

## **Open letter from Armando Tomey**

Colleagues and friends:

A few minutes ago, I was called to a meeting to participate in a tele-theater; the salary is the same they pay in teleplays, but this one is a novelty, with a lot of rehearsals and tapings, which apparently is becoming the fashion. To date, it is usual that players attend tryouts by their own means, but now they also want to make us accept going to tapings on our own; those of us who own cars should pay for gas, and those who don't should go by bus, taxi or on foot! This would be a normal thing if our living conditions were normal, such as earning a normal salary in line with what our work is worth (though it is still better than any laborer). They should allow us to be normal people and not have to worry about transportation. We have to be very careful and be firm to avoid this little fashion from being extended to the atypical, experimental, short, low budget or I-don't-know-what type of project classification, even the usual productions. It seems fine to me that Cuban TV should try to expand the drama spots that have been constrained for so long, but it does us no favors, when producing one or the other dramatic show, to offer us work while imposing a "take it or leave it" policy.

It is clear that the managers who are unable to manage their projects may accept less than the minimum just to produce the shows, regardless of the degree of sacrifice the actors and the rest of the personnel may be subjected to. I wonder if Randy, Taladrid or the rest of the select group at "THE ROUND TABLE" go by bus or on foot to their programs? We all know the answer, because they even pee in a separate bathroom. Just visit the bathrooms at the Focsa Studio, or the ones at the ICRT, the ones we use; they compete in the accumulated solid and liquid secretions categories with any bathroom at the Terminal or a national currency beer stand. There is only one TV in Cuba and it is not because of any decision we have made.

There is only one owner, so, that owner has to assume his responsibility and determine if we are a burden or an important social stratum. They cannot juggle what little we have achieved over many years through proposals, complaints, suggestions, weeping and wailing which, so far, are the only ways to try to achieve anything. For example, the shared right with doctors, athletes, pilots, scientists and few other privileged sectors for the authorization to buy a car, justifying the legally earned CUC in a country where we are not paid in CUC, while also requiring an exorbitant amount and, to top it all off, doing more paperwork than in "Death of a Bureaucrat" because they even demand a letter from the committee.

Some of us have also earned the right to e-mail, but of course without INTERNET! Because we are one of the few atypical countries in the world where we are not allowed access; I think it is North Korea and us. Why can't we have Internet? To answer that question would lead to a very critical analysis of the philosophy or autocratic and rigid manner our socialist society of mid-twentieth century is conducted: "OLD FASHIONED SOCIALISM".

Nothing about “THE NEW KIND” of twenty-first century socialism which we praise and defend so much for others in Latin America. Well, yes, it is about fighting for more, not losing anything. Why, after so many years working for this system, aging without getting anything from them, only the inherent respect from the people by having our work broadcast, do we have to take a bus in order to sign up? Young starting actors are sure candidates for ruthless exploitation.

If they allow it, they’ll see what the future holds. No! If we have to save, let the leaders take the bus, they exist because of us, some of them, very few of them, are capable and sensible and have even defended us with very good intentions, they have fought for our aspirations, but in the end... they have given up or suffered constantly before the giant crushing machine because they have to choose between keeping their jobs or swimming against the current and dying. The leaders are it, until they are hit with thunder; actors last a lifetime, on film, videotape or in the peoples’ memory. If we do not demand respect in a conscious way, they will never respect us. I call on all actors and artists in general, no matter how needy they are economically, not to accept draconian and humiliating work conditions. We have given up enough when accepting a reduction in pay constantly, in series where we are combined for non-compliance of “The Plan”, and always for reasons unrelated to the actors. While shooting on location out of doors, we should not have the minimal temporary dwellings where we even have to do our necessities in the bushes. In most of the TV productions, we should not eat inedible food, which has become an almost commonplace problem in our country, though it is fair to recognize that, lately, our producers have made discreet efforts to improve this.

It should not be because of scarce drama productions, and despite the emigration of many actors, that the ones who remain should suffer constant “bumps” and we should run out of work very often. For us, it has become customary to accept with resignation the shortages, regulations and measures. We always say: “What can we do?”... “No one can fix this!”... “We have to work!” Similarly, if we fall into the habit of going to tapings by our own means, what can we expect next?

Yes, we have to save. We are a country without an economy that has spent years squandering, buying snow sweepers to sweep dust, buying trains for tracks wider than ours, buying factories that were never assembled, while allowing the existing ones to be destroyed, allowing marabou bushes to go wild and take over our fields, imposing crazy agrarian policies that discouraged peasants’ production, imposing crops, allowing crops to go to waste in the fields, investing heavily in new techniques and machinery, but ending with the traditional crop culture, above all in one that was always our prime industry, sugar cane, which nowadays has been reduced by more than half.

Who could believe during the 70’s harvest that today half of our sugar refinery plants would be a pile of junk? Back then, the whole country was paralyzed in order to have the people help out at the harvest sites, no carnivals, no night spots, no transportation, centers and industry closed, everyone out to cut cane and “The ten million will be realized!”

We have to save! But it must be defined whether it’s more important to light up a sports stadium night after night while the air conditioning is turned off at a hospital’s recovery

room. We have to save! But above all, we need to rectify the errors. And there was an instance when a rectification was made and it became worse, because we became hermetically sealed and shut ourselves in much more. Most Cubans want another correction, but for the good. Of the good things we had before the revolution, the only thing that remains is the shaky architecture! ... And thanks! Because the old legacy is the best of all that is still standing. (Negation of the negation).

Let's not lose what we achieved very rapidly with the triumph of the revolution, and I am speaking of health and education with all the shortcomings they may have; of the first agrarian reform law that made many farmers, in danger of eviction, owners of their land; of the urban reform law, to ensure a roof over the heads for many families; the laborer housing plans, which, though it excluded many, it solved the desperate situation of so many other families. Today the issue of housing is one of the most serious problems for many Cubans, as many as three generations share an apartment, houses are not being built, or sold, or rented, a dead end!

Health care is free, but every day it is more difficult for us to get a good diagnosis, good medical attention, have tests, surgery. I know cases of patients who, after long days of hospital stays, have been discharged, undiagnosed or misdiagnosed and sometimes the price is, unfortunately, their lives. Some hospitals have been restored, but most are still in dirt and decay. Transportation has improved in the capital, but in the provinces it still consists of carts and bicycles! Rail transport is a shambles; many villages have been disconnected from the system. The inter-provincial bus transportation is also very deficient and bribery is what gets you tickets, while the unfortunate wait long hours.

Services to the population, after a brief period of improvement and efficiency, have again become very deficient, causing irritation and lack of responses to basic human needs like being able to sit when you have to wait, or a place for drinking water, pee and shit. The elderly who worked the required time, or the widows, have their little pensions, but, fuck! How they have to suffer in the kilometer-long lines to cash it and, as for other customers need to make a bank transaction on that date, better they should hang themselves.

Those with broken electrical equipment have to suffer so much, or anyone who needs a plumber, a carpenter or a mason at their home, because even those professions have been disappearing and getting more expensive every day. How do people with few resources and with limited mobility manage when they have to go to the hospital frequently?

Speaking of services in our country is like puckering up your lips and beginning to sweat. To all this, we must add the greatest misery of the Cuban people today, "eating". The ration book is a great help for most families, but it is just that, a help, the remainder, which is the larger portion, requires daily feats, from inventing to thievery over the heads of those who are bursting from working honestly and getting very little in return. Lately, a unique phenomenon is taking shape: "nobody has a kilo" ... but "there is nothing, either". It is true that we can still boast of some very good things, such as the fact that children in Cuba do not have to or are not permitted to work. They are required to study, and may suffer from many shortages and inequalities, but none die of hunger or live

under a bridge. But the question is why do we have to renounce to or abstain from so many other things to have this?

Yes, we have to save, but we have wasted and squandered many resources. We have helped many countries by giving them what we took away from ourselves. We wanted to head up and finance the world revolution while we were a poor country. In order to defend ourselves against the “Yankees” we sought refuge in the “Russians” and we know well how dearly that commitment has cost us. We engaged in too many warring conflicts at a great cost in lives and resources, and today, none of those countries’ political practices are similar to ours. We forgot to raise the living standards of the people and to think about their needs and aspirations and we became the Messiah of proletarian internationalism. Today we insist on old failed formulas and follow the same straight, straighter, straightest path. Where to?

There is much to do: To begin, we must recognize: Where did we go wrong all these years? And above all, let everyone participate! That is why I like Correa’s term (if not demagogic) to call his revolution “Citizens Revolution”. And, as the slogan says: Let’s put our feet on a good land! And perhaps we will not only achieve plantains and sweet potatoes, but manioc too!

Note: I am not a dissident in the slightest, nor am I attempting to be one. My political affiliation is logic, I do not believe in political or religious dogmas. I am not a patriot, but I love my country and I have never wished to abandon it. I love to give my opinion, to think, and to freely say what I am thinking. I don’t live like I want, but I think like I want and above all, I love to exchange points of view. It bothers me greatly that they want to make me believe in the lie and make me do what they tell me to do, but not what they do. If that bothers anyone, if it causes them harm or simply if these paragraphs bore them, please let me know so I won’t commit any indiscretions.

A hug,  
Tomey

Havana, September 6th, 2009.