

Speech by Carlos Matus in the presentation of *Adiós, Señor Presidente*

Discurso de Carlos Matus en la presentación de *Adiós, Señor Presidente*

*Matus, Carlos*¹

ABSTRACT The text of this article was written by Carlos Matus and read aloud by him at the first presentation of his book *Adiós, Señor Presidente* [Goodbye, Mr. President] in Venezuela in 1987. Matus describes the problems of the governments of Latin America of that day, in order to address the growing gap between the capacity of governments to govern and the complexity of social systems. For Matus, bridging this gap requires theories, techniques, systems and methods so as to develop government projects in which the governability of the system is not less than the magnitude of its problems. This document was recovered from the Mario Testa fund, in the Center for Documentation and Research Pensar en Salud (CEDOPS) of the Institute of Collective Health in the Universidad Nacional de Lanús.

KEY WORDS History, 20th Century; Government Programs; Government; Social Problems; Policies.

RESUMEN El texto que reproducimos en este artículo fue escrito y leído por Carlos Matus en la primera presentación del libro *Adiós, Señor Presidente* realizada en 1987, en Venezuela. Matus describe los problemas de los gobiernos de América Latina de aquellos años para abordar la brecha creciente entre la capacidad de gobierno y la complejidad de los sistemas sociales, que exige teorías, técnicas, sistemas y métodos para desarrollar proyectos de gobierno en los que la gobernabilidad del sistema no sea más baja que la magnitud de los problemas. Este documento fue recuperado del fondo Mario Testa, perteneciente al Centro de Documentación e Investigación Pensar en Salud (CEDOPS) del Instituto de Salud Colectiva de la Universidad Nacional de Lanús.

PALABRAS CLAVES Historia del Siglo XX; Programas de Gobierno; Gobierno; Problemas Sociales; Políticas.

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His Excellency, Dr. Luis Herrera Campins, President of the Republic of Venezuela, who honors us with his presence; Dr. Eduardo Casanova, President of the Rómulo Gallegos Foundation; ladies, gentlemen, dear friends,

I deeply appreciate your presence and the hospitality of the Rómulo Gallegos Foundation. You are accompanying me in a ceremony that is always very important for a writer – and on this occasion even more so, because I have the opportunity to encounter friends I have not seen for years but who are here today despite the long time that has elapsed.

Today the Pomaire publishing house is presenting my book. A book that has a very special format and content that poses a challenge. *Adiós, Señor Presidente* [Goodbye, Mr. President] is a wake-up call concerning the fate of our democracies.

We have not reflected deeply enough about what is required to successfully govern our democratic Republics. Therefore, we are accustomed to seeing and even accepting that as governments change, problems accumulate. Marginalization, unemployment, inflation, lack of housing, the deterioration of international power relations, urban congestion, extreme poverty and misuse of geographical spaces are age-old problems, the severity of which increases every day. We are used to living with these problems.

Some governments of the region are more successful than others, but based on the analysis of the last thirty years, averages are not exceptions even for the countries with better natural resources.

We are not succeeding in solving any of the serious problems of Latin America. Some Asian countries, formerly considered underdeveloped, have introduced major reforms in their social systems and today are able to challenge the industrial competitiveness of developed countries. Meanwhile, we are lagging behind them, imitating processes and policies of doubtful validity for our realities. It seems that we live anesthetized in a state of fragile comfort while other countries deal with their problems with creativity, aggressiveness and sacrifice.

Scientific and technological development progresses rapidly, concentrated in the hands of a

few actors. Meanwhile, we remain in the shadows, watching as simple spectators its quick advance. We are not actors of the modern world; we are merely spectators and sufferers of the growing inequality in the race for progress. We are not winning the battle against poverty; we are only managing its growth.

The founding fathers of our nations were the creators of a new society. They were not the shy administrators of an existing society; they were important and audacious people who made change. It is true that they could not create a united Latin America, but they accomplished a gigantic task as true actors. However, it seems that today we cannot so much as manage that historical legacy. We live in a time of rulers ruled by the state of things, of men who set their sights on easy targets, of weak leaders who trip at the slightest difficulty, of governments that have gone astray and of leaders who end up being led.

The simple explanation would be that the leaders of yesterday were better leaders, that they had stronger will, that they had learned to battle the elements and move mountains. Those reasons may appear truthful as we tend to mystify these figures. However, if we analyze history, we must conclude that beyond their iron will and their devotion to national aims, they had a clear and firm stance regarding the problems of their time; that clarity and devotion gave them the strength, willpower and efficacy with which to overcome their human weaknesses.

Today, in contrast, problems are serious, obvious and ever-growing, but their causes are so complex and controversial that our governments are constantly in doubt about how to deal with them, or they think the problems are so large that it is better to assimilate them as part of the landscape. Our countries are much more complex today. As we are unsure of the causes of these problems, we think they are insurmountable, our will is weaker and our actions less effective. Furthermore, the meaning of the word *problem* has become wider and more demanding. People demand more freedom, the fulfillment of their rights, greater wellbeing, more security, more equality, culture and international respect. They demand more than their governments can offer.

The demands are greater but the understanding of our problems is more limited and

general consensus is more fragile. Our abilities are even weaker if we measure them against the magnitude and complexity of the problems that require these skills.

It may not be that our current leaders have less valor than those who built our nations, but that the present problems are increasingly exceeding their capabilities. There is a growing gap in governmental capacity because the system is less governable and the magnitude of the problems requires bolder governmental projects.

In my book, this adverse scenario is expressed in the President's inability to lead the country towards the desired results. *Adiós, Señor Presidente* shows an honest, sincere, and concerned leader who cares about his people. He does not lack willpower, yet he fails in his purposes. The truth is that the social systems have become more complex than we are, and we are increasingly losing our ability to manage them. Today's economy, politics and organizations are much more complex than they used to be. The development of natural sciences has promoted complex social processes that the social sciences are unable to understand. Social systems are creative and they proliferate at a faster pace than our ability to understand them and govern them. Consequently, it is not about the President or his Ministers' personal qualities. It is not about individual people. It is about theories, techniques, systems and methods. Our governmental systems are in crisis and our governmental methods are too primitive to address the complexity of the social systems of the end of this century. The old way of doing politics is not enough.

Adiós, Señor Presidente should be understood under this broad perspective of analysis. If this approach gives rise to opportunistic, small and personal criticism, such criticism would not only move away from the purpose of the book, but would contradict the book's purpose by diverting attention to minor and specific casuistry.

This is the core issue. Governing is an increasingly complex problem and therefore there is a real trend that makes it so that our leaders fall increasing short of what is demanded by their tasks. These tasks can no longer be individual because they would require supermen. These tasks require teams specially trained to govern. The very few countries that have been able to show successful governments in the contemporary world

have achieved this success not on the basis of great personalities, but on the basis of adequate and qualified systems, methods and government teams. There is no other choice. The only alternative is to sow electoral illusions and harvest frustrations at the end of the term. The keys to the future are management teams employing powerful governing methods. Up to now, we have focused more on the design of action plans than on government teams and methods, without thinking that the capability of conceiving and executing a governmental project in an effective and imaginative way requires adequate and powerful teams and methods. Without powerful governing teams and techniques, the electoral platforms are useless and those action plans contradicting them become, under the prevailing circumstances, mere improvisation.

These theories have huge and serious implications for our democratic system, political parties, social organizations and universities.

Democracy will not be able to defend itself if it is not successful in the solution of common problems that affect people. Political parties, which are the main support of democracy, will lose prestige and trust if they do not dramatically heighten their capacity to understand the social reality in which they exist and change their style of doing politics in order to focus more on the terminal problems of the social system and less on the intermediate problems of intra and inter-party relations. What is important to politicians does not seem to be what is important to citizens. Enhancing the value of politics means reengaging with the demands of the people without giving in to populism.

The social organizations of both companies and workers, without failing to legitimately represent these interests, will increasingly have to be concerned with and deeply ponder national problems; this requires a different training for companies and union leaders in order to guide well-grounded trends in opinion regarding major national issues.

The universities have the obligation to shorten the existing distance between social reality and the social sciences, especially in what refers to the science and techniques of government, planning methods and organizational theory. However, their main aim should be the convergence of

the social sciences, which are currently departmentalized. As Ackoff says: "Nature is not organized in the same way universities are." In nature there are no departments of economy, sociology and politics. Nature is a unit that rejects division and makes and renders the fragmented social sciences more ineffective. Those fences are artificial and have a temporary methodological utility. Economic efficacy does not exist without political efficacy and political efficacy cannot exist without economic efficacy. The sciences have to facilitate the mediation of knowledge and action.

Our leaders receive only weak support from the social sciences, partly because their practicism and immediatism cause them to undervalue the sciences, but also because those fragmented sciences are of such little help to a leader that he reinforces his pragmatic convictions in his fruitless interaction with them.

I emphasize the sciences and techniques of government not because I believe that ideological concerns and issues of class interests and social forces are less important in explaining reality. The selfishness of the powerful explains much of the problem, but not the problem in full. I put this emphasis on the technologies of government because experience teaches us that beyond the

political ideology of our projects, we are mainly inefficient as leaders, whether on the left or on the right. Every case does not yield the same results, but case upon case suffers from the same disease: primitive governing methods.

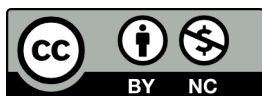
These theories are both important and complex, but our daily lives absorb us in thousands of minor issues that compete with our capacity to withdraw and reflect. We experience the same thing leaders do: we have little time and energy for what is important. We are hypnotized by the small problems of our daily lives and blind to the great issues. Nobody reads complex and tedious theses. The triviality of daily life exhausts us and we instinctively search for entertainment.

This is why I decided to try an adventure: to combine a novel and an essay in one book. Through the novel, I would like to entertain you by showing the problems of a well-intentioned ruler of a fictional country. Through the essay I would like to encourage you to reflect upon the causes and the serious nature of the story developed in the novel. Because, in the end, the novel is only fictional in its form: it tells of a reality we can experience anytime and anywhere in Latin America.

I would like to thank you for joining me today, I am deeply grateful to you all.

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