

# For the Dignity of All

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*Commemoration of the anniversary of Orlando Zapata Tamayo's death (Madrid, 2011)*

February 23<sup>rd</sup> now has a dual significance in Cuban history. On that day in 2010, prisoner of conscience Orlando Zapata Tamayo died, after a prolonged hunger strike during which the prison authorities even denied him water for 18 days. This revealed the unlimited nature of the Cuban government's criminal arrogance, but also made abundantly clear that there will always be men and women ready and willing to sacrifice themselves to defend the dignity of all their compatriots.

After the first anniversary of Zapata Tamayo's daring self-destruction, the entire country's oppositionist and human rights movement decided to pay him the homage he earned by means of his heroic sacrifice; he was a martyr to humility and wholeness. All around the island, hundreds of pro-democra-

cy leaders and activists filled their headquarters and poured out onto the streets to commemorate his fateful day.

A year after Zapata Tamayo's sacrifice, the immense majority of political prisoners that he so honorably knew how to represent have regained their freedom. The Cuban government was not able to handle the discredit and pressure the martyr's attitude, and the integrity shown by the valient Ladies in White, imposed on it, brought on by its inveterate devotion to intolerance. Lamentably, the immense majority of those former political prisoners were not able to participate in this day of pro-democratic reaffirmation, because they instead decided to march straight into exile.

Once again, the arrogance and panic among the upper echelons of Havana's leader-

ship was revealed that day, when they had to face the determination and commitment of the pro-democracy fighters. They were unable to maintain their composure when facing the growing degree of rejection being manifested by its citizens, and once more unleashed their repressive forces against the peaceful opposition. All over the country, cities, towns, and other places witnessed the pro-democracy fighters reaffirm their principles, and state-sponsored terrorism increased to the level of official policy.

Once again, the Ladies in White, who humbly and peacefully defend the greatest of human values, had to confront aggression on the part of the masses that were incited by the political police. Once more the Ladies in White demonstrated a firmness and impartiality that clearly exposed the despot's weakness, despite his insistence on reaffirming his own dominion, by force.

The *Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration* (CIR) also programmed a civic-cultural commemorative event at its headquarters, also in Havana. Invitees found a large, political police operation in force upon arriving, which prevented them access to the locale. The CIR leadership and other participants were arrested.

Similarly, leaders and activists from the *Pro-Democracy Youth Movement* (MJD), *Miguel Valdés Tamayo Movement*, *Racial Integration Movement*, *Oppositionist Movement for a New Republic*, and other oppositionist organizations were arrested for up to 48 hours, to prevent their participation in these commemorative events.

This expression of a desire for freedom faced arrogant repression in cities and towns like Palma Soriano, Santiago de Cuba, Holguín, Cárdenas, Matanzas, Guantánamo, Caimanera, Baracoa, Cienfuegos, Bayamo,

Santa Clara, Ranchuelo, Quemado de Güines, Manatí, Florida, Primero de Enero, Ciego de Ávila, Santa Cruz del Sur, Pinar del Río, Santi Spiritus, San Antonio de los Baños, Artemisa, and others, all of which were the scene of commemorative demonstrations determined to pay Zapata Tamayo the homage he deserves, even in the face repressive actions against these hundreds of activists.

This past 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, the arrogance and panic of the despots once again converged. Cuba's leaders, who lack all sensitivity and responsibility, are aware of how unhappy the Cuban people are, and how much they are rejecting them because they are tired of the high price they are paying for the dynastic absolutism that has plunged our beleaguered nation into an abyss of lies, repression, material desolation, corruption, and hopelessness. The repressive violence that has been unleashed on the streets against peaceful demonstrations concerning difference is immoral and unjustifiable. Yet, it is understandable, because of the Cuban authorities' need to instill so much panic amongst the population, to dissuade citizens from converting their discontent and concerns into open and frontal opposition.

Despite their blatant manipulation of reality and criminal arrogance, the authorities in Havana know that it is impossible to suffocate the entire populace's desire for freedom. This has been expressed in a dignified manner via the valor and dedication of the pro-democracy fighters, who for two years in a row have put aside their ideological, programmatic or personal differences to render the martyr the homage he deserves, and tell the world that the dream of a free Cuba, with dignity and equality, which cost a humble man his noble and brave life, will be rewarded in history, no matter how difficult the road to freedom.