and that so many international news sources discredit, truly reveal the decline of a regime that now lacks the most minimal credibility. Their complaint about the media campaign against the island has fallen on deaf ears. So has their usual claim that this has interfered with the island's internal affairs. Nor have they been able to blame their ever-present enemy to the north for the global campaign against the

unjust incarceration of around 200 political prisoners in Cuba. Those signatures from the leftist elite's frequent sharpshooters haven't done much for them either. The unilateral views of these signatories are well known by the world's democrats. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Rigoberta Menchú, Samir Amin, Ignacio Ramonet and Eduardo Galeano, among others, are steadfast supporters of the Revolution's battle cry, "In Defense of Cuba." Even so, they are seen as the blindest of the blind because they simply refuse to see things as they are in exchange for who knows what benefit or reason.

The knowing silence and support the Cuban regime receives from Chávez, Lula, Evo, Correa, Ortega and the rest means nothing. One can see the Cuban model reflected in their governments, as if they were all just one dog wearing different collars.

Those thousands of solidarity marches on behalf of human rights in Cuba, in Los Angeles, New York, and other parts of the world, constitute a gigantic wave that the weakening Revolution's fortress wall will not be able to hold back. As if that weren't enough, the more than 40,000 signatures at the orlandozapatatamayo.blogspot.com website prove that this peaceful dissident's death will not go away or be silenced.

Bolstered by the signatures of nearly 40,000 people from all walks of life, international demands for the immediate and unconditional release of Cuban political prisoners are announcing the beginning of the end for the Revolution's impunity.

Herta Miller's Nobel Prize in Literature; the Cervantes Prizes that went to Mario Vargas

Llosa and Juan Marsé; filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar; historian Enrique Krause; actor Andy García; singers Ana Belén and Víctor Manuel, Nacha Guevara; the Ladies in White; and, many others, have created an formidable, international mosaic in support of Cuba's freedom. A counteroffensive media campaign would not be enough to obfuscate this outpouring.

If there is any lesson to be learned from Orlando Zapata Tamayo's unjust death it is that both Cuba and the world are tired of the impunity with which the regime has misgoverned the country. From now on, the clamor for change will not die out. The previously successful manipulation of information will no longer work, inside or outside of Cuba. Activism, the work of alternative information groups, and the Internet, will keep this freedom flame burning.

Every day, more and more Cubans experience personally the injustice of laws aimed at anyone who does not strictly stick to the rules, or who refuses to let himself be blackmailed, and go against his own neighbors or workmates. The number of people who have a family member in prison in Cuba is ever-increasing. The phrase "Zapata Lives!" may be common, but it is true. He lives on not only in his mother's eternal weeping, but in all his comrades-in-arms and all those who have yet to join the call for freedom—but have definitely heard it. They listen, weigh the pros and cons, and finally understand that the only thing they have to lose is their dignity.

Orlando Zapata Tamayo was right about this. He is an example to follow, as he preferred dignity in death than a lifetime of humiliation.