

Ana Belén Montes at Year's End. 16 Years in a US Jail. Silenced for Saying the Truth about US Foreign Policy

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Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

A friend asked "Why write for the left? It's preaching to the converted". The question reflects an error. The appeal of wide reach. It is why friends of Cuba despair. They say Cuba should abandon socialism because the world's not following. It can't beat the propaganda of the internet. The youth won't listen.

They miss the point. It's age old, and still alive in Cuba: the power of direction, of example. Fidel Castro said about Che Guevara that he never lost faith in example. One life, reflecting and living truth, has durable effects. It changes relations. It changes thinking. But it takes time, focus, dedication.

Of what will you convince multitudes? Victor Hugo writes:

"This sincerity of muck pleases us ... When you have passed your time on earth enduring the spectacle of high and mighty airs put on by reasons of ... political wisdom ... it is a relief to step into a sewer and see the sludge that rightly belongs there."^[i]

He means history and daily life. Some readers skip Hugo's lengthy diversion into the sewers of Paris. But it matters. Drawn by "high and mighty airs", you don't "breathe in the enormous fetidness of social catastrophes". Mao Tse- Tung said the same about how to know reality.^[ii]

Critics say Che Guevara's death was useless. The conditions for revolution didn't exist in Bolivia. He didn't achieve political success and so he can be dismissed. They'll say the same of Ana Belén Montes, who completed her 16th year in a US jail. She's over sixty, suffering cancer, still silenced.

Her cousin, Miriam Mock, writes that, at year's end, Ana is the same caring, engaged, studious person as when she was apprehended. She's allowed to communicate with only a few friends and family members. They're not allowed to quote her. Her prison-mates supported her through cancer.

But psychologists insist: "There are no single brains".^[iii] They use concepts like "mirror neurons". Attitudes and orientations are passed around by "emotional transmission": within families, workplaces and social networks.^[iv] Psychologists don't see how the idea of shared

thinking is radical.

It has political implications, or should. It means that unless you do the hard work to discover and to live truth – *some* truth about human beings – you think like everyone else. You won't know your humanity. You can't, because the society you obey is a dehumanizing one, thoroughly.

Hence, the continued silencing of Ana Belén Montes. With a prestigious job and a comfortable life, she cared about truth. She told the judge in 2001 that she stood before him because she obeyed her conscience. She stepped into the sludge and knew truth about US foreign policy. She acted on her concern for people who were dying, innocent folk getting in the way of US power.

José Martí said “To think is to serve”. He meant, for one thing, that you don't get truth by “mere thinking”. Einstein knew it. He said great scientists, as opposed to good ones, are capable of solitude. They are capable of caring – for the universe perhaps, and for the people in it.^[v]

Einstein recognized relations. He said the truth of socialism is obvious because if you see a group of happy people, you'll notice passers-by smiling. Marx was one of many smart, sensitive philosophers (ones we don't teach) who noticed what psychologists have now established: We don't think alone. The Buddha was another: He said half the job of living ethically is walking with the right people.

They speak to you, silently, with their lives. Thomas Merton warned about filling the world with words, “expressing [ourselves] like nervous gunners, firing burst after burst of ammunition into the dark where there is no enemy.” There is an enemy, of course. We just need to identify it, properly. It takes work.

It's our own shared thinking, rooted in social practises. It is why the Left must talk to and listen to each other. Finding the way forward is not about, as Merton says, “boring through silent nature in every direction with our machines ... pretending to have a purpose”.

Yes, purpose. It's an idol. Liberal philosophers say you need purpose to have reasons. They call it “instrumental rationality”: You act reasonably when we act for ends, for purpose. They say it is uncontroversial, or at least academic philosophers do. Some even say you need purpose *to live*.

It is not true. You need relations, the right sort of relations. It is how more adequate purpose is *discovered*. It takes time. It's worth the effort. It's why Ana Belén Montes needs to be known. Her example is a real threat to dehumanizing liberal ideology. Otherwise she would not *still* be silenced.^[vi]

We need her for direction in 2018. Please sign [petition here](#).

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Notes

[i] *Les Misérables* (tr. Julie Rose) 1034-5

[ii] Talks at the Yenon Forum on art and literature <http://collections.mun.ca/PDFs/radical/TalksattheYenanForumonArtandLiterature.pdf>

[iii] Cozolino, L. *The neuroscience of relationships: Attachment and the developing social brain* (Norton, 2006) 6

[iv] Mauss et al, 2001; Larson and Almeida, 1999; Hill et al 2010 all cited in Michal Barnea-Astrog, *Carved by experience* (UK: Karnac Books, 2017)

[v] "Science and religion" and "Religion and science" in *Ideas and Opinions* (NY: Wings Books, 1954)

[vi] <http://www.prolibertad.org/ana-belen-montes>. For more information, write to sarahnes@cubarte.cult.cu or cincoheroes@listas.cujae.edu.cu

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