



Project Update

During these winter months Tribute to Liberty is moving towards the final approval stage of the development of the criteria for the tendering of the work related to the construction of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism (i.e., all concrete work supporting the Arc of Memory). Once approved, the tender process for the contracting of this work can start.

Final construction approval by the board of the National Capital Commission (NCC) is expected at their quarterly meeting in April. Once approved, the start of the development of the land in the Gardens of Provinces and Territories will start.

Also under way right now are the negotiations for the construction of the Arcs, and once NCC approval is obtained, construction of them will commence in Toronto, before moving them to Ottawa for their final placement within the Memorial structure.

Tribute to Liberty continues to work with our partners at Canadian Heritage and we will be thrilled to see the shovels in the ground this spring. Stay tuned for pictures as the site develops.

Please don't forget about the opportunity you have to memorialize the name of a loved one on the Wall of Remembrance which will be part of the Memorial (see photo below), with a donation of \$1000. We are building this memorial to tell the stories and preserve the memory of those who witnessed Communism firsthand. Space on the Wall is limited. Visit <http://tributetoliberty.ca/contribute> or use the last page of this newsletter to donate today!

Tribute to Liberty is a Canadian organization whose mission is to establish a memorial to the victims of Communism in the National Capital Region.

Tribute to Liberty's Newsletter is published four times a year. If you would like to add an email address to our subscriber list please email info@tributetoliberty.ca.

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www.tributetoliberty.ca



Croatian Catholic Parishes Donates to Memorial

Tribute to Liberty would like to thank the Croatian Catholic Parishes in Ontario and Quebec for their generous donation of \$40,000 to build the Memorial to the Victims of Communism in Ottawa.

The cheque was presented to Mrs. Alide Forstmanis, Treasurer for Tribute to Liberty, and Mr. Ivan Grbesic, Tribute to Liberty board member, on January 7th at a ceremony at the Croatian Martyrs Parish in Mississauga, Ontario.

Spearheaded by Fathers Tomislav Kasic (Croatian Martyrs Parish) and Ivan Vuksic (Holy Trinity Parish), the donation was a community donation from parishes in Mississauga, Oakville, Toronto, Norval, Hamilton, Kitchener, Ottawa, Montreal and others.

The Croatian Catholic Parishes in Canada donation, the largest single donation by a Croatian community to date, came from dedicated parishioners—seniors, pensioners, youth, average people giving \$20, \$30, \$50, and \$100—who contributed the bulk of the \$40,000.



History Unhidden

A Cuban Prisoner on a Hunger Strike

Ismael Samba is a prolific Cuban writer having to his credit a vast range of publications from laureate poetry to essays, short stories and screen-plays. He was imprisoned in 1993 after being convicted of distributing "Enemy propaganda" and received a ten-year sentence. His "crime" was to secretly print and distribute, during the 1992 general "elections" with only one party and one candidate, fliers that read: "Do not vote for Castro. Vote for Liberty". His older son, Guillermo, was sentenced to eight years for the same "crime".

He suffered the humiliation of being stripped of his clothes, stark naked, with a sprained knee due to the blows and the brutal force applied to it by the guards, locked in a punishment cell, which was flooded with cold water. The unbearable torture, suffered by him and six other political prisoners, led them, in desperation, to carry out a hunger-strike, in protest for their unjust and cruel imprisonment. It drove him close to death.

*The following excerpt of Ismael Samba's autobiographical novel **Procesado en el Paraiso (On Trial in Paradise)** refers to his time at the hospital where he was taken on his thirtieth day of fasting after having a heart attack. He describes his feelings and some facts related to his forty-day hunger-strike.*

David Levy

My physical condition worsened day by day. After a check-up, the cardiologist said that my blood pressure was not under control, with almost the same readings for "the maximum" and "the minimum". He would have to give me an injection with risky side effects. That, at least, I understood. I had agreed to drink some coffee without sugar because it was the only thing that, according to the doctor, could regulate my blood pressure. I was still on oxygen and they had started putting my serums back on.

On the 39th day of our hunger-strike my son Guillermo was taken from his cell and brought to the hospital to see me. He was told that I would not be alive much longer and that he should see me before I died. The doctors advised me that my son had arrived, that I should get ready to see him and that I should try to keep my heartbeat count from being altered by controlling my emotions. And that I had to have the monitor back on in order to be aware of my reaction during the meeting. Otherwise they would not allow

the visit.

I accepted their condition because I thought it showed their good will towards me. Since I entered the military hospital, I displayed my defiance in front of the group of doctors who treated me. I told them that I was an opponent of the regime and that I was imprisoned for being a declared dissident.

I know you are military officers and members of the Communist Party at the service of the government. I know my life is in your hands. But, first of all, you are also physicians who must respond to professional ethics above any ideology.

I spoke to them clearly and I think they all understood me, with the exception of Dr. Germán who did not move a single muscle of his lean face. I noticed he kept too quiet at a moment of a crucial definition. The doctors always acted correctly and only mentioned my health, my books and my family, even with some sympathy, respect or admiration. They even brought to me the news of what was happening with the new wave of emigrants and with the people who were setting sail very close to where we were. "I imagine that the noise of the crowd does not let you sleep". "I do not sleep anymore (I answered) and it is like almost fainting every time I close my eyes"

They mentioned the queues that were made by the thick crowds, everyone wanting to be the first to leave, that the boatmen were selling tickets to full capacity, that people were setting up their rafts rushing to set sail from nearby beaches to the naval base at Guantanamo, that many people came from the capital and from other cities to reach the base by sea. It was a safer way than going by land due to the minefields surrounding the base. The regime had placed thousands of hidden explosives in that area to discourage any attempt to escape to the US base. Many had been blown to pieces while trying.

Desperate people came over, to take advantage of the occasion, since this time there were neither "acts of repudiation", nor any of the usual direct attacks by agents pretending to be civilian citizens to those willing to emigrate. Obviously, these barbarous acts against those who disagreed or just wanted to leave had been planned and directed by the government.

It was apparent that the government policy on emigration had just been changed, and even I was given a chance to escape; one night the two guards at the door were no longer there. Then I went out into the corridor and walked toward the exit. Everything was deserted, no one was watching or guarding. I

thought it could be an invitation for me to escape, to run away, to mix and run along with the groups that were doing that a few meters away (...)

Anyone could have done it with impunity, not having to go through the usually tight controls (...). Those same guards who had left their posts had told me about what was happening and one of them said: "Why don't you take advantage and leave the country too?"

I answered that it was not my intention, that some years before I could have done it easily, but I stayed to work hard toward establishing a thriving democracy in the country, for the common good.

"In your situation it is better to leave. Now there are facilities. In Boniato (a Cuban jail) the common prisoners are receiving passes to enable them to take advantage of the moment."

Apparently the guard's purpose was just informing me of the situation, but it was up to me to interpret it. Did he do it out of sympathy or was he following some directives? I could have escaped if I wanted to, but I did not. It was the tyrant who should leave the country, not its people. If that ever happened everything would be fixed so easily! When my son was arrested I had enough time to make arrangements to get away; but I stayed at home waiting patiently to be arrested at any moment. Being imprisoned for my opinions on politics was also part of the struggle. It would show, once more, the repressor's infamy to the world.

No, clearly fleeing was not at all within my plans. I never liked to flee or avoid confrontations. Why was I going to change then, precisely when I was as committed as ever to the cause of liberty?

After wondering for a few moments about the disappearance of both guards, I decided to return. I thought that everything might have been a trap set up for me. I would be ashamed if caught escaping after so much exhorting my friends to resist and never give up. If I ever managed to come out alive, it would be morally impossible for me to claim any allegiance to our cause.

I went back into my cubicle utterly faint. I laid back on the bed while I continued to listen to the hullabaloo of those who, instead of the challenge, preferred the flight.

My son Guillermo had been told that my death was imminent. He was there, looking at me with sunken

eyes, totally emaciated, haggard. His appearance frightened me. I think he must have been scared too when he saw me. My poor boy, with all the illusions of youth, he was too young for such a transit to death. He hugged and kissed me. Through the embrace and the kiss I always transmitted to my children my trust and love as a father, and they always reciprocated. It was a habit that they had cultivated since childhood, day by day.

In the eyes of indifference and indolence, this action could be the first sign of our Christian sentiments. We were not rebellious beasts, but beings capable of creating love and sharing it, of working for others to learn that love builds bridges and hate destroys them.

Maybe I was dying for real and I did not know it. Maybe everything was a new trick of the repressors to make us desist. You always have doubts about the purpose of what they say or do. They have always tried to deceive us.

A few days have gone by since Diosmel Rodríguez had been brought to the hospital. The repressors told me that he had abandoned the strike, that he was eating and consequently his life had been saved. But it was a lie. I tried to contact him. I spoke to an old, almost bald, black woman, who was cleaning the cubicle, and asked her if she could give him a note from me. She said yes, but the note never arrived. The unhappy woman betrayed me to the guards and handed them my note. Traitor! Some contacts sometimes failed, out of fear, or because they were infiltrated into the security service to do that job.

Liars! They tried to weaken us. They lied to create doubt, to discredit and divide us. We always distrusted any information from them because we guessed their intentions. However, my case seemed to be different. Maybe I was really dying and the fucking death would surprise me when I least expected it. My physical condition could be very serious and my son's presence confirmed it. Was it for him to give me the last farewell? Could there still be time to recover or was my case irreversible?

The monitor altered its sound and I tried to calm myself. I breathed with difficulty, my vision blurred.

"Dad, they told me that you were dying and I did not want to believe it." His voice came to me from far away like slowly returning from an echo.

"Don't worry, my son, it's not my turn yet. One knows when one is going to die."

I felt I had to say words of encouragement to cheer him up, not to show any signs of dejection, even though I may have looked totally dejected.

"Dad, if you die, I die too."

"No, you will have to live to tell everything..."

We had entered together in that undertaking and we should be victorious together, after subjecting our life, our only existence, to so much juggling.

The guardhouse for emergencies was nearby. Sometimes I woke up at dawn and heard someone crying and weeping in mourning for the sudden death of a close relative or friend. And I thought about the irony of life, that we were wasting it, throwing it overboard without hesitation.

We had already arrived at a point of no return. That's what you feel when you reach the state we were at, almost without knowing it. The risks taken, the offenses received, spurred our pride and our courage. Our jailers had gone too far this time, and those persistent feelings did not allow us to go back. Even if we wanted to retreat we felt that we could not do it anymore, that it was too late.

It was going through such experience that made me understand why the dissident poet Pedro Luis Boitel died, why he preferred to die rather than abandon his prolonged hunger strike in the prison of Castillo del Príncipe. Before dying he left us this beautiful message: "Men do not abandon the struggle when the cause is just". His repressors never understood the secret of his persistence. Perhaps they were convinced, until the last moment, that by applying their repressive methods he would finally give up fasting. It was a tragic mistake, and due to their irreverent arrogance, they ended up killing him.

I resisted despite the seriousness of my health condition. I became more determined facing these surprising events. But everything has a limit. In my son's presence I lost control and then, lost consciousness. I had suffered a cardiac or respiratory arrest. I do not know exactly what happened. The doctors apparently expected it and acted quickly. Had it been real or had everything been prepared, provoked, to frighten me, to frighten us?

The signs were clear, the strike would continue until the end, even at the expense of a fatal outcome, even at the cost of losing my life.

English translation by David Levy.

Canada's National Memorial to the Victims of Communism

is about people, families, and the suffering they endured under Communism.

Memorialize the name of a loved one forever on the Memorial's Wall of Remembrance with a donation of \$1,000.

Tell the story of a victim of Communism by buying a brick on the virtual Pathway to Liberty that leads to the Memorial with a donation of \$200.

Donate today at www.tributetoliberty.ca or use the mail-in form below.

To contribute to the Memorial to Victims of Communism in Ottawa you can:

1. Become a Brick Donor - \$200.00

- With each brick purchased you can submit the story of a victim of Communism, or a message or dedication
- Please email your story, message or dedication to info@tributetoliberty.ca or include it on a separate piece of paper when you mail this form
- **Submissions will be published on the Tribute to Liberty website along with donor's names. Donors who wish to remain anonymous must indicate this in the space provided below**

2. Donate to the Wall of Remembrance - \$1,000.00

3. Donations in any amount are welcome

Mail-in Contribution Form

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Province _____ Postal Code _____

Phone (____) _____ Email _____

Donation Amount: \$1000 _____ \$200 _____ Other _____

I wish to remain anonymous:

Please make cheque payable to: Tribute to Liberty

Please mail in to: Tribute to Liberty, P.O. Box 84558, 2336 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6S 4Z7

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