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A 75 años del triunfo soviético en Stalingrado. Una batalla

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Aram Aharonian: "Telesur is taken by inept and counter-revolutionaries"

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Three years after the birth of Telesur, the first television project with a Latin Americanist vocation, Aram Aharonian, founder of the idea and co-participant of all the decisions of the channel until last December, argues that things do not work as they should, both due to factors external (arrest of journalist Fredy Muñoz in Colombia, among other threats) as internal. However, Aharonian is more critical of the channel's own policies. It denounces its statism and lack of democracy, as well as the irons of the Latin American left.

Telesur is today a means of quality communication, in contrast to an uncritical and manipulative panorama. But its little social impact makes it marginal. According to Aharonian, his biggest problem is that, in a context of great commercial competitiveness, this channel has not been able to become a representative of the transformations that are taking place in Latin America, at a social, political and economic level. In Caracas, Mundo Hispano had the opportunity to exchange impressions with this communication expert.

- Telesur differs from other media by its human approach ...

- Telesur is a revolutionary bet. A way and an attempt to change the paradigms to break with more than 500 years of seeing with foreign eyes and begin to see with their own eyes, Latin Americans, that represent the interests of the region. Regain the self-esteem of Latin Americans, go to the recovery of historical memory to know where we come from and know where we are going, because if not, fate will always be imposed by those from outside. The approach is branding because it also goes to another proposal: to define what is alternative.

- And what is?

- Some have tried to convince us that the alternative must be synonymous with marginal. That social movements, popular, the left, what they need is to have small weekly or small community radios. That is the paradigm of the marginal. That to be alternative to the hegemonic message of the North, one can not be massive, but one must be marginal. What we are told is that we must continue in that small niche forever. But to be really alternative to the hegemonic message, it must be massive.

- And the problem is that that does not assume that alternative left ...

- There is another problem added: that we still believe that our idiosyncrasy should be similar to the Anglo-Saxon one. We show ourselves with those ties and suits, even though we know that the Latin American is informal, colloquial.

With that refusal to represent our way of being we renounce to enter the home of the people! On the other hand, despite what some imbeciles say, CNN is an excellent TV channel, with a conception that perfectly fulfills the mission of misinforming or reporting what they want. The mistake is to copy them to them, to believe that to be competitive you have to imitate the enemy's forms. Telesur knows that everything has changed in a few years. That today, unlike before, CNN broadcasts the images of all the presidents, even those who are not related to the State Department of the President of the United States. They issued from the indigenous ceremonial investiture of Evo Morales to the speeches of Daniel Ortega at the UN. Why? Because CNN knows that if they do not give it, people have the option of going to Telesur to see it.

- They protect their cultural hegemony, to speak in terms of Gramsci ...

- A new television channel is useless if it does not have new contents and formats. If we do not understand it, we will be condemned to see El Chavo del Ocho and Walt Disney until the last day of our lives. A Latin American content factory is missing. What people need are documentaries, filmography, culture, entertainment in the best sense of the word, soap operas or sports, with a Latin American perspective. On the other hand, the distribution networks of the signals are in the hands of the enemy. If we do not bet on the democratization of the radio spectrum, which means more public space than private space, we will never reach anyone either. We will remain in a mere onanistic exercise. Because instead of seeing 100 million people, 100,000 will be watching us.

- A cultural elite?

- No. Not even cultural. Because he does not have access to culture either! The problem is that neither the message nor the signal arrive. And we must anchor viewers with productions that interest them, reversing, for example, the concept of a reactionary telenovela to turn it into a progressive soap opera. The news should be a plus. Actually, a "zapping" element. One does not spend all day watching information. It is a mistake that Telesur bases everything on giving news, I do not know if mediocrity or "sabotajista". In any case, it is a conceptual error.

- Does Telesur need media stars, like Maradona, then?

- Maradona could present 15 minutes a week ... Or subcomandante Marcos ... But no! On the left, it has always been thought that everything is a matter of money in order to produce something. Today the production costs have dropped a lot. So the problem is mental. We continue to be conceptually dominated, however much we put revolutionary slogans, in the belief that they solve everything. The challenge is to inform and train. The idea must be to work collectively and combat individualism.

- Reporting and training.

- In Latin America we do not know what is the formation of citizenship. We talk about social movements. But with the gringo concept of communication that we have now, where blacks or Indians are overlooked, we will continue to look at Latin America with foreign eyes. Some believe that just by going through a speech by Chávez or Fidel, an alternative will be formed. But what is needed is a permanent and transversal vision in all the programming. And we must promote the collective work model instead of following the North American model of stars, of competing individuals, camouflaged by revolutionary language, repeating slogans.

- Three years are few to create a resistance, internal and external, to the current incommunicative panorama ...

- Yes, but there have already been many mistakes. Because instead of betting on the continent, on people who share our own concepts, which are revolutionary, popular, Latin American, agreements are made with transnationals such as Mediapro or Telefónica.

- Is it a style book problem?

- No. What is missing is a strict conscience with the project. It is supposed to be a Latin American multi-state company. But it is not yet. It is a Venezuelan company, controlled by people who are interested in managing budgets and not projects. It has to do with the internal struggle that exists in the Government of Venezuela. Telesur has involuted a lot in the last year, with a very Venezuelan confusion of believing that technology solves everything. But technology does not do anything by itself. It has not been understood that the essential thing is to form cadres and be coherent with the proposals and the lines presented.

- It raises then that in Telesur does not work coherent people with this television: how and who enters to work?

- The friends of some ...

- Bad method ...

- Yes. And everything has been done to make sure that the best paintings we brought from Latin America were going away. Instead of being a hotbed of young people from Latin America. The possibilities of understanding what is an integration process goes through the communicational. Before, the enemy needed armed forces to impose their ideas. Today he needs means of communication. The last thing that happened in Argentina confirms that

the media are the spearhead of the imposition of policies that are to the liking of the transnationals. If we do not understand that, if we do not understand that it is not with publicity that the enemy is countered, we will not know how to fight in a battle of ideas.

- What do we understand by battle of ideas here?

- The weaving of an alternative Latin American project to neoliberalism. Today the real left is in the social movements that push governments, which may be more or less reformist, mere temporary administrators who do not have the real power. That same shyness in making decisions has made some governments have not faced the speculative capital. In Latin America what has failed is capitalism, not socialism. The last neoliberal experience has left 300 million Latin Americans in total exclusion, people who inhabit the territory but who do not have documentation, nor the right to education, health, or nutrition. The question is whether the Revolution can be done thanks to a television station. And the answer is that this will not make the process of change, but will help with it. Telesur must be plural, offering varied approaches on the same fact so that people can draw their own conclusions and have that capacity to decide their own future. The media always despise citizenship. Telesur must have a permanent respect for people.

- But this idea is not taught in the faculties ...

- In Latin America thousands and thousands of social communicators have graduated who will have a great capacity to handle a taxi, but who are totally divorced from the technological reality of the world and the social reality of their own country. There are gentlemen and young ladies who have been in college for five years to be able to move on television. Today a social communication title is useless.

- How should I be a good social communicator?

- First of all you must know your society. And contribute to the idea of informing and forming citizenship. We can disguise what you want. To make them believe that they are a power and here are many imbeciles who believe that being salaried are a power. The journalist who is not consubstantiated with his society is useless! He can only repeat slogans!

- The social communicator must be open minded ...

- Xenophobia, closing doors to others, things so in vogue in an underlying way in the minds of so many communicators, are concepts to be excluded. I am Uruguayan and I have lived here for twenty years. I understand the society here, but I do not renounce my nationality. I'm going to give you three examples of closure. On April 13, 2002, when the coup d'état against Chávez, the people in Caracas took to the streets to ask for the president's return. 640 radios and 47 private television stations refrained from giving this information. They set out to put music and cartoons. And they thought that nobody would find out about anything like that. But the old bamba radio technology, Internet, SMS, word of mouth, managed to go beyond all that. They believed in the idea that if television does not say it, it does not exist. Not at all. Television did not say it and that existed. Second example: Bolivian newspapers disqualified Evo Morales racially, socially and culturally. In spite of that, he gets 53% of the votes. Third example: in Ecuador, one of the countries where Telesur is most visible, Correa came despite the fact that all the media had been privatized and responded in favor of Novoa, his adversary. The false truths of many media, when they contrast with the daily reality of the people, fall on their own. People have learned to read between the media. The false truths of many media, when they contrast with the daily reality of the people, fall on their own. People have learned to read between the media.

- If Telesur manages to understand this social tam-tam will it become the TV of the villages?

- Clear. They are peoples with different forms, there is a diversity of people, of positions. Understanding pluralism does not mean giving tribune to the enemy, but giving a rostrum to all positions that approach the popular thing, the national thing, the integration thing. Those who understood the danger of Telesur were responsible for the US Department of State. Before we left, they already forbade us. They saw the threat. And they reacted by changing the CNN criteria. TVE also changed. Telesur is not being killed outside, but inside, people who do not understand its real meaning.

- Are you saying that in Telesur there are people who could be on CNN?

- There are people with a CNN mentality that tomorrow will go to CNN, if they call them. They do not care about the commitment. In Telesur there are people who are being separated, because it is considered that they do not meet these criteria, probably because they believed that it was something more than a job, that it was a project for democratization. The most watched program of the morning, 'Agenda del Sur', was called tedious and replaced. There are people who are worth a lot, who touch topics thoroughly, but who are now stopped because they are denied spaces.

- It seems that Telesur must clean the house inside

- You have to clean the house completely inside. Telesur is taken by inept, counterrevolutionary in the broad sense of the word: people who recite slogans to look revolutionary but have no idea what it is.

- People without their own thoughts

- If the Revolution is a slogan, it is nothing.

- Do you see a long-term Telesur?

- No. If it does not change much, it will be limited to being -as it is time- an international television of the Government of Venezuela instead of a multi-state company. It is immoral that the Minister of Information of Venezuela be the president of the channel and handle it discretionally.

- They are two different functions ...

- He signs the checks. What autonomy can Telesur have as well? Here is a confusion that was intended to manipulate. There was talk of a conspiracy against the project, but in reality the conspiracy is against the multistate, plural, diverse project that it wanted to be.

- Already Chavez must realize that Telesur has not just started ...

- He reads the reports they send him. The media has 100,000 daily viewers and he talks about 50 million.

- Obviously he does not have them.

- With Telefonica an agreement was made for more than one million euros a year that finally fell. But the advisors did charge. The cost of Mediapro's advice amounted to more than half a million euros. Money lost, because it has not served at all. I respect the Mediapro guys professionally, but they have absolutely nothing to do with Telesur.

- They are interested in money

- Sounds good to me! If the integration of Latin America gives them 30% benefits, they will be interested in integration. But they will never see integration with Latin Americanist eyes. Spanish society is very different from Latin America. The reality of a Mr. Mediapro will never have to do with the Venezuelan, Colombian, Argentine, Brazilian reality ... Telesur was born to be a revolutionary medium.

- Solutions?

- Dispense 250 people. It is the only way to change television. It is a small channel with 450 people, where the level of specialization is -10.

- A very bureaucratic medium?

- Yes, because there are senior officials who believe that the information is static and not dynamic. Ask a minister for permission to see if information is given? That is not the model.

- Mistakes have been made ...

- I am 62 years old and when we founded Telesur I said that I was going to be in the project for two or three years, that the old ones already made a lot of shit and it was the young people who had to make their own. The first thing the minister and president of the channel did was to throw out the people who created Telesur, who came from all of Latin America. And he surrounded himself with Venezuelan bureaucrats at his service, who came from private television.

- You are still vice president, can not you fix things?

- I am Vice President of a Board of Directors that is never called and that can be changed when the minister wants: the only shareholder is the ministry that is in charge. I'm not interested in the charges, I'm interested in the projects. Years ago they said that we were crazy to want to make a Latin American television, the dream of so many. We showed that it was possible. Maybe we did not realize that the enemies were not just outside.

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