

Coming Full Circle

by Raúl Rivero

The spiral of Cuban socialism has returned the majority of its most sincere and fervent activists to the same place they were in the decade of the '60s.

"That's true, only now we're old." Joaquín doesn't want to tell his real name.

"I'm still afraid. I'm still afraid. I can't deny it. I'm furious, but I'm afraid."

At 13 he was his father's assistant driving the '51 Ford that his Dad chauffeured in Esmeralda, Camagüey. At night he was studying at the Business School.

"I would have gotten a job in an office, and I would have had it made."

During the first few years of the revolution he enrolled in the militias and from there he went into the Army. There were mobilizations after mobilizations, schools and more schools. He specialized in military studies in Kiev. He fought in Angola and Ethiopia.

"Don't forget to write that for 25 years, counting hour by hour, I must have been on duty 6 or 7 years if you count them all together."

"I lived my life at the service of an idea, of an ideal. I tried to educate my two children in those same ideals, but later they each went their own way. The oldest one is in Mexico, and I hear from him from time to time. Somebody comes over. He sends me something. The other one is locked up in his house reading books. Nothing else interests him."

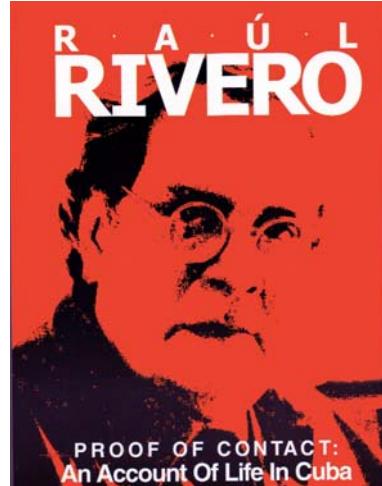
"Old man", he says, "you got into politics, you broke up with everyone, and life is something else. The ones on top always win, and here, the ones on top are the same ones of a half a century ago."

No, you can't talk to that one. My wife is a sweetheart. She has aged waiting for me to come back from the wars, and that business with the boy leaving, aged her ten years all at once.

I feel fine, my health is good. I'm still strong, a little potbellied and gray, but well. I have my car, a small Polish Fiat, which is all that I have left to show for my work, and a retirement check that is not enough. And I here am, struggling with this Polish machine from the Plaza de Marianao to the Railroad Station, easy, slow, trying to make a buck to survive.

I was discharged a lieutenant colonel. I am in a regional team. Once a week we meet, a bunch of old men lying to each other. I don't even want to talk about politics anymore. What I want is for everything to end, and to live in peace. I wouldn't want violence, because this country has suffered enough.

Now, I am going to tell you something, when my wife sees me getting home and getting out of that little car, huffing and with sweat rings on my shirt she tells me: "You see, old man, you are ending up just as you started, a driver for hire." And that's when I feel a slight pain, a piercing pain in my chest.



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