

The New Face of Communism: Totalitarianism with a Vote

Julio Borges Junyent

*"In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth
is a revolutionary act."*

George Orwell

1. The Story of Fernando Albán

When we were preparing this panel, we were reminded of something essential: that our words should not be merely analysis or theory, but carry the living mark of our experience. That speaking about communism should not be just an intellectual exercise, but a testimony.¹

That is why, before addressing the tragedy of communism in Latin America today, I want to open this space with a personal story, one I carry in my skin and in my soul, a story that hurts, but also gives meaning to who we are and what we do.

¹ The following text is from a lecture given during a second meeting of victims of communism, organized by CEU CEFAS in Madrid, 2025

I want to talk to you about Fernando Albán, a dear friend, a brother in the struggle, my right hand in the Primero Justicia party. He was a councilman in Caracas, and together we shared many battles, but above all one: confronting Nicolás Maduro's regime with dignity and truth.

It was 2018. In Venezuela, presidential elections were being held, marked by fraud and illegitimacy. The democratic opposition decided not to validate this farce. It was a critical moment. Fernando and I knew that simply rejecting these elections from within the country was not enough; we had to ensure that the entire world refused to recognize them. That was our goal: to plant in the international conscience the certainty that Maduro could no longer be acknowledged as the legitimate president.

We traveled to the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Those were intense days. We met with foreign ministers, ambassadors, presidents, journalists. We knocked on every door possible. We spoke with the clarity of those who have no weapons other than the truth. And we succeeded: the groundwork was laid for Maduro's regime to begin being isolated on the international stage starting in 2019. At the end of that mission, Fernando said he had to return to Caracas for personal matters. We all begged him not to go. We knew his life was in danger. But that was Fernando: brave, responsible, committed. He went back.

They were waiting for him the moment he arrived. The political police detained him at the plane's door. He disappeared after that. Hours later, thanks to the courage of his lawyer Joel García, we learned that Fernando was being brutally interrogated. They beat him until he lost consciousness, shocked him with electricity, suffocated him with a plastic bag, or dunked his head in water until it killed him. They wanted him to

accuse me and other leaders of alleged conspiracies, assassination plots, and acts of terrorism. They demanded a forced confession. But Fernando resisted with dignity.

Two days later, on October 8, an absurd, unbelievable piece of news spread through the media: Fernando Albán had committed suicide by jumping from the 10th floor of SEBIN, Maduro's political police headquarters. Handcuffed. In a controlled building. No one believed it. We all knew the truth: Fernando was murdered. The torture killed him, the hatred of a system that cannot tolerate dignity killed him, the soulless power killed him.

I myself had to call his wife and his children. I will never forget that moment. Telling them that Fernando would not return, that he had been murdered for doing what was right. His death sparked a wave of international outrage. From the European Parliament to human rights organizations around the world, Fernando's voice was present in the outcry for justice. But the regime's cynicism knew no bounds: the very agents who tortured him tried to sell us videos and photographs of his suffering for \$4,000. Horror turned into commodity.

Fernando Albán was not a manufactured martyr. He was a real man. A man of action. Of faith. Of family. He loved Venezuela and lived with the conviction that a different country was possible. That is why he fought. And that is why these words are for him. Because his death cannot and must not be in vain. Because communism in Latin America is not a theory or an abstract debate. It is Fernando. It is his absence.

Today, more than ever, we need to look to Fernando Albán and so many like him. We must remember them, name them, make them present. I dedicate this essay to Fernando because in

his memory lives the democracy we fight for. And in his example lies the certainty that truth has a price, but also a promise: that of a free and dignified homeland.

2. Power as a Secular Deity: The Logic of Totalitarianism

An old Soviet joke tells of a customer in a restaurant who, after seeing a splendid menu and being told no to any dish he orders, exclaims: “I thought this was a menu, not a constitution!” The anecdote illustrates a bitter truth: in communist dictatorships, constitutions are façades that promise everything and guarantee nothing.

This essay argues that communism is not merely a political system, but a secular pseudo-religion that seeks earthly redemption. By killing God, it enthrones power as a new deity, promising a utopian paradise through the radical transformation of human beings. This boundless ambition, embodied by “armed prophets” such as Lenin, Mao, or Castro, has always resulted in totalitarian nightmares.

This “political religion” operates along several coordinates. First, it presents itself as the culmination of history, a millenarian utopia that demands the destruction of the present order to achieve a radiant future that never arrives. Second, the Party and its charismatic leader assume a messianic role, becoming infallible redeemers whose word is dogma and whose criticism is treason. Third, it divides the world in a Manichean fashion between “the people” and “enemies,” emptying words like “democracy” or “freedom” of their meaning to turn them into rhetorical weapons. Finally, its fundamental method is terror —a system of generalized suspicion designed to paralyze society and annihilate individuality. What distinguishes communism from other

dictatorships is its religious aspiration: it is not content with controlling the body; it seeks to “redeem” the people by decree. As Eric Voegelin said, one cannot redeem man without first destroying his freedom. And, as Camus added, “all totalitarianisms begin with a heresy disguised as science.”

3. The Current Face of Communism in Latin America

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many considered communism dead. However, in Latin America it has mutated. Instead of armed revolutions or classic coups d'état, it adopted a subtler strategy: gaining power through the ballot box in order to dismantle democracy once in office. This covert totalitarianism operates through seven main mechanisms:

- A. The Constitution as a Tool for Perpetuation.** Instead of serving as a pact that limits power, the Constitution becomes a malleable instrument to enshrine the leader's indefinite rule. In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez promoted amendments to allow unlimited re-election. In Bolivia, Evo Morales managed to have a controlled court declare re-election a “human right” to override the results of a referendum. The most extreme case is Nicaragua, where Daniel Ortega not only removed re-election limits but also amended the Constitution to appoint his wife as “co-president,” subordinated all state powers to the executive, and legalized the revocation of nationality for so-called “traitors to the homeland.”
- B. Autocratic Legalism – Law as a Weapon:** These regimes do not govern against the law but through it. They pass legislation with noble-sounding names that conceal repressive purposes. Venezuela's “Law Against Hatred,”

for example, allows citizens to be imprisoned for opinions expressed on social media. In Nicaragua, a “Foreign Agents Law” is used to target NGOs and human rights defenders. Between 2018 and 2024, more than 5,600 NGOs were shut down in that country under legal pretexts. At the same time, laws meant to protect citizens —such as the right to private property in Venezuela— simply are not enforced, leaving the state with unlimited power. The law ceases to be a shield and becomes a club..

C. Hunger as a Mechanism of Social Control: The destruction of the economy is not a mere mistake but a deliberate strategy of domination. A population impoverished and dependent on the state is easier to control. In Venezuela, after the decimation of the productive apparatus, the regime implemented the CLAP food boxes, distributed through the “Carnet de la Patria” (Homeland ID Card). This electronic document records a citizen’s political loyalty; without it, access to food, medicine, or subsidies is denied. It is institutionalized food extortion, cynically summarized by a former Chavista minister: “The revolution is about keeping the poor, poor, but with hope. Because the poor are the ones who vote for us.”

D. The Mask of Mandatory “Progressivism”: Modern communism co-opts legitimate causes such as social justice, feminism, or environmentalism to impose a singular way of thinking. Under a discourse of diversity, it brutally punishes difference. In Nicaragua, the Ortega regime, which declares itself “Christian and compassionate,” has unleashed the worst religious persecution in decades in the region, expelling priests, shutting down over 1,250 charitable organizations, and

sentencing Bishop Rolando Álvarez to 26 years in prison for refusing to remain silent.

- E. **The Monopoly on Truth:** A fundamental pillar is the control of information. In Cuba, all media have belonged to the State for decades. Venezuela has followed the same path: between 2004 and 2021, over 200 media outlets disappeared, and hundreds of newspapers and radio stations were shut down through economic strangulation or license revocations. Censorship extends to the digital sphere, with news sites and social networks blocked. To fill the void, a massive propaganda apparatus was created, such as the Telesur network, which functions as the international media arm of Chavismo, spreading disinformation in partnership with outlets from Russia (RT), China (CGTN), and Iran (HispanTV).
- F. **Criminalization of Dissent:** In these systems, legitimate political opposition does not exist; it is equated with treason and criminality. Adversaries are not debated —they are neutralized. In Venezuela, most opposition leaders have been barred from holding public office. In Nicaragua, the regime went a step further: in 2021, it imprisoned all opposition presidential pre-candidates ahead of the elections. In Cuba, following the massive 2021 protests, more than 700 demonstrators were sentenced to up to 25 years for shouting “freedom.” Dissidents are dehumanized with epithets such as “squalid” or “worm” to justify violence against them.
- G. **Exporting the Model and International Alliances:** These regimes do not act alone; they form an interconnected authoritarian bloc. During the oil boom, Venezuela used

initiatives like Petrocaribe to buy diplomatic loyalty across the Caribbean and Central America, giving away billions of dollars in oil. Beyond the region, they forged strategic alliances. Russia became the main supplier of weapons and geopolitical support. China provided billions in loans and, crucially, technology for surveillance and social control (facial recognition, internet censorship). Iran offered assistance in evading sanctions and opaque cooperation. And Cuba, the oldest partner, exported its most prized asset: decades of know-how in methods of repression, intelligence, and torture.

Epilogue: The Resistance of Dignity

After this harsh journey, one must ask: what can we do in the face of this reality? Is resistance and hope possible under a communist totalitarianism? The answer is yes, but only by recognizing that resistance begins in a deeply personal and powerful sphere: **individual consciousness**.

Communism may take different forms, but its essence remains: it despises human freedom and reduces the person to a mere instrument for a utopian end. To resist is, above all, **to assert our irreducible humanity**.

The first form of resistance is not living in a lie: not repeating slogans you don't believe in, not feigning allegiance, not collaborating with injustice. **Living in truth** is the greatest subversive act.

It is also about **caring for language**. Calling a dictatorship what it is, calling a political prisoner what they are. Every just word is a crack in the wall of propaganda. And when this propaganda

is systematically upheld by networks of international power, one understands the critical force of committed denunciation.

To resist is also to **educate and to remember**. The memory of what happened prevents lies from prevailing. Document what occurred, name the martyrs, write the truth, even in the shadows. And above all, to resist is not to surrender one's dignity. Keep your head held high. Dignity is contagious: when one stands tall, another is encouraged to rise.

The battle against totalitarianism is not only political: it is spiritual. Opposing these regimes is not merely a matter of human rights, but of rescuing truth from organized lies. While values are relativized in Europe, in Latin America they are fought for with blood. The silence of liberal democracies is not neutrality—it is complicity. Totalitarianism advances not only when its tanks fire, but when our universities remain silent.

To maintain lucidity and hope—that is already victory, even before the final triumph. For a people who do not surrender internally can never be fully defeated. Freedom, justice, and above all, truth triumph. As Pope Leo XIV expressed in his first words of hope: *evil will not prevail*.