

## **El Poder de los Debiles — A Viewer's Response — July 5, 2015**

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I recently had the opportunity to see a video entitled *El Poder de los Debiles/ The Power of the Weak*. After seeing it I bought a copy of the DVD and over the next five days I watched the film three more times. It seems to me at the moment to be as important a documentary film as I have ever seen.

For anyone who thinks this film is simply one more sentimental piece about the noble struggles of a boy with cerebral palsy, who with help is able to overcome his handicaps — I have news for you. You are in for a surprise.

This film was made by German film maker Tobias Kriele. Kriele has lived for a number of years in Cuba and had a desire to give something back out of a sense of gratitude for all he had received from Cuba. Indeed gratitude is an emotion, which operates on many levels with this film. On the most superficial level it is the story of Jorge Jerez, a boy who was born in 1993 in Camaguey, Cuba. He had severe spastic cerebral palsy at birth. At the time of his birth Cuba's was in its "special period" struggling with the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of 80% of its trade. Despite the economic difficulties Cuba didn't close any clinics or schools. And as a result Jorge, or Jorgito as he is known, was able to obtain intensive rehabilitation services from his family and a variety of specialists. But this is only the beginning.

Jorgito not only received physical rehabilitation, he also is accorded the opportunity to fully participate in Cuba's first rate educational system, and Jorgito is not in any way disabled intellectually. But there is something else Jorgito is growing up in a country whose cultural atmosphere involves a certain revolutionary political consciousness. All of this surrounds Jorgito and interacts with him, such that at a certain point Jorgito begins to develop a deep sense of gratitude for everything he has received in his life — gratitude for the love of his family, teachers, neighbors, specialists, friends, but also gratitude for the Revolution, which he sees has made this possible. And with this gratitude grows a desire to give back to society in some way.

Then somewhere around age 10 or 11 Jorgito attends a national conference of the Young Pioneers. In the midst of the conference he takes a microphone that is in the audience and launches into a speech, in which he expresses all that he is feeling.... Fortunately this was filmed at the time so that we can watch it as it was taking place. There is a young girl sitting next to Jorgito, and as he speaks you see the emotions welling up in her, tears begin streaming down her face, and at a certain point the audience erupts with feeling in response to what Jorgito is saying. At this moment not only are tears streaming down the girl's face, they are streaming down my own face, and I imagine the faces of many who are in the audience with me watching the film. For a moment I wondered, "Could this have been staged?" But perhaps anticipating this response, his mother in the film comments that it was not rehearsed in anyway. It was just something that spontaneously came out of Jorgito. So all of a sudden things have turned around, and this person to whom so much was given, has now started giving back. And he is in a society which values and needs what he has to give back. His little speech is broadcast on Cuban TV and ordinary citizens are introduced to him.

Some time later Jorgito learns of the Case of the Cuban Five. This was the case in which Cuba had sent agents secretly into the South Florida in order to develop intelligence on terrorist plots that were being hatched against Cuba. At a certain point the Cuban authorities invited the FBI to come to Cuba, so the Cuban authorities could give the FBI this intelligence with the idea that the US authorities would arrest the terrorists. However instead of doing this, the FBI used the information to identify and arrest the Cuban agents. They were tried in Miami and all given long prison sentences. When Jorgito learns about the Case of the Cuban Five, he feels a deep sense of gratitude toward them. They have defended the Cuban Revolution, which has defended Jorgito, and so Jorgito feels compelled to come to their aid. In the process he launches his own unique campaign of support for the Five. I won't spoil it by telling you what he does. I must let him tell you himself in the film. But his activities come to the attention of the Cuban Five in prison and they in turn begin to be inspired by him...

The film is filled with ordinary people talking about Jorgito and what he has meant to them. Also Jorgito, who is now a journalist, speaks eloquently about many of his ideas including his ideas on social solidarity. Some very interesting ideas are expressed in this film. One idea is that Cuba views disability as a universal problem not just an individual problem, because we are all disabled and vulnerable in some fashion, and each of us needs the help of others. Another is the idea that the Cuban revolution was never, at its foundation, about building a solid economy. Rather the revolution was about seeing to it that every person had the opportunity to fully develop his or her humanity. If the Revolution could achieve this, the economy would take care of itself.

As I am watching this it begins to dawn on me that what I am seeing is what happens when a society commits itself to providing certain basic needs for all its people — healthcare, quality education, opportunities to participate in sports and in the arts.... When a society decides to do this, all of a sudden it needs the talents of everyone to achieve these goals. And so you have a situation in which not only is everyone being served, but everyone is needed to serve. And this tremendous sense of social solidarity develops. Of course for a long time now, Cuba's sense of social solidarity has not been limited to its own people, but has been extended around the world through a variety of international humanitarian missions.

I am recalling a speech I came across some years ago by Fidel Castro. In it he said the following: "Our people aren't... a great people in or of itself, but rather a people, which has made itself great .... out of the greatness of the ideas and the righteousness of the causes it defends.... Without abandoning national and cultural identities and even the legitimate interests of the peoples of each country, no cause is more important than the global causes, that is, the cause of humanity itself..."

Those words come back to me as I am watching this film. And I am struck by the fact that when it comes to the spirit of a people the reality that Cuba is not a poor country. It is a rich country, and it is we in the US who are living a deeply impoverished spiritual existence. I see that this small country in the midst of overwhelming odds has been struggling to rescue humanity's soul, struggling to create in reality a new world, and in the process Cuba has been defending me too! We have come full circle and it is I who am feeling a debt, a need to somehow to express my gratitude. Get this film, see it and share it as widely as possible.

The documentary costs \$20.00 per copy (which includes shipping). It can be ordered from The International Committee, Box 22455, Oakland, CA 9460.