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1868

October 10  Carlos Manuel de Céspedes leads an uprising that initiates the Ten Years’ War, Cuba’s first war for independence against Spain.

1879


1895

February  The War of Independence begins under the leadership of the Cuban Revolutionary Party.

1896

May 19  José Martí, who is later known as the Apostle of Cuba’s independence, is killed in battle at Dos Ríos, in eastern Cuba.

1898

December 10  Spain and the United States sign the Treaty of Paris, giving the United States control of four new territories: Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam.

1901

March 2  US control over Cuba is codified by Congress with the Platt Amendment to an Army Appropriations bill, restricting Cuba’s right to
determine its own foreign policy and budget and approving US military intervention at any time. The Platt Amendment is subsequently incorporated into Cuba’s 1901 constitution.

1933

**August 12** The dictatorship of Gerardo Machado is overthrown by a general strike and a provisional government assumes power.

**September 4** Fulgencio Batista leads the “Sergeants Revolt” and the provisional government is replaced by a government of President Ramón Grau San Martín.

1934

**January 15** Batista overthrows President Grau, initiating a period in which Batista wields significant political power.

1939

In an effort to overcome decades of corrupt administrations, a constituent assembly drafts a new constitution which takes effect in 1940.

1940

General Batista is elected president of Cuba, a post he retains until 1943.

1951

**August 16** Eduardo Chibás, founder of the Orthodox Party, commits suicide at the end of his regular radio broadcast.

1952

**March 10** General Fulgencio Batista takes power in a military coup.

1953

**July 26** Fidel Castro leads the attack by 165 young militants on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba, in the hope of sparking an uprising against the Batista dictatorship. The attack fails, many are killed, and Fidel narrowly escapes capture.
August 1  Fidel is surprised and captured by an army patrol.

October 16  At his trial for the Moncada attack, Fidel outlines the revolutionary political program that is later published as *History Will Absolve Me*. He is condemned to 15 years’ imprisonment.

1955

May 15  Fidel and his compañeros involved in the Moncada attack are released from prison after a widespread amnesty campaign. (The two women political prisoners, Haydée Santamaría and Melba Hernández, had been released the previous year on February 20.)

June 12  The July 26 Movement is formally established as an underground organization, headed by Fidel Castro.

July 7  With legal avenues closed in the fight against Batista, and threats against his life, Fidel leaves Cuba for exile in Mexico.

July  In Mexico, Fidel meets Ernesto Che Guevara, who had been befriended by some Cubans in Guatemala before the overthrow of President Árbenz in a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-sponsored coup the previous year.

1956

November 25  Fidel, Che Guevara and 80 Cubans leave the Mexican port of Tuxpan aboard the cabin cruiser *Granma*, with the intention of launching an armed struggle against Batista in the Sierra Maestra mountain range in eastern Cuba.

November 30  The urban wing of the July 26 Movement, led by Frank País, initiates an uprising against Batista in Santiago de Cuba.

December 2  The *Granma* expeditionaries land at Las Coloradas beach and the revolutionary war begins.

December 5  The guerrillas are dispersed after being surprised by Batista’s troops at Alegria de Pío. Of the *Granma* expeditionaries, only a handful survive.

December 18  Fidel, Raúl Castro and six others reunite at Cinco Palmas. A few days later, they are joined by Juan Almeida, Che Guevara, Ramiro Valdés and four others from the *Granma*.
1957

January 17  The guerrillas and some new peasant recruits capture the army base at La Plata.

January 22  A significant victory over Batista’s forces under the command of Lt. Angel Sánchez Mosquera is scored at Arroyo del Infierno.

February 17  New York Times journalist Herbert Matthews interviews Fidel in the Sierra Maestra. The same day, the first meeting between the urban underground and the guerrillas of the July 26 Movement since the start of the revolutionary war is held.

March 13  A group of students attack the Presidential Palace and seize a major Havana radio station. José Antonio Echeverría, Federation of University Students (FEU) president and leader of the Revolutionary Directorate (DR), is shot and killed.

May 28  The battle of El Uvero takes place in which Che Guevara stands out among the combatants. A few weeks later, he is the first to be named “commander” by Fidel to lead his own guerrilla column.

July 30  Frank País, the young leader of the urban underground in Santiago de Cuba, is killed.

August 20  Fidel leads Column One (José Martí) in the battle of Palma Mocha.

September 17  The first battle of Pino del Agua takes place.

November–December  The Rebel Army conducts the “winter offensive” against Batista’s forces in the Sierra Maestra.

1958

February 16–17  A significant victory is won by the rebels at the second battle of Pino del Agua.

March 1  Raúl Castro and Juan Almeida lead columns that open up second and third fronts in Oriente province.

April 9  The national general strike called by the July 26 Movement is defeated.
May 25  Batista’s army launches a military offensive against the Rebel Army, but it fails after two and a half months of intensive fighting.

July 11-21  At the battle of El Jigüe, Fidel personally leads the rebel forces in inflicting a decisive defeat on Batista’s army, which is expelled from the Sierra Maestra. This allows the Rebel Army to significantly expand its operational zone.

August 31  Commanders Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos lead columns east toward the center of the island of Cuba, opening new battle fronts in Las Villas province.

November 15  Fidel leaves the Sierra Maestra to direct the Rebel Army’s final offensive in Santiago de Cuba. By the end of the month, Batista’s elite troops are defeated at the battle of Guisa.

December 28  Che Guevara’s guerrilla column initiates the battle of Santa Clara, successfully taking control of the city within a few days.

1959

January 1  Fidel enters Santiago de Cuba as the military regime collapses. He calls for a general strike for January 2. Batista and several cronies flee to Santo Domingo, leaving General Cantillo in charge.

January 2  In the early hours, Fidel addresses the people of Santiago de Cuba in Céspedes Park. Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos reach Havana and take control of La Cabana fortress and Batista’s army headquarters at Camp Columbia.

January 8  Fidel arrives in Havana after a triumphant march across the island. A revolutionary government is installed headed by judge Manuel Urrutia as president and José Miró Cardona as prime minister. Fidel assumes the post of commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces.

January 23-27  Fidel visits Venezuela and addresses 300,000 people in the Plaza del Silencio in Caracas.

February 7  The 1940 constitution is reinstated.

February 9  Argentine-born Che Guevara is declared a Cuban citizen.
February 16 Fidel replaces Miró Cardona as prime minister in the revolutionary government.

March 22 At a mass rally in Havana, Fidel explains that the revolutionary government will be outlawing racial discrimination and adopting measures to protect workers in the lowest paid jobs.

April Gambling casinos are closed and Mafia boss Santos Trafficante, Jr., is arrested.

April 21 All private beaches are opened to the public.

April 15–27 At the invitation of the Association of Newspaper Editors, Fidel visits the United States, where he has a three-hour meeting with Vice-President Richard Nixon. Nixon later concludes that Fidel is “either incredibly naive about communism or under communist discipline.”

May 8 In a speech, Fidel answers red-baiting criticisms of Cuba, saying “This revolution is neither capitalist nor communist. Our revolution has its own ideology, its own roots, which are entirely Cuban and entirely American, so why is our revolution accused of being something it is not?”

May 17 The first Agrarian Reform Law is proclaimed, placing a limit on the maximum land holding allowed.

June 26 Cuba breaks diplomatic relations with the Dominican Republic but dictator Rafael Trujillo continues to back plots against the Cuban revolutionary government.

July 16 After a confrontation with Prime Minister Fidel Castro, President Urrutia resigns. Osvaldo Dorticós is appointed president.

July 26 To celebrate the anniversary of the 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks, the people of Havana open their homes to welcome thousands of peasant families in an effort to breach the country-city divide.

October 7 Che Guevara is designated head of the Department of Industry of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA).

October 21 Two planes flying from the United States strafe Havana, causing two deaths and wounding dozens. Former Cuban air force chief Pedro Luis Díaz Lanz later admits involvement.
October 26  Announcing the formation of the National Revolutionary Militias to incorporate workers and peasants into the defense of the revolution, Fidel says “the revolution is here to stay.”

October 28  After successfully negotiating an end to a counterrevolutionary plot led by Huber Matos, Camilo Cienfuegos is killed in a plane accident flying from Camagüey to Havana.

October  At the end of this month, President Eisenhower approves a CIA covert action program against Cuba.

November 25  Che Guevara is appointed director of the National Bank of Cuba.

December 11  Col. J.C. King, head of the CIA’s Western Hemisphere division, sends a memo to CIA chief Allen Dulles about the possibilities for eliminating Fidel Castro.

December  The CIA proposes to recruit Cuban exiles and train them for paramilitary attacks against Cuba.

1960

February  Soviet Foreign Minister Anastas Mikoyan visits Cuba and the first major trade agreements are signed.

March 4  An explosion on board La Coubre, a French vessel bringing Belgian arms to Cuba, results in 101 deaths and more than 200 wounded.

March 5  At the funeral for the victims of the previous day’s terrorist attack, Fidel first uses the slogan, “Patria o muerte” [Homeland or death]. Alberto Korda snaps a photograph of Che Guevara on the platform that becomes the iconic image of the revolutionary guerrilla.

March 17  President Eisenhower approves the CIA’s plans for a “Program of Covert Action Against Castro” — a comprehensive plan of military action and propaganda to overthrow the Cuban revolutionary government.

May 8  Diplomatic relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union are restored, having been broken previously by Batista.

May 17  First broadcasts by the CIA-run radio station on the Swan Islands, off the coast of Honduras.
June 28–July 1  The revolutionary government nationalizes foreign oil companies that refuse to refine Soviet oil, including Shell, Texaco and Esso.

July 6  President Eisenhower suspends Cuba’s US sugar quota. The Soviet Union agrees to buy Cuban sugar.

July 23  Cuba’s first commercial treaty with China is signed.

August 6  Cuba nationalizes other US businesses, including oil refineries, sugar mills and US electricity and telephone companies.

August 7  The Cuban Catholic bishops issue a pastoral letter warning about “communism,” marking a serious rift between the church and the revolutionary government.

August 28  The United States imposes an embargo on trade with Cuba.

September 2  In response to the hostile “Declaration of San José” issued by the Organization of American States (OAS), a “National General Assembly of the People of Cuba” in Revolution Plaza, a gigantic mass rally, adopts the “Declaration of Havana,” calling for the end of exploitation of human beings and the exploitation of the underdeveloped world by imperialist finance capital.

September 17  Cuba nationalizes all US banks.

September 26  Fidel Castro addresses the United Nations General Assembly in New York for four and a half hours. At his hotel in Harlem, Fidel meets with Egyptian President Nasser, Indian Prime Minister Nehru, Soviet Prime Minister Khrushchev and African American leader Malcolm X.

September 28  Establishment of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs).

October 13  Large commercial and industrial enterprises in Cuba are nationalized.

October 14  The Urban Reform Law is proclaimed, ending commercial real estate.

October 19  President Eisenhower prohibits all US exports to Cuba except food and medicines.
October 21  Che Guevara leaves on an extended visit to the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, China and North Korea.

November  CIA broadcasts from the Swan Islands off Honduras warn Cubans of an imminent plan by the revolutionary government to remove parents’ rights over their children.


December 2  Cuba establishes diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Hanoi).

December 5  Some small retail businesses are nationalized.

December 16  President Eisenhower cancels Cuba’s sugar quota for the first quarter of 1961.

1961

January 3  Washington breaks diplomatic relations with Havana.

January 5  Volunteer teacher Conrado Benítez is murdered by a band of counterrevolutionaries.

January 11  Cuba’s National Literacy Campaign begins. Over 100,000 high school students are mobilized for the task in the “Conrado Benítez” literacy brigades.

January 20  John F. Kennedy is sworn in as president of the United States.

February 23  The revolutionary government establishes the Ministry of Industry headed by Che Guevara.

March 12  As part of a terrorist bombing campaign, an oil refinery in Santiago de Cuba is attacked.

March 13  President Kennedy proposes the “Alliance for Progress” to counter the influence of the Cuban revolution in Latin America.

April 15  Bombing raids are simultaneously launched on three Cuban air fields by planes with fake Cuban insignia.

April 16  At the ceremony to bury the victims of the previous day’s terrorist attack, Fidel proclaims the socialist character of the revolution. This same
day the first members of the “Conrado Benítez” literacy brigades arrive at the Varadero training camp.

**April 17** The invasion of 1,500 mercenaries (Brigade 2506), trained and armed by the CIA, begins at the Bay of Pigs on the southern coast of Cuba.

**April 19** With more than 1,200 mercenaries captured, the Bay of Pigs invasion is defeated.

**May 1** At an enormous May Day rally in Havana, Fidel sums up the lessons of the Bay of Pigs invasion and assesses the stage reached in the unfolding revolutionary process.

**June 30** Fidel addresses the final session of a three-day meeting of Cuban writers and artists, explaining, “Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing.”

**July** Formation of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI) as a fusion of the July 26 Movement, the Revolutionary Directorate (DR) and the Popular Socialist Party (PSP).

**August 8** Che Guevara denounces President Kennedy’s “Alliance for Progress” at the OAS meeting in Punta del Este, Uruguay.

**September 2** Cuba is the only Latin American country to participate in the founding meeting of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries in Bandung, Indonesia.

**November 26** A young literacy teacher (Manuel Ascunce) and his student (a campesino called Pedro Lantigua) are lynched by counterrevolutionaries.

**December 2** In a television broadcast, Fidel says he is “and will always remain a Marxist-Leninist.”

**December 22** A huge celebration in Revolution Plaza marks the completion of the National Literacy Campaign, and Cuba is declared a “territory free of illiteracy.”

1962

**January 22–31** The OAS meeting in Punta del Este, Uruguay, decides to expel Cuba from the organization.
February 3  President Kennedy announces the total blockade of Cuba to take effect on February 7.

February 4  The “Second Declaration of Havana,” in effect, a manifesto for the liberation of the Americas, is proclaimed by more than one million Cubans, stating, “The duty of a revolutionary is to make the revolution.”

March 12  The ration book system is established in Cuba.

March 16  A new CIA covert action program against Cuba dubbed “Operation Mongoose” is approved by President Kennedy.

March 26  Fidel Castro denounces sectarianism within the ORI, and a new party, the United Party of the Socialist Revolution (PURS), is established.

August 27–September 7  Che Guevara makes his second visit to the Soviet Union.

October 22  After US spy planes discover Soviet missile installations in Cuba, the international crisis that brings the world to the brink of nuclear war unfolds.

November 2  President Kennedy announces that the Soviet missiles in Cuba are being dismantled.

December 24  The mercenaries captured during the Bay of Pigs invasion are sent back to the United States in exchange for medicines and baby food worth $54 million.

1963

April 27  Fidel Castro arrives in Moscow on his first state visit to the Soviet Union.

October 4  A second agrarian reform law is passed, nationalizing all holdings of more than 5 caballerías (33 acres).

October 4  Hurricane Flora devastates Cuba, especially the eastern provinces.

November 22  President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Almost immediately, a media campaign attempts to link the assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, to Cuba.
December 20  Cuba initiates a campaign in solidarity with Vietnam.

1964

January  A conflict between Washington and London arises over a British company’s plan to sell 450 buses to Cuba.

March 25  Che Guevara speaks at the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) conference in Geneva, at which the Group of 77 (a caucus of Third World countries) is born.

December 11  Che Guevara addresses the UN General Assembly in New York, condemning the US war in Vietnam and supporting the independence movements from Puerto Rico to the Congo.

December 17  Che Guevara embarks on an extended trip to Egypt and several other African countries.

1965

February 22–27  Che Guevara makes a controversial speech at the Afro-Asian conference in Algeria, urging the socialist countries to do more to support Third World struggles for independence.

March 13  Discussing the Sino-Soviet split at a meeting at the University of Havana, Fidel says, “Division in the face of the enemy was never a revolutionary or intelligent strategy.”

March 25  Che Guevara returns to Cuba and shortly afterwards drops from public view.

April  Che Guevara leaves Cuba, along with a brigade of almost 100 Cubans, on a mission to support the liberation movements in Africa.

October 3  The newly formed Communist Party of Cuba holds its first Central Committee meeting, where Fidel reads Che’s farewell letter.

October 10  Because of the US suspension of flights from Cuba, the port of Camarioca is opened for boats coming from the United States to take Cubans wishing to emigrate.

November 21  Che Guevara leaves the Congo and writes up his account of the mission, which he describes as a “failure.”
1966

January First Tricontinental Conference of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL) is held in Havana.

September 28 At a ceremony on the sixth anniversary of the establishment of the CDRs, Fidel says “We will never build a communist consciousness with a dollar sign in the hearts and minds of men.”

November 2 US Congress adopts the Cuban Adjustment Act that encourages illegal departures from Cuba.

November 4 Che Guevara arrives in Bolivia to begin the revolutionary struggle it is hoped will spread throughout the continent of Latin America.

December 31 Che Guevara meets with Mario Monje, the Bolivian Communist Party leader. There is a serious disagreement about perspectives for the guerrilla movement.

1967

March 13 Speaking at the University of Havana, Fidel criticizes several Latin American communist parties, saying, “Those who are not revolutionary fighters cannot be called communists.”

April 16 Che Guevara’s “Message to the Tricontinental” is published in Cuba, calling for the creation of “two, three, many Vietnams.”

April 19 On the sixth anniversary of the Bay of Pigs invasion, in the year designated the “Year of Heroic Vietnam,” Fidel argues, “Our people have no other path to liberation than that of armed struggle.”

August 10 Fidel addresses the Latin American Solidarity Organizations (OLAS) conference reaffirming armed struggle as the “fundamental road” for Latin American revolutionaries. Che Guevara is elected honorary chair of the organization.

October 8 Che Guevara is wounded in combat and captured. This date becomes known in Cuba as the “Day of the Heroic Guerrilla.”

October 9 Che Guevara is assassinated in cold blood by Bolivian Army Rangers under instructions from Washington.
October 15 In a television appearance, Fidel confirms news of Che Guevara’s death in Bolivia.

October 18 Fidel delivers a memorial speech for Che Guevara to almost one million people gathered in Havana’s Revolution Plaza.

1968

January The trial of 35 members of the “pro-Soviet micro-faction” led by Aníbal Escalante takes place.

March 13 The revolutionary government confiscates virtually all private businesses, except small family farms. At the University of Havana, Fidel explains, “We did not make a revolution to establish the right to trade.”

July Che Guevara’s Bolivian Diary is published and distributed free to the Cuban people. It is simultaneously published around the world.

August 21 The Soviet Union invades Czechoslovakia. Fidel responds with cautious approval.

October 10 Cuba commemorates the 100th anniversary of the struggle for independence at the Demajagua monument, Manzanillo, Oriente province.

1969

July 14 Fidel Castro announces the campaign for a 10-million-ton sugar harvest.

1970

May 20 Fidel acknowledges the failure of the campaign to achieve a 10-million-ton sugar harvest in a televised speech.

1971

November 10–December 4 Fidel visits Chile and tours the country extensively at the time of the Popular Unity government, led by Salvador Allende.

December 2 Fidel gives a farewell speech to a huge crowd in the National Stadium in Santiago de Chile.
1972

**July 11** Cuba joins the socialist trading bloc, the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).

**December 8** Cuba becomes less isolated as several Caribbean countries (Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago) decide to establish diplomatic relations with the island.

1973

**September 5-9** For the first time, Fidel Castro attends a summit of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries, held in Algiers. Afterwards, he travels to Vietnam.

**September 9** The Cuban exile terrorist group Omega-7 claims responsibility for bombing Cuba’s UN Mission in New York, and further bomb attacks in October and November.

**September 11** President Allende of Chile is overthrown in a coup led by General Augusto Pinochet, openly backed by the CIA and US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

1974

**January** Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev visits Cuba.

**March 26** Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong visits Cuba and Fidel gives a speech emphasizing the importance of international solidarity.

**November** Cuban and US officials begin talks seeking a solution to the migration problem.

1975

**January 27** A US Senate Commission headed by Senator Frank Church is established to investigate the activities of US intelligence agencies against foreign governments and political leaders, including Fidel Castro.

**February 14** The Cuban Family Code is passed, affirming women’s rights in the workplace and in the home.
November 5  As part of “Operation Carlota” Cuba sends troops to support Angola’s independence against a South African invasion.

December 17–22 The first congress of the Communist Party of Cuba is held. Fidel addresses the closing ceremony, saying, “we are the privileged heirs to what others have done.”

1976

February 24  Cuba adopts a new socialist constitution after it has been put to a referendum in which 98 percent of voters participated.

October 6  A Cubana airlines plane explodes in mid-air off the coast of Barbados, killing all 73 passengers, including Cuba’s national fencing team. Cuban exiles Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, known agents of the CIA, are arrested in Venezuela and charged with the crime. Cuba cancels the skyjacking agreement signed with the United States in 1973.

December 2  The first National Assembly of People’s Power is held and elects Fidel Castro as president of the Council of State.

1977

September 1  Under the presidency of Jimmy Carter, Cuba and the United States agree to open diplomatic offices (“Interests Sections”) in their respective countries.

October The African National Congress (ANC) leader in exile Oliver Tambo and Mozambican President Samora Machel visit Cuba this month. Fidel is welcomed in Jamaica by Prime Minister Michael Manley.

1978

February 9  The US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence proposes legislation to prohibit political assassinations by US agents.

July 28–August 5  Havana hosts the World Festival of youth and students.

August 1  Five Cuban exiles are indicted for assassinating Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and his assistant Ronnie Moffitt in Washington on September 21, 1976.
1979

January 1  As a result of “the Dialogue” on migration issues, Cuban Americans are permitted to visit Cuba. More than 100,000 visit Cuba during this year.

March 13  A revolution occurs in the Caribbean island of Grenada led by Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement.

July 19  The Sandinistas overthrow the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua. At the July 26 celebrations, Fidel says, “No two revolutions are the same.”

September 3–9  The sixth summit of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries is held in Havana and Fidel Castro is elected as chair.

October 12  Fidel Castro addresses the UN General Assembly in New York on behalf of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries, which he explains represents “the great majority of humanity.”

December 23  The first contingent of the Antonio Maceo brigade (a group of young Cuban Americans) arrives in Havana for a three-week visit.

1980

April  A new migration crisis unfolds as a group of would-be émigrés crash a bus through the gates of the Peruvian embassy in Havana. Cuba responds by opening the port of Mariel for boats to come and take people to the United States. At a gigantic rally, called the “March of the Fighting People,” Fidel states that the revolution and the construction of socialism must be the task of “free men and women.”

May 1  Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega and Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop attend the May Day celebrations in Havana. Fidel describes Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada as “three giants rising up.”

July 19  Fidel attends the first anniversary celebrations of the Nicaraguan revolution and promises Cuba’s support for the Sandinista government against Washington’s “dirty war.”

September 11  Cuban diplomat Félix García is assassinated in New York by the terrorist organization Omega-7.

December 17–20  The Communist Party of Cuba holds its second congress.
1981

January 20  The Territorial Troop Militia is formed.

October 22  The North-South Summit in Cancun, Mexico, is pressured by the United States to exclude Fidel Castro, even though he heads the Group of 77 developing nations.

1982

April 2–June 13  War between Britain and Argentina over the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands.

October 18  French President François Mitterrand intervenes to secure the release of Armando Valladares from a Cuban prison after serving 22 years for acts of terrorism.

1983

October 25  The United States invades Grenada after the assassination of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. Of the 600 Cuban civilians working on the island, some are arrested and sent back to Cuba while others die fighting.

1984

December  Cuba and the United States reach agreement on migration issues.

1985

March 11  Mikhail Gorbachev becomes prime minister in the Soviet Union and announces a policy of glasnost (transparency) and perestroika (restructuring) of Soviet political and economic life.

May 19  US-sponsored “Radio Martí” begins hostile broadcasts from Florida to Cuba.

July 18  In a dialogue with delegates to a Latin American trade union conference on the debt crisis, Fidel says the choice is either “to pay tribute to the empire or to pay tribute to your homeland.”
August 3–7 Fidel Castro addresses a conference in Havana on the debt crisis in Latin America, the debt now spiralling to $360 billion.

1986

February 4–7 At the closing ceremony of the third congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, Fidel says, “Our homeland is stronger, our economy more solid, our experience richer.”

February 26 Fidel goes to Moscow to meet Prime Minister Gorbachev.

April 19 On the 25th anniversary of the Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro announces a campaign to wipe out corruption, economism, individualism and bureaucracy in the Communist Party of Cuba, a campaign that becomes known as the “rectification” campaign.

December 20 Cuba releases counterrevolutionary leader Eloy Menoyo Gutiérrez from prison.

1987

October 8 On the 20th anniversary of Che Guevara’s death in Bolivia, Fidel urges a return to Che’s writings on political economy and the transition to socialism.

1988

March 23 Cuban troops play a major role in the victory against the South African army at Cuito Cuanavale, Angola, paving the way for the independence of Namibia and the downfall of the apartheid regime in Pretoria.

July 26 Fidel rejects perestroika as anathema to the principles of socialism, saying “We will never adopt capitalist methods.”

1989

April 2–5 Prime Minister Gorbachev visits Cuba. This is the first state visit by a Soviet leader since Brezhnev in 1974.

June 14 General Arnaldo Ochoa and officials in Cuban state security are put on trial for drug trafficking.
July 26  Fidel warns of the possible collapse of the Soviet Union but declares that even if the Soviet Union disappears, the Cuban revolution will continue to advance.

October 18  Cuba is elected for a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council.

November 9  The collapse of the Berlin Wall marks the beginning of the downfall of the European socialist bloc.

December 7  Cuba honors the heroes of its internationalist missions at a ceremony for the Cubans who died fighting in southern Africa. Facing the imminent collapse of the European socialist bloc, Fidel says the choice for Cuba is “Socialism or death!”

December 20  US military intervention in Panama captures and imprisons General Manuel Noriega. Thousands of people are killed. More than one million Cubans protest at the US Interests Section in Havana.

1990

February  Florida’s governor, Republican Bob Martínez, appoints a “Free Cuba Commission” headed by Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) chairman Jorge Mas Canosa.

March  The first group of child victims from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster arrive in Cuba for treatment.

March 27  The first trials of “TV Martí” are broadcast from Florida, but are immediately jammed by Cuba.

April  The Sandinista government is defeated in elections in Nicaragua.

August  The Cuban government adopts drastic measures in the face of the looming economic crisis referred to as the “special period in time of peace.”

1991

February  The CMEA, which had accounted for 85-88 percent of Cuba’s foreign trade, formally disbands.

July 18  The first Ibero-American summit is held in Mexico City.
July 26  ANC leader Nelson Mandela attends the Moncada anniversary celebrations and thanks Cuba for its support in the struggle against apartheid.

September 11  Prime Minister Gorbachev announces the withdrawal of Soviet military advisors from Cuba.

October 10  Fidel addresses the opening session of the fourth congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, saying “The only situation in which we would have no future would be if we lost our homeland, the revolution and socialism.”

October 14  The Communist Party of Cuba congress ends, marking a significant shift toward developing a new, younger party leadership, and making a change in the party rules to accept as members those practicing their religious beliefs.

November 25  Following the military coup against President Aristide in Haiti, the United States announces that the Guantánamo naval base will be used to accommodate thousands of Haitian refugees.

December  The Soviet government collapses.

1992

January 1  First year of the “special period” is declared and many predictions are made about the imminent collapse of the Cuban revolution.

April 1  “TV Martí,” which had been initiated in 1990, steps up broadcasts from Florida to Cuba, escalating the battle of the airwaves.

June 12  Fidel participates in the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, arguing “tomorrow is too late” to address environmental problems. “Let hunger, not humanity, disappear from the face of the earth,” Fidel states.

July  Somewhat prematurely, US commentators publish various books and articles predicting the “final hour” of Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolution.

July 23  At the second Ibero-American summit in Madrid on the 500th anniversary of the colonization of the Americas, Fidel stresses the need for solidarity among the peoples of the continent.
**September 5** In a speech in Cienfuegos, Fidel acknowledges Cuba is facing a severe economic crisis, having lost 70 percent of its trade purchasing power.

**September 6** The 10th summit of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries demands an end to the US blockade of Cuba and US withdrawal from the Guantánamo naval base.

**October 3** US Congress approves the “Cuban Democracy Act” (proposed by Democrat Robert Torricelli), extending the US economic blockade against Cuba to third countries.

**November 24** The UN General Assembly approves for the first time a Cuban resolution opposing the US economic blockade with a vote of 59 to 3, with 71 abstentions and 42 absentees. Cuba estimates that the blockade has cost it $30 billion over three decades.

1993

**February 24** The first direct elections are held to Cuba’s National Assembly of People’s Power, with 99.62 percent of eligible voters participating.

**July 27** Fidel announces the legalization of the US dollar and other major economic changes, including the approval of free farmers’ markets. “Cuba will neither sell out nor surrender,” Fidel states.

1994

**May 10** Fidel attends the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president of the new democratic South Africa.

**May 10** A new crisis breaks out with Cubans seeking to emigrate to the United States by crossing the Florida Straits on rafts.

**September 9** The “rafters crisis” leads to a new migration agreement between the United States and Cuba.

1995

**October 22** In a speech at the UN General Assembly, Fidel condemns the fact that 20 million people die each year of curable diseases and that the arms race continues although the Cold War is over.
1996

February 24 Two planes flown by counterrevolutionary “Brothers to the Rescue” pilots flying from the United States are shot down over Cuban territorial waters.

March 12 President Bill Clinton signs into law the “Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad)” Act (proposed by Jesse Helms and Dan Burton), which becomes known as the Helms-Burton Act.

December 24 Cuba’s National Assembly passes the Law of Reaffirmation of Cuban Dignity and Sovereignty.

1997

April–September A series of bombs explode at hotels in Havana and Varadero, with one fatality: an Italian tourist.

September 10 Salvadoran citizen Raúl Cruz León is arrested for these bombings and admits links to the Miami Cuban exile terrorists, including Luis Posada Carriles.

October 10 The fifth congress of the Communist Party of Cuba concludes with the slogan, “We will defend the unity of the party, democracy and human rights.”

October 17 The remains of Che Guevara and other combatants killed in Bolivia 30 years earlier are returned to Cuba and placed in a mausoleum in Santa Clara.

December 13 The National Assembly of People’s Power votes to make some significant changes to the Cuban constitution.

1998

January 21–25 Pope John Paul II visits Cuba and urges that “Cuba should open itself up to the world and the world should open up to Cuba.”

May 6 Nobel prize-winning author Gabriel García Márquez takes a message from Fidel Castro to President Clinton providing information about the activities of counterrevolutionary terrorist groups based in the United States.
July 12  In an article in the *New York Times*, Luis Posada Carriles admits involvement in the terrorist bombings of Cuban hotels in 1997, saying they were financed by the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF).

September 2  Speaking at the summit of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries in South Africa, Fidel says, “There is no end of history.”

September 4  Fidel addresses the South African parliament and receives an enthusiastic welcome in Soweto the following day.

September 12  Five Cubans are arrested in Miami on espionage charges, having infiltrated exile organizations in order to avert terrorist attacks against Cuba.

December 6  In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez is elected president with a clear majority vote. Chávez makes his first state visit to Cuba the following month.

1999

February  Fidel attends the inauguration of President Chávez in Venezuela and speaks about the “battle of ideas” at a meeting at the university.

May 31  Cuba issues a lawsuit against the US government claiming $181.1 billion in damages for aggression and terrorist acts over 40 years.

September 19  Fidel sends a message to the Group of 77 saying globalization is “an irreversible reality.”

November 25  Five-year-old Elián González is rescued off the coast of Florida after his mother and several other Cubans drowned in their attempt to reach the United States. The boy is immediately taken hostage by his Miami relatives and every attempt by his father and the Cuban government to effect his return to Cuba is blocked.

November 30–December 3  The World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Seattle becomes the scene of mass protests against neoliberal globalization.

December 5  Members of the Youth Technical Brigades lead a march past the US Interests Section in Havana protesting against the failure to return Elián González to his father in Cuba.
2000

February 19 Provoked by Washington’s inaction concerning Elián González, Cuba issues a new Oath of Baraguá.

April 14 At the closing ceremony of the South Summit in Havana, Fidel calls for the abolition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

June 28 Elián González is finally returned to Cuba.

September 6 Fidel participates in the Millennium Summit at the United Nations in New York, stating, “Chaos rules in our world... and blind laws are offered up as divine norms that will bring the peace, order, well-being and security our planet needs so badly.”

September 8 Fidel speaks to an overflowing crowd at the Riverside Church in Harlem, New York.

October 26–30 During a state visit to Caracas, President Castro addresses the Venezuelan National Assembly and signs important accords for economic cooperation between Cuba and Venezuela.

November Cuban intelligence discovers a plot to assassinate Fidel at the 10th Ibero-American Summit in Panama. Luis Posada Carriles and three others are arrested by Panamanian authorities.

2001

January 25–30 The first World Social Forum is held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, raising the slogan “Another world is possible.”

April 17 Fidel sends a message of support to protests in Quebec against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

June 8 The five Cubans arrested for espionage in 1998 are sentenced in the US federal court in Miami to four life sentences and 75 years collectively.

June 23 During a three-hour speech, Fidel suffers a fall, giving rise to widespread speculation about his health.

September 1 Fidel addresses the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, arguing that racism is “not a natural, instinctive human reaction but a social, cultural and political phenomenon.”
September 11  Terrorists use hijacked aircraft to attack the Pentagon in Washington and the World Trade Center in New York. On behalf of the Cuban government, Fidel offers his sympathy and assistance to US authorities.

2002

January 7  Cuba is informed that the Guantánamo naval base will be used to hold “enemy combatants” captured in the “war on terror” in Afghanistan.

April 11  President Hugo Chávez is the victim of an attempted coup in Venezuela.

May 6  President George W. Bush makes unfounded accusations that Cuba is developing biological weapons.

May 12–17  Former US President Jimmy Carter visits Cuba and addresses a large audience at the University of Havana.

May 21  Cuba is included in President Bush’s list of countries “supporting terrorism.”

2003

May 13  Washington expels 14 Cuban diplomats.

May 26  Fidel attends the inauguration ceremony of President Néstor Kirchner in Argentina and addresses a large, enthusiastic meeting at a university.

June 26  After more than eight million Cubans sign a petition, the National Assembly votes to amend the constitution to make socialism “irrevocable.”

October 10  President Bush announces a Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba (CAFC) to prepare for a “transition to democracy” at the same time as tightening restrictions on US travel to the island.

October  In response to severe hurricane damage, the US sale of food and agricultural products to Cuba is authorized.

2004

January 1  Cuba celebrates the 45th anniversary of the revolution.
January 29  Fidel Castro accuses President Bush of plotting his assassination.

April 29  A US State Department report accuses Cuba of maintaining links with “international terrorism.”

May 8  The Bush administration plan to “accelerate the transition to democracy in Cuba” is released to the public. Fidel responds on May 14 with his letter titled, “Proclamation by an adversary of the US government.”

May 18  A meeting with moderate exile leaders is held in Havana.

June 10  Five opposition leaders are released from prison in Cuba, followed by the release of others.

June 21  Addressing over one million Cubans in front of the US Interests Section in Havana, Fidel reads his “Second Epistle” to President Bush.

July  The US administration further tightens travel restrictions to Cuba.

August 26  Cuba breaks diplomatic ties with Panama after the outgoing President Mireya Moscoso grants an amnesty to Luis Posada Carriles and his three accomplices in the plot to kill Fidel Castro.

October 20  Fidel breaks his arm and fractures his knee in a fall during a speech in Santa Clara.

November 8  The circulation in Cuba of the US dollar is suspended and replaced with a special currency for use in the tourist market.

November 23  Chinese premier Hu Jintao visits Cuba and signs several significant trade agreements.

December 14  In the spirit of ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas)—a counterproposal to Washington’s FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas)—presidents Castro and Chávez agree to close economic cooperation.

2005

March 17  The Cuban peso is revalued against the US dollar as a result of the excellent performance of the Cuban economy.
May 17 More than one million Cubans accuse the United States of harboring Luis Posada Carriles, who was convicted for the terrorist bombing of the Cubana airplane in 1976.

July 28 US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice names Caleb McCarry as the coordinator of the “transition” in Cuba.

August 9 An Atlanta court orders a new trial for the five Cubans convicted of espionage in 1998, declaring the original trial in Miami invalid.

October 14-15 The Ibero-American Summit in Salamanca, Spain, condemns the blockade against Cuba and demands that US authorities facilitate the trial of Luis Posada Carriles.

October 15 A brigade of young social workers are put in charge of gas stations in Havana in an anti-corruption campaign.

November 8 The UN General Assembly condemns the US blockade against Cuba for the 14th time.

November 17 In a speech at the University of Havana, Fidel says that the revolution can only be destroyed from within, after he had criticized the “nouveau riche” for corruption and illegal trading in a speech a few weeks earlier.

November 23 Cuba reaches the goal of 2 million tourists for 2005.

December 18 Evo Morales, leader of the Movement toward Socialism (MAS), is elected president in Bolivia. Evo Morales comes to Havana on December 30 to sign cooperation accords.

December 31 The year ends with an announcement that Cuba has achieved economic growth of 11.8 percent.

2006

July 31 Prior to major intestinal surgery, Fidel temporarily hands over his government and party responsibilities to Raúl Castro, minister for defense and first vice-president of the Council of State.

August 1 Fidel’s message to the Cuban people from hospital is published.
November 5  Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega wins the presidential election in Nicaragua.

November 28–December 2  The Guayasamín Foundation holds a colloquium in Havana to celebrate Fidel’s 80th birthday, an event postponed from August 13 because of Fidel’s illness.

2007

March 28  Fidel writes his first column for Granma since his illness, “Reflections of the Commander.”

July 31  Fidel sends his message “The Eternal Flame,” which concludes: “Life is meaningless without ideas. There is no greater joy than to struggle in their name.”

2008

February 18  Fidel announces he will not seek reelection as president of the Council of State. Consequently, Raúl Castro is elected president by Cuba’s National Assembly on February 24.
The Cuban revolution, one of the events that defined the shape of the 20th century, has now reached its 50th anniversary. Throughout those years, it has been depicted by its enemies first as a satellite, a tool of Soviet policy in Latin America and Africa, and then, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the community of nations created when Central and Eastern Europe were liberated from Nazism, as a kind of tenacious relic left over from the Cold War. But the very fact of Cuba’s survival against all expectations defies these simplifications.

The continued existence of revolutionary Cuba must be seen as a consequence of something much more profound than any individual’s whim or the Numantian stubbornness that was referred to years ago as a synonym of hopeless, suicidal determination. Nor is its survival explained by the understandable reaction to the stupidity of US policy toward Cuba, expressed in the more recent phase of the Torricelli and Helms-Burton laws.

Nearly 50 years ago, Che Guevara argued that Cuba was a historical exception. His reasoning is still valid.

Thus, on reaching this anniversary, in a new century and a new

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1. The Cuban Democracy Act was proposed by Robert Torricelli (D-NJ) and passed by US Congress in October 1992. Aimed at restricting Cuba’s trade with US subsidiaries in third countries, this is often referred to as the Torricelli Act.

2. The Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (“Libertad”) Act was supported by Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Dan Burton (R-IN). Often referred to as the Helms-Burton Act, this bill sought to obstruct foreign investment in Cuba and was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on March 12, 1996.
millennium, it could be said that the greatest moments of the Cuban revolution may not be the 45 key historical moments that we have selected for this book. Perhaps the greatest moments still lie in the future, in the difficult new era of the coming decades.

Some commentaries written outside Cuba and even certain reflections from inside Cuba contain hints of something akin to belated remorse over the fact that the Cuban revolution entered into the Soviet sphere of influence and became somewhat dependent on the Soviet Union.

According to this thesis, it would have been better for Cuba if those links had not existed. Those who argue this say that we would not have been encumbered with the dangerous burden of dogmatized Marxism; the experience of highly centralized and bureaucratic economic management; backward technology; tendencies toward gigantism, excessive consumption of electricity and indifference to the environmental effects of investment projects; a formalistic concept of democracy; and a cultural policy based on pedantic models.

Naturally, it is easy to speculate with hindsight about what the course of history might have been, but the unavoidable conclusions that the country should draw from nearly five decades are one thing, and the desire to replace history with abstractions is something very different.

Cuba did not choose—nor could it choose—the world in which the revolution took place. Naturally, it would have been much better if the Soviet Union, which was to become Cuba’s main economic, political and military partner, had not so early lost Lenin, the true leader of its socialist revolution; if it had not experienced the mistakes and crimes of Stalinism; if it had not had to pay the terrible price of the war. Later, with a political bureaucracy that was more interested in looking after its own interests than in achieving socialist ideals, the Soviet Union was unable to rectify those deformations completely. It would have been much better if the enemy’s blockade had not forced the Soviet Union to compete in an arms race that drained its resources.

But, accepting reality as it was, the Cuban people had the unexpected good fortune of achieving victory when the balance of power in the world offered the revolution at least minimal conditions for survival.

The existence of the Soviet Union—whatever its historical tragedies and mistakes—constituted a decisive advantage in the consolidation of
the Cuban people’s militant self-determination and their right to defend their independence and revolution at whatever cost. Moreover, the Soviet government of that period, headed by Nikita S. Khrushchev, still had some Bolshevik daring, an ethic of solidarity and the political will to take the risks that the defense of Cuba required. These constituted important factors in those circumstances that determined whether or not the Cuban people could be crushed.

To think that Cuba had options, that it could choose between one thing and another, is simply ridiculous. The country lacked the necessary critical mass, economic clout and military strength to break away from the forces of the bipolar world.

The real alternative faced by Cuba was between sovereignty and the ruthless reestablishment of US rule, between the revolution and the counter-revolution, between the advancement and deepening of the process toward socialism and an unimaginable regression in history. Che summed it up concisely: “Socialist revolution or caricature of revolution.” And, when considered realistically, this challenge placed Cuba in the camp of the only allies it could count on. Soviet solidarity was a privilege, and we Cubans, who should not be ungrateful, should always recognize this, even if now we do so only in our hearts.

The foregoing, of course, does not exonerate us from the need to analyze why, in certain circumstances, those relations between our small, underdeveloped country and that great economic and military power—relations that, objectively, implied some degree of dependence—tended to lean excessively toward unjustified influences and unnecessary imitation. These influences were not carefully selected and subjected to the critical scrutiny that should accompany the importation of any experience.

Without pretending to exhaust such a vast topic, I would say that the Cuban revolution inherited the old [Cuban] communists’ defensive approach to the Soviet Union—an attitude that was one of the unquestioned creeds of that party, a party with so many merits and so many outstanding members. But now it seems amazing that later, when the Soviet party was in power and had so many resources and possibilities, it did so little to replace that defensiveness with a more serious, scientific study of the realities and internal contradictions that existed in the country that was our main ally.

It seems undeniable that the dominant role played by the Soviet Union—
when it supplied us with the weapons we needed for our defense, bought the sugar that the United States rejected, and sent us oil and food when a deadly trap had been laid for Cuba—to some extent placed it beyond criticism and investigation.

In addition, a more balanced relationship would have been difficult to conceive of without lesser economic dependence. Unfortunately, Cuba’s economy was extremely vulnerable and very dependent on foreign trade; Cuba was a net importer of food and energy—the historical result of the slave plantation economy that had developed from the end of the 18th century. A single-crop system, a single export product, submission to the US market and profound structural deformities were the features of this reality.

Cuba could not limit itself to changing its trading and financial partners. It had to try to effect basic changes, and that was what it did, starting with the agrarian reform. This was what lay behind the effort to achieve an enormous sugarcane harvest in 1970. The setback of that failed effort, the defects that later hindered the country in its attempts to increase and diversify its export capacity, the harsh US blockade and the unfavorable circumstances of the world economy led to Cuba becoming even more dependent.

It was difficult for a country purchasing 72 percent of Cuba’s exports and dominating all of its main economic sectors not to influence, consciously or otherwise, many other spheres, even while maintaining a policy of respect for Cuba’s independent decisions.

There are plenty of examples showing that Cuba never relinquished its sovereignty or behaved like a satellite country. When a point of principle was reached, the revolutionary government never hesitated to face the consequences of a quarrel with Moscow. However, it is obvious that the Soviet Union’s significance for Cuba’s continued survival and defense made it necessary to keep its viewpoint in mind and to coordinate the policies of the two countries as much as possible.

Cuba did not make a mistake when it availed itself of the advantages of its relations with the Soviet Union to confront the US blockade and consolidate Cuba’s development and defense.

The mistakes that were made—and there were some—were made by those who, in certain situations, thought that the safest, surest path was to
imitate the methods and formulas that were already obsolete in the Soviet Union itself; those who ignored Martí’s warning that the government in each new republic should reflect the nature of that particular country, and Mariátegui’s foresight in saying that, in Latin America, socialism could not be a copy but must rather be a heroic creation.

The inglorious collapse of the Soviet Union and of the socialist experience stemming from the 1917 October revolution created a completely new strategic situation in the world. This counterbalance had previously offset the imperialists’ drive for expansion and domination and had served as a premise for the struggles of so many peoples against colonialism and other forms of oppression. Without going into what the disappearance of this counterbalance meant for humankind, for Cuba, the loss of its main ally, its markets, its fair prices, its financing and its supplies of arms constituted a life-or-death challenge.

The blockade was doubled. For the second time in 30 years, Cuba had to restructure and redirect its entire economy. In slightly over two years, it lost 35 percent of its Gross Domestic Product, and its import capacity—a decisive index in our case—was reduced from US$8.139 billion in 1989 to US$2.236 billion in 1992. On the political and ideological planes, the situation seemed to take Cuba back to the polemic the Bolsheviks had with their adversaries in 1903 about whether or not it was possible for socialism to triumph in a single country.

The Cuban leaders, headed by Fidel Castro, thus had to confront a new problem that was unprecedented in the history of the revolutionary movement, with the aggravating factor that, this time, it was not an immense country rich in natural resources, such as Russia, facing the imperialist powers at the beginning of the 20th century, but was rather a tiny, relatively poor island confronting the designs of the strongest military and political power of all time.

Once more in the life of the Cuban nation, it was not a matter of theoretical analysis or the cool calculation of probabilities. Cuba overcame, and is overcoming, that terrible trial because it drew on its history, sense of duty and honor, and the ethics that constitute the essence of the Cuban spirit. Paradoxically, this may be a new example of the idea that every cloud has a silver lining.

The disappearance of the Soviet Union—a misfortune that seemed
inconceivable some years ago—brought Cuba not only dangers and challenges but also the opportunity to review its own experiences, free itself from foreign elements, return to some extent to its original values and, in short, to begin anew. The task is not an easy one, because the pincers of the US blockade are squeezed tighter than ever before. In addition, in order to enable its economy to recover in the present conditions, Cuba must allow capitalist formulas to be applied—in however limited a way—within its territory, and open areas to market influences and undertake reforms in its economic structure, accepting the social costs and ideological risks involved.

This is not a case of Caribbean rationalization—of arguing that everything that happens is a good thing. Naturally, it would have been much better if the Soviet Union had found a way out of the bog in which it was mired that would have preserved that socialist nation’s enormous achievements.

Did any such way out exist? Probably yes. The peoples of the Soviet Union had the tradition, patriotism and moral reserves for regenerating their society. The catastrophe was not fatal; it was the leadership that failed. Opportunism, political primitivism and personal ambition prevailed. The lack of true democracy, stubborn isolationism and a lack of information facilitated the rise of confusion and demoralization. Bureaucracy succeeded in taking over the state. The workers and the people as a whole were pitilessly sacrificed.

A thorough analysis of this phenomenon has yet to be made, but it is important for the Cuban revolution to examine more deeply and fully everything that happened there, since Soviet ideas and practice permeated many sectors of this country.

The responsibility and possibility for making a valuable contribution to the reconstruction of peoples’ alternatives to modern capitalism—that is, neoliberal globalization—have fallen, unsought, to the Cuban revolution.

People are now beginning to see more clearly that the true meaning of Cuba’s resistance over these years has not been only to protect the independence, social justice and right to self-determination of the Cuban people—which, in itself, would have been of tremendous value. More importantly, Cuba has also played a role in preserving the hope, idea and prospects of socialism and the new development of revolutionary thought.

Parodying the classical judgment of history that latifundism was Rome’s
downfall, it may be said that corruption was the downfall of the Soviet Union. Even though that country was a strategic nuclear force, the internal decay of its values, its spiritual decline, left it without a perspective for its own future or a solution to the problems of humanity now or in the future. Cuba was not exempt from negative internal pressures, which were, above all, the consequence of its lack of social development. However, Cuba has a revolution that now, nearly 50 years after its triumph, still maintains its links with the masses and retains their support, ensures communication between the leaders and the people, upholds administrative honesty, rejects caste privileges and implements a principled policy.

It is only fair to recognize that serious Marxist-Leninist thought did exist in the Soviet Union, which tried to develop in accord with the times and reality; but bureaucratic sway over intellectual and scientific creativity suffocated it. Cuba’s circumstances in this sphere—apart from occasional transgressions—have been significantly more advantageous and not at all comparable.

Cuba has an eminently advanced, patriotic and socialist culture, which is both a shield for defending the island against constant informational and psychological siege by its enemies and a sword for taking the offensive and succeeding on the decisive terrain of the struggle of ideas.

This culture—forced at one of the crossroads of the Western world, heir to the values created there and a participant in the norms and agendas of intellectual debate (even though, on occasion, resentfully, because of a certain isolation)—has greater possibilities than others for dialog with political forces and with thinking men and women all over the world. It is also this culture that helps Cuba to delve deeper into current world problems and to identify solutions.

In political and theoretical terms, this culture is alien to any kind of sectarian narrowness. The Cuban revolution’s—and especially Fidel Castro’s—understanding of Marxism-Leninism has nothing to do with dogma and the mechanical transposition of concepts. Revolutionary thought in Cuba is considered to be a combination of the basic ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin with the dialectical method inherent to that universal theory; the legacy of José Martí and other key experiences, traditions and values of the Cuban national liberation movement; and, above all, the present development of that thought in the praxis of the struggle to transform the country.
If we add to these conditions the tremendous esteem in which Cuba is held in the rest of Latin America, the Caribbean and throughout the world; the respect with which people listen to its leaders’ views in all international forums; and the ability of its leaders to get people to meet and unite, it is clear that, in these circumstances, no other country or revolutionary process can presently play the role assumed by Cuba.

This does not mean that Cuba should seek to set itself up as a new “model” or as a new “center” of the world revolutionary movement. In the coming years, keeping pace with irreversible technological changes, the world will become ever more closely knit and interdependent, but, along with the increasing need for more integrated action, there will also be the prospect of great diversity. Each country and region will seek its own formulas. There will be no “models” or “centers” to be imitated or to tell others what they should do.

Cuba’s most important role in that world will be that of setting an example of resolution and resistance, of showing that there is a humane developmental alternative to neoliberal capitalism, of promoting a sustainable and rational environmental policy, and especially of establishing itself as a force for promoting and spreading the new revolutionary thinking that is needed for moving beyond this phase of history.

It is not fate that decided Cuba should make this important contribution; it is simply a possibility. In the past, we heard it said that socialism was irreversible; now, we know that this is only true when a principled line is followed and that subjective mistakes can lead to the failure of any revolutionary process.

The possibility of the Cuban revolution serving as the standard-bearer of these ideas requires the internal unity of the people and the constant strengthening of their political vanguard. The Communist Party of Cuba, with 800,000 members, is the heart of this cohesion and represents the force par excellence of example, morale and intelligent action for solving or explaining all problems. The party and all the other social organizations and institutions have the task of doing more and more effective ideological work, because Cuban society must develop its virtues while in open contact with all kinds of ideological contaminants and influences.

Besides this, economic efforts are now of decisive importance. We no longer have trading partners who will underwrite the deficits of our balance
of payments; the US blockade continues, like a giant octopus, to plague our operations in every part of the world; and some effects of globalization are creating additional difficulties for us. Cuba’s only solution lies in its capacity to increase its economic efficiency; master the art of good administration; and, in short, obtain the hard-currency income required to meet Cuba’s needs, including the basic one of feeding the people.

Never before could Cuba make such an essential and timely contribution to humankind, which seems to be on the brink of a global crisis of incalculable proportions.

This crisis is defined by the fact that four-fifths of the world’s population now live in conditions of poverty and real hunger. Although the population is growing rapidly, especially in the underdeveloped world, the means required for providing food, clothing, shelter and medicine are not increasing. The scientific-technological progress of industrialized countries is amazing and could ensure a decent life for every man and woman in the world, but it has a diametrically opposite effect. Even though the possibilities for communication, information and the transmission of knowledge are extraordinary, isolation and marginalization prevail.

Moreover, environmental destruction—due to the selfishness of the consumer societies and the devastating impact on those who are struggling at the extreme limits of survival—has, in several areas, already passed the point of no return.

Capitalism, with its incurable blindness, is dragging our planet to the brink of a catastrophe. This is no science fiction movie and is not something to be faced in the distant future—it is already happening to the 40 million people, especially children, who die of hunger and curable diseases each year.

A global crisis calls for global thinking and a global strategy. In a manner consistent with his concept of solidarity—the unity of the exploited peoples and their joining forces to attain their legitimate rights—Fidel outlined the key elements of what could be a new revolutionary approach for the 21st century.

The first thing to be clearly understood is the need to avoid confusing globalization—which is an objective phenomenon and consequence of the development of productive forces and human knowledge, which implies new opportunities and possibilities for the peoples of the world—with
the model that dominant capitalism has imposed: neoliberal globalization, which turns the market into an all-powerful god, turns its back on human beings, trampling them underfoot and subordinating everything to super-exploitation and super-profits.

As Fidel said, “The most important stage in the history of humanity is beginning now.” In his view, in line with the new world order and the US claim to political and military hegemony, the violent revolutionary methods appropriate in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century are not the most advisable now.

Naturally, an isolated revolution may appear where oppression, repression and hunger become unbearable. Those who see all other paths closed to them and resort to rebellion cannot be criticized. But imperialism now has greater means than ever before for crushing any attempt to attain or retain power by force of arms. The international financial institutions serve its interests. The United States even uses the United Nations Security Council selectively and undemocratically to serve its own interests by intervening and punishing governments it does not like.

The globalized world needs a world government that will establish order in the present chaos, contribute to a better distribution of resources, protect the environment and promote international cooperation and democratic participation by all countries—a government that is a far cry from the gross caricature that the United States is imposing unilaterally and abusively on the world community.

In the mid-1980s, the poor countries—many of which were victims of division, submissiveness and false promises—lost a great opportunity to solve the foreign debt crisis.

The same situation is being repeated now, at a higher level. In recent times, far from being alleviated, the economic problems of these peoples have multiplied. The crisis is no longer simply financial; it is now also political, spiritual, medical and ecological. It no longer affects the Third World countries alone but includes growing masses in the industrialized countries themselves as well.

At the same time, the transnationalization of the economy and the current speculative flows in what has been called a “casino economy” are showing signs of what may well become a great global crisis, unprecedented in its scope and implications. The strong north winds of the storm have begun
to sweep through Asia—which, only recently, the experts of neoliberalism had considered to be the area of most dynamic end-of-the-century and beginning-of-the-next-century growth.

Thus, while entailing serious dangers and threats for humankind, neoliberal globalization—like the foreign debt crisis in the past—is also placing a very powerful weapon in the hands of our governments and peoples.

The objective, material premises for taking advantage of this opportunity have emerged relatively rapidly. However, there are still inadequate subjective conditions in terms of ideas, programs, organization, leadership and a determination to act in a united, coordinated way.

It is hardly strange that this should be so in a world in which the ruling powers—especially the United States—have imposed and keep reinforcing a virtual spiritual and informational dictatorship as part of their totalitarian plan to establish a single mindset. In this same context, the revolutionary and other progressive forces are barely beginning to recover from the confusion, despair and fatalism that stemmed from the collapse of the socialist community that looked to the Soviet Union.

This explains Fidel’s statement to the effect that, at this moment, the Cuban revolution’s main role—and his own—is to work to create awareness among the peoples of all latitudes of the problems they face; to carry this message to political figures, thinkers and spiritual leaders; and to mobilize public opinion.

In today’s world, the importance of ideas is growing; the possibilities for spreading the truth are multiplying. No one’s voice is weak if they are determined to be heard.

Achieving true, socialist, human globalization implies, above all, joining forces to confront the unipolar appetites of US imperialism, its hegemony, its desire to rule the entire planet. In these circumstances, socialism cannot be an immediate goal. Intermediate stages will probably be required, in which multipolarism is strengthened, various formulas of regional integration gain ground, the unity and coordination of peoples and governments assert the right to full and multilateral negotiations, and the United Nations is effectively democratized.

The important thing is for such a perspective to help hold us on course in the medium and long term. Therefore, it is not a matter of just any old
ideology. It should constitute a higher synthesis of the best and most advanced principles of human integrity.

The revolutionary concepts of Marx, Engels and Lenin and the lessons learned by the international communist movement in the past century and a half will be prominent, as will the patriotic and humanist traditions of each nation and, certainly, the ethics and aspirations of the great universal religions to spiritual improvement. The theories and analyses of environmental protection will be included, as will the other great contemporary contributions of the social and natural sciences. The new political movements, the new forms of association of the masses that are emerging from the present socioeconomic crisis, will also add their experiences to this thinking.

If this new universalism manages to slough off old, sectarian models; if the peoples and all the other social forces learn to unite; and if the countries and governments set aside what now divides them, a new era will be ushered in for humankind. Cuba is speaking out for these goals. Now, nearly 50 years after the triumph of its revolution, Cuba pledges its best, most determined efforts to achieving them. Cuba is advancing, stepping into the breach. The real history of humanity may well be just beginning. Great moments await us.

Julio García Luis
1. TRIUMPH OF THE REVOLUTION

Time ran out for the Batista dictatorship\(^1\) on the night of December 31, 1958. The end of the war was imminent, as the Rebel Army had launched a sudden offensive on all fronts. A revolutionary force of fewer than 3,000 armed men had pushed to the brink of collapse the 80,000 members of the repressive agencies of the terrorist regime that had seized power on March 10, 1952.

In Oriente province, the main scene of the rebel campaign, the combined forces of the first, second and third fronts, under Fidel Castro’s direct command, set about launching an attack on Santiago de Cuba, the second largest city in the country. Most of the towns in Oriente province had already been liberated, and the military garrisons that had not yet surrendered were under siege.

At the same time, Che Guevara\(^2\) was winding up his brilliant offensive in Santa Clara, Las Villas province, cutting the island in two, and on the northern

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1. Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar (1901–73) took part in the September 4, 1933, military coup (the “Sergeants’ revolt”) as a sergeant and stenographer. As an agent of reactionary and imperialist forces, he overthrew the Grau-Guiteras administration in 1934 and wielded power in Cuba until 1944. On March 10, 1952, he instigated another coup and installed a bloody dictatorship. He fled from Cuba with a group of his henchmen on January 1, 1959.

2. Ernesto Che Guevara de la Serna, (1928–67) was born and trained as a doctor in Argentina. He came to Cuba from Mexico with the Granma expedition. He became a major in the Rebel Army and head of Column Four in the Sierra Maestra and led the “Ciro Redondo” Invasion Column Four to Las Villas Province. A distinguished political leader, theoretician, economist and military chief, he was Minister of Industry and president of the National Bank. He headed a contingent of internationalists who went to help the national liberation forces in the Congo, Africa. Wounded and taken prisoner in Bolivia, he was murdered on October 9, 1967.
front, Camilo Cienfuegos\textsuperscript{3} was completing his 10-day attack on the Yaguajay garrison. Other rebel forces and groups were active in Camagüey, Matanzas, Havana and Pinar del Río provinces. The demoralization and collapse of Batista's army was an undeniable fact.

In the early hours of January 1, 1959, Batista and his main henchmen went straight from the New Year's Eve party at the Camp Columbia army headquarters to planes that were to take them to the Dominican Republic.

General Eulogio Cantillo, who had been Chief of Operations of Batista's army in the eastern region, played a role in these events. General Cantillo broke the promises he had made to Fidel Castro, the commander of the Rebel Army, during a meeting held some days earlier in which the general acknowledged that the Batista regime had lost the war. In an effort to help end the war, Cantillo had agreed to organize an uprising of the troops in Santiago de Cuba on the afternoon of December 31. In spite of Fidel's warnings, Cantillo went to Havana and offered to cooperate with the US embassy's hastily conceived plans to prevent a victory of the revolutionary forces. He facilitated Batista's flight and became temporary head of the armed forces in a fleeting attempt at a coup.

\textsuperscript{3} Camilo Cienfuegos Gorriarán (1932–59) was a member of the Granma expedition. As a major in the Rebel Army, he led the “Antonio Maceo” Invasion Column Two to the northern part of Las Villas Province and took part in the final offensive against the dictatorship. Appointed head of the Rebel Army in 1959, he died in a plane accident on October 28, 1959, while returning to Havana from Camagüey, where he had gone to resolve the delicate political situation created by Huber Matos’s treachery.
INSTRUCTIONS FROM GENERAL HEADQUARTERS TO ALL REBEL ARMY COMMANDERS AND THE PEOPLE

This address was read by Fidel Castro over Radio Rebelde from the city of Palma Soriano on January 1, 1959.

No matter what news comes from the capital, our troops should not cease firing at any time.

Our forces should continue their operations against the enemy on all battlefronts.

Agree to parleys only with garrisons that want to surrender.

It seems that there has been a coup in the capital. The Rebel Army doesn’t know the conditions in which it came about.

The people should be very alert and heed only those instructions that come from General Headquarters [of the Rebel Army].

The dictatorship has collapsed as a result of the crushing defeats dealt it in the last few weeks, but this does not mean that the revolution has already triumphed.

Military operations will continue unchanged until an express order to the contrary is received from this headquarters. Such an order will be issued only when the military elements that have rebelled in the capital place themselves unconditionally under the orders of the revolutionary leadership.

Revolution, yes! Military coup, no!

A military coup behind the backs of the people and the revolution, no, because it would only serve to prolong the war.

A coup that enables Batista and the other criminals to escape, no, because it would only serve to prolong the war.

A Batista-style coup, no, because it would only serve to prolong the war.

Stealing the people’s victory, no, because it would only serve to prolong the war until the people have achieved total victory.

After seven years of struggle, the people’s democratic victory must be absolute, so there will never be another coup like that of March 10 [1952] in our homeland.

No one should allow themselves to be confused or deceived.
You are ordered to stay on the alert.

The people—and especially the workers throughout the republic—should keep tuned to Radio Rebelde, make preparations for a general strike in all work places and begin it when they receive the order, if it is needed to resist a counterrevolutionary coup attempt.

The people and the Rebel Army must be more united and firmer than ever before, so the victory that has cost so many lives is not snatched away.

Fidel Castro
Commander-in-Chief


CALL FOR A REVOLUTIONARY GENERAL STRIKE

This “Call for a Revolutionary General Strike” was also read over Radio Rebelde from Palma Soriano on January 1, 1959.

A military junta in complicity with the tyrant [Batista] has seized power to safeguard Batista’s flight and that of the main assassins and to try to halt the revolutionary impetus, to snatch victory from us.

The Rebel Army will continue its sweeping campaign, accepting only the unconditional surrender of the military garrisons.

The workers and other people of Cuba should immediately make preparations for a general strike, to begin throughout the country on January 2, supporting the revolutionary forces and thus guaranteeing the total victory of the revolution.

Seven years of heroic struggle, with thousands of martyrs whose blood has been shed throughout Cuba, cannot be ignored. The same people who, up until yesterday, were accomplices of and responsible for the dictatorship and its crimes want to continue to give the orders in Cuba.
Cuban workers, guided by the workers’ section of the July 26 Movement, should take over all the pro-Mujal unions and organize themselves in the factories and other work places to bring the country to a halt at dawn.

Batista and Mujal have fled, but their accomplices still control the army and the unions.

A coup to betray the people, no. That would only prolong the war.

The war will not have ended until the forces at Camp Columbia have surrendered. This time, nothing and nobody can prevent the triumph of the revolution.

Cubans: For freedom, democracy and the complete triumph of the revolution, join the revolutionary general strike in all the territories still to be liberated.


THIS TIME IT IS A TRUE REVOLUTION!

Excerpts from the address by Fidel Castro in Céspedes Park, Santiago de Cuba, on January 2, 1959.

I am not going to be diplomatic. I will say outright that General Cantillo betrayed us...

We always said that there would be no point in resolving this matter at the last moment with a puny little military uprising, because even if there was a military uprising, behind the people’s backs, our revolution will go forward and this time it cannot be crushed. It will not be like 1895 when

4. The United National Workers Front (FONU) was formed in November 1958, grouping all the workers’ organizations that opposed the Batista dictatorship. It responded to this call.

5. Eusebio Mujal Barniol led the attack on labor unions under the administrations of Ramón Grau San Martín and Carlos Prio and seized control of the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC). When Batista carried out his 1952 coup, Mujal became one of his main yes-men.
the North Americans came and took over, intervening at the last moment, and afterwards did not even allow Calixto García\textsuperscript{6} to assume the leadership, although he had fought in Santiago de Cuba for 30 years.

It will not be like 1933, when the people began to believe that the revolution was going to triumph, but then along came Mr. Batista to betray the revolution, seize power and establish an 11-year dictatorship.

Nor will it be like 1944, when the people took courage, believing that they had finally reached a position where they could take power, while those who assumed power proved to be thieves.\textsuperscript{7} We will have no thievery, no treason, no intervention. This time it is a true revolution...

Time is a highly important factor in everything. The revolution cannot be completed in a single day but you may be sure that we will carry the revolution through to the end. You may be sure that for the first time the republic will be truly and entirely free and the people will have their just reward.


\textsuperscript{6} Calixto García (1839–98) was a major general who participated in all three of Cuba’s wars of independence in the 19th century. After the death of Antonio Maceo, he became second in command of the Cuban Liberation Army.

\textsuperscript{7} A reference to the Authentic Party administrations of Ramón Grau (1944–48) and Carlos Prio (1948–52), which were both characterized by graft and corruption.
2. FIDEL ENTERS HAVANA

Between January 1 and January 8, 1959, there was a dizzying succession of events, which constituted the most radical shift in Cuba’s history. The neo-colonial government and its repressive forces—established when independence was thwarted in 1898—were dismantled, and a new, revolutionary government was created.

Caught off guard by the speed of the dictatorship’s collapse, the United States took hasty action to try to save Batista’s army, which had always been the mainstay of its domination of the island.

On January 1, in collusion with the US embassy, the leaders of General Eulogio Cantillo’s coup sent a plane to the Isle of Pines (now the Isle of Youth) to bring back Colonel Ramón Barquín. Barquín was serving a prison term there for his involvement in the “conspiracy of the pure,” in which a group of military officers opposed to Batista had tried to overthrow the dictator in 1956. Cantillo handed over command of the army to Barquín, who had the support of the CIA and who immediately tried to make changes in the army command.

In Santiago de Cuba, Fidel Castro announced that he did not recognize Barquín’s authority, saying he would speak with only one person at Camp Columbia—Major Camilo Cienfuegos, once he had taken charge of the camp.

To thwart the US embassy’s maneuver, Fidel called a revolutionary general strike and ordered majors Ernesto Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, heading the “Ciro Redondo” and “Antonio Maceo” rebel columns,

1. Colonel Ramón Barquín had been a military attaché at the Cuban embassy in Washington and had been sent to prison for his role in the 1956 military conspiracy against Batista.
to advance immediately from the center of the island toward the capital. Once there, Che was to occupy La Cabaña fortress, headquarters of the artillery, and Camilo, Camp Columbia, the army’s headquarters. They achieved this after the enemy garrisons along the Central Highway surrendered one after the other without offering any resistance.

After addressing the people of Santiago de Cuba early on the morning of January 2, with a combined force composed of rebel combatants and soldiers from the deposed regime who had joined the rebels, Fidel set out for Bayamo, where the operations troops of Batista’s army in Oriente province had their main base. More joined the rebels in Bayamo, and the Liberation Column led by Fidel, composed of 1,000 rebels and 2,000 soldiers from Batista’s defeated army, began a march to Havana on January 3.

On January 4, after the attempted coup had been exposed and the revolutionary forces had control of all the weapons and military installations in Cuba, the people were called on to end the strike and go back to work.

During these days, municipal and provincial governments were dissolved and new, revolutionary authorities were appointed. Leadership of the labor unions was placed in the hands of their legitimate class leaders. For their part, the old political parties disappeared from the scene. On January 5, Dr. Manuel Urrutia Lleó² took office as president of the Republic; he immediately named a cabinet of ministers.

On January 8, Fidel entered Havana. This marked the consolidation of the people’s triumph. Fidel visited the cabin cruiser Granma, which was tied up at a dock in the bay, and then went to the Presidential Palace, where he addressed the throng of people gathered on the terrace on the north side of the building. That night, a mass meeting was held at Camp Columbia (later renamed Liberty City). Fidel’s address to the Cuban people at this rally was broadcast on radio and television.

² Manuel Urrutia Lleó was a judge in the Santiago de Cuba court. His stance in the trial following the attempted uprising of November 30, 1956, led the revolutionary movement to propose him as president of the Republic. He took office on January 5, 1959, but after obstructing revolutionary measures he resigned on July 17 that same year. He left the country and went to the United States. He died in 1981.
I know that my speaking here this evening presents me with an obligation that may well be one of the most difficult in the long process of struggle that began in Santiago de Cuba on November 30, 1956.

The revolutionary combatants, the army soldiers, whose fate is in our hands, and all the rest of the people are listening.

I think that this is a decisive moment in our history. The dictatorship has been overthrown and there is tremendous joy, but there is still much to do. We shouldn’t fool ourselves, thinking that everything will be easy from now on, because things may turn out to be more difficult.

The first duty of all revolutionaries is to tell the truth. Fooling the people, promoting illusions, always brings the worst consequences, and I believe that the people should be warned against excessive optimism.

How did the Rebel Army win the war? By telling the truth. How did the [Batista] dictatorship lose the war? By deceiving the soldiers.

When we were dealt a setback, we said so over Radio Rebelde; we criticized the mistakes of any officer who committed them; and we warned all the compañeros so the same thing wouldn’t happen with another unit. That didn’t happen with the army’s companies. Several units made the same mistakes, because no one ever told the officers and soldiers the truth.

That’s why I want to start—or, rather, continue—using the same system: that of always telling the people the truth.

We have advanced, perhaps quite a long way.

Here we are in the capital, at Camp Columbia. The revolutionary forces appear to be victorious. The government has been constituted and recognized by many countries. It seems that we have achieved peace, yet we shouldn’t be too optimistic.

While the people laughed and celebrated today, I worried; the larger the crowd that came to welcome us and the greater the people’s joy, the more

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3. In anticipation of the landing of the guerrilla expedition arriving on the Granma from Mexico, an uprising was called in Santiago de Cuba on November 30, 1956.
worried I was, because the greater was our responsibility to history and to the Cuban people.

The revolution no longer has to confront an army ready for action. Who might be the enemies of the revolution now and in the future? Who, in the face of this victorious nation, might be the enemies of the Cuban revolution in the future? We ourselves, the revolutionaries.

As I always told the rebel combatants, when we aren’t confronting the enemy, when the war is over, we ourselves will be the only enemies the revolution can have. That’s why I always said and still say that we should be more rigorous and demanding with the rebel soldiers than with anyone else, because the success or failure of the revolution depends on them...

The first thing that those of us who have carried out this revolution have to ask ourselves is why we did it. Was it out of ambition, a lust for power or any other ignoble reason? Were any of the combatants for this revolution idealists who, while moved by idealism, also sought other ends? Did we carry out the revolution thinking that as soon as the dictatorship was overthrown we would benefit from being in power? Did any of us do what we did simply to jump on the bandwagon? Did any of us want to live like a king and have a mansion? Did any of us become revolutionaries and overthrow the dictatorship in order to make life easy for ourselves? Did we simply want to replace some ministers?

Or, did we do what we did out of a real spirit of selflessness? Did each of us have a true willingness to make sacrifices? Was each of us willing to give their all without any thought of personal gain? And, right from the start, were we ready to renounce everything that didn’t mean continuing to carry out our duty as sincere revolutionaries?

Those are the questions we must ask ourselves, because the future of Cuba, ourselves and the people, is largely dependent on this examination of conscience.

When I hear talk of columns, battlefronts and troops of whatever size, I always think, here is our firmest column, here are our best troops—the only troops that, alone, can win the war: the people!

No general or army can do more than the people. If you were to ask me what troops I preferred to command, I would say, I prefer to command the people, because the people are invincible. It was the people who won this
war, because we didn’t have any tanks, planes, cannon, military academies, recruiting and training centers, divisions, regiments, companies, platoons or even squads.

So, who won the war? The people. The people won the war.

It was the people who won this war—I’m saying this very clearly in case anyone thinks they won it or any troops think they won it. Therefore, the people come first.

But there is something else: The revolution isn’t interested in me or in any other commander or captain as individuals; the revolution isn’t interested in any particular column or company. The revolution serves only the interests of the people.

It was the people who won. It was the people who suffered the horrors of the last seven years, the people who must ask themselves if, in 10, 15 or 20 years, they and their children and grandchildren are going to continue suffering the horrors they have suffered ever since the establishment of the Republic of Cuba, crowned with dictatorships such as those of Machado and Batista.

The people want to know if we’re going to do a good job of carrying out this revolution or if we’re going to make the same mistakes that previous revolutions made—and, as a result, make them suffer the consequences of our mistakes, for every mistake has terrible consequences for the people; sooner or later, every political mistake takes its toll.

Some circumstances aren’t the same. For example, I think that this time there is a greater chance than ever before that the revolution will really fulfill its destiny. This may explain why the people are so very happy, losing sight a little of how much hard work lies ahead...

What do the people want? An honest government. Isn’t that right? There you have it: an honorable judge as president of the republic. What do you want? That young people whose slates are clean be the ministers of the revolutionary government? There you have them: check out each of the ministers of the revolutionary government, and tell me if there are any thieves, criminals or scoundrels among them.

It’s necessary to talk this way so there will be no demagogy, confusion or splits, and so the people will be immediately aware if anyone becomes ambitious. As for me, since I want the people to command, and I consider
the people to be the best troops and prefer them to all the columns of armed men put together, the first thing I will always do, when I see the revolution in danger, is call on the people.

We can prevent bloodshed by speaking to the people. Before there is any shooting here, we must call on the people a thousand times and speak to the people so that, without any shooting, the people will solve the problem. I have faith in the people, and I have demonstrated this. I know what the people are capable of, and I think I have demonstrated this, too. If the people here want it, no more shots will be heard in this country. Public opinion has incredible strength and influence, especially when there is no dictatorship. In eras of dictatorship, public opinion is nothing, but in eras of freedom, public opinion is everything, and the military must bow to public opinion.

How am I doing, Camilo?

The important thing, what I still have to tell you, is that I believe that the actions of the people in Havana today, the mass meetings that were held today, the crowds that filled the streets for kilometers—all of that was amazing, and you saw it; it will be in the movies and photos—I sincerely think that the people went overboard, for it’s much more than we deserve.

Moreover, I know that there never will be such a crowd again, except on one other occasion—the day I’m buried. I’m sure that there will be a large crowd then, too, to take me to my grave, because I will never defraud our people.

SOURCE:
3. AGRARIAN REFORM

The signing of the first Agrarian Reform Law in the camp at La Plata, in the Sierra Maestra mountains, four and a half months after the taking of power, was the most decisive step the revolution took in the national liberation stage and the event that led the US government to use any and every means to try to overthrow the new power in Cuba.

Agrarian reform was fundamental to any program of socioeconomic development, even within the capitalist relations that still prevailed on the island at the time.

Part of the agrarian problem was caused by the fact that Cuba’s main material resource—the land—had been expropriated. This expropriation had started with the US intervention in 1898 and continued with attacks by large US sugar and cattle companies—joined by the Cuban oligarchs—who took over most of the land that had been owned by the government. Prior to the Agrarian Reform Law, 1.5 percent of the landowners possessed more than 46 percent of the arable land in Cuba.

The other aspect of Cuba’s agrarian problem was the terrible circumstances of those who worked the land. Around 150,000 farm families were sharecroppers, tenant farmers and squatters, working land that did not belong to them. Another 200,000 families living in the countryside had no land at all, obtaining only sporadic employment as day laborers.

The first Agrarian Reform Law set a limit of 30 caballerías [402 hectares]\(^1\) of land for each individual owner, although more was allowed in exceptional cases. The law made the farmers who worked small- and medium-sized plots

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1. One caballería is equivalent to 13.4 hectares or 2.47 acres.
the owners of the land they worked, freeing them from rent payments. Even though it was not a socialist law and did not affect an important stratum of rural bourgeoisie (which owned around 1.7 million hectares), it represented a radical challenge to the control exercised by the United States and the Cuban oligarchy. The revolutionary government had the foresight not to carve up the expropriated large landholdings, promoting instead the creation of cooperative farms and agricultural enterprises that could apply technologies of large-scale production.

The first Agrarian Reform Law was complemented by a second law in October 1963, which set the maximum amount of land that could be owned by any individual at 5 caballerías [67 hectares].

FIRST AGRARIAN REFORM LAW

This law was promulgated symbolically at La Plata, in the Sierra Maestra, on May 17, 1959.²

CHAPTER I: ON THE LAND IN GENERAL

Article 1. Large landholdings are proscribed. The maximum amount of land that any individual or body corporate may own is 30 caballerías. Land owned by an individual or body corporate in excess of this limit will be expropriated for distribution among the landless agricultural workers and farmers.

Article 2. The following land is exempted from the provisions of the preceding article:
   a. Sugarcane areas whose yield is no less than 50 percent above the national average.
   b. Cattle-raising areas that support at least the minimum number of head of cattle per acre established by the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA), in accord with the breed, age, birth rate, feeding system and yield

². For the sake of synthesis and to present the most substantive aspects of the law, the introduction and articles on technical elements of the law are omitted.
in terms of beef (in the case of beef cattle) or milk (in the case of milk cattle). The possibilities of the production area concerned will be assessed by means of a physical-chemical analysis of the soil, humidity and rainfall.

c. Rice areas that normally yield at least 50 percent more than the average national production for the variety involved, in the opinion of the INRA.

d. Areas used for one or several crops or animal husbandry, either with or without industrial activity, for whose efficient exploitation and rational economic yield it is necessary to maintain an amount of land greater than that established as the limit in Article 1 of this law.

In spite of the foregoing, in no case may an individual or body corporate own more than 100 caballerías…

**Article 3.** Land belonging to the government, provinces and municipalities will also be subject to distribution…

**Article 5.** The order of procedure for expropriation, when applicable, and for the redistribution of land in each Agrarian Development Area will be as follows:

First: The government-owned land and privately owned land that is worked by tenant farmers, subtenants, small and/or medium peasant cane growers, sharecroppers and squatters.

Second: The excess land not protected by the exemptions set forth in Article 2 of this law.

Third: The rest of the land that may be encumbered…

**Article 6.** Land in the private domain up to a limit of 30 caballerías per person or entity will not be expropriated unless it is affected by contracts with small and/or medium peasant cane growers, tenant farmers, subtenants and/or sharecroppers or is occupied by squatters who have plots no greater than 5 caballerías, in which case it, too, will be subject to expropriation under the provisions of this law.

**Article 7.** Once the expropriations, adjudications and sales to tenant farmers, subtenants, small and/or medium peasant cane growers and squatters living on the farms have been carried out, the former owners of the land that was encumbered may retain the rest of the property up to the maximum amount authorized by the law.
Article 8. Land that was not registered in the real estate record offices prior to October 10, 1958, will be considered to belong to the government...

Article 11. As of the promulgation of this law, sharecropping and/or any other contracts that stipulate that rents for rural properties will take the form of a share of their products are prohibited. Contracts for grinding sugarcane are not included in this concept...

CHAPTER II: ON THE REDISTRIBUTION OF LAND AND COMPENSATION FOR OWNERS

Article 16. A “vital minimum” of two caballerías of fertile land that does not have irrigation, is far from any urban centers and is used for crops of average economic yield is established for a farm family of five people...

Article 17. The private land that may be expropriated under the provisions of this law and the government-owned land will be granted in areas of undivided property to cooperatives recognized by this law or will be distributed among the beneficiaries, in plots of no more than two caballerías, whose ownership they will receive without prejudice to the adjustments that the INRA may make to determine the “vital minimum” in each case...

Article 18. The land in the private domain that is worked by small and/or medium peasant cane growers, tenant farmers and subtenants, sharecroppers and/or squatters will be adjudicated free of charge to those who work it when the amount of that land does not exceed the “vital minimum.” When those farmers work less land than the “vital minimum,” the land required to complete that amount will be adjudicated to them free of charge, as long as it is available and the socioeconomic conditions of the region permit...

Article 22. The land that is available for distribution under the provisions of this law will be apportioned in the following order of priority:

a. Farmers who have been evicted from the land they worked.

b. Farmers living in the region where the land to be distributed is located and who lack land, or who work an area less than the “vital minimum.”

c. Agricultural workers who work and habitually live on the land to be distributed.
d. Farmers from other regions, with preference given to those from neighboring regions, who lack land or who have an area less than the “vital minimum.”

e. Agricultural workers from other regions, with preference given to those from neighboring regions.

f. Anyone else who makes a request, with preference given to those who show they have agricultural experience and/or knowledge.

**Article 23.** Within the groups mentioned in the preceding article, preference will be given to the following:

a. Combatants of the Rebel Army and/or their dependent relatives.

b. Members of the auxiliary bodies of the Rebel Army.

c. Victims of the war and/or of repression by the dictatorship.

d. The dependent relatives of people killed because of their participation in the revolutionary struggle against the dictatorship.

In every case, the heads of families will be given priority…

**Article 30.** The constitutional right of the owners adversely affected by this law to receive compensation for the property that is expropriated is recognized. The said compensation will be established in accord with the market value of the farms as set forth in the municipal tax assessment statements made prior to October 10, 1958…

**Article 31.** The compensation will be paid in callable bonds. For that purpose, an issue of bonds of the Republic of Cuba will be made in the amount, terms and conditions to be established. The bonds will be called Agrarian Reform bonds and will be considered public securities. The issue or issues will be made for terms of 20 years, with annual interest of no more than 4.5 percent. The amount required to pay the interest, amortization and issuance expenses will be included in the national budget each year…

**CHAPTER III: ON REDISTRIBUTED AGRICULTURAL PROPERTY**

**Article 33.** The property received free of charge under the precepts of this law may not be made a part of the capital of civil corporations or business partnerships other than matrimonial partnerships and the agricultural cooperatives referred to in Chapter V of this law.
Article 34. Under the precepts of this law, the property referred to in the preceding article may not be transferred by any means other than inheritance or sale to the government or exchange authorized by the authorities in charge of its application, nor may it be the subject of contracts of leasing, sharecropping, usufruct or mortgage...

CHAPTER IV: ON AGRARIAN DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Article 37. Agrarian development areas will be established out of continuous, defined portions of Cuba’s national territory in which, by resolution of the INRA, it is divided for the purposes of facilitating the implementation of the reform...

CHAPTER V: ON AGRARIAN COOPERATION

Article 43. Whenever possible, the INRA will promote agricultural cooperatives. The agricultural cooperatives that the INRA establishes on the land it has by virtue of the precepts of this law will be under its direction, and it reserves the right to appoint administrators in order to ensure their optimal development in the initial stage of this kind of socioeconomic organization and until the law grants them greater autonomy.

Article 44. The INRA will help only the agricultural cooperatives that farmers and/or agricultural workers form in order to exploit the soil and gather its fruits by means of the personal efforts of their members, according to the internal regime regulated by the Institute. In the cases of those cooperatives, the INRA will see to it that they are located on land appropriate for their purpose and act only if they are willing to accept the Institute’s help and abide by its technical guidance.

Article 45. Other forms of cooperation may include one or several of the following: material resources, tools, credit, sales, the preservation of products, buildings to be used communally, other installations, reservoirs, irrigation, the industrial processing of byproducts and residues and as many facilities and useful means as may contribute to the improvement of the cooperatives, in accord with the regulations, resolutions and instructions issued by the INRA.
Article 46. The INRA will mobilize all the funds needed to promote the cooperatives, facilitating long-term credits for this purpose. These credits will be amortized with minimum interest. The Institute will also provide short-term credits for the functioning of the cooperatives, adapting systems of financing to the economic prospects of the enterprises and always guaranteeing a decent family income right from the start...

CHAPTER VI: ON THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF AGRARIAN REFORM

Article 48. The INRA is created as an autonomous entity with its own legal status for the application and enforcement of this law.

A president and an executive director, who will be appointed by the Council of Ministers, will govern the INRA...

CHAPTER VIII: ON FORESTRY AND SOIL CONSERVATION

Article 55. The government will reserve forested areas in the land it owns to be made into national parks, in order to maintain and develop its forests. Those who have been given title to land by virtue of the application of this law should strictly comply with the forestry laws and apply soil conservation when working their crops. Violation of these provisions will result in the loss of their right to the property acquired free of charge from the government, without prejudice to the compensation to which they are entitled for improvements, which will be deducted from the amount corresponding to the damage occasioned...

Article 58. The tenant farmers, subtenants and/or squatters on rural properties that are to be used exclusively for recreational and/or residential purposes are excluded from the benefits of this law...

Article 62. The presumptive beneficiaries recognized in this law may not be evicted from the land they are using while the land to be encumbered by the agrarian reform is being distributed...

FINAL PROVISIONS

First: Ownership of the summit of Turquino Peak and a strip of land stretch-
ing 1,500 meters [5,000 feet] west of it is reserved for the government, to be made available to the Rebel Army so a Rebels’ House, a botanical garden and a small museum may be built there. The museum, focusing on the struggle against the dictatorship, will help to preserve the loyalty to principles and unity of the combatants in the Rebel Army…

Availing myself of the constituent powers of the Council of Ministers, I declare this law to be an integral part of the constitution of the republic, to which it is added.

Consequently, this law has constitutional force and standing.

Therefore, I order that this law be carried out and implemented throughout the country.

Fidel Castro Ruz
Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government

La Plata, Sierra Maestra, May 17, 1959, Year of Liberation

4. LAST SPEECH OF CAMILO CIENFUEGOS

During the first year after the triumph of the revolution, confusion and political prejudice stemming from the McCarthy period were rife. Reactionaries both inside and outside Cuba tried to undermine the people’s unity on every front. One of the most dangerous and complex moments was the betrayal by Major Huber Matos Benítez, head of the Rebel Army in Camagüey.

Matos, an educated but arrogant and ambitious man, had a contradictory record in the revolutionary movement. After the January 1 victory, when he was named military chief of Camagüey, he sided politically with the sugar and cattle oligarchs, who had one of their strongest bases in that region. After the adoption of the Agrarian Reform Law, they launched an intensive reactionary, anticommunist campaign claiming, as was frequently said in that period, that Marxists had “infiltrated” the ranks of the Rebel Army. They demanded clarification of the ideological direction of the revolution and a statement about how far it would go.

As the culmination of this maneuver, Matos wrote a letter of resignation to Fidel Castro. Far from private, it was first shown to other officers and leaders of various organizations in the province. Its real purpose was to win their support and to create an internal and international crisis for the revolution.

Because of Camilo Cienfuegos’s courage, proven loyalty and fine political

1. At the end of the revolutionary war Huber Matos Benítez was a major in the Rebel Army and head of the “Antonio Guiteras” Column Nine. Appointed military chief of Camagüey after the triumph of the revolution, he was arrested and sentenced to 20 years in prison for the crime of treason. After serving his sentence, he became the ringleader of a counterrevolutionary organization outside Cuba.
sense, Fidel appointed him to go to Camagüey. He was instructed to arrest Huber Matos and take immediate measures to halt the plot. When Fidel arrived in the province a few hours later, he would help mobilize the people of Camagüey and explain to them the real meaning of what was going on.

The tense days, beginning on October 21, highlighted the exceptional abilities of Camilo Cienfuegos, not only as a guerrilla leader but also as a political figure of the revolution, noted for his direct manner, frankness and clear thinking.

Referring to Matos’s demand that Fidel state exactly how far he was going to take the Cuban revolution, Camilo said, “It isn’t necessary to say where Fidel Castro is going to take the Cuban revolution. This revolution will go as far as it can. This revolution will reach its goals. As in the days of the war, this revolution has only two choices: to win or to die… If you ask me how far I’m going, I’ll tell you that I’ll be with this revolution all the way. We’re going to have real social justice; we’re going to lift the farmers and workers out of the misery to which they’ve been subjected by the interests now serving the forces of the counterrevolution…”

On October 26, Camilo Cienfuegos addressed a gathering in Havana. It was to be his last speech. He returned to Camagüey to continue the work of repairing the damage done by the plot. Two days later, when flying back to Havana to report on his efforts, the small plane in which he was traveling was lost in a storm. Thus, Huber Matos’s betrayal cost the life of the man whom Che Guevara called “the best of all the guerrillas.”

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FOR EVERY TRAITOR WHO APPEARS,
WE WILL MAKE NEW REVOLUTIONARY LAWS

Address given by Camilo Cienfuegos on the terrace of the Presidential Palace in Havana on October 26, 1959.

The integrity, dignity and courage of the Cuban people in this gigantic mass rally in front of this now-revolutionary palace of the Cuban people are as great and strong as the Sierra Maestra mountains.

The Cuban people’s support for the revolution, which was carried out for the Cuban people, is and always will be as great as the invincible Turquino Peak.3

This afternoon, you are showing that no deceitful, cowardly betrayals of this people and of this revolution matter. It doesn’t matter that mercenary planes flown by war criminals and supported by powerful interests of the US government4 have come, because, here, the people won’t let themselves be confused by traitors and are not afraid of mercenary planes, just as the Rebel [Army] troops were not afraid of the dictatorship’s planes when they were mounting an offensive.

This enormous mass meeting confirms the Cuban people’s unbreakable faith in this government. I know that the people won’t let themselves be confused by the campaigns launched by the enemies of the revolution. The Cuban people know that, for every traitor who may appear, we will make new revolutionary laws to benefit the people.

The Cuban people know that, for every traitor who appears, there will be 1,000 rebel soldiers who are willing to fight to the death defending the freedom and sovereignty that this nation has won. I can see the placards and hear the voices of the courageous people, saying, “Forward, Fidel—Cuba is with you!”

Now, the Rebel Army, the combatants who came out of the mountains,

3. The highest mountain in Cuba, Turquino Peak, (1,960 meters) in the Sierra Maestra mountains, is one of the symbols of the Cuban revolution.

4. The reference is to the attacks on sugar mills made by planes coming from bases in the United States and, particularly, to the terrorist bombing of Havana on October 21, 1959, by Pedro Luis Díaz Lanz, former head of the Cuban Air Force, who flew from a base in Miami, Florida.
who did not sell out to any interests, who can’t be frightened, say, “Forward, Fidel—the Rebel Army is with you!” This rally, these farmers, workers and students who have come to this palace today, give us energy—energy to continue the revolution, to continue the agrarian reform, which nothing and nobody can stop. Today, you are showing that, just as 20,000 Cubans gave their lives to achieve this freedom and sovereignty, all the people are willing to give their lives if necessary to keep from living on their knees.

Anyone who wants to halt this very Cuban revolution will have to kill all the people to do so, and, if this should come to pass, the verses of Bonifacio Byrne⁵ would become a reality:

If my flag should ever be
torn and full of rents,
even the dead will leave their tombs
and rise in its defense...

Neither the traitors nor all the revolution’s enemies and all the interests that try to confuse the people matter when the people do not allow themselves to be confused. The Cuban people know… that 20,000 Cubans died for this revolution—to put an end to abuses and other despicable acts, the hunger and the agony, which the Republic of Cuba experienced for more than 50 years.

The enemies of the revolution should not think that we’re going to stop, that this nation is going to stop; those who send planes and those who fly them should not think that we are going to get down on our knees and bow our heads. We are going to bow our heads once and once only: on the day we reach Cuban soil, guarded by 20,000 Cubans, and tell them, “Brothers and sisters, the revolution has been carried out; your blood was not shed in vain!”


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⁵. Bonifacio Byrne was a poet and patriot from Matanzas who wrote these lines when, on returning from exile after the War of Independence, he saw the US flag flying over Havana’s Morro Castle.
5. EXPLOSION ON LA COUBRE

The year 1960 began with more air incursions from Miami, with planes dropping bombs and incendiary materials on sugar mills, sugarcane fields and towns throughout Cuba in an attempt to disrupt the sugarcane harvest—Cuba’s main source of income—and, at the same time, to create a climate of terror and instability.

On January 13, 1960, Allen Dulles, director of the CIA, created a special task force for carrying out actions against the Cuban government.

US pilot Robert Ellis Frost died on February 18 when the plane he was flying in an attack against the España Sugar Mill, in Matanzas province, exploded. Documents found on board confirmed that he had left US bases on three other occasions to make flights over Cuban territory.

Early in the afternoon of March 4, while the French steamship La Coubre was being unloaded at the Pan American Dock in the port of Havana, an explosion occurred on board. As soldiers, fire fighters, police and other workers rushed to the ship to help the victims, a second explosion killed and wounded even more people. The hold where the work of unloading had been in progress was completely destroyed.

The French ship, whose port of embarkation had been Antwerp, Belgium, was carrying arms and munitions that Cuba had purchased for its defense. The toll was 75 dead and over 200 wounded, including many people who were badly mutilated. Cuba’s investigations included taking some boxes of FAL rifle shells—some of which had exploded at the time of the disaster—up in a plane and dropping them, showing that the explosions could not possibly have been an accident. The investigators concluded, therefore, it had been an act of sabotage, with the boxes of ammunition loaded in such a way that they would explode when moved.
The victims were buried on the following day, March 5. The long funeral cortege went along 23rd Street to Colón Cemetery, the largest in Havana. At the entrance to the cemetery, Fidel Castro addressed the indignant crowd. It was evening when he concluded his speech using for the first time the catch cry: “Patria o muerte!” (“Homeland or death!”)

**HOMELAND OR DEATH!**

Excerpts from the speech of Fidel Castro on March 5, 1960, at the burial of the victims from the sabotage of the ship, *La Coubre*.

Great have been our losses over these 14 months; our dear and unforgettable compañeros who are no longer among those of us who now follow their coffins; compañeros who, in the line of duty, disappeared from our ranks; nonetheless, our ranks keep marching on, and our people remain standing on their own feet, and this is what matters! And what a powerful thing it is to see a people standing on its own feet, what a marvelous and impressive spectacle is a people standing on its own feet. What a spectacle, like this one today, to see people marching when some years ago it would have seemed to them like a dream, to see them marching as they were marching today. Who could have dreamed a few years ago that they would see workers’ militias marching shoulder-to-shoulder with the university brigades; shoulder-to-shoulder with soldiers from the Rebel Army, shoulder-to-shoulder with members of the navy and the police; shoulder-to-shoulder with a column of peasants in their mambi hats, their ranks compact and soldierly, their guns on their shoulders; peasants from the mountains who have come to accompany us in this moment of sorrow today so that nobody would be left unrepresented, so that here, where ministers and citizens are one indistinguishable people, the whole nation has come together in all its generous, combative and heroic spirit!

Who could ever have dreamed that one day members of the military and workers would no longer be enemies; that one day military men, workers, students, peasants and the people would no longer be enemies; that one day intellectuals would march arm-in-arm with armed men; that one day, the
power of labor, thought and the gun would march together, as they have marched today!

Once they marched separately, once they were enemies, once the country was split into different kinds of interests, distinct groups, separate institutions, and today our country is one single spirit, our country is one single force, our country is one single group. Today peasants and soldiers, students and police, people and the armed forces, do not fight each other and die; today we all arise from the same yearning and the same aspiration: the people and the military are one and the same thing. Once they fought each other and now they fight together; once they marched along separate paths and today they march together. Today they die together, helping each other, giving their lives to save the lives of others, like beloved brothers…

Today I have seen our country as more glorious and more heroic, our people as more admirable, and worthy of being admired as a column returning from combat is honored, worthy of identifying with and expressing solidarity with.

What matters are not so much the empty places in our ranks; what matters is the presence of the spirit of those who remain on their feet. And it is not just once, but many times we have seen empty places in our ranks, in the ranks of our army. We see painful empty places, like those in the ranks of our people today; but the important thing is the firmness of the people, of a people still on its feet.

And thus, in saying farewell to our fallen today, to these soldiers and these workers, I have only one thought in saying goodbye, and that is the idea of what this struggle symbolizes and what our people symbolize today. May they rest in peace! Workers and soldiers together in their tombs. As they struggled together, so they died together and so are we prepared to die together.

And in saying farewell to them, here at the entrance to the cemetery, we are aware that a promise is more than today’s promise, for it is yesterday’s promise and a promise forever. Cuba will never be intimidated, Cuba will never go back. The revolution will not be stopped, the revolution will not go back, the revolution will continue victoriously on its way, the revolution will continue on its march, yielding to nothing!

Those who did not want us to receive these munitions are the enemies of our revolution, the same people who do not want our country to be able to
defend itself, those who do not want our country to have what it needs to defend its sovereignty.

We know about the efforts that have been made to stop us from buying these arms, and among those most concerned that we should not receive these arms were employees of the US government. We can assert this without making any secret about it because, if this is a secret, it is one of those secrets that the whole world knows. It’s not just what we say; it’s what the British government says. The British government has declared that the US government was concerned that we should not acquire planes in England. The US authorities have said it themselves, and their spokesmen have said it—that efforts should be made to prevent arms from being sold to Cuba. We have been struggling against these pressures and we have been struggling against these obstacles...

We will never be strong enough to attack anyone, not only because we do not have enough arms or men or resources but also because we would never have the right to attack anybody. Yet we feel strong enough to defend ourselves, because we are defending what is right and we know how to defend that.

Then, why is it that they do not want us to have the resources we need? It is simply because they do not want us to be able to defend ourselves, so that we remain defenseless. And why do they want us to be defenseless? To break us, to make us submit, so that we can’t resist their pressures, so that we can’t resist their aggression. Do they, in fact, have the right to obstruct our efforts to acquire the means to defend ourselves, these authorities of a country that have not managed to prevent the systematic use of their own territory to launch bombing raids against us?

If only these people, who are mentally unbalanced in the most elementary sense of the term, would dare to consider the possible consequences of an invasion of our territory, then they would discover the monstrous error of their ways—because we would be unstinting in our sacrifices! But if this should unfortunately occur, the misfortune would be still greater for those who attack us. Let them be in no doubt that here, in this land called Cuba, here, among these people who are called Cubans, they will have to fight us until the last drop of our blood has been shed, they will have to fight to the last remaining atom of our lives. We will never attack anybody and nobody will ever have anything to fear from us; but anybody who wants to
attack us must know—make no mistake—who the Cubans are today. We are not talking about 1899, we are not talking about the beginning of the century and we are not talking about 1910 or 1920 or 1930—but the Cubans of this decade, the Cubans of this generation, the Cubans of this era. This is not because we are the best, but because we have had the good luck to be able to see more clearly, because we have had the good luck to receive the lessons and the example of history, the lesson for which our ancestors made so many sacrifices, the lesson that exacted so much humiliation and so much pain from the generations that have gone before us. Because we have had the good luck to receive this lesson, they will have to fight if they attack us, against this generation, to our last drop of blood. They will have to fight the guns that we have, the guns that we will buy. We can buy weapons from anyone who will sell them to us and from wherever we see fit.

Unfazed by the threats, unfazed by the maneuvers, we will remember that there was a time when we were only 12 men and that, comparing the strength we had then with the strength of the [Batista] dictatorship, our strength was so small and insignificant that nobody would have believed it was possible to resist. However, we believed that we were resisting aggression then, just as we believe that we are resisting today. And we believe that we not only know how to resist any aggression but that we will know how to overcome any aggression, and that, once again, we will have no choice to make but the one with which we began our revolutionary struggle: that of freedom or death. Except that, now, freedom means even more than it did then. Freedom means our country. And our choice will be: Homeland or death!

6. NATIONALIZATION OF US COMPANIES

Cuba’s history had seen the island turned into an economic colony of the United States, a process that began even before the colonies that were to become the United States of America had gained their independence from England. Naturally, those trade and financial ties—which were already decisive in the 19th century—became much stronger following the US military intervention in Cuba in 1898 and throughout the first six decades of the so-called republic.

Large US companies were the main owners of the land, sugar mills, mines, oil refineries, industries of all kinds, chain stores, public utilities and a large part of the banking and import trade sectors.

Cuba’s traditional sugar quota on the US market—that is, the part of US sugar imports that Cuba provided every year—was the island’s main source of income.

The first measures the US government took to force Cuba to its knees following the 1959 revolution—diplomatic pressure, conspiracies, acts of sabotage, pirate attacks, armed uprisings, subversive radio broadcasts and the organization of a mercenary invasion—failed. In 1960, the United States stepped up actions aimed at paralyzing and crushing Cuba’s economy.

As part of the effort to meet that challenge, Cuba signed a trade agreement with the Soviet Union in February 1960, during a visit of Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan to Havana. Under that agreement, Cuba would receive oil, wheat, steel and some equipment in exchange for sugar and other Cuban products. The Soviet Union promised to buy 5 million
tons of sugar in five years and also gave Cuba a 12-year credit of US$100 million at 2.5 percent interest per year.

In June 1960, the United States responded by refusing to refine Soviet crude oil in the Esso, Sinclair and Texaco refineries in Cuba, which also announced that they would not supply any more oil to Cuba. The revolutionary government responded to this crisis—which might have meant the end of the revolution if it had not been for Soviet solidarity—by taking over those refineries.

The next blow from the United States was the reduction of Cuba's sugar quota. The US Congress authorized President Eisenhower to dispose of that quota by means of executive orders, and, on July 6, he resolved to end the US purchase of 700,000 tons of sugar—which Cuba had already produced.

That same day, in Havana, the revolutionary government adopted Law 851, whose Article 1 authorized "the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, acting jointly, to issue resolutions nationalizing, by means of forcible expropriation, the companies and other property owned by US citizens and/or corporations of the United States and/or by companies in which they have an interest or participation, even if the same have been constituted under Cuban law, whenever they deem this advisable for the defense of the nation's interests."

On August 6, 1960, in view of the maneuver in the Organization of American States (OAS) to call a meeting of foreign ministers in Costa Rica, the revolutionary government proceeded to nationalize the main US companies in Cuba. Fidel Castro made the announcement of this measure in Cerro Stadium, during the closing session of the first Latin American Congress of Youth.

The Cuban government also issued Law 980, of October 13, 1960, which nationalized industries and businesses regardless of the nationality of their owners; Law 981, of the same date, which declared banking to be a public service; the Urban Reform Law, of October 14, 1960, which gave tenants title to their homes; and Law 1076, of December 5, 1962, which nationalized certain small retail businesses.
DEFENDING CUBA'S NATIONAL INTERESTS

Law passed by the revolutionary government on August 6, 1960.

THE EXECUTIVE POWER
RESOLUTION NO. 1

WHEREAS Law 851, of July 6, 1960, which was published in the Official Gazette on July 7, authorized the undersigned to jointly order a nationalization by means of forcible expropriation of the assets and/or companies owned by individuals and/or corporations of the United States of North America and/or of the companies in which they have interests and/or participation, even if the said companies have been constituted in accord with Cuban law, when they consider it to be in defense of the national interest;

WHEREAS the attitude of constant aggression that the government and legislative power of the United States of North America have assumed for political purposes against the fundamental interests of the Cuban economy, as expressed in the amendment to the sugar law passed by Congress, by means of which the president of that country was granted exceptional powers to reduce Cuban sugar’s access to the US sugar market as a weapon of political action against Cuba, was contemplated in laying the foundations for that law;

WHEREAS the executive branch of the government of the United States of North America, making use of the said exceptional powers and in a notorious attitude of economic and political aggression against our country, has proceeded to reduce Cuban sugar’s participation in the US market, with the unquestionable purpose of attacking Cuba and the development of its revolutionary process;

WHEREAS that act constitutes a reiteration of the government of the United States of North America’s continued conduct aimed at keeping our people from exercising their sovereignty and integral development, thus corresponding to the changeable interests of the US monopolies that have hindered the growth of our economy and our political freedom;
WHEREAS, in view of these facts, the undersigned, aware of their great historic responsibilities and in the legitimate defense of the nation’s sovereignty, are forced to anticipate measures needed to counteract the damage caused by the attacks to which our nation has been subjected;

WHEREAS, in accord with our constitution and code of laws, in the exercise of our sovereignty and as an internal legislative measure, the undersigned understand that it is advisable, in view of the consummation of the aggressive measures referred to in the previous whereases, to make use of the powers conferred on them by Law 851, of July 6, 1960—that is, to proceed to the forcible expropriation by the Cuban government of the assets and/or companies owned by individuals who are citizens of the United States of North America—as a decision justified by the nation’s need to be compensated for the damage caused in its economy and to affirm the consolidation of Cuba’s economic independence;

WHEREAS the Compañía Cubana de Electricidad and the Cuban Telephone Company have been typical examples of the extortionist, exploiting monopolies that have drained and thwarted the nation’s economy and the people’s interest for many years;

WHEREAS the sugar companies seized the best land in our country under the Platt Amendment, the clause that threatens and impedes our national economy and which facilitated the invasion of our country by the imperialist capital of insatiable, unscrupulous foreign owners, who have recovered the value of their investments many times over;

WHEREAS the oil companies have continuously defrauded the nation’s economy by demanding to be paid monopoly prices—which, for many years, meant outlays of enormous amounts of hard currency—and, in their eagerness to perpetuate their privileges, treated the laws of the nation disrespectfully and devised a criminal plan of boycotting our homeland, forcing the revolutionary government to control them; and

WHEREAS it is the duty of the peoples of Latin America to strive to recover their national wealth, removing them from the domain of foreign interests and monopolies that impede their progress, promote political interference
and infringe on the sovereignty of the underdeveloped peoples of the Americas,

THEREFORE, in exercise of the powers invested in us, in accord with the provisions of Law 851, of July 6, 1960,

WE RESOLVE

FIRST: To nationalize, by means of forcible expropriation, and award to the Cuban government, in fee simple, all the assets and/or companies located in Cuban national territory and the rights and actions that arise from the exploitation of those assets and/or companies, which are owned by individuals who are citizens of the United States of North America or operators of companies in which citizens of that country have a prevailing interest, which are listed below:

1. Compañía Cuban de Electricidad;
2. Cuban Telephone Company;
3. Esso Standard Oil, S.A., Cuba Division;
4. Texas Co. West Indies Ltd.;
5. Sinclair Cuba Oil Co., S.A.;
6. Central Cunagua, S.A.;
7. Compañía Azucarera Atlántica del Golfo, S.A.;
8. Compañía Central Altagracia, S.A.;
9. Miranda Sugar Estates;
10. Compañía Cubana, S.A.;
11. Cuban American Sugar Mills;
12. Cuban Trading Company;
13. New Tuinicú Sugar Co., Inc.;
14. Francisco Sugar Company;
15. Compañía Azucarera Céspedes;
16. Manatí Sugar Company;
17. Punta Alegre Sugar Sales Company;
18. Baraguá Industrial Corporation of New York;
19. Florida Industrial Corporation of New York;
20. Macareño Industrial Corporation of New York;
21. General Sugar Estates;
22. Compañía Azucarera Vertientes Camagüey de Cuba;
23. Guantánamo Sugar Company;
24. United Fruit Sugar Company;
25. Compañía Azucarera Soledad, S.A.; and
26. Central Ermita, S.A.

SECOND: Consequently, to declare the Cuban government subrogated in the place and degree of the corporations listed in the preceding paragraph in terms of the assets, rights and actions mentioned and in terms of the assets and liabilities of which the capital of the said companies consists;

THIRD: To declare that these forcible expropriations are being made on the basis of the public need and utility and of the national interest as set forth in the whereases of this resolution;

FOURTH: In accord with the provisions of Article 3 of Law 851, of July 6, 1960, to appoint the INRA as the agency which will be in charge—through the Department of Industry, the General Administration of Sugar Mills and the Cuban Oil Institute, with all the powers inherent to the function entrusted to them—of administering the assets and/or companies expropriated under the provisions of this resolution;

FIFTH: To have the agencies mentioned in the preceding paragraph select and appoint the officials who will, on their behalf, assume the full administration of the said assets and/or companies, without limitations of any kind and, after they have assumed those powers, inform the undersigned so they may proceed to naming experts who will assess the assets appropriated, in order to determine the amount of the compensation to be paid in accord with Law 851, of July 6, 1960;

SIXTH: To authorize the administrators who are appointed to go ahead with the immediate preventive intervention of the corporations, companies, and subsidiary and other assets linked to or connected with those covered by this resolution and, once the said interventions have been carried out, to inform the undersigned; and
SEVENTH: To authorize the designated agencies to send out notifications stating that ownership of the companies, assets, rights and actions referred to in this resolution has been transferred to the Cuban government and to issue writs to the registrars of deeds and to the provincial registrars of companies and businesses, so they may make the necessary inscriptions of ownership by the Cuban government.

Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado, President
Fidel Castro Ruz, Prime Minister

Havana, August 6, 1960

The seventh consultative meeting of foreign ministers of the Organization of American States was inaugurated in the National Theater in San José, Costa Rica, on August 22, 1960. This meeting had been called in response to a request from the Peruvian government “to consider the requirements of hemispheric solidarity and the defense of the regional system and American democratic principles, in view of threats that may harm that system.”

In reality, the US government was pulling the strings behind the scenes, once again using the OAS as a cover to isolate and attack governments that displeased it, as had already occurred in 1954 with the CIA and United Fruit Company’s conspiracy to overthrow the administration of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala.¹

The pretext that was used—and would continue to be used for many years—was that because of its links with the Soviet Union Cuba constituted a threat to the so-called inter-American system.

Fidel Castro had already described the upcoming OAS meeting as “nothing but a US maneuver against Cuba,” and warned “US imperialism proposes to use the OAS meeting to isolate Cuba.”²

One of the most shameful chapters in that history was the United States’ sharing out among several Latin American governments the sugar quota it

1. In 1954, the CIA and the United Fruit Company conspired in a coup and US military invasion that overthrew the progressive government of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala, beginning a period of repression and bloody regimes that took the lives of over 150,000 people.

had taken away from Cuba, and its use of those extra quotas, credits and other advantages as bribes to obtain votes for its maneuvers against Cuba in the OAS.

As in other memorable diplomatic battles during these years, Raúl Roa, known as Cuba’s “Foreign Minister of Dignity,” represented the Cuban revolutionary government in San José.

On August 28, after intensive debates in which the courageous stand of Uruguay, Bolivia and Mexico prevented US Secretary of State Christian Herter from obtaining a direct denunciation of the Cuban government, the OAS meeting approved the Declaration of San José.

At the end of the meeting, Cuban Foreign Minister Roa asked for the floor and said, “Gentlemen, the delegation that I have the honor to head has decided to withdraw from this consultative meeting of American foreign ministers. The main reason for our doing so is that, in spite of all the statements and postulations made that Cuba might seek protection and support against the attacks of another American government, the denunciations presented by my delegation have not been supported here. My people and all the peoples of Latin America go with me.”

On the afternoon of Friday, September 2, more than a million people who had gathered in Havana’s José Martí Revolution Plaza listened attentively to a document read by Fidel and then raised their hands to vote for what, from then on, would become known as the First Declaration of Havana.

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3. Raúl Roa García (1907–82) was a recognized Cuban intellectual, politician and diplomat. Imprisoned for opposing the Machado dictatorship, he later fought against Batista. After the triumph of the revolution, he served as Cuba’s ambassador to the OAS and then as Minister of Foreign Relations. He was also vice-president and president ad interim of the National Assembly of People’s Power.

FOR THE SOVEREIGNTY AND DIGNITY
OF THE PEOPLES OF AMERICA

Read by Fidel Castro in Havana’s Revolution Plaza on September 2, 1960.

The people of Cuba, Free Territory of America, acting with the inalienable powers that flow from an effective exercise of their sovereignty through direct, public and universal suffrage, have formed themselves in National General Assembly close to the monument and memory of José Martí.5

The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba, as its own act and as an expression of the sense of the people of Our America:

FIRST: Condemns in its entirety the so-called “Declaration of San José, Costa Rica,” a document that, under dictation from North American imperialism, offends the sovereignty and dignity of other peoples of the continent and the right of each nation to self-determination.

SECOND: The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba strongly condemns US imperialism for its gross and criminal domination, lasting for more than a century, of all the peoples of Latin America, who more than once have seen the soil of Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, Santo Domingo and Cuba invaded; who have lost to a greedy imperialism such wide and rich lands as Texas, such vital strategic zones as the Panama Canal, and even, as in the case of Puerto Rico, entire countries converted into territories of occupation; who have suffered the insults of the Marines toward our wives and daughters and toward the most cherished memorials of the history of our lands, among them the figure of José Martí.

This domination, built upon superior military power, upon unfair treaties and upon the shameful collaboration of traitorous governments, has for more than a hundred years made of Our America—the America that Bolívar, Hidalgo, Juárez, San Martín, O’Higgins, Tiradentes, Sucre and Martí wished to see free—a zone of exploitation, a backyard in the financial

5. José Martí Pérez (1853–95) is revered by Cubans as a national hero and the “Apostle of Independence.” As a teenager, he suffered imprisonment and forced labor for his opposition to Spanish colonialism. He organized the Cuban Revolutionary Party in preparation for the War of Independence in 1895, but died in combat in that struggle in 1896.
and political Yankee empire, a reserve supply of votes in international organizations where we of the Latin American countries have always been regarded as beasts of burden to a “rough and brutal North that despises us.”

The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba declares that Latin American governments betray the ideals of independence, destroy the sovereignty of their peoples and obstruct a true solidarity among our countries by accepting this demonstrated and continued domination. For such reasons this assembly, in the name of the Cuban people, with the same spirit of liberation that moved the immortal fathers of our countries, rejects this domination, thereby fulfilling the hope and the will of the Latin American peoples.

THIRD: The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba also rejects the attempt to perpetuate the Monroe Doctrine, until now utilized “to extend the domination in America” of greedy imperialists, as José Martí foresaw, and to inject more easily “the poison of loans, canals and railroads,” also denounced by José Martí long ago.

Therefore, in defiance of that false Pan-Americanism that is merely the prostration of spineless governments before Washington and rule over the interest of our peoples by the Yankee monopolies, this assembly of the Cuban people proclaims the liberating Latin Americanism of Martí and Benito Juárez. Furthermore, while extending the hand of friendship to the people of the United States—a people that includes persecuted intellectuals, blacks threatened with lynching, and workers subjected to the control of gangsters—this assembly reaffirms its will to march “with the whole world and not just a part of it.”

FOURTH: The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba declares that the spontaneous offer of the Soviet Union to help Cuba if imperialist military forces attack our country cannot be considered an act of intervention, but rather an open act of solidarity. Such support, offered to Cuba in the face of an imminent attack by the Pentagon, honors the government of the Soviet

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Union as much as cowardly and criminal aggressions against Cuba dishonor the government of the United States. Therefore, this National General Assembly of the People of Cuba declares before America and the world that it accepts with gratitude the help of rockets from the Soviet Union should our territory be invaded by military forces of the United States.

FIFTH: The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba denies absolutely that there has existed on the part of the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China any aim “to make use of the economic, political and social situation in Cuba… in order to break continental unity and to endanger hemispheric unity.” From the first to the last volley, from the first to the last of the 20,000 martyrs who fell in the struggle to overthrow tyranny and win power for the revolution, from the first to the last revolutionary law, from the first to the last act of the revolution, the people of Cuba have acted of their own free will. Therefore, no grounds exist for blaming either the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China for the existence of a revolution that is the just response of Cuba to crimes and injuries perpetrated by imperialism in America.

On the contrary, the National General Assembly of the People of Cuba believes that the peace and security of the hemisphere and of the world are endangered by the policy of the government of the United States—which forces the governments of Latin America to imitate it. This US policy seeks to isolate the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, of engaging in aggressive and provocative acts, and of systematically excluding the People’s Republic of China from the United Nations, despite the fact that it represents nearly all the 600 million inhabitants of China.

Therefore, the National General Assembly of the People of Cuba confirms its policy of friendship with all the peoples of the world and reaffirms its intention of establishing diplomatic relations with, among others, the socialist countries of the world. From this moment the Assembly expresses its free and sovereign will to establish relations with the People’s Republic of China, therefore rescinding relations with the puppet regime maintained in Formosa [Taiwan] by the Seventh Fleet of the United States.

SIXTH: The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba—confident that it is expressing the general opinion of the people of Latin America—affirms that democracy is not compatible with financial oligarchy; with
discrimination against blacks; with outrages by the Ku Klux Klan; nor with the persecution that drove scientists like Oppenheimer from their posts, deprived the world for years of the marvelous voice of Paul Robeson, held prisoner in his own country; and sent the Rosenbergs to their death against the protests of a shocked world, including the appeals of many governments and of Pope Pius XII.

The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba expresses the Cuban conviction that democracy does not consist solely of elections that are nearly always managed by rich landowners and professional politicians in order to produce fictitious results, but rather in the right of citizens to determine their own destiny, as this assembly of the people is now doing. Furthermore, democracy will come to exist in Latin America only when people are really free to make choices, when the poor are not reduced—by hunger, social discrimination, illiteracy and the judicial system—to dreadful impotence.

Therefore, The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba:

Condemns the backward and inhuman system of latifundia—large, poorly cultivated holdings of land—a source of misery and poverty for the rural population; condemns the starvation wages and the heartless exploitation of human labor by illegitimate and privileged interests; condemns the illiteracy, the absence of teachers, schools, doctors and hospitals, and the lack of care for the aged that prevail in the countries of America; condemns discrimination against blacks and Indians; condemns the inequality and exploitation of women; condemns the military and political oligarchies that keep our peoples wretched, and hinder the full exercise of their sovereignty and their progress toward democracy; condemns the concession of the natural resources of our countries to foreign monopolies as handouts, disregarading the interests of the people; condemns governments that render homage to Washington while they ignore the sentiments of their own people; condemns the systematic deception of the people by the press and other media serving the interests of political oligarchies and the imperialist oppressor; condemns the monopoly of news by agencies that are the instruments of Washington and of US trusts; condemns repressive laws that deter workers, peasants, students and intellectuals, who together form a majority in every country from joining together to seek patriotic and social goals; condemns the monopolies and imperialist enterprises that plunder
our resources, exploit our workers and peasants, bleed our economies and keep them backward while subjecting politics in Latin America to their own designs and interests.

Finally, the National General Assembly of the People of Cuba condemns:

The exploitation of human beings and the exploitation of underdeveloped countries by imperialist finance capital.

In consequence, the National General Assembly of the People of Cuba proclaims before America:

The right of peasants to the land; the right of the workers to the fruit of their labor; the right of children to education; the right of the sick to receive medical and hospital care; the right of youth to a job, the right of students to free education that is both practical and scientific; the right of blacks and Indians to “a full measure of human dignity”; the right of women to civil, social and political equality; the right of the elderly to a secure old age; the right of intellectuals, artists and scientists to fight through their work for a better world; the right of states to nationalize imperialist monopolies as a means of recovering national wealth and resources; the right of countries to engage freely in trade with all other countries of the world; the right of nations to full sovereignty; the right of the people to convert their fortresses into schools and to arm their workers, peasants, students, intellectuals, blacks, Indians, women, the young, the old—all the oppressed and exploited—that they themselves may better defend their rights and their destiny.

SEVENTH: The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba affirms:

The duty of workers, peasants, students, intellectuals, blacks, Indians, youth, women, the aged, to fight for their economic, political and social rights; the duty of oppressed and exploited nations to fight for their liberation; the duty of every people to make common cause with all other oppressed, exploited, colonized and afflicted peoples, wherever they are located, regardless of distance or geographical separation. All peoples of the world are brothers!

EIGHTH: The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba affirms its faith that Latin America, united and victorious, will soon be free of the
bonds that now make its economies rich spoils for US imperialism; that keep its true voice from being heard at conferences, where cowed ministers form a sordid chorus to the despotic masters. The assembly affirms, therefore, its decision to work for this common Latin American destiny, which will allow our countries to build a true solidarity, founded on the free decision of each and the common goals of all. In this fight for a liberated Latin America there now arises with invincible power—against the obedient voice of those who hold office as usurpers—the genuine voice of the people, a voice that breaks forth from the depths of coal and tin mines, from factories, and sugar mills, from feudal lands where rotos, cholos, gauchos, jíbaros, the heirs of Zapata and Sandino, take up the arms of liberty; a voice heard in poets and novelists, in students, in women and in children, in the old and helpless.

To this voice of our brothers and sisters the Assembly of the People of Cuba responds: We are ready! Cuba will not fail!

Cuba is here today to proclaim before Latin America and the world its historic commitment and irrevocable resolution: Homeland or death!

NINTH: The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba resolves that this declaration will be known as the “Declaration of Havana.”

Havana, Cuba, Free Territory of America, September 2, 1960

8. ASSASSINATION PLOTS AGAINST FIDEL CASTRO

For over 40 years a campaign was conducted by the CIA, some US political figures and US-based counterrevolutionary terrorist groups to assassinate Fidel Castro and other leaders of the revolution. Never before in the history of any country has there been such a long lasting program.¹

On September 9, 1960, CIA agent Robert Maheu—following instructions from high-ranking CIA chiefs Richard Bissell, Colonel J.C. King and Colonel Sheffield Edwards—met in the Brown Derby in Beverly Hills, California, with John Rosselli, a Mafia figure linked to Las Vegas gambling. Maheu informed Rosselli that senior figures in the US government wanted to get rid of Fidel and asked him to recruit the right people for the job. Rosselli hesitated at first but then agreed, saying that he had to help his government. As a condition, he asked for a meeting with an official representative. Four days later, senior CIA official Jim O’Connell met with Rosselli in the Plaza Hotel in New York and offered him the guarantees he wanted.

Fidel was scheduled to arrive in New York a few days later, on September 18, to attend the UN General Assembly.

The CIA operatives then met in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel to draw up a plan that required the recruitment of the head of the New York police (who were responsible for Fidel’s security) and getting him to sneak a pack of cigars into the Cuban leader’s room. When Fidel opened the pack, it would explode in his face. The police officer angrily refused to go along with the plan, saying that his job was to protect Fidel, not kill him.

In the following years, the Mafia, the CIA and the counterrevolutionary organizations run by the CIA both inside and outside Cuba planned and tried to implement scores of assassination attempts against Fidel. Some of them came close to achieving their purpose. One such near miss occurred in 1971, during Fidel’s trip to Chile, when a terrorist pretending to be a journalist managed to get right in front of Fidel with a gun hidden in a TV camera. He did not shoot, however, when he realized he had no way to escape.

After the political scandal of Watergate and the statements made in court by Mafia boss John Rosselli, US Congress decided to investigate the assassination plots that had been drawn up in the United States in the 1960s. Although fragmentary and incomplete, that investigation brought out some amazing facts that had been kept from the public. In 1975, a US Senate committee headed by Senator Frank Church issued a special report on alleged assassination conspiracies against the leaders of foreign countries.

CONCRETE PROOF OF AT LEAST EIGHT PLOTS TO ASSASSINATE FIDEL CASTRO BETWEEN 1960 AND 1965


We have found concrete evidence of at least eight plots involving the CIA to assassinate Fidel Castro from 1960 to 1965. Although some of the assassination plots did not advance beyond the stage of planning and preparation, one plot, involving the use of underworld figures, reportedly twice progressed to the point of sending poison pills to Cuba and dispatching teams to commit the deed. Another plot involved furnishing weapons and other assassination devices to a Cuban dissident. The proposed assassination devices ran the gamut from high-powered rifles to poison pills, poison pens, deadly bacterial powders, and other devices, which strain the imagination...

2. The Watergate scandal brought down the administration of President Richard Nixon in 1974.
Efforts against Castro did not begin with assassination attempts. From March through August 1960, during the last year of the Eisenhower administration, the CIA considered plans to undermine Castro’s charismatic appeal by sabotaging his speeches.

According to the 1967 Report of the CIA’s Inspector General, an official in the Technical Services Division (TSD) recalled discussing a scheme to spray Castro’s broadcasting studio with a chemical that produced effects similar to LSD, but the scheme was rejected because the chemical was unreliable. During this period, TSD impregnated a box of cigars with a chemical that produced temporary disorientation, hoping to induce Castro to smoke one of the cigars before delivering a speech. The Inspector General also reported a plan to destroy Castro’s image as “The Beard” by dusting his shoes with thallium salts, a strong depilatory that would cause his beard to fall out. The depilatory was to be administered during a trip outside Cuba, when it was anticipated Castro would leave his shoes outside the door of his hotel room to be shined. TSD procured the chemical and tested it on animals, but apparently abandoned the scheme because Castro cancelled his trip...

POISON CIGARS

A notation in the records of the Operations Division, CIA’s Office of Medical Services, indicates that on August 16, 1960, an official was given a box of Castro’s favorite cigars with instructions to treat them with lethal poison. The cigars were contaminated with a botulinum toxin so potent that a person would die after putting one in his mouth. The official reported that the cigars were ready on October 7, 1960; TSD notes indicate that they were delivered to an unidentified person on February 13, 1961. The record does not disclose whether an attempt was made to pass the cigars to Castro.

POISON IS PREPARED AND DELIVERED TO CUBA

The Inspector General’s Report described conversations among Bissell, Edwards, and the Chief of the Technical Services Division (TSD), concerning the most effective method of poisoning Castro. There is some evidence that [Sam] Giancana or Rosselli originated the idea of depositing a poison pill in Castro’s drink to give the “asset” a chance to escape...
Edwards rejected the first batch of pills prepared by TSD because they
would not dissolve in water.

A second batch, containing botulinum toxin, “did the job expected of
them” when tested on monkeys. The Support Chief received the pills from
TSD, probably in February 1961, with assurances that they were lethal, and
then gave them to Rosselli.

The record clearly establishes that the pills were given to a Cuban for
delivery to the island some time prior to the Bay of Pigs invasion mid-April
1961...

The Support Chief recalled that Colonel J. C. King, head of the Western
Hemisphere Division, gave him $50,000 in Bissell’s office to pay the Cuban
if he successfully assassinated Castro...

Joseph Shimon, a friend of Rosselli and Giancana who testified that he
was present when the passage occurred, ...testified that he had accompanied
Maheu to Miami and that he, Giancana, Rosselli and Maheu shared a suite
in the Fontainebleau Hotel. During a conversation, Maheu stated that he had
a “contract” to assassinate Castro, and had been provided with a “liquid”
by the CIA to accomplish the task. Shimon testified that Maheu had said
the liquid was to be put in Castro’s food, that Castro would become ill and
die after two or three days, and that an autopsy would not reveal what had
died him...

Shimon testified that a few days later, he received a phone call from
Maheu, who said: “…did you see the paper? Castro’s ill. He’s going to be
sick two or three days. Wow, we got him.”...

THE OPERATION IS REACTIVATED

In early April 1962, Harvey, who testified that he was acting on “explicit
orders” from [CIA director Richard] Helms, requested Edwards to put him
in touch with Rosselli...

Harvey, the Support Chief and Rosselli met for a second time in New
York on April 8–9, 1962. A notation made during this time in the files of
the Technical Services Division indicates that four poison pills were given
to the Support Chief on April 18, 1962. The pills were passed to Harvey,
who arrived in Miami on April 21 and found Rosselli already in touch with
the same Cuban who had been involved in the pre-Bay of Pigs pill passage.
He gave the pills to Rosselli, explaining “these would work anywhere and at any time with anything.” Rosselli testified that he told Harvey that the Cubans intended to use the pills to assassinate Che Guevara as well as Fidel and Raúl Castro. According to Rosselli’s testimony, Harvey approved of the targets, stating, “Everything is all right, what they want to do.”

The Cuban requested arms and equipment as a *quid pro quo* for carrying out the assassination operation...

Rosselli kept Harvey informed of the operation’s progress. Sometime in May 1962, he reported that the pills and guns had arrived in Cuba...

**PLANS IN EARLY 1963**

Two plans to assassinate Castro were explored by Task Force W, the CIA section then concerned with covert Cuban operations, in early 1963. Desmond Fitzgerald (now deceased), Chief of the Task Force, asked his assistant to determine whether an exotic seashell, rigged to explode, could be deposited in an area where Castro commonly went skin diving...

A second plan involved having James Donovan (who was negotiating with Castro for the release of prisoners taken during the Bay of Pigs operation) present Castro with a contaminated diving suit...

The Technical Services Division bought a diving suit, dusted it inside with a fungus that would produce a chronic skin disease (Madura foot), and contaminated the breathing apparatus with tubercule bacillus...

**THE POISON PEN DEVICE**

Another device offered to [secret agent] AM/LASH was a ballpoint pen rigged with a hypodermic needle. The needle was designed to be so fine that the victim would not notice its insertion.

According to the Inspector General’s Report, when Case Officer 2 was interviewed in 1967, he stated that AM/LASH had requested the Agency to “devise some technical means of doing the job that would not automatically cause him to lose his own life in the try.”...

Fitzgerald’s assistant told the Committee that the pen was intended to show “bona fides” and “the orders were to do something to get rid of Castro... and we thought this other method might work whereas a rifle wouldn’t.”
Helms confirmed that the pen was manufactured “to take care of a request from him that he have some device for getting rid of Castro, for killing him, murdering him, whatever the case may be.”

A CIA document dated January 3, 1965 states that B-1, in a lengthy interview with a case officer, said that he and AM/LASH had reached a firm agreement on the following points:

B-1 is to provide AM/LASH with a silencer for the FAL; if this is impossible, B-1 is to cache in a designated location a rifle with a scope and silencer plus several bombs, concealed either in a suitcase, a lamp or some other concealment device that he would be able to carry, and place next to Fidel Castro…

Fidel Castro and the other members of the Cuban delegation arrived in New York on September 18, 1960, to take part in the 15th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. They arrived in the midst of a climate of hysteria and hostility on the part of US authorities, but at the same time, encountered support from members of minority groups and US-based Cubans who supported the revolution.

As part of the protest against Fidel, the management of the Shelburne Hotel, where the Cuban delegation was staying, presented unacceptable and offensive financial demands that led to the decision to leave that hotel.

The Cuban leader then threatened to put up a tent within the grounds of UN headquarters, by the East River, or in New York’s Central Park. But this did not prove necessary. Prominent African Americans in New York expressed their solidarity, and Fidel was welcomed in the Theresa Hotel, at 125th Street and 7th Avenue, in Harlem. Enthusiastic crowds outside shouted their support night and day throughout his stay.

In that Harlem hotel, Fidel and US black Muslim leader Malcolm X had a historic meeting.

There, too, Fidel met with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

On September 26, Fidel addressed the UN General Assembly. He spoke for an hour and a half, describing the roots of the historical conflict between Cuba and the United States; denouncing the OAS for punishing Cuba, the victim of attacks, rather than the aggressor; and explaining that, at that very
moment, the US government was organizing even more subversive actions against Cuba.

At that time, the process of recruiting and training the mercenaries of Brigade 2506 was under way. This brigade would be the invading force several months later at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961.

Prime Minister Fidel Castro returned to Havana on September 28. On arriving at the airport, he drove straight to the former presidential palace, where he addressed a huge crowd that filled the street. During this rally, counterrevolutionaries set off bombs nearby. In response, Fidel announced, to great applause, that new revolutionary vigilance committees would be organized throughout Cuba: the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs).

END THE PHILOSOPHY OF PLUNDER!

Excerpt of the speech by Fidel Castro at the UN General Assembly on September 26, 1960.

When the revolution triumphed in Cuba, what did we find? What “marvels” lay spread out before the eyes of Cuba’s victorious revolutionaries? First of all, the revolution found that 600,000 Cubans, ready and able to work, were unemployed—as many, proportionally, as were unemployed in the United States at the time of the Great Depression which shook this country, and which produced a catastrophe here [in the United States]. We found permanent unemployment in my country. Three million in a population of just over six million had no electricity and therefore none of its advantages and comforts. Three and a half million people lived in shacks or in slums, without even minimal sanitation. In the cities, rents took almost one-third of family incomes. Electricity rates and rents were among the highest in the world.

Thirty-seven and a half percent of our population was illiterate; 70 percent of rural children lacked teachers; 2 percent of our population suffered from tuberculosis, that is to say, 100,000 people, out of a total population of a little over six million, were suffering from the ravages of tuberculosis. Ninety-
five percent of children in rural areas were suffering from parasites. Infant mortality was appallingly high. The standard of living was appallingly low. Eighty-five percent of the small farmers were paying rent on their land to the tune of almost 30 percent of their gross income, whilst 1.5 percent of all landowners controlled 46 percent of land in the countryside. The proportion of hospital beds to the number of inhabitants of the country was ludicrous when compared with countries that have even half-way decent medical services. Public utilities, electricity and telephone services all belonged to US monopolies. A major portion of the banking sector, importing businesses and the oil refineries; a greater part of the sugar production; the lion’s share of arable land in Cuba and the most important industries in all sectors belonged to US companies.

The balance of payments in the last 10 years, from 1950 to 1960, has favored the United States vis-à-vis Cuba to the tune of $1 billion. This is without taking into account the hundreds of millions of dollars that were extracted from the country’s treasury by corrupt officials of the dictatorship, which were later deposited in US or European banks. A poor and under-developed country in the Caribbean, with 600,000 unemployed, was contributing $1 billion over 10 years to the economic development of the most highly industrialized country in the world!

This was the situation that confronted us. Yet this should not surprise many of the countries represented in this assembly, because when all is said and done, what applies in Cuba is, one might say, a template that could be superimposed and applied to many of the countries represented here.

What alternative was there for the revolutionary government? To betray the people? As far as the US president is concerned, of course, we have betrayed our people. But would he have said the same if, instead of being true to the people, we had been true to the monopolies that were exploiting Cuba?

At the very least, let a note be taken of the “marvels” that were laid before our eyes when our revolution triumphed. These were no more and no less than the usual marvels of imperialism, which are themselves no more and no less than the marvels of the “free world,” as far as we, the colonies, are concerned.

We cannot be blamed for the 600,000 unemployed in Cuba or the 37.5 percent of the population that was illiterate, for the 2 percent of the popu-
lation that suffered from tuberculosis or for the 95 percent that suffered from parasites. Not in the least! Until that moment, none of us had any hand in the destiny of our country. Until that moment when the revolution was victorious, the only voices heard in our country were those of the monopolies. Did anyone object? No! Did this bother anyone? No! The monopolies went about their nefarious business, and these were the results.

What was the state of the national reserves? When the dictator Batista came to power there was $500 million in the treasury. A decent amount—had it been invested in the development, industrial or otherwise, of the country. But when the revolution triumphed, we found only $70 million. Was any concern ever shown for the economic and industrial development of our country? No, never! That is why we were astonished, and we are even more amazed to hear about the extraordinary concern of the US government for the fate of countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. And it continues to amaze us, when we have seen the results of that concern over 50 years...

Cuba was not the first victim of aggression. Cuba was not the first country threatened by aggression. In this hemisphere everyone knows that the US government has always imposed its own law, the law of the mightiest. In accordance with this law, it has destroyed Puerto Rican nationhood and maintained its control over that island. In accordance with this law, it seized and still holds the Panama Canal.

So this was nothing new. The OAS should have defended us, but it didn’t. Why not? Let us now go to the heart of this matter and not merely consider the surface. If we stick to the letter of the law, then we have guarantees. If we stick to reality, however, there are no guarantees whatsoever because reality imposes itself over and above the law outlined in international codes. And this reality is that a small country attacked by a powerful country was not defended and could not be defended.

What happened [at the OAS meeting] in Costa Rica? Lo and behold, by an ingenious miracle there was no condemnation of the United States or the US government in Costa Rica! (I wish to avoid any misunderstanding here that we are confusing the government of the United States with the US people. We regard them as two completely different entities.) The US government was not condemned in Costa Rica for the 60 incursions by pirate aircraft. The US government was not condemned for the economic and other aggressions of which we have been victim. No! The Soviet Union
was condemned! It was really quite bizarre. We had not been attacked by the Soviet Union. We had not been the victims of aggression by the Soviet Union. No Soviet aircraft had flown over our territory. Yet in Costa Rica it was the Soviet Union that was condemned for interference.

The Soviet Union had only said, theoretically speaking, that if there was a military aggression against our country, they could, figuratively speaking, support us with rockets. Since when is support for a weak country under attack from a powerful country regarded as interference? In legal terms, there is something called an impossible condition. If a country considers that it is incapable of committing a certain crime, it can simply say: “Because there is no possibility that we [i.e. the United States] will attack Cuba, there is no possibility that the Soviet Union will support Cuba.” But that principle was not followed. Instead, it was established by the OAS that the intervention of the Soviet Union had to be condemned.

And what about the bombing of Cuba? Not a word. And what about the aggressions against Cuba? Not a word...

These are the circumstances in which the revolutionary process in Cuba has taken place. This is how we found the country and this is why difficulties have arisen. Nevertheless, the Cuban revolution is changing things. What was yesterday a land without hope, a land of misery, a land of illiteracy, is gradually becoming one of the most enlightened, advanced and developed nations of this continent...

The case of Cuba is not an isolated one. It would be an error to think of it only as the case of Cuba. The case of Cuba is that of all underdeveloped nations. It is the case of the Congo, it is the case of Egypt, it is the case of Algeria, it is the case of Iran, and finally, it is the case of Panama, which wants its canal back. It is the case of Puerto Rico, whose national spirit they are destroying. It is the case of Honduras, a portion of whose territory has been seized. In short, without specifically referring to other countries, the case of Cuba is the case of all the underdeveloped and colonized countries.

The problems we have outlined in relation to Cuba apply to all of Latin America. The control of Latin America’s economic resources is exercised by the monopolies which, when they do not directly own the mines, control them in other ways, as is the case with copper in Chile, Peru and Mexico; with zinc in Peru and Mexico; and with oil in Venezuela. They are the owners of the public utility companies, such as is the case with the elec-
tricity services in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, or with the telephone services in Chile, Brazil, Peru, Venezuela, Paraguay and Bolivia. Or, they commercially exploit our products, as is the case with coffee in Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Guatemala; with cotton in Mexico and Brazil; or with the exploitation, marketing and transportation of bananas by the United Fruit Company in Guatemala, Costa Rica and Honduras. Economic control of the most important industries of our countries is exercised by US monopolies. These countries are completely dependent on those monopolies.

Woe to any countries in Latin America, if they too wish to carry out agrarian reform! They will be asked for “speedy, efficient and just payment.” And if, in spite of everything, a sister nation carries out agrarian reform, any representatives coming here to the United Nations will be confined to Manhattan; they will have hotel rooms denied to them; they will have insults poured on them and they may, possibly, be mistreated by the police themselves.

The problem of Cuba is only an example of the problem of Latin America. How long must Latin America wait for its development? As far as the monopolies are concerned, it will have to wait ad calendas Graecas [forever]. Who will industrialize Latin America? It will certainly not be the monopolies. No way!

There is a UN Economic Commission report that explains how even private capital, instead of going to the countries that need it most for the establishment of basic industries, is being channeled to the more industrialized countries, where private capital finds greater security. Naturally, even the UN Economic Commission has had to recognize the fact that there is no possibility of development through the investment of private capital—in other words, through the monopolies.

The development of Latin America will have to be achieved through public investment planned and granted unconditionally with no political strings attached. Obviously, we all want to be representatives of free countries. No one wants to represent a country that does not feel itself to be completely free. No one wants the independence of one’s country to be subject to any interests other than its own. Any assistance must therefore have no political strings attached.

The fact that Cuba has been denied assistance does not matter. We never
asked for it. However, in the interests of and for the benefit of the peoples of Latin America we feel bound, out of solidarity, to stress that assistance must be given without any political conditions whatsoever. Public investment must be for economic development, not for “social development,” which is the latest invention to hide the genuine need for economic development.

The problems of Latin America are like the problems of the rest of the underdeveloped world, in Africa and Asia. The world is divided up among the monopolies, and those same monopolies that we find in Latin America are also found in the Middle East. Oil in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and in every corner of the earth is in the hands of monopolistic companies that are controlled by the financial interests of the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France...

Have the colonialists or the imperialists ever lacked a pretext when they wanted to invade a country? Never! Somehow they always manage to find the necessary pretext. Which are the colonialist countries? Which are the imperialist countries? There are not four or five countries but four or five groups of monopolies that possess the world’s wealth.

Let us imagine someone from outer space were to come to this assembly, someone who had read neither Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* nor the UPI and AP cables, nor any other publication controlled by the monopolies. That person might ask how the world was divided, and would see on a map how wealth was divided among the monopolies of four or five countries. They would say: “The world has been divided up badly, the world has been exploited.” Here in this assembly, where there is a majority of underdeveloped countries, they might comment: “The great majority of the peoples, who are represented here, have been exploited for a long time. The forms of that exploitation may have varied, but the peoples are still being exploited.” That would be the verdict.

In the statement made by Premier Khrushchev, a particular remark attracted our attention because of the value that it holds. He said that the Soviet Union has neither colonies nor investments in any country. How great would it be for our world, a world threatened with catastrophe, if all the representatives of all countries could make the same statement: Our country has neither colonies nor investments in any foreign country!

Why labor the matter further? Because this is the crux of the matter. This is the crux of the question of peace and war. This is the crux of the arms race
and disarmament. Since the beginning of humankind, wars have emerged for one reason, and one reason alone: the desire of some to plunder the wealth of others.

End the philosophy of plunder and the philosophy of war will end. End the existence of colonies and the exploitation of countries by monopolies, and humankind will achieve a true era of progress.

While preparations for a US-backed invasion were being made in Guatemala under the direct command of the CIA, the situation in Cuba became very tense. During the last few months of 1960 and the first months of 1961, the Cuban people were organized and active. Battalions of workers’ and farmers’ militias waged intensive campaigns in the Escambray mountains to root out the bands of armed counterrevolutionaries that were being supplied by airlifts from the United States. Counterrevolutionary organizations appeared in Cuban cities, creating a difficult situation for the recently formed units of State Security.

On November 18, 1960, CIA Director Allen Dulles and Deputy Director Richard Bissell informed US President-elect John F. Kennedy of the plans for invading Cuba.

A month later, on December 16, President Eisenhower cancelled Cuba’s sugar quota for the January–April 1961 period.

On December 31, 1960, expecting Kennedy’s inauguration to be a particularly dangerous time in terms of a possible military attack on Cuba, the leaders of the revolutionary government ordered a general mobilization of the armed forces, the militias and the people as a whole. Hundreds of thousands of men and women took up defensive positions along Cuba’s coasts.

On January 3, 1961, the US government broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba. As the year of the National Literacy Campaign began, on January 5, a band of counterrevolutionaries in the mountains of Sancti Spíritus prov-
ince kidnapped and murdered Conrado Benitez, an 18-year-old volunteer teacher.

At the same time, saboteurs using incendiary materials supplied by the CIA gutted several large department stores in Havana.

John F. Kennedy was sworn in as US president in Washington on January 20, 1961. The day before, President Eisenhower informed Kennedy of the mercenary brigade that was being trained and, according to the notes taken of the meeting by Clark Clifford, Eisenhower told Kennedy, "It was the policy of this government to help these forces to the utmost. At the present time, we are helping train anti-Castro forces in Guatemala. It was [Eisenhower's] recommendation that this effort be continued and accelerated."1

During these hard months of struggle, the Cuban people’s political consciousness advanced tremendously, especially in terms of their patriotic sentiments and class interests. The solidarity demonstrated by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries during this difficult period contrasted sharply to the aggressiveness of the US government.

Moreover, in practice, with the nationalizations that were carried out in the latter half of 1960, a broad sector of the state economy had been established based on ownership by the people and was being administered on a socialist basis, even though this had not been publicly stated.

On April 13, 1961, Havana’s El Encanto department store was burned to the ground in an act of sabotage. Sales clerk Fe del Valle died in the flames.

On April 15, B-29 planes provided by the CIA took off from bases in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, to unleash the prelude to the mercenary invasion that took place at the Bay of Pigs a few days later. Their task was to destroy the few obsolete fighter planes that the revolution had while they were still on the ground, to guarantee that the invaders would control the air. The planes, painted with the insignia of the Cuban Air Force, attacked the airports at Ciudad Libertad, San Antonio de los Baños and Santiago de Cuba. One of the attacking pilots flew to Miami and issued statements there hoping to make people believe that the attack was part of an uprising in Cuba.

Seven Cuban combatants were killed that day while repulsing the attack. On April 16, in a funeral oration for those fighters, Fidel Castro told the armed

militia who filled the area at 23rd and 12th Streets, at the entrance to Colón
Cemetery, “That’s what they can’t forgive us for—the fact that we’re still here,
right under their noses, and that we have carried out a socialist revolution so
close to the United States.”

THIS IS A REVOLUTION OF THE HUMBLE,
BY THE HUMBLE AND FOR THE HUMBLE

Excerpts from Fidel Castro’s speech at the burial of the victims of the
bombing raid on Havana, April 16, 1961.

Yesterday, as everyone knows, three groups of bombers, coming from
outside the country, entered our national territory at 6:00 in the morning
and attacked three different targets in our national territory. In each of
these places, our people defended themselves heroically; in each of these
places the valuable blood of our defenders was shed; in each of these places
there were thousands and, where there were not thousands, hundreds and
hundreds, of witnesses to what happened. Moreover, this was something
we expected; it was something that was expected every day; it was the
logical culmination of the burning of the sugarcane fields, of the hundreds
of violations of our air space, of the pirate air raids, of the pirate attacks
on our refineries from vessels that enter our waters before the sun is up. It
was the consequence of what everyone knows; it was the consequence of
the plans to attack us that were hatched by the United States in complicity
with its lackey governments in Central America; it was the consequence of
the air bases that everyone knows about only too well, because even the US
newspapers and news agencies have published this information, and even
their own news agencies and newspapers are tired of talking about the mer­
cenary armies that are being organized, about the air fields that they have
made ready, about the planes that the US government has given to them,
about the Yankee instructors, about the air bases they have established in
Guatemalan territory…

Imperialism plans the crime, organizes the crime, arms the criminals,
trains the criminals, pays the criminals and the criminals come here and
kill seven working people and then calmly go back and land in the United States. Even when the whole world knows about their deeds, they then say it was Cuban pilots who did it and they make up a fantastic tale, spread it all around the world, publish it in all the newspapers, propagate it from all the radio and television stations of the Miami reactionaries throughout the world, and then along come the archbishops to bless and sanctify the lie. Thus the whole throng of mercenaries, exploiters and phonies from all around the world come together in crime...

This is because what these imperialists can’t forgive is that we are here, and what these imperialists can’t forgive is the dignity, the firmness, the courage, the ideological integrity, the spirit of sacrifice and the revolutionary spirit of the Cuban people.

This is what they can’t forgive, the fact that we are here right under their very noses, and that we have brought about a socialist revolution right under the nose of the United States!

And we are defending this socialist revolution with these guns! We are defending this socialist revolution with the same courage that our anti-aircraft artillery showed yesterday in riddling the attacking planes with bullets!...

We are not defending this revolution with mercenaries; we are defending this revolution with the men and women of our nation.

Who has the arms here? Perhaps it is the mercenary who has the arms? Perhaps it is the millionaire who has the arms? Perhaps the mercenary and the millionaire are one and the same thing. Perhaps the little boys with rich daddies have the arms? Perhaps the overseers have the arms?

Whose hands hold the arms here? Are they the hands of playboys? Are they the hands of the rich? Are they the hands of the exploiters? Whose hands hold the arms here? Aren’t they workers’ hands, peasants’ hands? Aren’t they hands that have been hardened by work? Aren’t they hands that create? Aren’t they the hands of our humble people? And who are the majority of our people? Millionaires or workers? Exploiters or exploited? The privileged or the humble? Do the privileged have arms? Or do the humble have arms? Aren’t the privileged a minority? Aren’t the humble a majority? Isn’t a revolution where the humble bear arms democratic?

Compañeros, workers and peasants: This is a socialist and democratic revolution of the humble, by the humble and for the humble. And for this
revolution of the humble, by the humble, for the humble, we are ready to
give our lives.

Workers and peasants, humble men and women of our country: Do
you swear to defend this revolution of the humble, by the humble, for the
humble, to the last drop of your blood?

Compañeros, workers and peasants of our country, yesterday’s attack
was a prelude to a mercenary aggression. Yesterday’s attack, which cost
seven heroic lives, aimed to destroy our planes on the ground. But it failed.
They only destroyed two planes while most of the enemy planes were
damaged or shot down. Here, before the tomb of our fallen compañeros;
here, next to the remains of these heroic young people, children of workers,
children of the humble, we reaffirm our resolve that just as they exposed
themselves to the bullets, just as they gave their lives, we, too, all of us, proud
of our revolution, proud of defending this revolution of the humble, by the
humble and for the humble, shall not hesitate, whenever the mercenaries
come, no matter who is against us, to defend it to our last drop of blood.

Long live the working class! Long live the peasants! Long live the humble!
Long live the martyrs of our country! May the martyrs of our country live
forever! Long live the socialist revolution! Long live a free Cuba!

Homeland or death!
We will win!

While Fidel Castro was giving the funeral oration on April 16 for those killed in the air attack and proclaiming the socialist nature of the Cuban revolution, the fleet carrying Brigade 2506, the mercenary invasion force, was advancing through the Caribbean escorted by US Navy warships. The mercenaries had been taken from their camps in Retalhuleu, Guatemala, to Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, where the obese and histrionic Luis Somoza—son of the dictator Anastasio Somoza—saw them off and asked them to bring back “at least a hair from Castro’s beard.”

The revolutionary government had declared a general mobilization in the face of imminent attack, but it was not known where the enemy would strike.

At 1:30 on the morning of April 17, the advance guard of the landing force took up positions at Larga and Girón beaches, in the southern part of the Zapata Peninsula. There was a clash with the small detachments of militia that were on patrol, and the first shots were exchanged.

By dawn, the members of the revolutionary high command came to the conclusion that Girón—the Bay of Pigs—was the focal point of the enemy actions and began to send the men and materiel required to push the attackers back into the sea.

The place chosen by the Pentagon and CIA, after months of studying various possibilities, was extremely inaccessible. It was a coastal area where the revolution had built some tourist facilities and an airport, but only three narrow roads crossed the thick underbrush and marshy swampland that separated it from the rest of the country.

The US plan was to establish a foothold; to consolidate it under cover of the air support that the invaders hoped to have; to dig in along the three roads; and then to bring in the members of the new “government,” composed of leaders of the so-called Cuban Revolutionary Council, whom the CIA had
kept at an unused airport in Opa-Locka, Florida, since April 16, awaiting events. Once that “government” had been recognized, the initiative would pass to the OAS, which would recommend some kind of collective action to legitimize the entry of US ships, planes and troops into the conflict. This would then involve the population on the island in a war of destruction and attrition if the revolutionary government had not already collapsed under the attack.

However, things turned out differently. On April 17, in spite of the invaders’ momentary advantage, the Revolutionary Air Force—which had managed to preserve a few old planes—hit the enemy and its ships hard. On April 18, forces of the Rebel Army, Revolutionary National Police and militias, supported by artillery and tanks, advanced along the roads and dislodged the mercenaries from important positions. On April 19, after about 65 hours of continuous battle, the revolutionary forces took Girón Beach, the last point held by Brigade 2506.

More than 200 of the invaders were killed in the fighting, and 1,197 were taken prisoner. The Cubans’ losses were 156 dead and around 800 wounded.1

The Bay of Pigs was not only a military victory. It also constituted a strategic defeat for the plans of the US government and the counterrevolutionaries it sponsored. It was significant that the members of the invading brigade who were taken prisoner included over 100 large landowners, 35 industrialists, 194 members of Batista’s army, 67 urban landlords, 112 merchants, 89 high-rankin company officials, over 415 members of the middle class and 112 men who were considered lumpen elements because of their criminal and antisocial records.

Commenting on the victory, Fidel said, “Death holds no terror for self-respecting men and women. What frightens them and the people as a whole is the idea of a yoke, the idea of seeing themselves once more ruled and oppressed by men of that ilk who pay so little attention to and have so little respect for the people… The compañeros who died fighting at Larga and Girón beaches, San Blas and Yaguaramas—everywhere—deserve a beautiful monument. A great monument must be raised here on the Zapata.

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To the People of Cuba:

Invading troops are attacking various points of national territory in southern Las Villas province by sea and by air, supported by warships and planes.

The soldiers of the Rebel Army and Revolutionary National Militias have already engaged in combat with the enemy at all landing points.

They are fighting in the defense of our homeland against an attack by mercenaries organized by the imperialist government of the United States.

Our troops are already advancing against the enemy, confident of victory.

The people are already being mobilized, carrying out our watchwords of defending the homeland and maintaining production.

Forward, Cubans! We will reply without quarter to the barbarians who scorn us and who want to force us back into slavery.

They are coming to take away the land that the revolution turned over to the farmers and cooperatives—we are fighting to defend the farmers’ and cooperatives’ land. They are coming to take away the people’s factories, sugar mills and mines—we are fighting to defend our factories, sugar mills and mines. They are coming to take away our children’s and farm girls’ schools, schools that the revolution has opened everywhere—we will defend the children’s and farm girls’ schools. They are coming to strip from black men and women the dignity the revolution has returned to them—we will fight to maintain that supreme human dignity for all the people. They are coming to take away the workers’ new jobs—we will fight for a free Cuba with jobs for every working man and woman. They are coming to destroy the homeland—we will defend the homeland.

Forward, Cubans; everyone to their post of combat and of work.
Forward, Cubans; the revolution is invincible, and all our enemies will fail in their attempts to crush it and the heroic people who are defending it. Now, when Cubans are already sacrificing themselves in combat, let us shout with more fervor and determination than ever before:

Long live free Cuba!
Homeland or death!
We will win!

Fidel Castro Ruz
Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government

CALL TO THE PEOPLES OF AMERICA
AND THE REST OF THE WORLD
APRIL 18, 1961

US imperialism has launched its publicized and cowardly attack on Cuba. Its mercenaries and soldiers of fortune have landed in our country. The revolutionary people of Cuba are fighting them courageously and heroically and are sure to crush them.

However, we call on the peoples of the Americas and the rest of the world for solidarity.

We especially ask our Latin American brothers and sisters to make the indisputable force of their action felt by the US imperialists. Let the world know that the people of Latin America—the workers, students, intellectuals and farmers—are with Cuba; with its democratic, patriotic, redeeming people’s revolution; and with its revolutionary government.

Let us step up the struggle against Yankee imperialism, the main enemy of humanity.

All Cuba is on the alert and has adopted the watchword of “Homeland or death.”

Our battle is yours.
Cuba will win!

Osvaldo Dorticós, President of the Republic
Fidel Castro Ruz, Prime Minister
COMMUNIQUÉ NO. 2
APRIL 18, 1961

The revolutionary government announces to the people that the armed forces of the revolution continue fighting heroically against the enemy forces in the southwestern part of Las Villas province, where the mercenaries landed with imperialist support. In the next few hours, the people will be given details of the successes won by the Rebel Army, the Revolutionary Air Force and the Revolutionary National Militias in the defense of our homeland’s sovereignty and the achievements of the revolution.

Fidel Castro Ruz
Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government

COMMUNIQUÉ NO. 3
APRIL 19, 1961

North American participation in the attack that is being made on Cuba was proved dramatically this morning when our antiaircraft batteries shot down a US military plane that was bombing the civilian population and our infantry forces near the Australia Sugar Mill.

The aggressor US pilot, whose body is being held by the revolutionary forces, was Leo Francis Berliss. Several documents were also seized: his pilot’s license, number 08323-IM, with an expiration date of December 24, 1962; his Social Security card, number 014-07-6921; and his motor vehicle registration card, which gives his address as 100 Nassau Street, Boston, Mass. The US pilot’s registered address was 48 Beacon Street, Boston. He was 5 feet 6 inches tall.

Documents about the mission of an aggressive flight over our homeland were also found in the US pilot’s clothing.

This is one of the four enemy military planes that were shot down this morning, making a total of nine planes shot down since the mercenary attack began on the Zapata Peninsula—the complete liquidation of which is only hours away.

General Staff of the Revolutionary Armed Forces
Forces of the Rebel Army and Revolutionary National Militias have taken by assault the last positions occupied by the invading mercenary forces in Cuban territory.

Girón Beach, which was the last point held by the mercenaries, fell at 5:30 in the afternoon.

The revolution has emerged victorious, although at a high cost in lives of the revolutionary combatants who confronted the invaders and attacked them ceaselessly, giving them no respite, thus destroying in less than 72 hours the army that the imperialist government of the United States had spent many months organizing.

The enemy has been dealt a crushing defeat. Some of the mercenaries tried to reembark so as to escape, using diverse vessels that the Rebel Air Force sank. The other mercenaries, after suffering many losses in dead and wounded, are scattered in a swampy region from which none of them can escape.

Many US-made weapons were captured, including several heavy Sherman tanks. A complete inventory of the war materiel seized has yet to be made.

In the coming hours, the revolutionary government will offer the people complete information about everything that has happened.

Fidel Castro Ruz
Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces

12. WORDS TO INTELLECTUALS

It is remarkable that in such a busy year as 1961—when the echoes of the defeated mercenary invasion were still to be heard, when the US rulers were making angry threats every day, when more than 300,000 Cubans were in armed units fighting the bands of counterrevolutionaries in several provinces and protecting Cuba’s economic targets and its coasts, and when the US blockade was beginning to have a stronger impact on food supplies and daily life—the leaders of the Cuban revolution were able to put so much energy into and pay so much attention to the campaign against illiteracy, and to education and culture in general.

That year, in spite of all the obstacles, the key foundations were laid for the cultural revolution within the Cuban revolution.

The meetings of writers, artists, critics and others held in the Ceremonial Hall of Havana’s José Martí National Library were some of the most important events in that process. Fidel Castro participated in these meetings and delivered the closing speech, now known as “Words to Intellectuals,” which summed up the revolution’s policy on culture.

To some extent, it was inevitable that the proclamation of socialism would lead to many questions among Cuba’s intellectuals, who were essentially progressive and patriotic, although they expressed different ideological nuances showing a wide range of aesthetic trends and different social backgrounds.

Cuban intellectuals were generally in favor of the revolution, and many of them were active supporters, but they also felt apprehensive about the artistic experiences of “socialist realism” and bureaucratic “guidance” of the work of artists in the Soviet Union and other countries.
During the meetings in the National Library, the Cuban revolution courageously reaffirmed its own path and decisively distanced itself from the errors made elsewhere in the name of socialism in the spheres of art and literature.

The conclusions reached through this fruitful collective dialog were so profound that it has not been necessary to add anything major to that perspective over five decades. During this time, a few mistakes were committed and a few attempts were made in an ambiguous manner to impose imitative, bureaucratic, populist guidelines, but this was due to mediocre officials with slavish minds and not the expression of any policy direction from the leaders of the revolution.

This speech constituted an important step toward the free development of artistic creativity, helped to create a climate of communication and trust between the island’s political leaders and intellectuals, and laid the basis for the tremendous diversity and richness of Cuba’s national culture today.

ONE OF THE GOALS OF THE REVOLUTION IS TO DEVELOP ART AND CULTURE

Excerpts of the speech made by Fidel Castro on June 30, 1961, in the auditorium of the José Martí National Library at the closing session of a series of meetings of intellectuals and cultural figures.

We have been active participants in this revolution, the social and economic revolution taking place in Cuba. At the same time, this social and economic revolution will inevitably produce a cultural revolution in our country...

If we are not mistaken, the fundamental question raised here is that of freedom of artistic creation. When writers from abroad have visited our country, political writers in particular, this question has been brought up more than once. It has undoubtedly been a subject of discussion in every country where a profound revolution like ours has taken place...

Therefore, one of the revolution’s characteristics has been its need to confront many problems under the pressure of time. We are just like the revolution, that is, we have improvised quite a bit. This revolution has not had
the period of preparation that other revolutions have had, and the leaders of this revolution have not had the intellectual maturity that leaders of other revolutions have had...

There have been certain fears floating about, expressed by some compañeros. Listening to them, we felt at times that we were dreaming. We had the impression that our feet were not firmly planted on the ground—because if we have any fears or concerns today, they are connected with the revolution itself. The great concern, for all of us, should be the revolution. Or do we believe that the revolution has already won all its battles? Do we believe that the revolution is not in danger? What should be the first concern of every citizen today? Should it be concern that the revolution is going to commit excesses; that the revolution is going to stifle art or that the revolution is going to stifle the creativity of our citizens—or should it be the revolution itself? Should our first concern be the dangers, real or imaginary, that might threaten that creative spirit, or should it be the dangers that might threaten the revolution?...

We believe that the revolution still has many battles to fight, and that our first thoughts and our first concerns should be: What can we do to assure the victory of the revolution? That comes first. The first thing is the revolution itself, and then, afterwards, we can concern ourselves with other questions. This does not mean that other questions should not concern us, but that the fundamental concern in our minds—as it is with me—has to be the revolution.

The question under discussion here and that we will tackle is the question of the freedom of writers and artists to express themselves.

The fear in people’s minds is that the revolution might choke this freedom, that the revolution might stifle the creative spirit of writers and artists.

Freedom of form has been spoken of. Everyone agrees that freedom of form must be respected; I believe there is no doubt on this point.

The question becomes more delicate, and we get to the real heart of the matter, when dealing with freedom of content. This is a much more delicate issue, and it is open to the most diverse interpretations. The most controversial aspect of this question is: Should we or should we not have absolute freedom of content in artistic expression? It seems to us that some compañeros defend the affirmative. Perhaps it is because they fear that the
question will be decided by prohibitions, regulations, limitations, rules and the authorities.

Permit me to tell you in the first place that the revolution defends freedom. The revolution has brought the country a very high degree of freedom. By its very nature, the revolution cannot be an enemy of freedom. If some are worried that the revolution might stifle their creativity, that worry is unnecessary, there is no basis for it whatsoever...

No one has ever assumed that every person, every writer or every artist has to be a revolutionary, just as no one should ever assume that every person or every revolutionary has to be an artist, or that every honest person, just because they are honest, has to be a revolutionary. Being a revolutionary is to have a certain attitude toward life. Being a revolutionary is to have a certain attitude toward existing reality. There are some who resign themselves and adapt to this reality, and there are others who cannot resign or adapt themselves to that reality but who try to change it. That’s why they are revolutionaries.

There can also be some who adapt themselves to reality who are honest people—it is just that their spirit is not a revolutionary spirit; their attitude toward reality is not a revolutionary attitude. Of course, there can be artists, and good artists, who do not have a revolutionary attitude toward life, and it is precisely this group of artists and intellectuals for whom the revolution constitutes something unforeseen, something that might deeply affect their state of mind. It is precisely this group of artists and intellectuals for whom the revolution constitutes a problem...

The case was well made here that there are many writers and artists who are not revolutionaries, but who are nevertheless sincere writers and artists. It was stated that they wanted to help the revolution, and that the revolution is interested in their help; that they wanted to work for the revolution and that for its part, the revolution had an interest in them contributing their knowledge and efforts on its behalf.

It is easier to appreciate this by analyzing specific cases, and some of these are difficult. A Catholic writer spoke here, raising problems that concerned him and he spoke with great clarity. He asked if he would be able to write on a particular question from his ideological point of view, or if he would be able to write a work defending that point of view. He asked quite frankly if, within a revolutionary system, he could express himself in
accordance with his beliefs. He thus posed the problem in a way that might be considered symptomatic.

He wanted to know if he could write in accordance with those beliefs or that ideology, which is not exactly the ideology of the revolution. He was in agreement with the revolution on economic and social questions, but his philosophical position was different from that of the revolution. It is worth keeping this case in mind, because it is representative of the type of writers and artists who demonstrate a favorable attitude toward the revolution, and wish to know what degree of freedom they have within the revolution to express themselves in accordance with their beliefs.

This is the sector that constitutes a problem for the revolution, just as the revolution constitutes a problem for them. It is the duty of the revolution to concern itself with these cases. It is the duty of the revolution to concern itself with the situation of these artists and writers, because the revolution should strive to have more than just the revolutionaries march alongside it, and more than just the revolutionary artists and intellectuals.

It is possible that women and men who have a truly revolutionary attitude toward reality are not the majority of the population. Revolutionaries are the vanguard of the people, but revolutionaries should strive to have all the people march alongside them. The revolution cannot renounce the goal of having all honest men and women, whether or not they are writers and artists, march alongside it. The revolution should strive to convert everyone who has doubts into revolutionaries. The revolution should try to win over the majority of the people to its ideas. The revolution should never give up relying on the majority of the people. It must rely not only on the revolutionaries, but on all honest citizens who, although they may not be revolutionaries—who may not have a revolutionary attitude toward life—are with the revolution. The revolution should turn its back only on those who are incorrigible reactionaries, who are incorrigible counter-revolutionaries.

The revolution must have a policy and a stance toward this sector of the population, this sector of intellectuals and writers. The revolution has to understand this reality and should act in such a way that these artists and intellectuals who are not genuine revolutionaries can find a space within the revolution where they can work and create. Even though they are not revolutionary writers and artists, they should have the opportunity and
freedom to express their creative spirit within the revolution.

In other words: Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing. Against the revolution, nothing, because the revolution also has its rights, and the first right of the revolution is the right to exist, and no one can oppose the revolution’s right to exist. Inasmuch as the revolution embodies the interests of the people, inasmuch as the revolution symbolizes the interests of the whole nation, no one can justly claim a right to oppose it.

I believe that this is quite clear. What are the rights of writers and artists, revolutionary or nonrevolutionary? Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, there are no rights.

This is not some special law or guideline for artists and writers. It is a general principle for all citizens. It is a fundamental principle of the revolution. Counterrevolutionaries, that is, the enemies of the revolution, have no rights against the revolution, because the revolution has one right: the right to exist, the right to develop, and the right to be victorious. Who can cast doubt on that right, the right of a people who have said, “Patria o muerte!” [Homeland or death!], that is, revolution or death…

The revolution cannot seek to stifle art or culture since one of the goals and fundamental aims of the revolution is to develop art and culture, precisely so that art and culture truly become the patrimony of the people. Just as we want a better life for the people in the material sense, so too do we want a better life for the people in a spiritual and cultural sense…

Now is the time for you to contribute in an organized way and with all your enthusiasm to the tasks corresponding to you in the revolution, and to constitute a broad organization of all writers and artists.¹ I don’t know if the questions that have been raised here will be discussed at the congress,* but we know that the congress is going to meet, and that its work—as well as the work to be done by the association of writers and artists—will be good topics for discussion at our next meeting.

We believe that we should meet again; at least, we don’t want to deprive ourselves of the pleasure and usefulness of these meetings, which have served to focus our attention on all these questions. We have to meet

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¹ A reference to the founding conference of the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC).
again. What does that mean? That we have to continue discussing these questions. In other words, everyone can rest assured that the government is greatly interested in these questions, and that the future will hold ample opportunity for discussing all these questions at large meetings. It seems to us that this should be a source of satisfaction for writers and artists, and we, too, look forward to acquiring more information and knowledge...

Does this mean that we are going to tell the people here what they have to write? No. Everyone should write what they want, and if what they write is no good, that’s their problem. If what they paint is no good, that’s their problem. We do not prohibit anyone from writing on the topic they prefer. On the contrary, everyone should express themselves in the form they consider best, and they should express freely the idea they want to express. We will always evaluate a person’s creation from the revolutionary point of view. That is also the right of the revolutionary government, which should be respected in the same way that the right of each person to express what he or she wants to express should be respected...

It has fallen to us to live during a great, historic event. It can be said that this is the second great, historic event that has occurred in the last three centuries in Latin America. And we Cubans are active participants, knowing that the more we work, the more the revolution will become an extinguishable flame, the more it will be called upon to play a transcendental role in history. You writers and artists have had the privilege of being living witnesses to this revolution. And a revolution is such an important event in human history that it is well worth living through, if only as a witness...

You have the opportunity to be more than spectators, you can be actors in the revolution, writing about it, expressing yourselves about it. And the generations to come, what will they ask of you? You might produce magnificent artistic works from a technical point of view, but if you were to tell someone from the future generation, 100 years from now, that a writer, an intellectual, lived in the era of the revolution and did not write about the revolution, and was not a part of the revolution, it would be difficult for a person in the future to understand this. In the years to come there will be so many people who will want to paint about the revolution, to write about the revolution, to express themselves on the revolution, compiling data and information in order to know what it was like, what happened, how we used to live...
What we have to fear is not some imaginary, authoritarian judge, a cultural executioner. Other judges far more severe should be feared: the judges of posterity, of the generations to come. When all is said and done, they will be the ones to have the last word!

“Next year, we will do battle with illiteracy. Next year, we must teach everyone in our country how to read and write.” With these words, on August 29, 1960, Fidel Castro announced that 1961 would be the Year of Education and that this task would have to be carried out by mobilizing the entire population. “We will mobilize all the students and everybody else who knows how to read and write, so they can teach those who don’t,” he said.

The eradication of illiteracy was a political, social and humanitarian pledge—and also a basic prerequisite for developing the productive forces of the country.

The most recent census had estimated the illiteracy rate in Cuba at around 37 percent of the population of school age and above, and that figure may well have been conservative. In addition, there were many people who, even though they had received a few years of elementary school and knew how to write their names, were functionally illiterate from lack of practice.

In some of the most backward areas in the countryside—especially in the mountains—more than 90 percent of people did not know how to read and write.

A literacy campaign in the Rebel Army and militias had been in progress since the triumph of the revolution. Detachments of volunteer teachers\(^1\) and other teachers gave it a tremendous boost. What was new about the 1961 literacy campaign was that it brought all Cubans into an organized mass effort that extended across the country. The “Conrado Benítez” literacy brigades,

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1. During 1960 and 1961, in view of the shortage of teachers who were willing to go to the mountains and other isolated parts of the countryside, the revolution trained three contingents of volunteer teachers at Minas de Frio and in nearby camps in the Sierra Maestra mountains.
composed of 100,000 young students, were the shock force in that effort. These brigades had been named for a young black teacher who had been murdered by a band of counterrevolutionaries in the mountains of central Cuba.

Members of the “Patria o Muerte” Brigades, mobilized by the labor unions, joined in this work, mainly in and around the cities.

The literacy campaign stopped for nothing. It continued during the Bay of Pigs attack in April 1961, even when mercenaries captured several young literacy teachers who had been teaching fishermen and their families in the area. It continued in the mountains and other rural areas while militia and army units were searching for and capturing the bands of counterrevolutionaries, and it was stepped up, with even more energy, when, on November 26, the bodies of Manuel Ascunce Domenech, a young literacy teacher, and Pedro Lantigua, the farmer he was teaching, were found—brutally murdered—in the Escambray mountains.

On December 22, 1961, the members of the literacy brigades marched victoriously through Havana’s José Martí Revolution Plaza wearing their uniforms and backpacks and carrying their lanterns. It was a day of triumph and great joy. A red flag was raised declaring Cuba to be a territory free of illiteracy. The young people shouted, “Fidel, give us another task!” to which he replied, “Study!”

THERE ARE PRACTICALLY NO ILLITERATES IN CUBA

Report presented by Dr. Armando Hart Dávalos, Minister of Education, at the mass rally in Revolution Plaza, Havana, on December 22, 1961, when Cuba was declared a territory free of illiteracy.

I am going to inform the people about a resolution issued by the revolutionary government and about a report on the literacy campaign.

The revolutionary government has decided to institute a “Heroes of the Revolution” national order in homage to our people’s sons and daughters who have carried out acts of exceptional heroism while doing their duty for their homeland and for the revolution.
Manuel Ascunce Domenech (literacy brigade member), Conrado Benítez, and Delfín Sen Cedré (a member of the “Patria o Muerte” Workers Brigade), were heroic victims of imperialism and the counterrevolution. They were all killed while carrying out the great task of teaching literacy.

Therefore, the revolutionary government resolves to confer posthumously the national order of “Heroes of the Revolution” on these combatants.

Compañero Osvaldo Dorticós, President of the Republic, will now remove the flag covering the case that contains the medals and present them to the relatives of Manuel Ascunce Domenech and Delfín Sen Cedré.

In this way, all those who lost their lives in the literacy campaign are honored.

Let us now observe a minute’s silence in honor of all those who lost their lives in the National Literacy Campaign.

Glory to the fallen!

Now, I am going to report to the people of Cuba on the status of the great National Literacy Campaign and read the final report from the National Literacy Commission, which met yesterday to review the development and culmination of the campaign.

The National Literacy Commission—which includes representatives of all the mass and other revolutionary organizations, the six Provincial Literacy Commissions and the Ministry of Education of the revolutionary government—held its 10th national meeting on December 21 to evaluate the final results of the great literacy campaign, and has the great pleasure of informing the people of Cuba:

First: At this time of reporting on the final results of the great literacy campaign, it is appropriate to acknowledge, first of all, the preparatory work done by the revolution throughout the insurrectional struggle waged by the Rebel Army and in the efforts made in 1959 and 1960. Through those initial efforts, the revolution managed to teach around 100,000 adults how to read and write.

Second: The literacy census taken in the Year of Education as a result of the direct mobilization of the people in all urban and rural areas in the country showed that there were 979,207 illiterate adults.
Third: During the Year of Education, 707,000 illiterates were taught how to read and write.

According to reports of the Central Planning Board, the population of Cuba in 1961 was 6,933,253; keeping in mind that, for various reasons, 272,000 illiterates did not learn how to read and write, the illiteracy rate in Cuba has been reduced to 3.9 percent of the total population. This makes Cuba one of the countries with the lowest illiteracy rates in the world, along with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, France, England and Japan.

Fourth: The 3.9 percent of the population that is still illiterate includes 25,000 Haitians living in the agricultural regions of Oriente and Camagüey provinces, who were not taught how to read and write in the campaign because they do not speak Spanish. It also includes those with physical or mental impairments; and those whose advanced age or bad health made them impossible to teach. Thus, there are practically no illiterates in Cuba.

Fifth: Moreover, the illiteracy rate will never increase but will, instead, decrease, since the people’s revolutionary government has taken measures to combat illiteracy among the productive forces by providing elementary schooling, planning a follow-up campaign and Workers’ Advancement Courses, and promoting the adult education plan to be implemented by the people’s forces.

Sixth: This tremendous revolutionary achievement was carried out by a powerful literacy force consisting of 121,000 Popular Literacy Teachers, 100,000 members of the “Conrado Benítez” brigades, 15,000 members of the “Patria o Muerte” brigades and 35,000 teachers, making a total of 271,000 literacy teachers. Together with the leaders, political cadres and administrative workers in the campaign, this makes an impressive total of over 300,000 workers in the National Literacy Campaign – 300,000 Cubans who dedicated themselves to keeping the promise compañero Fidel Castro, our leader, made at the United Nations.

Seventh: The literacy campaign has been successful because the momentum of the revolution has developed and guided it. The close coordination and unity of the mass and other revolutionary organizations has been a key
factor in this triumph. The popular support and the boost given it by all working people have made it possible to achieve this victory.

Eighth: This report is the result of a strict control, of rigorous censuses, for which the National Literacy Commission and the Ministry of Education take responsibility. The data which is the basis for this information, the work methods employed for obtaining the data and the provincial and municipal grass-roots agencies that provided it is now placed at the disposal of the revolutionary government, the national leadership of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI) and any international educational agency that may need this information to carry out similar work. This has been an extremely valuable experience to show what the people can do when they take revolutionary power and decide to apply all their energy to achieving a great goal.

Homeland or death!
We have won!

SOURCE: From the archives of Dr. Armando Hart Dávalos.
14. SECOND DECLARATION OF HAVANA

Following the disaster for the US government and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs, throughout 1961 US strategists continued to discuss how to reorganize counterrevolutionary activities against Cuba. Meanwhile, the Kennedy administration continued to apply pressure internationally through the Organization of American States in an attempt to isolate Cuba, particularly in the Americas.

With few exceptions—such as Mexico and the João Goulart administration in Brazil—most Latin American regimes joined in these maneuvers in exchange for portions of Cuba’s former sugar quota and funds from the so-called Alliance for Progress.

In December 1961, the eighth consultative meeting of foreign ministers of the OAS was held in the San Rafael Hotel in Punta del Este, Uruguay.

The United States, the main instigator of the meeting, worked feverishly to achieve the goal of Cuba’s expulsion from the OAS and a collective breaking of diplomatic relations with the island as part of a new plan to overthrow the revolution, a plan that also included economic measures—the tightening of the US blockade—and military options.

On January 3, 1962, the US State Department issued a “White Paper,” accusing Cuba of being a “Soviet satellite.” On January 7, 1962, Secretary of State Dean Rusk declared that the OAS meeting should confront the threat of “Castroism” in Latin America and impose sanctions on Cuba. On January 19, almost the eve of the Punta del Este meeting, the US government circulated a proposal that the OAS member countries adopt “automatic sanctions” against Cuba if the Cuban government did not break its ties with the “communist countries” within 60 days.
During a television appearance at this time, Fidel Castro stated, “Cuba is going to wage a battle for all America at Punta del Este, because this battle revolves around a key principle: the peoples’ right to self-determination and sovereignty… What do the imperialists seek there? The right to intervene in any Latin American country. Wherever the people begin to rebel, wherever the people begin to demonstrate a lack of compliance with imperialist exploitation, they want to have the right to intervene, including with their armed forces.”

President Osvaldo Dorticós headed the Cuban delegation to the Punta del Este meeting, accompanied by Foreign Minister Raúl Roa.

In his address, Dorticós stated: “I would like to ask the foreign ministers who accuse us—and especially the secretary of state of the United States—one question here: Is it or is it not true, in your opinion, that the US government and the US intelligence services, under Allen Dulles, promoted, financed, directed and supported the bombing of Havana and Santiago de Cuba and the invasion of our country at the Bay of Pigs?…

“Why didn’t you get upset then? Why didn’t the Organization of American States take action? Why didn’t you gentlemen who are accusing Cuba—I’m referring only to those of Cuba’s accusers who are present today—challenge the United States? Is it because, within the rigorous, strict norms of the Organization of American States, the United States has a special dispensation to act with impunity when it invades another country? If so, what good is the Organization of American States?”

On January 30, 1962, following intensive lobbying in which the US representatives dangled money and promises of all kinds in front of the other delegates, a resolution excluding the Cuban government from participation in the inter-American system was passed (14 votes in favor, one opposed and six abstentions).

It stated the following:

1. The adherence by any member of the Organization of American States to Marxism-Leninism is incompatible with the inter-American system, and the alignment of such a government with the Communist bloc destroys hemispheric unity and solidarity.

1. Nicanor León Cotayo, El bloqueo a Cuba, 211–2.
2. Ibid, 221.
2. The present government of Cuba, which has officially identified itself as a Marxist-Leninist government, is incompatible with the aims and principles of the inter-American system.

3. This incompatibility excludes the present government of Cuba from participating in the inter-American system.

4. The Council of the Organization of American States and the bodies and agencies of the inter-American system will speedily adopt the measures required to implement this Resolution.¹

A few days later, on February 13, 1962, the OAS Council excluded Cuba from that organization.

Some days earlier, on February 4, Havana was the scene of one of the largest and most emotionally charged mass rallies in Cuba’s history. Over a million Cubans filled José Martí Revolution Plaza to overflowing as Fidel read a very different document—the Second Declaration of Havana—that was then approved by a mass of hands held high.

**THIS GREAT MASS OF HUMANITY HAS SAID “ENOUGH!” AND HAS BEGUN TO MARCH**


On May 18, 1895, on the eve of his death from a Spanish bullet through the heart, José Martí, the Apostle of our independence, wrote in an unfinished letter to his friend Manuel Mercado:

Now I am able to write... I am in danger each day now of giving my life for my country and for my duty... of preventing the United States, as Cuba obtains her independence, from extending its control over the Antilles and consequently falling with that much more force on the countries of our America. Whatever I have done so far, and whatever I will do, has been for that purpose...

¹ Ibid, 239.
I have lived inside the monster and know its entrails; and my sling is David’s.

In 1895, Martí had already pointed out the danger hovering over the Americas and called imperialism by its name: imperialism. He pointed out to the people of Latin America that more than anyone, they had a stake in seeing to it that Cuba did not succumb to the greed of the Yankees, scornful of the peoples of Latin America. And with his own blood, shed for Cuba and Latin America, he wrote the words that posthumously, in homage to his memory, the people of Cuba place at the top of this declaration.

Sixty-seven years have passed. Puerto Rico was converted into a colony and is still a colony burdened with military bases. Cuba also fell into the clutches of imperialism, whose troops occupied our territory. The Platt Amendment was imposed on our first constitution, as a humiliating clause that sanctioned the odious right of foreign intervention. Our riches passed into their hands, our history was falsified, and our government and our politics were entirely molded in the interests of the overseers. The nation was subjected to 60 years of political, economic and cultural suffocation.

But Cuba rose up. Cuba was able to redeem itself from the bastard tutelage. Cuba broke the chains that tied its fortunes to those of the imperial oppressor, redeemed its riches, reclaimed its culture, and unfurled its banner of Free Territory and People of the Americas.

Now the United States will never again be able to use Cuba’s strength against the Americas. Conversely, the United States, dominating the majority of the other Latin American states, is attempting to use the strength of the Americas against Cuba.

The history of Cuba is but the history of Latin America. The history of Latin America is but the history of Asia, Africa and Oceania. And the history of all these peoples is but the history of the most pitiless and cruel exploitation by imperialism throughout the world...

The movement of the dependent and colonial peoples is a phenomenon of a universal character that agitates the world and marks the final crisis of imperialism.

Cuba and Latin America are part of the world. Our problems form part of the problems engendered by the general crisis of imperialism and the struggle of the subjugated peoples, the clash between the world that is
being born and the world that is dying. The odious and brutal campaign
unleashed against our nation expresses the desperate as well as futile effort
that the imperialists are making to prevent the liberation of the peoples.

Cuba hurts the imperialists in a special way. What is hidden behind the
Yankees’ hatred of the Cuban revolution? What is it that rationally explains
the conspiracy—uniting for the same aggressive purpose the richest and
most powerful imperialist power in the contemporary world and the oligar-
chies of an entire continent, which together are supposed to represent a
population of 350 million human beings—against a small country of only
seven million inhabitants, economically underdeveloped, without financial
or military means to threaten the security or economy of any other country?

What unites them and agitates them is fear. What explains it is fear. Not
fear of the Cuban revolution but fear of the Latin American revolution. Not
fear of the workers, peasants, intellectuals, students and progressive layers
of the middle strata who by revolutionary means have taken power in Cuba;
but fear that the workers, peasants, students, intellectuals and progressive
sectors of the middle strata might take power by revolutionary means in the
oppressed and hungry countries exploited by the Yankee monopolies and
reactionary oligarchies of America; fear that the plundered people of the
continent will seize the arms from their oppressors and, like Cuba, declare
themselves free peoples of the Americas.

By crushing the Cuban revolution they hope to dispel the fear that tor-
ments them, the specter of revolution that threatens them. By liquidating
the Cuban revolution, they hope to liquidate the revolutionary spirit of the
people. They imagine in their delirium that Cuba is an exporter of revol-
utions. In their sleepless, merchants’ and usurers’ minds there is the idea
that revolutions can be bought, sold, rented, loaned, exported and imported
like some piece of merchandise...

But the development of history, the ascending march of humanity
cannot, and will not, be halted. The forces that impel the people, who are
the real makers of history, are determined by the material conditions of
their existence and by the aspirations for higher goals of well-being and
liberty that emerge when the progress of humanity in the fields of science,
technology and culture make it possible. These forces are superior to the
will and the terror unleashed by the ruling oligarchies.
The subjective conditions of each country, that is to say, the factors of consciousness, organization, leadership, can accelerate or retard the revolution, according to its greater or lesser degree of development. But sooner or later, in every historical epoch, when the objective conditions mature, consciousness is acquired, the organization is formed, the leadership emerges and the revolution takes place.

Whether this takes place peacefully or through a painful birth does not depend on the revolutionaries; it depends on the reactionary forces of the old society, who resist the birth of the new society engendered by the contradictions carried in the womb of the old society. Revolution historically is like the doctor who assists at the birth of a new life. It does not needlessly use the tools of force, but will use them without hesitation whenever necessary to help the birth—a birth that brings to the enslaved and exploited masses the hope of a new and better life.

In many countries of Latin America, revolution is today inevitable. That fact is not determined by anyone’s will. It is determined by the horrifying conditions of exploitation in which Latin Americans live, the development of the revolutionary consciousness of the masses, the world crisis of imperialism and the universal movement of struggle of the subjugated peoples...

And in the face of the objective reality and the historically inexorable Latin American revolution, what is the attitude of Yankee imperialism? To prepare to wage a colonial war against the peoples of Latin America; to create an apparatus of force, the political pretexts and the pseudo-legal instruments subscribed to by the reactionary oligarchies to repress with blood and fire the struggle of the Latin American peoples...

This policy of gradual strangulation of the sovereignty of the Latin American nations and of a free hand to intervene in their internal affairs culminated in the recent meeting of foreign ministers at Punta del Este [in Uruguay]. Yankee imperialism gathered the ministers together to wrest from them—through political pressure and unprecedented economic blackmail in collusion with a group of the most discredited rulers of this continent—the renunciation of the national sovereignty of our peoples and the consecration of the Yankees’ odious right of intervention in the internal affairs of Latin America; the submission of the peoples entirely to the will of the United
States of North America, against which all our great leaders, from [Simón] Bolívar to [Augusto] Sandino, fought...

At Punta del Este a great ideological battle unfolded between the Cuban revolution and Yankee imperialism. Who did each side represent, for whom did each one speak? Cuba represented the people; the United States represented the monopolies. Cuba spoke for the exploited masses of Latin America; the United States for the exploiting, oligarchic and imperialist interests. Cuba for sovereignty; the United States for intervention. Cuba for the nationalization of foreign enterprises; the United States for new investments by foreign capital. Cuba for culture; the United States for ignorance. Cuba for agrarian reform; the United States for great landed estates. Cuba for the industrialization of the Americas; the United States for underdevelopment. Cuba for creative work; the United States for sabotage and counterrevolutionary terror practiced by its agents—the destruction of sugarcane fields and factories, bombing by their pirate planes of a peaceful people’s work. Cuba for the murdered literacy workers; the United States for the assassins. Cuba for bread; the United States for hunger. Cuba for equality; the United States for privilege and discrimination. Cuba for the truth; the United States for lies. Cuba for liberation; the United States for oppression. Cuba for the bright future of humanity; the United States for the past without hope. Cuba for the heroes who fell at the Bay of Pigs to save the country from foreign domination; the United States for the mercenaries and traitors who serve the foreigner against their own country. Cuba for peace among peoples; the United States for aggression and war. Cuba for socialism; the United States for capitalism...

What “Alliance for Progress” can serve as encouragement to those 107 million men and women of our America, the backbone of labor in the cities and fields, whose dark skin—black, mestizo, mulatto, Indian—inspires scorn in the new colonialists? How are they—who with bitter impotence have seen how in Panama there is one wage scale for Yankees and another for Panamanians, who are regarded as an inferior race—going to put any trust in the supposed “alliance”?...

What Cuba can give to the peoples, and has already given, is its example.

And what does the Cuban revolution teach? That revolution is possible, that the people can make it, that in the contemporary world there are no
forces capable of halting the liberation movement of the peoples...

No nation in Latin America is weak—because each forms part of a family of 200 million brothers and sisters, who suffer the same miseries, who harbor the same sentiments, who have the same enemy, who dream about the same better future and who count on the solidarity of all honest men and women throughout the world.

Great as the epic struggle for Latin American independence was, heroic as that struggle was, today’s generation of Latin Americans is called on to engage in an epic that is even greater and more decisive for humanity. That struggle was for liberation from the Spanish colonial power, from a decadent Spain invaded by the armies of Napoleon. Today the battle cry is for liberation from the most powerful world imperialist center, from the strongest force of world imperialism, and to render humanity a greater service than that rendered by our predecessors.

But this struggle, to a greater extent than the earlier one, will be waged by the masses, will be carried out by the people; the people are going to play a much more important role now than they did then. The leaders are less important and will be less important in this struggle than in the earlier one.

This epic before us is going to be written by the hungry Indian masses, the peasants without land, the exploited workers. It is going to be written by the progressive masses, the honest and brilliant intellectuals, who so greatly abound in our suffering Latin American lands. A struggle of masses and of ideas. An epic that will be carried forward by our peoples, mistreated and scorned by imperialism; our peoples, unreckoned with until today, who are now beginning to shake off their slumber. Imperialism considered us a weak and submissive flock; and now it begins to be terrified of that flock; a gigantic flock of 200 million Latin Americans in whom Yankee monopoly capitalism now sees its gravediggers.

This toiling humanity, these inhumanly exploited, these paupers, controlled by the system of whip and overseer, have not been reckoned with or have been little reckoned with. From the dawn of independence their fate has been the same: Indians, gauchos, mestizos, zambos, quadroons, whites without property or income, all this human mass that formed the ranks of the “nation,” which never reaped any benefits, which fell by the millions, which was cut into bits, which won independence from the mother country
for the bourgeoisie, which was shut out from its share of the rewards,
which continued to occupy the lowest rung on the ladder of social benefits,
continued to die of hunger, curable diseases and neglect, because for them
there were never enough life-giving goods—ordinary bread, a hospital bed,
medicine that cures, a hand that aids.

But now from one end of the continent to the other they are signaling
with clarity that the hour has come—the hour of their redemption. Now this
anonymous mass, this America of color, somber, taciturn America, which
all over the continent sings with the same sadness and disillusionment,
now this mass is beginning to enter definitively into its own history, it is
beginning to write its history with its own blood, it is beginning to suffer
and die for that history.

Because now in the fields and mountains of the Americas, on its plains
and in its jungles, in the wilderness and in the traffic of its cities, on the
banks of its great oceans and rivers, this world is beginning to tremble.
Anxious hands are stretched forth, ready to die for what is theirs, to win
those rights that were laughed at by one and all for 500 years. Yes, now
history will have to take the poor of the Americas into account, the exploited
and spurned of the Americas, who have decided to begin writing their
history for themselves and for all time. Already they can be seen on the
roads, on foot, day after day, in an endless march of hundreds of kilometers
to the governmental “eminences,” there to obtain their rights.

Already they can be seen armed with stones, sticks, machetes, in one
direction and another, each day occupying lands, sinking hooks into the
land which belongs to them and defending it with their lives. They can
be seen carrying signs, slogans, flags; letting them fly in the mountain or
prairie winds. And the wave of anger, of demands for justice, of claims for
rights trampled underfoot, which is beginning to sweep the lands of Latin
America, will not stop. That wave will swell with every passing day. For that
wave is composed of the greatest number, the majorities in every respect,
those whose labor amasses the wealth and turns the wheels of history. Now
they are awakening from the long, brutalizing sleep to which they had been
subjected.

For this great mass of humanity has said “Enough!” and has begun to
march. And their march of giants will not be halted until they conquer true
independence—for which they have died in vain more than once. Today, however, those who die will die like the Cubans at the Bay of Pigs—they will die for their own, true, never-to-be-surrendered independence.

Homeland or death!
We will win!

[Signed] The people of Cuba

The National General Assembly of the people of Cuba resolves that this declaration be known as the Second Declaration of Havana, and be translated into the major languages and distributed throughout the world. It also resolves to urge all friends of the Cuban revolution in Latin America to distribute it widely among the masses of workers, peasants, students and intellectuals of this continent.

Havana, Cuba
Free Territory of the Americas
February 4, 1962

As soon as it had pushed through the resolution on Cuba’s expulsion from the Organization of American States—without even waiting for the OAS Council to begin implementing its decision on February 13—the Kennedy administration took a new step in its anti-Cuba program. On February 3, 1962, President John F. Kennedy signed Executive Order 3447, which established a total blockade on all trade between the United States and Cuba as of 12:01 a.m. on February 7.

This would be the culmination of the economic measures imposed by the US government and US companies since 1959 to cause Cuba difficulties and paralyze its ability to function. Those measures included the August 1959 cancellation of credit that had been granted to improve the electricity network; the US refineries’ refusal, in June 1960, to refine Soviet crude oil; the first reduction of Cuba’s sugar quota, which President Eisenhower ordered in July 1960; and subsequent presidential orders that eliminated Cuba’s sugar quota altogether while closing off exports to Cuba and stopping US purchases of other Cuban products, such as fruit and nickel.

Legally, it was necessary to construct a very complex legislative scaffolding in order to justify, within US law, what was manifestly an illegal action: the imposition of wartime measures against a tiny neighboring nation in times of peace.

As notable jurists have pointed out, there is no norm of international law that justifies a “peaceful blockade.” Since the London Naval Conference of 1909, a blockade has been considered an act of war that may only be used between belligerents.¹

Therefore, the United States has resorted to the inexact term “embargo”—a term that suggests the retention of a debtor’s property until contractual obligations have been met, or the simple cancellation of trade between two countries. But over nearly five decades, the United States has harassed and done its utmost to disrupt Cuba’s normal trade and financial activities with other countries. This policy of blockade, according to incomplete figures, has cost Cuba more than US$60 billion.

Kennedy’s Executive Order of February 3, 1962, the imposition of the US blockade of Cuba, was by no means the end of the legal attack. In later years, new efforts were made to tighten the blockade. Some measures were eased during the Carter administration (1977–80), but they were tightened again when the “New Right” in the United States held sway in government, and became particularly acute with the 1992 Torricelli [Cuban Democracy] Act and 1996 Helms-Burton [“Libertad”] Act, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

PROCLAMATION 3447 OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEBRUARY 3, 1962

EMBARGO ON ALL TRADE WITH CUBA

WHEREAS the Eighth Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers, serving as organ of consultation in application of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, in its Final Act resolved that the present government of Cuba is incompatible with the principles and objectives of the Inter-American system; and, in the light of the subversive offensive of Sino-Soviet Communism with which the government of Cuba is publicly aligned, urged the member states to take those steps that they may consider appropriate for their individual and collective self-defense;

WHEREAS the Congress of the United States, in section 620(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (75 Stat. 445), as amended, has authorized the president to establish and maintain an embargo upon all trade between the United States and Cuba; and
WHEREAS the United States, in accordance with its international obligations, is prepared to take all necessary actions to promote national and hemispheric security by isolating the present government of Cuba and thereby reducing the threat posed by its alignment with the communist powers:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOHN F. KENNEDY, President of the United States of America, acting under the authority of section 620(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (75 Stat. 445), as amended, do

1. Hereby proclaim an embargo upon trade between the United States and Cuba in accordance with paragraphs 2 and 3 of this proclamation.

2. Hereby prohibit, effective 12:01 A.M. Eastern Standard Time, February 7, 1962, the importation into the United States of all goods of Cuban origin and all goods exported from or through Cuba; and I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of the Treasury to carry out such prohibition, to make such exceptions thereto, by license or otherwise, as he determines to be consistent with the effective operation of the embargo hereby proclaimed, and to promulgate such rules and regulations as may be necessary to perform such functions.

3. AND FURTHER, I do hereby direct the Secretary of Commerce, under the provisions of the Export Control Act of 1949, as amended (50 USC. App. 2021-2032) to continue to carry out the prohibition of all exports from the United States to Cuba, and I hereby authorize him, under that Act, to continue, make, modify, or revoke exceptions from such prohibition.

(Signed by President John F. Kennedy with the seal of the United States of America, in Washington, on February 3, 1962.)

SOURCE:
16. RATION CARDS

Cubans today may not remember that on March 12, 1962, as a result of the total blockade ordered by the US government, the revolutionary government passed Law 1015, which established a ration system throughout the country.

The agrarian reform and the increase in job opportunities that followed the triumph of the revolution meant that millions of people became consumers, and the illusion of abundance that capitalist shop windows had offered quickly disappeared.

Months before, a shortage of food and other goods had hit hard. Given Cuba’s underdeveloped, dependent economy, its imports from foreign markets—especially from the United States—had served as an umbilical cord supplying the daily needs of the people, industry, transportation and public utilities. Cuba was notorious for having no wholesale warehouses, drawing its supplies directly from ports and other cities in the southern part of the United States.

Because of its historical deformation as a plantation economy, Cuba could not meet many of its food needs. One study showed that, in the years just before the triumph of the revolution, Cuba had to import 60 percent of the grain, 37 percent of the vegetables, 41 percent of the cereals, 84 percent of the oils, 69 percent of the canned meat, 80 percent of the canned fruit and 83 percent of the cookies and candy that were consumed in the country.¹

In order to be able to purchase those products, Cuba had to export sugar and, to a lesser extent, nickel and tobacco products. When the United States closed its doors to a market that it had been molding for almost 200 years—

from well before the 13 colonies declared their independence from England—Cuba could not immediately redirect its foreign trade and compensate for this harsh blow.

Nevertheless, the solidarity of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries helped to provide basic foodstuffs and enabled the Cuban people to survive.

Rationing was the necessary response to the undeclared war to which Cuba was subjected, in conditions in which the nation’s defense was swallowing up enormous resources and human energy. It represented a statement of political principle: to share whatever food there was, whether a lot or a little, among everybody, so nobody would be left out; not to allow the laws of money and of supply and demand to be imposed, but to ensure justice for all; and not to allow intolerable inequalities to arise in the heart of society between those with less income and those with more.

Thus, rationing was linked to the ideas of popular unity and national consensus as the bases for resisting in the long term the US policies of blockade, permanent hostility and the undermining of the revolution.

In later years, with the consolidation of relative peace and the gradual stabilization of the economy, new market formulas appeared; supplies of products and durable goods were increased and diversified; and rationing became a kind of social guarantee for all families, a vital minimum heavily subsidized by the government. This allowed them to acquire a supply of staples at constant, low prices, thus bolstering the real income of working people.

Some economists, both in and outside Cuba, have debated whether the continuation of the system of rationing for nearly five decades has or has not been a factor that has worked against increasing productivity and economic efficiency, because of the egalitarianism it obviously embodies.

The answer to this problem cannot be technocratic. Rather, one must consider Cuba’s specific conditions—a poor country subjected to a blockade imposed by the mightiest power in the world, which uses its wealth as a permanent element of ideological penetration and confusion. In this situation, Cuba must provide its citizens with the certainty of solidarity and the most equitable possible distribution of the available goods.

It has been an unwritten truth since 1962 that, as long as the blockade and threats from abroad continue, ration cards may be an effective tool with
which to confront adverse situations. This was confirmed during the 1990s economic crisis, the application of the Torricelli and Helms-Burton laws and Cuba’s “special period in times of peace.”

ESTABLISHMENT OF A SYSTEM OF RATIONING
LAW 1015, MARCH 12, 1962

WHEREAS the development of our revolutionary process, through urban employment, the reduction of rents for housing, the elimination of payments for schooling and other similar measures, has meant a considerable increase in the urban population’s buying power;

WHEREAS by turning former tenant farmers and squatters—who, as small farmers, used to be exploited by large landowners, companies and middlemen—into landowners and by increasing employment in the countryside; whilst the agrarian reform has given farmers and former agricultural workers—now members of cooperatives and state farms—a buying power that immediately raised the level of consumption of agricultural products in rural areas and created a demand for manufactured articles in those areas that is many times the demand that existed in January 1959;

WHEREAS the unprecedented increase in agricultural and industrial production is, nevertheless, limited by the brutal economic wall that US imperialism has raised against our national economy by means of the blockade on sales of raw materials, spare parts, fertilizers, pesticides and other materials, which has forced our agriculture and industry to make abrupt changes in the organization of their productive resources and therefore prevents the agrarian and industrial production of certain articles from meeting the growing demand at this time;

WHEREAS counterrevolutionaries and other antisocial elements have taken advantage of this situation of the relative scarcity of certain articles to engage in speculation, promote campaigns urging people to hoard, and
arouse uncertainty among consumers concerning articles whose supplies are sufficient to meet present consumption needs; and

WHEREAS it is the duty of the revolutionary government to confront this abnormal situation by organizing a form of distribution that is equitable and which gives all sectors of the citizenry equal access to articles of regular consumption, thus eliminating the distribution problems that have arisen as a result of the situation described above,

Therefore: making use of the powers conferred on it, the Council of Ministers resolves to issue the following:

LAW 1015
BETTER DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPLIES

Article 1. In order to achieve better distribution of the supplies of articles of regular consumption, a National Board for the Distribution of Supplies is created.

Article 2. The National Board for the Distribution of Supplies will be composed of a representative of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA), a representative of the Ministry of Industry, a representative of the Ministry of Domestic Trade, a representative of the Ministry of Labor, a representative of the Executive Committee of the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC), a representative of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) and a representative of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC).

Article 3. The National Board for the Distribution of Supplies is empowered to

   a. Prepare, after consultation with the Council of Ministers, a list of consumer articles that, for justified reasons, should be rationed, either locally or nationally;

   b. Prepare, after consultation with the Council of Ministers, a system of rationing that should be adopted with regard to each article and the quantities of each that should be distributed to the population;
c. Prepare, after consultation with the Council of Ministers, the relative corrections that should be made concerning supplies of products that are rationed to private and government-run industry and to the businesses in the private and government-run networks of restaurants and cafeterias;

d. Organize, after consultation with the Council of Ministers, a system of rationing and its implementation and decide on which governmental and people’s agencies should take part in implementing and overseeing the rationing system; and

e. Propose to the Council of Ministers as many measures as it deems necessary to ensure the smooth functioning of rationing.

Article 4. Any legal provisions and/or regulations that go counter to the implementation of what is set forth in this Law are annulled. This Law will go into effect upon its publication in the *Official Gazette* of the Republic.

THEREFORE I order that this Law be implemented and carried out in full.

Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz
Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government

March 1962 is one of the many important dates in the Kennedy administration's dirty war against the Cuban revolution. Following the crushing defeat of the Bay of Pigs invasion in the spring of 1961, President Kennedy responded to growing US resentment and desire for revenge against Cuba.

On April 22, 1961, he assigned General Maxwell Taylor the task of investigating the causes of the disaster the United States had suffered at the Bay of Pigs. General Taylor’s report, issued on June 13, exposed the mistakes made by the CIA, which then became the scapegoat for the failure and saw the removal of its main officials in the following months.

The covert action program was subsequently redefined. Special Group 5412 was reconstituted with power over CIA missions, and General Maxwell Taylor was named as its head.

General Taylor recommended to Kennedy the drafting of new guidelines for political, military, economic and propaganda actions against Fidel Castro. In late 1961, the US president put General Edward Lansdale in charge of drawing up a secret plan of operations aimed at “helping Cuba” topple the communist regime. This program was given the code name “Operation Mongoose.” It was reviewed, revised and refocused during the following months along the general guidelines of promoting destabilizing activities inside Cuba—such as acts of sabotage, the creation and support of bands of armed counterrevolutionaries, assassination attempts and propaganda activities. At the same time, the economic blockade would reduce the productive capacity of Cuba’s economy, thus promoting discontent among the people, splitting the revolutionary leadership and finally bringing about an internal uprising by
the Cuban people—or by a section of the population—which would serve as a pretext for direct military intervention by the US armed forces.

The Special Group (Augmented), reporting directly to President Kennedy, was created to direct the plan. Attorney General Robert Kennedy played a key role in this group. At a January 19, 1962, meeting of this new group, Robert Kennedy declared that solving the Cuba problem was a priority for the US government. He urged the participants to devote all their time, money, efforts and human resources into implementing the program and emphasized that special attention should be given to espionage, with a view to acts of sabotage and the future use of US military forces.¹

To support that project, the US government created Task Force W and built a huge CIA station in southern Florida.

On March 14, 1962, General Maxwell Taylor, head of the Special Group (Augmented), issued a series of guidelines for Operation Mongoose, which explicitly stated that, in the effort to overthrow the Cuban government, the United States would make “maximum use of indigenous resources, internal and external, but recognizes that final success will require decisive US military intervention... Such indigenous resources as are developed will be used to prepare for and justify this intervention, and thereafter to facilitate and support it.”²

Two days later, on March 16, in the presence of the Special Group (Augmented), President Kennedy personally approved those guidelines.

From January through August 1962, there were 5,780 acts of sabotage, terrorism and subversion against Cuba; 716 of them damaged important economic and social targets. In the Escambray mountains alone, from March to September, the number of bands of armed counterrevolutionaries increased from 42 to 79. The number of counterrevolutionary groups infiltrated into the country increased, as did the burning of cane fields, plans for assassination attempts, espionage and enemy reconnaissance flights.³

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³. Peligros y principios, 66.
On July 25, in a memorandum to the Special Group (Augmented), General Lansdale proposed four alternatives for action:

a. Cancel operational plan; treat Cuba as a Bloc nation; protect Hemisphere from it, or

b. Exert all possible diplomatic, economic, psychological, and other pressures to overthrow the Castro-Communist regime without overt employment of US military, or

c. Commit US to help Cubans overthrow the Castro-Communist regime, with a step-by-step phasing to ensure success, including the use of US military force if required at the end, or

d. Use a provocation and overthrow the Castro-Communist regime by US military force.\(^4\)

In fact, at that time, the US government and armed forces were already developing various alternatives for direct military action against Cuba.

The failure of the various aspects of Operation Mongoose—which, in one of General Lansdale’s original versions, had predicted that the revolutionary government would be overthrown in eight months—led to the adoption of even more energetic measures. On August 17, 1962, General Maxwell Taylor reported to President Kennedy that while the Special Group (Augmented) believed “the new course of action will create added difficulties for the regime and will increase the visibility of its failures, there is no reason to hope that it will cause the overthrow of the regime from within.”\(^5\) In conclusion, a more aggressive Mongoose program was recommended.

Knowledge of these antecedents is required in order to understand what took place a few months later in October 1962, when a crisis broke out that pushed the world to the brink of nuclear war.

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In November 1962 the proposal for a major new covert action program to overthrow Castro was developed. The President’s Assistant, Richard Goodwin, and General Edward Lansdale, who were experienced in counter-insurgency operations, played major staff roles in creating this program, which was named Operation MONGOOSE. Goodwin and Lansdale worked closely with Robert Kennedy, who took an active interest in this preparatory stage, and Goodwin advised the President that Robert Kennedy “would be the most effective commander” of the proposed operation. In a memorandum to Robert Kennedy outlining the MONGOOSE proposal, Lansdale stated that a “picture of the situation has emerged clearly enough to indicate what needs to be done and to support your sense of urgency concerning Cuba.”

At the end of the month, President Kennedy issued a memorandum recording his decision to begin the MONGOOSE project to “use our available assets [deleted] to help Cuba overthrow the Communist regime.”

The establishment of Operation MONGOOSE resulted in important organizational changes.

A new control group, the Special Group (Augmented) (SGA), was created to oversee Operation MONGOOSE. The SGA comprised the regular Special Group members (i.e., McGeorge Bundy, Alexis Johnson of the Department of State, Roswell Gilpatric of the Department of Defense, John McCon [of the CIA], and General Lyman Lemnitzer of the Joint Chiefs) augmented by Attorney General Robert Kennedy and General Maxwell Taylor. Although Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara were not formal members of the Special Group or the Special Group (Augmented), they sometimes attended meetings...

In late 1961 or early 1962, William Harvey was put in charge of the CIA’s Task Force W, the CIA unit for MONGOOSE operations. Task Force W operated under guidance from the Special Group (Augmented) and employed a total of approximately 400 people at CIA headquarters and its
McCones and Harvey were the principal CIA participants in Operation MONGOOSE. Although Helms attended only seven of the 40 MONGOOSE meetings, he was significantly involved, and he testified that he “was as interested” in MONGOOSE as were Harvey and McCon... 

Lansdale’s concept for Operation MONGOOSE envisioned a first step involving the development of leadership elements—“a very necessary political basis”—among the Cubans opposed to Castro. At the same time, he sought to develop “means to infiltrate Cuba successfully” and to organize “cells and activities inside Cuba [deleted] who could work secretly and safely.” Lansdale’s plan was designed so as not to “arouse premature actions, not to bring great reprisals on the people there and abort any eventual success.”...

On January 19, 1962, a meeting of principal MONGOOSE participants was held in Attorney General Kennedy’s office. Notes taken at the meeting by George McManus, Helms’ Executive Assistant, contain the following passages:

Conclusion: Overthrow of Castro is Possible

[Deleted] a solution to the Cuban problem today carried top priority in US government. No time, money—or manpower is to be spared.

Yesterday [deleted] the President had indicated to him that the final chapter had not been written—it’s got to be done and will be done.

McManus attributed the words “the top priority in the US government—no time, money, effort or manpower is to be spared” to the Attorney General [Robert Kennedy]...

On January 18, 1962, Lansdale assigned 32 planning tasks to the agencies participating in MONGOOSE... The 32 tasks comprised a variety of activities, ranging from intelligence collection to planning for “use of US military force to support the Cuban popular movement” and developing an operational schedule for sabotage actions inside Cuba. In focusing on intelligence collection, propaganda, and various sabotage actions, Lansdale’s tasks were consistent with the underlying strategy of MONGOOSE to build gradually toward an internal revolt of the Cuban people...

The SGA approved Lansdale’s 32 tasks for planning purposes on
January 30, 1962. On February 20, Lansdale detailed a six-phase schedule for MONGOOSE, designed to culminate in October 1962 with an “open revolt and overthrow of the Communist regime.” As one of the operations for this “Resistance” phase, Lansdale listed “attacks on the cadre of the regime, including key leaders.” Lansdale’s plan stated:

This should be a ‘Special Target’ operation [deleted]. Gangster elements might provide the best recruitment potential for actions against police—G2 (intelligence) officials...

The Kennedy administration pressed the MONGOOSE operation with vigorous language. Although the collection of intelligence information was the central objective of MONGOOSE until August 1962, sabotage and paramilitary actions were also conducted, including a major sabotage operation aimed at a large Cuban copper mine. Lansdale described the sabotage acts as involving “blowing up bridges to stop communications and blowing up certain production plants.” During the Missile Crisis in the fall of 1962, sabotage was increasingly urged...

On August 20, Taylor told the President that the SGA saw no likelihood that Castro’s government would be overturned by internal means without direct United States military intervention, and that the SGA favored a more aggressive MONGOOSE program. On August 23, McGeorge Bundy issued NSC Memorandum No. 181, which stated that, at the President’s directive, “the line of activity projected for Operation MONGOOSE Plan B Plus should be developed with all possible speed.” On August 30, the SGA instructed the CIA to submit a list of possible sabotage targets and noted that: “The Group, by reacting to this list, could define the limits within which the Agency could operate on its own initiative.”

The onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis initially caused a reversion to the stepped-up Course B plan. At an SGA meeting on October 4, 1962, Robert Kennedy stated that the President “is concerned about progress on the MONGOOSE program and feels that more priority should be given to trying to mount sabotage operations.” The Attorney General urged that “massive activity” be undertaken within the MONGOOSE framework. In response to the proposal, the SGA decided that “considerably more sabotage” should be undertaken, and that “all efforts should be made to develop new and
imaginative approaches with the possibility of getting rid of the Castro regime.” However, on October 30, 1962, the Special Group (Augmented) ordered a halt to all sabotage operations...

Helms testified that the “intense” pressure exerted by the Kennedy administration to overthrow Castro had led him to perceive that the CIA was acting within the scope of its authority in attempting Castro’s assassination, even though assassination was never directly ordered. He said:

I believe it was the policy at the time to get rid of Castro and if killing him was one of the things that was to be done in this connection, that was within what was expected. I remember vividly (the pressure to overthrow Castro) was very intense.

Helms stated that this pressure intensified during the period of Operation MONGOOSE and continued through much of 1963. As the pressure increased, “obviously the extent of the means that one thought were available [deleted] increased too.”

Helms recalled that during the MONGOOSE period, “it was made abundantly clear [deleted] to everybody involved in the operation that the desire was to get rid of the Castro regime and to get rid of Castro [deleted] the point was that no limitations were put on this injunction.”

18. THE DENUNCIATION OF SECTARIANISM

The main revolutionary forces that opposed the Batista dictatorship—primarily, the July 26 Movement and the Rebel Army, and also the March 13 Revolutionary Directorate (DR) and the Popular Socialist Party (PSP)—were separate entities at the time of the revolution, although they cooperated and there was a dialog between them.

In the new stage ushered in after January 1959, it became necessary to unite all the people in the extended struggle to defend, consolidate and advance the revolution. And as the political objectives of complete national liberation, anti-imperialism and socialism became more clearly defined, unity became even more important.

From the very beginning, under Fidel Castro’s leadership, the revolution had to take a stand against various forms of exclusionism and sectarianism that had emerged among some of the guerrillas and combatants in the urban underground, some of the veterans of the Rebel Army and members of the workers’, farmers’ and student militias; and some of the old communists who had belonged to the old Marxist-Leninist party for 15 to 20 years.

At the highest level of the revolutionary leadership and among the main leaders of the various organizations, however, a sense of historic responsibility, generosity and a broader view prevailed.

Blas Roca Calderio, the well-respected general secretary of the Popular Socialist Party since 1934, set an outstanding example. He turned over his organization to the revolutionary leadership and placed his party under Fidel’s authority, expressing his desire to join the ranks of a new, unified organization of all Cuban revolutionaries.
In 1960, an integrated political leadership began to function, meeting informally as a consultative body to review important decisions. The following year, a process was initiated of fusing the memberships and creating a new leadership structure.

The proclamation of the socialist character of the revolution on April 16, 1961, was a milestone in the organization of the new party. But serious mistakes were made when the nuclei of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI) were created as the embryo of the nascent political vanguard.

Since the Popular Socialist Party had the most organizational experience, Aníbal Escalante from that party was appointed Organization Secretary of the ORI. He began to use this key position to promote a sectarian policy in line with his craving for personal power. He claimed the right to make all decisions, including the main appointments of cadres throughout the country.

He appointed yes-men to important posts, passing over men and women of great merit who had fought for the revolution but were not members of the PSP and did not subordinate themselves to him. Escalante was primarily interested in controlling the party and State Security apparatus. At the grassroots level, the party cells created as a result of these twisted concepts were weak, functioned apart from and behind the backs of the workers, and often confused their role with that of the state's administrative work.

This came to a head on March 13, 1962, during the traditional ceremony held on the anniversary of the attack by the Revolutionary Directorate on the Presidential Palace in 1957. Fidel Castro presided over the ceremony. The student leader who read José Antonio Echeverría's political testament left out his invocation of God's blessing on the action in which he gave his life. Because of the prevailing anti-religious sentiment, this had been crossed out. Speaking a few minutes later, Fidel criticized the omission as an example of the deviations that had been taking place.

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1. José Antonio Echeverría Bianchi (1932–57) was president of the Federation of University Students (FEU) and founder of the Revolutionary Directorate (DR). In 1956, with Fidel Castro, he signed the “Letter from Mexico.” He organized the March 13, 1957, attack on the Presidential Palace and headed the group that seized Radio Reloj, where he went on air to announce the expected execution of Batista. Minutes later, on his way back to the University of Havana, he was killed in a clash with Batista’s police.
On March 26, in a public address, Fidel considered the mistakes made by Aníbal Escalante and the others responsible for the sectarian policy and explained the decision of the national leadership of the ORI, which he headed, to rectify the process of the construction of the future United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba (PURS) by involving the masses.

He proposed workers’ assemblies to elect exemplary workers, from among whom the members of specially appointed commissions would select those who had the required merits and wanted to be members of the vanguard political organization.

This view of a party closely linked to the workers and the people—which would reflect the feelings of the masses and act in response to them; report back to the people on what it was doing; and, above all, be guided by the principles of merit and ability; a party that would be united politically and ideologically and would have an extensive democratic, disciplined and creative inner life—became the perspective guiding the party that was leading the Cuban revolution.

As Fidel explained, “This party was formed in the crucible of a revolutionary process from unity and ideas, unity and doctrine. We will always have to watch over these two things—unity and doctrine—because they are the main pillars of the party, and ensure that merit, revolutionary virtue, modesty and selflessness prevail within it. We must ensure that it always maintains close ties with the masses, from whom it must never be separated, because it exists for the masses, and it is the masses that bestow its prestige, authority and strength. Never above the masses; always with the masses and in the hearts of the people.”

The Communist Party of Cuba, which had around 800,000 members at the time of the 40th anniversary of the triumph of the revolution, is the fruit of that policy.

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It was logical that the revolution should concern itself with the problem of organizing its political apparatus, its revolutionary apparatus. And there began that whole process, which we have explained here on more than one occasion, through which the different forces that had participated in the [revolutionary] process, that represented the masses, the forces of ideas, the forces of public opinion, began to be integrated; it was those forces that represented experience, represented a wealth of values that the revolution had to integrate into a single organization…

So, has that whole process of the integration of the revolutionary forces been free of errors? No, it has not been free of errors. Could these errors have been avoided? It cannot be determined precisely up to what point these errors could have been avoided. My personal opinion is that those errors could not have been avoided…

One of the fundamental problems produced in the struggle against reactionary ideas, against conservative ideas, against the deserters, against the waiverers, against those with negative attitudes, was sectarianism. It may be said that this was the fundamental error produced by the ideological struggle that was being waged.

This type of error was produced by the conditions in which the revolutionary process developed, and by the serious and fundamental struggle that revolutionary ideas had to wage against conservative elements and against reactionary ideas.

What tendency was manifesting itself? An opposite tendency began to manifest itself: the tendency to mistrust everybody, the tendency to mistrust anyone who could not claim a long record of revolutionary militancy, who had not been an old Marxist militant. It is logical that in certain phases of this process—when a serious struggle of ideas was underway, when there was confusion, when there were many who wavered, if a compañero was to be named to a post of high trust, if it was a post in which an especially important job was to be done, a post requiring persons who were firm in
their ideas, that is to say, persons unaffected by doubt, who did not waver—it was correct to select a compañero about whom, because of their record of militancy, there existed not the least doubt regarding the steadfastness of their ideas, a compañero who entertained no doubts as to the course of the revolution...

But the revolution continued its forward march. The revolution became a powerful ideological movement. Revolutionary ideas slowly won the masses over. The Cuban people, in great numbers, began to accept revolutionary ideas, to uphold revolutionary ideas. This ardor, that rebelliousness, that sense of indignant protest against tyranny, against abuse, against injustice, was slowly converted into the firm revolutionary consciousness of our people...

If that was a self-evident truth, could we then apply methods that were applicable to other conditions? Could we convert that policy, which the struggle in a specific phase required, could we convert that into a system? Could we turn that policy into a system? Could we turn those methods for the selection of compañeros for various administrative posts into a system? We could not turn those methods into a system!

It is unquestionable—and dialectics teaches us this—that what is a correct method at a given moment, later on may be incorrect. Anything else is dogmatism, formalism. It is a desire to apply measures that were determined by our special needs at a given moment to another situation in which the needs are different, in which other circumstances prevail. And we turned certain methods into a system and we fell into frightful sectarianism.

What type of sectarianism? Well, the sectarianism of believing that the only revolutionaries, that the only compañeros who could hold positions of trust, that the only ones who could hold office on a people’s farm, in a cooperative, in the government, anywhere, had to be old Marxist militants. We fell into that error partly unconsciously, or at least it seemed that all those problems brought about by sectarianism were problems that were the product of unconscious forces, that they came about with a fatal inevitability, that it was a virus, that it was an evil that had become lodged in the minds of many people, and that it was difficult to combat...

The party was taking shape, or rather the ORI was taking shape, the ORI was being integrated. But, were we really forming a true Marxist party? Were we really constructing a true vanguard of the working class? Were we
really integrating the revolutionary forces?

We were not integrating the revolutionary forces. We were not organizing a party. We were organizing, creating or making a straitjacket, a yoke, compañeros. We were not furthering a free association of revolutionaries; rather we were forming an army of tamed and submissive revolutionaries…

The compañero who was authorized—it is not known whether he was invested with the authority or whether he assumed it of his own accord, or whether it was because he had slowly begun to assume leadership on that level, and as a result found himself in charge of the task of organizing, as the Organization Secretary of the ORI. The person who enjoyed everyone's confidence, who acted with the prestige given him by the revolution, who, while speaking with the authority of the revolution because he spoke in its name and in the name of the other compañeros of the revolution, the person who despite this regrettably fell—who most regrettably fell—into the errors we have been enumerating, was compañero Aníbal Escalante…

We reached the conclusion—we were all convinced—that compañero Aníbal Escalante, abusing the faith placed in him, in his post as Organization Secretary, followed a non-Marxist policy, a policy that departed from Leninist norms regarding the organization of a workers' vanguard party, and that he tried to organize an apparatus to pursue personal ends.

We believe that compañero Aníbal Escalante has had a lot to do with converting sectarianism into a system, with the conversion of sectarianism into a virus, into a veritable disease during this process.

Compañero Aníbal Escalante is responsible for having promoted the sectarian spirit to its highest possible level, for having promoted that sectarian spirit for personal reasons, with the purpose of establishing an organization that he controlled. He is responsible for introducing, in addition, methods within the organization that were leading to the creation, not of a party—as we were saying—but rather of a tyranny, a straitjacket.

We believe that Aníbal Escalante's actions in these matters were not the product of oversight nor were they unconscious, but rather that they were deliberate and conscious. He simply allowed himself to be blinded by personal ambition. And as a result, he created a series of problems, in a word, he created veritable chaos in the nation.

Why? It's very simple. The idea of organizing the United Party of the
Socialist Revolution, the idea of organizing a vanguard, a vanguard party, a workers’ party, is widely accepted among the masses. Marxism has the full support of the masses. Marxism-Leninism is the ideology of the Cuban people…

In such a situation, when all the people accept this principle, it was very easy to convert that apparatus, already accepted by the people, into an instrument for the pursuit of one’s personal ambitions. The prestige of the ORI was immense. Any order, any directive coming from the ORI was obeyed by all. But the ORI was not the ORI.

Compañero Aníbal Escalante had schemed to make himself the ORI. How? By the use of a very simple contrivance. Working from his post as Organization Secretary he would give instructions to all revolutionary cells and to the whole apparatus as if these instructions had come from the National Directorate. And he began to encourage them in the habit of receiving instructions from there, from the offices of the Organization Secretary of the ORI, instructions that were obeyed by all as if they had come from the National Directorate. But at the same time, he took advantage of the opportunity to establish a system of controls that would be completely under his command…

On the other hand, on the level of the Organization Secretary, it already was impossible for a minister to change an official or to change an administrator without having to call the office of the ORI, because of norms which this compañero—by deceiving government officials, by making them think that he was acting under instructions from the National Directorate—tried to establish, and succeeded in establishing to a large degree…

What is the function of the party? To orient. It orients on all levels, it does not govern on all levels. It fosters the revolutionary consciousness of the masses. It is the link with the masses. It educates the masses in the ideas of socialism and communism. It encourages the masses to work, to strong endeavor, to defend the revolution. It spreads the ideas of the revolution. It supervises, controls, guards, informs. It discusses what has to be discussed. But it does not have authority to appoint and to remove officials…

The nucleus has other tasks. Its tasks are different from those of state administration. The party directs; it directs through the party as a whole, and it directs through the governmental apparatus.

Today an official must have authority. A minister must have authority,
an administrator must have authority. They must be able to discuss whatever is necessary with the Technical Advisory Council. They must be able to discuss with the masses of workers, with the nucleus. Administrators must decide, the responsibility must be theirs.

The party, through its National Directorate, endows the administrative personnel with authority. But in order to demand an accounting from them, it must endow them with true authority. If it is the nucleus that decides, if it decides at the provincial level, or at the level of the workplace, or at the local level, how then can we make the minister responsible for these decisions? They cannot be made responsible if they have no power.

The minister has the power to appoint, to remove, to appoint within the norms established by the rules and the laws of the nation. But at the same time he or she is charged with responsibility, they are responsible to the political administration of the revolution for their actions, for their work. In a word, ministers must give an accounting of their stewardship. Now, to give an accounting one must have powers...

Was [Escalante’s] power real? No, it was not a real power; it was a power in form only; it was a fictitious power. There was no real power in that compañero’s hands. Fortunately, there was no real power! The real power did not rest there. The real power of the revolution cannot simply be usurped in that fashion. It cannot be circumvented in that way, compañeros. That is a ridiculous and idiotic attempt at circumvention!...

It was important to discuss this problem because it was vital to the revolution, fundamental for the revolution, simply because it was imperative to correct those errors, that incorrect and absurd policy, forced here into the midst of a revolutionary process filled with glory and greatness. The conditions that made possible such a state of affairs had to be rooted out and the conditions that permitted the organization and the functioning of a true workers’ vanguard party had to be created...

I believe sincerely and firmly in the principles of collective leadership, but no one forced me to do so; rather it came from a deep and personal conviction, a conviction to which I have known how to be true. I believe what I said on December 2: I believe in collective leadership; I believe that history is written by the masses, I believe that when the best opinions, the opinions of the most competent individuals, the most capable individuals, are discussed collectively, that they are cleansed of their vices, of their errors, of their
weaknesses, of their faults. I also believe that neither the history of nations, nor the lives of nations, should be dependent on individuals, on human beings, on personalities. I state that which I firmly believe…

How did this affect the masses? Well, clearly this discouraged the masses. Did this turn the masses against the revolution? No, the masses did not turn against the revolution, the masses are with the revolution and they will always be with the revolution, in spite of its errors. But this cooled the enthusiasm of the masses; this cooled the fervor of the masses.

How did this affect the political organization of the revolution? Very simply, compañeros. We were not creating an organization; I already said that we were preparing a yoke, a straitjacket. I’m going to go a little further—we were creating a mere shell of an organization. How? The masses had not been integrated. We speak here of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations. It was an organization composed of the militants of the Popular Socialist Party.

The rest of the organizations, the Revolutionary Directorate, the July 26 Movement, what were they? Were they organizations that had an old organized membership? No. They were organizations that had great mass support; they had overwhelming mass support. That is what the July 26 Movement was; that is what the other organizations were. They enjoyed great prestige, great popularity. These people were not organized into an organization.

If we are going to form a fused organization, and we do not integrate the masses, we will not be integrating anything, we will be falling into sectarianism just like we did.

Then how were the nuclei [units of the ORI] formed? I’m going to tell you how. In every province the general secretary of the PSP was made general secretary of the ORI, in all the nuclei, the general secretary of the PSP was made general secretary of the ORI; in every municipality, the general secretary of the PSP was made general secretary of the ORI; in every nucleus, the general secretary—the member of the PSP—was made general secretary of the nucleus. Is that what you would call integration? Aníbal Escalante is responsible for that policy…

Such sectarianism fosters anticommunism anew. What Marxist-Leninist mind could think of employing the methods employed when Marxism-Leninism was not in power, when it was completely surrounded and
isolated? To isolate oneself from the masses when one is in power—that
is madness. It is another matter to be isolated by the ruling classes, by the
exploiters, when the *latifundistas* and the imperialists are in power; but to
be divorced from the masses when the workers, the *campesinos*, when the
working class is in power, is a crime. Then sectarianism becomes counter-
revolutionary because it weakens and harms the revolution...

The best workers in the country should be members of the party. Who
are they? They are the model workers, the model laborers, who are in
abundant supply.

In other words, the first requirement for belonging to the nucleus is to
be a model worker. One cannot be a builder of socialism, or a builder of
communism, if one is not an outstanding worker. No vagrant, no idler, has
any right to be a member of a revolutionary nucleus.

Very well now, that is not enough. Our experience during the course
of this meeting has provided us with many interesting examples. One has
to be an exemplary worker, but in addition, one must accept the socialist
revolution; one must accept the ideology of the revolution; one must want,
of course, to belong to that revolutionary nucleus; one must accept the
responsibilities that go with membership in the revolutionary nucleus. But,
in addition, it is necessary to have led a clean life...

After all, the masses are not going to elect the nucleus; the party is not an
elected party. It is a “selection,” which is organized through the principle of
democratic centralism. Now, the opinion of the masses must be taken into
consideration. It is of the utmost importance that those who belong to that
revolutionary nucleus have the complete support of the masses, that they
enjoy great prestige among the masses...

How could we keep the masses out? How could we divorce ourselves
from the masses? There are many model workers among the old revolution-
aries who are recognized as such by the masses. There are others who are not
model workers. There is no reason why there should be disagreement with
this, because being a communist does not endow one with a hereditary title
or with a title of nobility. To be a communist means that one has a certain
attitude toward life, and that attitude has to be the same from the first day
until the moment of death. When that attitude is abandoned, even though
one has been a communist, it ceases to be a communist attitude toward life,
toward the revolution, toward one’s class, toward the people. If this is so, let
us then not convert [being a communist] into a hereditary title!…

What is the revolution? It is a great trunk that has its roots. Those roots, coming from different directions, were united in the trunk. The trunk begins to grow. The roots are important, but what begins to grow is the trunk of a great tree. All of us together made the trunk. The growing of the trunk is all that remains for us to foster and together we will continue to make it grow.

The day will come, compañeros—think well upon this, because this is fundamental, think well upon this—the day will come when what we have done in the past will be less important, when what each of us has done on his or her own account will be less important than what we have done together. Let us take this idea with us. Within 10 years, within 20 years, we will have the common history of having done this together, and then no one will be talking about what each one did on their own—in the Popular Socialist Party, in the July 26 Movement, in the Revolutionary Directorate, or in any other group. Then those things will be like distant roots that we have now gone far beyond. The important thing is what we are now doing as a single trunk, in which we are all united…

Rest assured, compañeros, that by achieving this our revolution will be invincible. Rest assured, compañeros, that by achieving this there will be no force in the world that will be able to defeat our revolution. And I repeat here what I said when we first reached the capital of the republic: “We have overcome our own obstacles. No enemies but ourselves, but our own errors, remain. Only our own errors will be able to destroy this revolution!”

I repeat this today, but I add that there will be no error that we will not rectify, and therefore there will be no error that will be able to destroy the revolution! There will be no errors that cannot be overcome, and that is why our revolution will be invincible.

19. october missile crisis

The Missile Crisis of October 1962 was one of the most serious events in the Cold War and brought the world to the brink of nuclear conflagration. Its causes can be found, first of all, in the US government’s plans—explicitly approved by the president—to carry out a series of actions against Cuba, including direct intervention by US armed forces.

As historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., acknowledged, “Certainly Castro had the best grounds for feeling under siege. Even if double agents had not told him the CIA was trying to kill him, Operation Mongoose left little doubt that the American government was trying to overthrow him. It would hardly have been unreasonable for him to request Soviet protection. But did he request Soviet missiles? The best evidence is that he did not. Castro’s aim was to deter American aggression by convincing Washington that an attack on Cuba would be the same as an attack on the Soviet Union. This did not require nuclear weapons.”

In fact, after the Bay of Pigs, Cuba was rushing through preparations for meeting a large-scale attack by the United States. Two agreements had been signed with the Soviet government on supplies of conventional weapons for Cuba’s army, air force and navy. The Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) were reorganized into the three units with the kinds of armed forces it now has, and were provided with more and better weapons.

On the other side of the Florida Straits, the US Armed Forces were also prepared, attaining an impressive level of soldiers and weaponry, and the details of various plans for an attack on Cuba were refined.

In this situation, in May 1962, it occurred to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev that nuclear missiles might be installed in Cuba. The military hierarchy of the Soviet Union supported the idea. A Soviet delegation including Marshal Sergei Biriuzov, head of the Strategic Missile Forces, went to Cuba on May 29 and presented the proposal to the leadership of the revolution, arguing the United States would only halt its plans if it knew that an attack on the island would mean a confrontation not only with conventional weapons but also with Soviet nuclear power.

Motivated not simply by his solidarity with Cuba, Khrushchev also revealed his characteristic shrewdness, seeking an advantage for the Soviet Union in the international balance of power.

In spite of the Soviet Union's repeated declarations that they had already achieved strategic response parity with the United States and the NATO bloc, this was not the case. If 42 medium- and intermediate-range missiles with nuclear warheads were installed in Cuba, the Soviets' situation would improve dramatically.

Fidel Castro and the other Cuban leaders did not like the idea, but finally agreed to accept the missiles, since this was a step that would strengthen socialism and constitute a gesture of solidarity with the Soviet Union, which was running great risks to defend Cuba's physical integrity.

Cuba's main reservations concerned not the dangers that the action implied but the political price Cuba might have to pay—how the other Latin American countries and the rest of the world would view the situation. Under the agreement with the Soviets, 48,000 Soviet soldiers with full technical support would be stationed in Cuba but would be directly subordinate to the government of the Soviet Union. In effect, this turned Cuba into a military base of the Soviet Union.

For Cuba, it was clear that the missiles were not absolutely necessary for the defense of the country and the revolution. The same results could have been attained with a public announcement of a military pact in which the Soviet Union proclaimed that a direct military attack on Cuba would be equivalent to an attack on the Soviet Union.

However, in spite of repeated urging by Cuba, the Soviets made the serious mistake of keeping the agreement secret. Later on, this gave the Kennedy administration a great advantage when US spy planes discovered the installation of missiles, enabling the United States to seize the military
OctobEr missiLe Crisis

The United States took advantage of the political and psychological circumstances and was able to present the world with its response as a legitimate reaction to lies and deceit.

The Soviet missile group was sent to Cuba in the summer of 1962. The medium-range missiles were installed and made operational, although the nuclear warheads were never attached, but remained in storage. The intermediate-range missiles were still on the high seas when the crisis broke out and were returned to the Soviet Union.

On October 14, a US spy plane took photographs of a missile emplacement near San Cristóbal, Pinar del Río province. During the next few days, although it was not aware of this, Cuba was in extreme danger while the US government examined various military options. On October 20, the US National Security Council decided to declare a naval blockade (which it called a “quarantine”) of Cuba and to take other—political, diplomatic and military—measures.

On October 22, Kennedy announced this decision publicly in a message to the nation. On the afternoon of that same day, Fidel Castro declared a combat alert for the FAR and the Cuban people. A total of 400,000 men and women took up arms in a calm and orderly way.

Those were the “brilliant, yet sad” days to which Che Guevara referred later. Tension reached a peak starting on October 26, when a massive air attack by the United States seemed imminent. The Cuban and Soviet troops’ morale was very high; they had received orders to fire on US planes making barnstorming flights over Cuban territory. Cuban batteries opened fire on October 27, and, that same day, an antiaircraft missile fired from a Soviet emplacement shot down a U-2 spy plane over northern Oriente province.

However, in the diplomatic negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States, in which Cuba did not participate, the Soviet leadership made more mistakes—in addition to those committed in the process of drawing up the agreement of military cooperation and mutual defense. The worst error was the October 28 accord, in which Khrushchev—without consulting or even informing the Cuban government—accepted Kennedy’s “compromise” of not attacking or invading the island if the construction of the installations was halted and the missiles were dismantled and returned to the Soviet Union.

Cuba was far from happy with this, since much more could have been achieved with a firm negotiating position that would have forced the United
States to discuss matters directly with Cuba and provide effective guarantees regarding its future. This was one of the roots of the differences that cooled Soviet-Cuban relations during the following years.

The Cuban revolution’s response to this fait accompli was expressed in the Five Points of Dignity, announced by Fidel on television on October 28, the same day as the US-Soviet accord. That night, in Santiago de Cuba, Raúl Castro emphasized, “We will never negotiate our rights and sovereignty. We will fight for them.”

THE FIVE POINTS OF DIGNITY

Read by Fidel Castro on Cuban television on October 28, 1962.

FIRST. The economic blockade and all of the other measures that the United States is taking all over the world to bring trade and economic pressure to bear against Cuba must cease.

SECOND. All subversive activities, airlifts and landings of arms and explosives by air and by sea, the organization of mercenary invasions, the sending of spies into our country illegally, and acts of sabotage—whether carried out from US territory or from that of accessory countries—must cease.

THIRD. The pirate attacks that are carried out from bases in the United States and Puerto Rico must cease.

FOURTH. All violations of Cuba’s airspace and territorial waters by US planes and warships must cease.

FIFTH. US troops must be withdrawn from the Guantánamo Naval Base, and that part of Cuban territory occupied by the United States must be returned.

Fidel Castro Ruz
Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government
We don’t constitute an obstacle to a peaceful solution, a truly peaceful solution. We are neither a warlike nor an aggressive nation. Ours is a peaceful nation, but being peaceful doesn’t mean allowing ourselves to be trampled upon. If anyone should try it, we will fight as much as need be to defend ourselves. The facts bear this out.

We will never constitute an obstacle to a truly peaceful solution. The prerequisites for a truly peaceful solution are the five-point guarantees set forth by the Cuban government.

We want the United States to start giving proof, not promises, of its good faith. Deeds, not words! It would be convincing if the United States were to return the territory it occupies at the Guantánamo Naval Base. That would be much more convincing than any words or promises.

And if the United States doesn’t agree to the guarantees that Cuba wants? Then there won’t be any truly peaceful solution, and we will have to keep on living with this tension that we have endured so far. We want peaceful solutions, but they must also be honorable. We are entitled to peace, a truly peaceful solution, and, sooner or later, we will get it, because we have won that right with our people’s spirit, resistance and honor…

They don’t let us work in peace. More than weapons, we want to use work tools. We want to create, not kill and destroy. Our people aren’t allowed to create and are constantly forced to mobilize, to place themselves on a war footing, to defend themselves, to be ready for anything. They are forced to do this; it isn’t that we want that policy. It’s a policy that the aggressors impose on our country. What our country wants is to work, to develop its resources, to develop its people, and to carry out its peaceful work.

We won’t accept just any old formula. We will accept any formula for peace that is truly honorable. I think that with such a formula, we wouldn’t be the only ones to benefit. Everyone would—the Americas, the rest of the
world, the United States. That is, even those responsible for this situation would benefit from a solution of honorable peace for our country...

In the course of this crisis, while this crisis was developing, some differences arose between the Soviet and Cuban governments, but I want to tell all Cubans one thing: This isn’t the place to discuss those problems, because discussing them here could help our enemies, who could benefit from such differences. We must discuss such things with the Soviets at the government and party levels; we have to sit down with them and discuss whatever is needed, using reason and principles; because, above all, we are Marxist-Leninists; we are friends of the Soviet Union. There will be no breach between the Soviet Union and Cuba.

I would like to say something else, too: We have confidence in the Soviet Union’s policy of principles, and we have confidence in the leadership of the Soviet Union—that is, in the government and in the party of the Soviet Union.

If my compatriots ask me for my opinion now, what can I tell them, what advice should I give them? In the midst of a confusing situation, where things haven’t been understood or not understood clearly, what should we do? I would say we must have confidence and realize that these international problems are extremely complex and delicate and that our people, who have shown great maturity, extraordinary maturity, should demonstrate that maturity now...

And, above all, there are some things that need to be said now, when some people may be annoyed because of misunderstandings or differences. It is good to remember, above all, what the Soviet Union has done for us in every one of the difficult moments we have had, what it has done to offset the economic attacks of the United States, the suppression of our sugar quota and the ending of oil shipments to our country. Every time the United States has attacked us—every time—the Soviet Union has extended its hand to us in friendship. We are grateful, and we should say so here, loud and clear...

The principal weapons used by our armed forces were sent to us by the Soviet Union, which hasn’t demanded payment for them.

A few months ago, the Soviet Union decided to cancel all of our country’s debt for weapons.
Some of these matters, of a military nature, must be treated with great care. However, I can tell you one thing: Cuba didn’t own the strategic weapons that were used for its defense. This isn’t the case with the tanks and a whole series of other weapons that do belong to us, but we didn’t own the strategic weapons.

The agreements covering their shipment to our country to strengthen our defenses in the face of threats of attack stated that those strategic weapons, which are very complex and require highly specialized personnel, would remain under the direction of Soviet personnel and would continue to belong to the Soviet Union. Therefore, when the Soviet government decided to withdraw those weapons, which belonged to them, we respected that decision. I’m explaining this so you will understand about their withdrawal…

Don’t think that the withdrawal of the strategic weapons will leave us unarmed. It doesn’t mean that we will be unarmed.

We have impressive—very powerful—means of defense, extraordinary resources with which to defend ourselves. The strategic weapons are leaving, but all the other weapons will stay in our country. They are an extremely powerful means of defense, with which we can handle any situation that may arise. Don’t misunderstand this.

Little by little, the confusion will disappear.

There is one thing that I would like to emphasize today, an appreciation that I would like to express, which refers to the people, to the way the people have behaved during the past few days. The people’s attitude, in terms of determination, courage and discipline, has been more impressive than even the greatest optimists could ever have imagined…

Such a nation is invincible!

Such a nation, whose people confront such difficult situations so serenely and admirably, is a nation that has the right to get what it desires, which is peace, respect, honor and prestige.

We have long-range moral missiles that cannot and will never be dismantled. They are our most powerful strategic weapons, for both defense and attack.

That is why, here and now, I want to express my admiration for the Cuban people. Based on this experience, all revolutionaries feel doubly
obliged to struggle and work tirelessly for our people. In closing, I would like to say, from the bottom of my heart, that today I am prouder than ever before of being a son of this nation.

20. HURRICANE FLORA

At the end of September 1963, a tropical storm developed over the Atlantic Ocean east of the Lesser Antilles. On October 4, having attained the force of a hurricane and now named Flora (the sixth hurricane of the year), it was over the Windward Passage, and heavy rain began to scourge a large part of the mountain areas of what was then Oriente province.

During the next six days, the hurricane followed one of the most erratic courses recorded in the history of hurricanes in Cuba.

Moving slowly—sometimes nearly stationary—the hurricane moved into the middle of Oriente province, looped around the Cauto Valley, advanced along the length of that vast plain, emerged near Manzanillo on the southern coast, went into the Gulf of Guacanayabo, turned north again, entered Camagüey province, turned east, headed back to Oriente province and finally left Cuba for the Florida Straits between Gibara and Lucrecia Point.

It was not Flora’s winds but the heavy rainfall that caused the worst damage. In some places, 29 inches (735 millimeters) of rain fell in 24 hours, and totals of up to 63 inches (1,600 millimeters) were recorded during the hurricane.

An enormous mass of water accumulated in the Sierra Maestra mountains, at the headwaters of the Cauto and its main tributaries, and in the mountains in the northern part of Oriente province, which also feed into that watershed. Like an avalanche, this water came crashing down to the plains, overflowing the banks of the rivers and dragging everything along in its path. Such towns as Cauto el Paso, Cauto Embarcadero and Guamo, along the lower reaches of the Cauto, were the worst hit. Later, the farmers who survived remembered having heard a roar like deafening thunder in the night, followed by the sound of the water which, in a matter of minutes, swallowed up houses, people, animals and crops.

The very mountains were molded by Flora’s passage. Landslides buried
entire families and changed the course of the rivers.

The leaders of the Cuban revolution, headed by Fidel Castro and other Rebel Army commanders, were in charge of operations to try to save as many lives as possible. Fleets of helicopters from the Revolutionary Armed Forces played a key role in saving people who were isolated, sitting on the roofs of their houses or clinging to the branches of trees that surfaced out of the immense sea of muddy water that had once been the plains of the Cauto, waiting to be rescued. The crews of amphibious vehicles also performed an important role. Riding on one of those combat vehicles, Fidel went into the heart of the flooded area to get a clear idea of just how bad the catastrophe was, to direct the work on the spot and to inspire by his example those taking part in the rescue operation and the people as a whole.

When the water finally subsided the final toll was around 1,200 dead and damage worth hundreds of millions of pesos.

Subjected to the tight blockade and to an undeclared war by the CIA, the country thus had to face one of the worst tragedies in its history—both in terms of the number of lives lost and the amount of material damage done. Far from easing the blockade or offering any assistance to the Cuban people, political circles in Washington and Miami greeted the news with rejoicing. As before, help came mainly from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

Flora was not just a terrible blow dealt by nature; it was also a useful experience. It led to the water projects program: the building of dams along the main rivers, in the Cauto Valley and other parts of the country, in order to prevent future flooding and to use the water for the benefit of the population as well as agriculture.

A REVOLUTION IS A FORCE STRONGER THAN NATURE

Excerpts from Fidel Castro’s speech on Hurricane Flora’s damage in Oriente and Camagüey provinces, October 22, 1963.

The scenes of the people’s pain and suffering can never be forgotten. From the human point of view, they constitute a terrible tragedy. As I have
already said, nobody could imagine anything worse than what has happened. Everything that anyone with a lively imagination could invent has happened, and even more serious things, too. Extraordinary things have become daily occurrences for the people.

I was afraid there would be enormous numbers of victims, in spite of the evacuation. Large numbers of people were evacuated before and even during the hurricane. Even so, I thought there would be a large number of victims. Why? Because nobody thought that some of the people who were in danger would be at risk.

Naturally, people who live in places where the river has reached before are always evacuated, as are those in places near the sea and in low-lying areas. We had the experience of what happened in Santa Cruz del Sur. Of course, the measures that were taken were mainly aimed at reducing the possible effects of rip tides in all areas close to the sea. The people living in towns in low-lying areas were evacuated, but the worst danger came from floods, which reached record levels. That is, there was a rip tide, but it came from the mountains rather than the sea—a rip tide that came from inland...

We still do not know exactly how many victims there are, because new casualties are still being reported. At the time I received those reports—October 20—the party had confirmed a total of 1,126 victims in Oriente province. Naturally, the total will be larger, because of the people who have not yet been located. Little by little, they are being found—some dead and others alive. There may be hundreds more victims...

I had the opportunity to learn the details of some cases. For example, there was a farm family that had two little houses—the parents in one, and the children in the other. They were separated. The father says he saw the house where the children were beginning to crack, so he swam over and made a hole in the roof so the children could get out. Then he saw something in the other house and went back there. When he looked back at the children’s house, which contained three of his children, a cousin and some other people—around six or seven in all—he saw that the water was carrying it away...

Then he set out to swim after the house, and his wife started swimming, too. After a mile, they managed to catch up with it. It was caught in some trees. The father got there first, and then the mother. They practically tore their hands to pieces cutting wire. Then he tied the house, which was
floating, to the trees there, and they got in the house and held out for three
days.

It’s certain that, if they had not done what they did, the children would
have died, because everything would have been too much for them. The
current would have kept dragging them off, and they would have grown
weak. The parents—especially the father, because the wife was very weak—
were able to save the children’s lives because they defended and protected
them. Just imagine what it must have been like at night, those interminable
nights with the rain coming down all the time; cold, hunger and trauma
must have made the children very weak. They stayed there for three days,
but they saved the children’s lives.

Then they went back home where, they said, they had around 200
animals: chickens and pigs. They lost all of them, all their clothes and the
furniture…

When it became possible for helicopters to fly in, even at great risk, they
went into action. The helicopters did a tremendous job. They are marvelous
things for situations such as this…

Really, everybody made a terrific effort. The regional committees and
grass-roots committees of our party in the two provinces did an incredible,
extraordinary job and inspired everybody else to do great things, too. Every­
body did their utmost. Those who could do more, such as the helicopter
pilots, did more. The pilots and mechanics, who knew the importance of
the humanitarian service they were providing, worked indefatigably. It
reminded me of the spirit of the men in the Air Force at the time of the Bay
of Pigs invasion: the pilots’ courage; the nonstop efforts of the mechanics,
who did not rest for a minute, carrying and repairing equipment; and the
people’s attitude…

It can be said that the human solidarity that was achieved there, under
those circumstances, reached its highest peak—a most incredible and in­
conceivable level of human solidarity. If anyone should say that the revol­
tion has done nothing but produce this kind of person—who has been
produced in the conditions of the revolution—and develop this feeling of
solidarity among human beings, this alone would justify the revolution.
What happened there was the opposite of selfishness, of everybody inter­
ested only in saving themselves and solving their own problems. There,
everybody helped everybody else, as if they were sons and daughters and
brothers and sisters. They were in a battle with nature, and their deter­mination, courage, stoicism and calmness—even of those who lost every­thing—was impressive...

A revolution is a force stronger than nature. Hurricanes and things like that are nothing compared to what a revolution can do. A revolution has a power much greater than those of natural phenomena and cataclysms. A revolution is a social upheaval; it is a powerful people’s movement that flows over everything and can sweep away whatever is in its way, including all obstacles. That is a revolution. We know this, and we are calm. Some people do not know this and get frightened. They are frightened just as much by the revolution as by what might happen when they have problems. And then there are the enemies of the revolution, who have illusions. They shut their eyes to reality and never see things as they are...

Here, two upheavals have clashed: the social one—the revolution—and the other—nature. The revolution will emerge victorious. There is no doubt about that...

We will do something to compensate those who have suffered losses and to help the families. We will wage a veritable battle with nature in order to protect our country against such misery and pain and to turn what is now a center of desolation, devastation and death into a center of incalculable wealth for our country. Of course, the whole country will reap the benefits. That is what our response should be, one of honor... In short, what we intend to do is build dams on all the rivers: the Cauto, the Contramaestre, the Mayari, those in the Guantánamo Valley and all their tributaries. We will build dams on all the rivers, and there will be no more floods. When there is torrential rain, instead of causing problems, it will be a good thing for the country, because then we will fill all the reservoirs and have plenty of water, so we can irrigate the agricultural regions.

21. SOLIDARITY WITH VIETNAM

On December 20, 1963, the third anniversary of the founding of the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam, Ernesto Che Guevara raised the urgent need for solidarity with Vietnam, in view of the escalating war in Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War had a greater influence on the Cuban people’s consciousness than any other international event of the past five decades. Day by day, the war was a great school in which millions of Cubans watched, almost as if in a movie, what would happen to their country if US armed forces launched a direct attack.

During more than 14 years—from December 20, 1960, when the liberation movement began in South Vietnam, to April 30, 1975, when the United States and its puppet regime were defeated—solidarity with the Vietnamese people’s cause was an important part of Cubans’ lives.

Vietnam was a relatively small, poor country that stood up with impressive dignity and heroism against a big political and military power, which turned its territory into a proving ground for the most cruel practices—“strategic hamlets,” chemical warfare, carpet bombing with B-52s, napalm, torture and the mass murder of women and children. Vietnam was palpable proof that it was possible to oppose and defeat the invaders, and this was an encouraging message for revolutionaries in Cuba.

Moreover, Cubans felt that the Vietnamese were fighting for Cuba, too. There was no doubt that, by drawing off US military, political and diplomatic efforts for an extended period—forcing the empire to concentrate most of its resources in distant Indochina—Vietnam generously gave Cuba the time it needed to grow stronger, to become better organized and to keep the ever-present threat of direct US aggression at bay.

Fidel Castro stated, “We are willing to give even our lives for Vietnam.”
Vietnam did not ask for help in the form of fighters, but Cubans helped to build the Ho Chi Minh Trail; Cuban doctors went to alleviate the terrible wounds of the war; and Cuban sailors took their ships loaded with sugar and other products to Vietnam’s blockaded and bombed ports.

What Vietnam needed, above all, was solidarity. The unequal struggle in which that nation was engaged was taking place in the difficult circumstances of the split in the international revolutionary and communist movement, which often meant Vietnam became a hostage and victim of the conflict between the main socialist nations (China and the Soviet Union). Thus, it was obvious that the liberation struggles of other peoples in Asia, Africa and Latin America could and should be the best response to the sacrifices that Vietnam was making for humanity.

In his famous “Message to the Peoples of the World,” published in Tricontinental magazine, Ernesto Che Guevara wrote:

This is the painful reality: Vietnam, a nation representing the aspirations and hopes for victory of the dispossessed of the world, is tragically alone. This people must endure the pounding of US technology—in the south almost without defenses, in the north with some possibilities of defense—but always alone.

The solidarity of the progressive world with the Vietnamese people has something of the bitter irony of the plebeians cheering on the gladiators in the Roman circus. To wish the victim success is not enough; one must share his or her fate. One must join that victim in death or in victory.

When we analyze the isolation of the Vietnamese we are overcome by anguish at this illogical moment in the history of humanity. US imperialism is guilty of aggression. Its crimes are immense, extending over the whole world. We know this, gentlemen! But also guilty are those who, at the decisive moment, hesitated to make Vietnam an inviolable part of socialist territory—yes, at the risk of a war of global scale, but also compelling the US imperialists to make a decision. And also guilty are those who persist in a war of insults and tripping each other up, begun quite some time ago by the representatives of the two biggest powers in the socialist camp.

Let us ask, seeking an honest answer: Is Vietnam isolated or not, as it tries to maintain a dangerous balancing act between the two quarrelling powers?

1. The first Tricontinental Conference of Solidarity was an initiative of Cuba and held in Havana January 13–15, 1966. It led to the creation of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL).
And what greatness has been shown by this people! What a stoic and courageous people! And what a lesson for the world their struggle holds...

What is the role that we, the exploited of the world, must play?

The peoples of three continents are watching and learning a lesson for themselves in Vietnam. Since the imperialists are using the threat of war to blackmail humanity, the correct response is not to fear war. Attack hard and without letup at every point of confrontation—that must be the general tactic of the peoples...

Latin America, a continent forgotten in the recent political struggles for liberation, is beginning to make itself felt through the Tricontinental in the voice of the vanguard of its peoples: the Cuban revolution. Latin America will have a much more important task: the creation of the world’s second or third Vietnam, or second and third Vietnam...

How close and bright would the future appear if two, three, many Vietnams flowered on the face of the globe, with their quota of death and their immense tragedies, with their daily heroism, with their repeated blows against imperialism, forcing it to disperse its forces under the lash of the growing hatred of the peoples of the world!

And if we were all capable of uniting in order to give our blows greater strength and certainty, so that the aid of all kinds to the peoples in struggle was even more effective—how great the future would be, and how near!2

VIETNAM WILL BE REUNITED


Compañeros of the South Vietnam National Liberation Front, compañero ambassador of the Republic of Vietnam, the revolutionary government and the United Party of the Revolution have asked me to salute, in their name, and in the name of the people of Cuba, the liberation struggle of the South Vietnamese people and the third anniversary of the armed struggle for the liberation of your country.

The struggle of the Vietnamese people has been fought for many years now, because we cannot consider the people of Vietnam in the framework of the artificial division that was established following the Geneva Accords. Even when the whole of Vietnam was part of the French colonial empire and was known in our geography books as Indochina, the people’s forces had already begun a long struggle for liberation...

We are unable to say how long this struggle is going to last. These struggles take a long time, and are processes that are sometimes, or almost always, very slow, involving great sacrifices. Nevertheless, the people’s forces keep increasing geometrically, and almost as soon as these forces come together to give a small margin to the people’s party, the solutions rapidly fall into place.

This is what happened in our country of Cuba, and it also happened in North Vietnam, and it happened, too, in the long, long war of national liberation that finally resulted in the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.

There comes a point when all the people’s forces become so powerful that they can move immediately into a large-scale offensive, transform their guerrilla forces into regular or semi-regular armies and move from simple guerrilla actions to the operational tactics of a military column. At that point they soon destroy the power of the oppressor.

We do not know when we will be able to salute the definitive liberation of South Vietnam. We will never be able to say when each one of the peoples who are struggling today, their weapons in their hands, fighting for their freedom, will attain their liberation. What we do know is that the result will certainly be the liberation of the people. And the more energy, the more enthusiasm, and the more faith the people put into this, the shorter the time that the population will have to suffer the violence of the oppressor.

Some months ago, conditions in South Vietnam became such that the United States decided to make changes in the team they had in power. The dictator of the moment did not want to accept this, so yet again the United States provided us with an example of what happens to puppets who, at some point, do not obey orders. From what the news agencies informed us, it seems that the dictator Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother died in what was described as an “accidental suicide.” More or less the same thing happened, in our part of the world, to Trujillo [in the Dominican Republic] when he also
refused to be pushed around in opportunistic deals made by the imperial power when their protégés no longer serve any purpose.

This indicates, however, that the situation is getting out of control for the forces of oppression in South Vietnam, and our compañeros in the National Liberation Front have stated this clearly. There are various options for imperialism. There are signs that the present strategy of using South Vietnamese troops (with only a special team of US advisors) for repression and torture is impossible to maintain. There is the other alternative of a direct invasion of South Vietnam and the massive use of Yankee expeditionary forces...

Today, when with great enthusiasm we salute the cause of Vietnam, we are not doing it merely in the interests of proletarian internationalism, and for the love of justice that the revolution has inculcated in all of us. We are also doing so because this front of the struggle is supremely important for the entire future of America.

There in Vietnam, they are training the forces that one day might overcome our guerrillas—the guerrillas we have throughout our American territory. There, they are testing all the new weapons for extermination and the most modern techniques for fighting against the freedom of our peoples. Right now, South Vietnam is the great laboratory of Yankee imperialism where they are preparing all their teams for a future struggle, even more impressive and more significant, if that is possible, than what we have already seen, and this is going to occur in the backyard of their colonial possession, in Latin America.

They know that if this struggle today has a victorious finale it will also mean the end of US imperialism. This is why they are giving it so much attention; and it goes without saying that South Vietnam has a strategic importance as an operational base for attacking the entire flank of the socialist bloc in Asia. These two strategic characteristics ensure that South Vietnam is classified as one of the most serious problems confronting the new Yankee administration and, right now, they are doubtless making an analysis of what they should do.

Nobody should believe that there will be any easy progress toward a real and democratic formula for peace that—without delay—would permit the Vietnamese people to achieve victory, to become united into one nation, and to move actively, as their brothers in the north have already done, into
constructing socialism over the legacy of backwardness that was left them by colonialism.

The oppressors are thinking about other tactics and in a different strategic direction. What will their decision be? We cannot know this yet, but we do foresee a long struggle and great suffering for the heroic people of South Vietnam—in other words, the same as we foresee for all peoples who are fighting for their freedom.

Nonetheless, the vigorous presence of the Vietnamese liberation forces, their constant successes, their continuous advance toward the most heavily defended zones of the enemy, represent an example that all the peoples of the world are absorbing. Our mission here in Cuba is to take this living example, to incarnate it here among our people because of the justice it represents and for what it means as an integral part of the whole great fraternal spirit among the oppressed peoples of the world; and to transmit this example, by whatever means possible, to the oppressed peoples of America to demonstrate how, in all continents, it is possible to fight for the emancipation of the people. And we wish to show our peoples of America even more than this, and that is, when the peaceful conditions for this struggle are exhausted, when the reactionary powers deceive the people again and again, not only is it possible to raise the flag of revolution—the flag of revolution must be raised...

They are trying to destroy Cuba today in order to destroy the “bad example,” and they certainly think, if they won, they would wipe out everything this government has done, all our conquests in the social field, along with all the representatives of this government. We all know this very well. This is why our struggle is a fight to the death. The people of South Vietnam know this, too.

There is no alternative but victory. Otherwise, it is the devastation of years and years of imperialist power, with the oppressed countries firmly under the boot.

Therefore, the struggle must be well thought out, must be properly mature but, once it is begun, it must be seen through to the end. Deals cannot be made and neither can there be any compromises.

Making peace that only partly guarantees the stability of a country cannot be done either. Victory must be total. It is with this understanding that our people remain ready to fight. It was with the same understanding that the
people of Algeria were prepared to fight for seven years. And, with this conviction, the people of South Vietnam are ready to fight today. Although it may not seem possible, there are also some advantages: They have the support of their brothers and sisters in North Vietnam, nearer to them than anyone else, and they have the example of what a tireless battle of a people for their freedom means. In other words, they have the example of their brothers and sisters who fought for nine years to rid themselves of the yoke of French colonialism. They have the present example of North Vietnam as a contrast to what South Vietnam is now undergoing.

With all of this, their faith must be even deeper, their belief that they will win still greater. Because of all of this, we know—as our compañero delegate has already stated—that, whatever kind of fighting is resorted to by US imperialism, the end result will be victory in South Vietnam and the reunification of the whole country.

To bring to an end this week’s festivities held to celebrate the third anniversary of the foundation of the National Liberation Front, we send our greetings to our brothers and sisters, the people of South Vietnam, as our brothers and sisters in struggle, as our exemplary compañeros in these difficult moments of world history. And, even more than this, they are our colleagues, like soldiers in the vanguard, in the frontline trenches of the fight of the proletarians of the world against imperialism.

For all these reasons, when we come together here to send our greetings to the Vietnamese people, we are greeting our true brothers and sisters, we are opening our arms to men and women who, in a far-away part of the world, are fighting for our security and who are fighting for the common yearning that unites the peoples of the three oppressed continents of today: Asia, Africa and Latin America.

22. FORMATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CUBA

October 3, 1965, was an important date in the process of unifying the Cuban revolutionary forces and the people as a whole. On that evening, the secretaries of all the United Party of the Socialist Revolution (PURS) cells met in the Chaplin Theater (later renamed the Karl Marx Theater) to be consulted about the main agreements reached by the leadership of the revolution and the main cadres of the party in the preceding days.

The first Central Committee of the political organization leading the people and the revolutionary government had been created on October 1. The Political Bureau of the party had also been established on that day, headed by Fidel and Raúl Castro, as first and second secretaries, respectively.

This was the result of the process of radical rectification of the sectarian methods that had been employed in building the ORI cells, a process begun in March 1962. This involved searching among the workers for the men and women with the greatest merit and selecting from among them those who, because of their vanguard attitude, their ideas and actions, deserved the honor of being members of the new party.

As Fidel Castro later commented, “From this time on, we would act as a single organization, under a cohesive leadership. The brilliant ideas of Martí and Lenin on the need for a party to direct the revolution were more palpable than ever before. Its ideology could not be liberal or bourgeois; rather, it would be that of the revolutionary social class that history itself had placed at the head of the struggle for the liberation of humanity, the working
class: Marxism-Leninism, which Baliño\(^1\) and Mella\(^2\) had already propounded courageously in 1925.

“This ideology was historically linked with the aspirations of the heroic mambi fighters for Cuba’s independence in the 19th century. The only difference was that, now, the nation’s enemy was US imperialism, and its social enemy, the modern advocates of slavery: foreign monopolies, large landowners and the bourgeoisie. This ideology linked the national struggle with the world revolutionary movement, which was essential for our people’s national and social liberation. The building of a Marxist-Leninist party, which now heads the revolution and guarantees its continuity, was one of the greatest accomplishments of our people in that historic period.”\(^3\)

The leaders who met on October 3 approved the new name—the Communist Party of Cuba—by acclamation. Fidel had proposed this at the first meeting of the Central Committee.

Fidel asked that the party be given “a name that implies the absolute unity of the entire people and, at the same time, expresses the final goals of our revolution. This is why I suggested it be called the Communist Party of Cuba. The imperialists do not like this, so we will give them a triple dose…”\(^4\)

The moment of greatest emotion in the ceremony came when Fidel referred to “the absence in our Central Committee of one who has all the merits and all the virtues—and in the highest degree—required for belonging to it.”

For several months, the international press had been speculating about the disappearance from Cuban public life of Ernesto Che Guevara, president of the National Bank. Now, Fidel revealed the news that had remained secret. In a voice charged with emotion, he read the letter Che had written to him on

\(^{1}\) Carlos Baliño, together with José Martí, founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) in 1892; in 1925, he founded the first Communist Party of Cuba.

\(^{2}\) Julio Antonio Mella (1903–29) was a student leader and communist who headed the struggle for university reform in 1923. He was also one of the 13 delegates who founded the Communist Party of Cuba. Opposing the Machado dictatorship, he went into exile in Mexico, where he continued his revolutionary and internationalist activities. He was assassinated by agents of the Machado dictatorship on January 10, 1929.


\(^{4}\) Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro, Selección de discursos, 47–8.
leaving Cuba to do what he believed his duty: to struggle against imperialism in other parts of the world. At the time the letter was made public in Havana, the Argentine revolutionary had been at a base in the Congo (Kinshasa) for several months, leading the contingent of Cuban combatants who had gone to that part of Africa to support the liberation movements fighting against Moise Tshombe’s pro-imperialist regime.

Thus, the process of political unification and internal strengthening of the revolution was firmly linked to the idea and practice of internationalist solidarity. This would continue to be the case in the years to come.

**WE ARE ON THE ROAD TO A COMMUNIST SOCIETY**


The whole country received the news of the formation of our Central Committee with joy and enthusiasm. The names and the histories of the compañeros who form this committee are very well known. If all of them are not known to everyone, all of them are known to a significant and important number of the people. We have tried to choose those who, in our judgment, represent to the fullest extent the history of the revolution. Those who, in the fight for the revolution as well as in the fight to consolidate, defend and develop the revolution, have worked and fought hard and tirelessly.

There is no heroic period in the history of our revolution that is not represented here. There is no sacrifice, there is no combat, no feat—either military or civilian, heroic or creative—that is not represented. There is no revolutionary or social sector that is not represented. I am not speaking of organizations. When I speak of a sector, I speak of the workers, I speak of the youth, I speak of the farmers, I speak of our mass organizations...

The list of compañeros of the Revolutionary Armed Forces would be endless due to their history both before and after the triumph as outstanding revolutionaries, as tireless workers, as examples of self-improvement in their studies, cultural development, cultural and political level—compañeros of extraordinary modesty, in whose hands the defense of the nation has
principally rested during these seven dangerous and threat-filled years.

It is not necessary to speak about the best known. That does not mean that they are the only heroes of the nation. No, far from it! Fortunately our country has innumerable heroes and, above all, a mass of new compañeros now being developed, who will some day—without a doubt—demonstrate their sense of responsibility and honor.

If we ask ourselves whether we have left anyone out, of course we have to answer in the affirmative.

It would be impossible to form a Central Committee of 100 revolutionary compañeros without leaving out many compañeros. What is important is not those who have been left out. They will come later. What is important are those who are there, and what they represent. We know that the party and the people have received the formation of this committee with satisfaction.

This committee, which met yesterday, reached several agreements: First, it ratified the measure adopted by the former national leadership. It ratified the Political Bureau, the Secretariat and the work commissions, as well as the compañero elected as organization secretary. The committee also reached two important agreements that had been submitted by the former national leadership [of the party].

One related to our official organ. Instead of publishing two newspapers of a political nature, we are going to concentrate all human resources, all resources in equipment and paper on establishing a single morning paper of a political nature, in addition to the newspaper _El Mundo_, which is not exactly a political organ. We will concentrate all our resources and we will establish a new newspaper. It will be called _Granma_, the symbol of our revolutionary concepts and goals.

An even more important agreement refers to the name of our party. Our first name was ORI, which stood for Integrated Revolutionary Organizations. During the first stage in the uniting of all the revolutionary forces this had its positive and negative aspects. Later we became the United Party of the Socialist Revolution (PURS), which constituted an extraordinary step forward, an extraordinary step ahead in the creation of our political apparatus. This effort took three years during which time innumerable valuable individuals emerged from the inexhaustible source that the people and the workers constitute to form what we are today—not only in number, but
essentially in quality. The name United Party of the Socialist Revolution says a lot, but not everything.

The name United Party suggests something that is in need of uniting, it still reminds us a little bit of the origin of each part. We consider that we have now reached that level in which all shades and all types of origin distinguishing one revolutionary from another must disappear forever. Since we have already arrived at that fortunate stage of history in which our revolutionary process has only one type of revolutionary, and since it is necessary for the name of our party to show not what we were yesterday, but what we will be tomorrow, what name should our party have now? Yes, the Communist Party of Cuba!

That is the name that in view of the development of our party, of the revolutionary consciousness of its members and the objectives of our revolution, was adopted by the first Central Committee meeting yesterday…

We are on the road toward a communist society. And if the imperialists don’t like it, they can lump it.

From now on, gentlemen of UPI and AP, understand that when you call us “communists,” you are giving us the greatest compliment you can give.

Absent from our Central Committee is someone who possesses in the highest degree all the necessary merits and virtues to be included, but who, nevertheless, is not among those announced as members of our Central Committee.

The enemy has conjured up a thousand conjectures. The enemy has tried to sow confusion, to spread discord and doubt, and we have waited patiently because it was necessary to wait…

In short, the moral spectacle of our adversaries is truly lamentable. The soothsayers, the pundits, the specialists on the Cuba question have been working incessantly to unravel the mystery: Has Ernesto Guevara been purged? Is Ernesto Guevara sick? Does Ernesto Guevara have differences? And things of this sort.

Naturally, the people have confidence, the people have faith. But the enemy uses these things, especially abroad, to slander us. Here, they say, is a frightening, terrible communist regime: people disappear without a trace, without a sign, without an explanation. When the people began to notice his
absence, we told them that we would inform them at the appropriate time, and that there were reasons for waiting.

We live and work surrounded by the forces of imperialism. The world does not live under normal conditions. As long as the criminal bombs of the US imperialists fall on the people of Vietnam, we cannot say we live under normal conditions. When more than 100,000 US soldiers land there to try to crush the liberation movement; when the soldiers of imperialism land in a republic that has legal rights equal to those of any other republic in the world, to trample its sovereignty, as in the case of the Dominican Republic, the world doesn’t live under normal conditions. When the imperialists are surrounding our country, training mercenaries and organizing terrorist attacks in the most shameless manner, as in the case of [the attack by counterrevolutionary Cuban exiles on the Spanish merchant ship] Sierra Aránzazu, when the imperialists threaten to intervene in any country in Latin America or in the world, we do not live under normal conditions.

When we fought in the underground against the Batista dictatorship, revolutionaries who did not live under normal conditions had to abide by the rules of the struggle. In the same way—even though a revolutionary government exists in our country—so far as the realities of the world are concerned, we do not live under normal conditions, and we have to abide by the rules of that situation.

To explain this I am going to read a letter, handwritten and later typed, from compañero Ernesto Guevara, which is self-explanatory. I was wondering whether I needed to describe our friendship and comradeship, how it began and under what conditions it began and developed, but that’s not necessary. I’m going to confine myself to reading the letter.

It reads as follows: “Havana...” It has no date, because the letter was intended to be read at what we considered the most appropriate moment, but to be strictly accurate it was delivered April 1 of this year—exactly six months and two days ago. It reads:
At this moment I remember many things: when I met you in the house of [Cuban revolutionary] María Antonia, when you proposed I come along, all the tensions involved in the preparations [for the Granma expedition]. One day, they came and asked me who should be notified in case of death, and the real possibility of that fact struck us all. Later, we knew it was true that in a revolution one wins or dies (if it is a real one). Many compañeros fell along the way to victory.

Today everything has a less dramatic tone, because we are more mature. But the event repeats itself. I feel that I have fulfilled the part of my duty that tied me to the Cuban revolution in its territory, and I say goodbye to you, to the compañeros, to your people, who now are mine.

I formally resign my positions in the leadership of the party, my post as minister, my rank of commander, and my Cuban citizenship. Nothing legal binds me to Cuba. The only ties are of another nature—those that cannot be broken as can appointments to posts.

Recalling my past life, I believe I have worked with sufficient integrity and dedication to consolidate the revolutionary triumph. My only serious failing was not having had more confidence in you from the first moments in the Sierra Maestra, and not having understood quickly enough your qualities as a leader and a revolutionary.

I have lived magnificent days, and at your side I felt the pride of belonging to our people in the brilliant yet sad days of the Caribbean [missile] crisis. Seldom has a statesman been more brilliant than you in those days. I am also proud of having followed you without hesitation, of having identified with your way of thinking and of seeing and appraising dangers and principles.

Other nations of the world call for my modest efforts. I can do that which is denied you because of your responsibility at the head of Cuba, and the time has come for us to part.

I want it known that I do so with a mixture of joy and sorrow. I leave
here the purest of my hopes as a builder and the dearest of my loved ones. And I leave a people who received me as a son. That wounds a part of my spirit. I carry to new battlefronts the faith that you taught me, the revolutionary spirit of my people, the feeling of fulfilling the most sacred of duties: to fight against imperialism wherever one may be. This comforts and more than heals the deepest wounds.

I state once more that I free Cuba from any responsibility, except that which stems from its example. If my final hour finds me under other skies, my last thought will be of this people and especially of you. I am thankful for your teaching, your example, and I will try to be faithful up to the final consequences of my actions.

I have always been identified with the foreign policy of our revolution, and I continue to be. Wherever I am, I will feel the responsibility of being a Cuban revolutionary, and I shall behave as such. I am not sorry that I leave nothing material to my wife and children. I am happy it is that way. I ask nothing for them, as the state will provide them with enough to live on and to have an education.

I have many things to say to you and to our people, but I feel they are unnecessary. Words cannot express what I would want them to, and I don’t think it is worthwhile to keep scribbling pages.

Ever onward to victory!

Homeland or death!

I embrace you with all my revolutionary fervor.

Che

Those who speak of revolutionaries, those who consider revolutionaries as cold, insensitive and unfeeling people, will have in this letter the example of all the feeling, all the sensitivity, all the purity that can be held within a revolutionary soul.

From mid-September 1967, the international wire services carried disquieting reports stating that the Bolivian army might be laying a tactical siege around the tiny guerrilla group that Ernesto Che Guevara commanded in the mountains in southeastern Bolivia.

Using information obtained from captured prisoners, the Bolivian military regime was already certain that Che and other Cuban combatants were with the Bolivian revolutionaries in the guerrilla group that had begun armed actions in a jungle area near Ñancahuazú on March 23 of that year.

US advisors and CIA agents had been sent to La Paz and to the zone of operations to help capture Che, dead or alive.

Various factors had combined at the time to place Che in a particularly difficult situation; moreover, the beginning of every struggle involving irregular warfare, with a very small force in a territory that has not yet been consolidated and in which the enemy troops can move freely, is always complex and dangerous.

The separation—which should have been temporary—of the group commanded by Joaquín (Major Vitalio Acuña\(^1\)) from the rest of the guerrillas and Che's fruitless efforts to find them took precious time and forced Che and his group to stay more or less in the same area, making it easier for the enemy to locate them. The ambush and annihilation of Joaquín's group on August 31, 1967, also meant the loss of valuable combatants. In addition, Che did not have enough medicine to control the frequent asthma attacks that weakened him. Finally, the group included combatants who were in very bad physical condition, which forced them to march through populated areas during the day. This inevitably led to a clash with the Bolivian army, which

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1. Vitalio Acuña Núñez (Joaquín) was one of the first peasant farmers who joined the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra mountains and ultimately became a major in the Rebel Army.
had concentrated its forces in order to corner the guerrillas.

On September 26, the guerrilla vanguard was ambushed in Batán Valley, and three of the best combatants were killed. This terrible setback placed the group in extreme peril, even though Che’s diary from the time does not show that he felt defeated or considered his situation to be hopeless.

Che waged his last battle, at Yuro Ravine, on October 8, 1967. He was wounded, although not mortally; the barrel of his M-2 carbine had been put out of commission; he did not have a magazine for his pistol; and most of the revolutionaries who had fought at his side had been killed. Under these circumstances, he was captured by a company of Bolivian Rangers and taken to the little schoolhouse in the hamlet of La Higuera. There, the troops received orders from La Paz to kill him. A drunken sergeant major carried out the order the next day, October 9, entering the classroom where Che was tied up and killing him with a burst of his submachine gun.

The Cuban people refused to believe the reports of Che’s death coming in from Bolivia until Fidel Castro went on television and presented irrefutable, detailed information convincing them that it was so. A photo showed the CIA agent and terrorist Félix Rodríguez2 in a group of people next to Che’s body, proving that the United States had participated in Che’s death.

A silent, grieving crowd bade Che farewell in a solemn vigil held in Havana’s Revolution Plaza.

Everyone was aware of the immense loss, even though the extent of this loss may not have been adequately appreciated at the time. Everyone now knows that the “Heroic Guerrilla’s” dreams and revolutionary plans encompassed all of Latin America and the entire world. His talent as a truly critical and creative Marxist thinker placed Che in the vanguard of revolutionary thinkers. The experience he had gained in building socialism in Cuba and his opinions about the achievements and defects of what had been done in other countries were extremely valuable. All of those qualities combined in his personality as a political figure, economist, military commander, trainer of cadres and inspired writer. As Fidel said some years later, “Che is much more than everything that has been written about him.”

Fidel also refuted reports of alleged disagreements between Che Guevara and other leaders of the Cuban revolution:

2. Félix Rodríguez was born in Cuba and took part in numerous covert action operations against Cuba and later in Vietnam and Central America.
In Mexico, after he joined our movement, he made me promise that after the triumph of the revolution in Cuba, I would allow him to return to fight for his homeland and for Latin America. He remained in Cuba for several years, carrying out important responsibilities, but he always had that in mind. And when the time came I kept my word. I didn't hold him back or hamper his return; rather, I helped him do what he believed was his duty. At the time I didn't stop to think if my doing so could harm me. I faithfully kept the promise I had made, and when he said, “I want to go on a revolutionary mission now,” I said, “All right, I’ll keep my promise.”

Everything was done in great accord. The things that were said about alleged differences with the Cuban revolution were infamous calumnies. He had his own personality and criteria. We used to argue fraternally on various topics, but there was always harmony, communication, complete unity on everything, and excellent relations, because he also had a great sense of discipline.

For 30 years, the place where Che’s body was buried in Bolivia remained a secret; but, in 1997, the Cuban people were finally able to pay tribute to and express their admiration for him by placing his remains and those of a group of the compañeros who died with him in Bolivia at the base of the monument to Che that was built in Santa Clara, in the central part of the island, where he had carried out one of his greatest feats during Cuba’s revolutionary war.

A NECESSARY INTRODUCTION

This introduction by Fidel Castro appeared in the Cuban and international editions of Che Guevara’s Bolivian Diary when it was first published in Cuba in 1968.

It was Che’s custom during his days as a guerrilla [during the 1956–58 Cuban revolutionary war] to carefully record his daily observations in a personal diary. During long marches over rugged and difficult terrain, in the midst of damp woods, when the lines of men, always hunched over

3. The reference is to the stage of exile in Mexico, when Fidel Castro met Ernesto Guevara and the latter joined the expedition on the cabin cruiser Granma.
from the weight of their packs, ammunition and weapons, would stop for a moment to rest, or when the column would receive orders to halt and set up camp at the end of an exhausting day’s march, you would see Che—as he was affectionately nicknamed by the Cubans from the beginning—take out a small notebook and, with the tiny and nearly illegible handwriting of a doctor, write his notes.

What he was able to save from these notes he later used in writing his magnificent historical narratives of the revolutionary war in Cuba—accounts full of revolutionary, educational and human content.5

This time, thanks to his invariable habit of noting the main events of each day, we have at our disposal rigorously exact, priceless, and detailed information on the heroic final months of his life in Bolivia.

These notes, not really written for publication, served as a tool in the constant evaluation of events, situations, and people, and at the same time served as an outlet for the expression of his keenly observant and analytical spirit, often laced with a fine sense of humor. They are soberly written and form a coherent whole from beginning to end.

It should be kept in mind that they were written during those rare moments of rest in the midst of a heroic and superhuman physical effort, where he bore exhausting obligations as leader of a guerrilla detachment in the difficult first stages of a struggle of this nature, which unfolded under incredibly harsh material conditions. This reveals once more his method of work, his iron will.

In the course of analyzing in detail the incidents of each day, Che’s diary takes note of the shortcomings, critical assessments and recriminations that are part of and inevitable in the development of a revolutionary guerrilla struggle.

Inside a guerrilla detachment such assessments must take place constantly. This is especially true in the stage in which it consists of a small nucleus facing extremely adverse material conditions and an enemy infinitely superior in number, when the slightest negligence or the most insignificant mistake can be fatal. The leader must be extremely demanding, using each event or episode, no matter how insignificant it may seem, to

educate the combatants and future cadres of new guerrilla detachments.

The process of training a guerrilla force is a constant appeal to each person’s consciousness and honor. Che knew how to touch the most sensitive fibers in revolutionaries. When Marcos, after being repeatedly admonished by Che, was warned that he could be dishonorably discharged from the guerrilla unit, he replied, “I would rather be shot!” Later he gave his life heroically. Similar behavior could be noted among all those in whom Che placed confidence and those he had to admonish for one reason or another in the course of the struggle. He was a fraternal and humane leader, but he also knew how to be demanding and, at times, severe. But above all, and even more than with others, Che was severe with himself. He based discipline on the guerrilla’s moral consciousness and on the tremendous force of his own example.

The diary also contains numerous references to [Régis] Debray; it reflects the enormous concern Che felt over the arrest and imprisonment of the revolutionary writer who had been given a mission to carry out in Europe—although at heart Che would have preferred him to have stayed with the guerrilla unit, which is why Che shows a certain uneasiness and, on occasion, some doubts about his behavior.

Che had no way of knowing the odyssey Debray experienced in the hands of the repressive forces, or the firm and courageous attitude he maintained in face of his captors and torturers. He noted, however, the enormous political significance of the trial and on October 3, six days before his death, in the midst of bitter and tense events, he wrote, “We heard an interview with Debray, very courageous when faced by a student acting as an agent provocateur.” This was his last reference to the writer.

The Cuban revolution and its relation to the guerrilla movement are repeatedly referred to in the diary. Some may interpret our decision to publish it as an act of provocation that will give the enemies of the revolution—the Yankee imperialists and their allies, the Latin American oligarchs—arguments for redoubling their efforts to blockade, isolate and attack Cuba.

Those who judge the facts this way should remember that Yankee imperialism has never needed a pretext to carry out its crimes anywhere in the world, and that its efforts to crush the Cuban revolution began as soon as our country passed its first revolutionary law. This stems from the obvious and well-known fact that imperialism is the policeman of world reaction,
the systematic supporter of counterrevolution, and the protector of the most backward and inhuman social structures that still exist in the world.

Solidarity with a revolutionary movement may be taken as a pretext for Yankee aggression, but it will never be the real cause. To deny solidarity in order to avoid giving a pretext is a ridiculous, ostrich-like policy that has nothing to do with the internationalist character of today’s social revolutions. To abandon solidarity with a revolutionary movement not only does not avoid providing a pretext, but in effect serves to support Yankee imperialism and its policy of dominating and enslaving the world.

Cuba is a small country, economically underdeveloped as are all countries dominated and exploited for centuries by colonialism and imperialism. It is located only 90 miles from the coast of the United States, has a Yankee naval base on its territory [Guantánamo], and faces numerous obstacles in attaining socioeconomic development. Grave dangers have threatened our country since the triumph of the revolution; but imperialism will never make us yield for these reasons, because the difficulties that flow from a consistently revolutionary line of action are of no importance to us.

From the revolutionary point of view, there is no alternative but to publish Che’s Bolivian diary. It fell into the hands of [President René] Barrientos, who immediately sent copies to the CIA, the Pentagon and the US government. Journalists with links to the CIA had access to the document inside Bolivia; having made photocopies of it, they promised to refrain, for the moment, from publishing it.

The Barrientos government and the top-ranking military officers have more than enough reasons not to publish the diary. It reveals the immense incapacity of their army and the countless defeats they were dealt by a handful of determined guerrillas who, in a matter of weeks, took nearly 200 weapons from them in combat. Furthermore, Che describes Barrientos and his regime in terms they deserve, with words that cannot be erased from history.

Imperialism also had its own reasons: Che and the extraordinary example he set are gaining increasing force in the world. His ideas, image and name are banners of struggle against the injustices suffered by the oppressed and exploited; they evoke impassioned interest among students and intellectuals throughout the world.

In the United States itself, the black [rights] movement and progressive
students, both of which are continuing to grow in numbers, have made Che’s figure their own. In the most combative demonstrations for civil rights and against the aggression in Vietnam, his image is brandished as a symbol of struggle. Few times in history, perhaps never before, has a figure, a name, an example become a universal symbol so quickly and with such impassioned force. This is because Che embodies, in its purest and most selfless form, the internationalist spirit that marks the world of today and that will characterize even more the world of tomorrow.

Arising from a continent yesterday oppressed by colonial powers, today exploited and held in backwardness and the most iniquitous underdevelopment by Yankee imperialism, there has emerged this singular figure who has become the universal symbol of revolutionary struggle, even in the metropolitan centers of the imperialists and colonialists.

The Yankee imperialists fear the power of this example and everything that may help to spread it. The diary is the living expression of an extraordinary personality; a lesson in guerrilla warfare written in the heat and tension of daily events, as flammable as gunpowder; a demonstration in life that the people of Latin America are not powerless in face of the enslavers of entire peoples and of their mercenary armies. That is its intrinsic value, and that is what has kept them from publishing it up to now.

Also among those who may be interested in keeping the diary unpublished are the pseudorevolutionaries, opportunists and charlatans of every stripe. These people call themselves Marxists, communists and other such titles. They have not, however, hesitated to call Che a mistaken adventurer or, when they speak of him more benignly, an idealist whose death marked the swan song of revolutionary armed struggle in Latin America. “If Che himself,” they say, “the greatest exponent of these ideas and an experienced guerrilla fighter, died in the guerrilla struggle and his movement failed to free Bolivia, it only shows how mistaken he was!” How many of these miserable creatures were happy with the death of Che and have not even blushed at the thought that their stance and arguments completely coincide with those of imperialism and the most reactionary oligarchs!

That is how they justify themselves. That is how they justify their treacherous leaders who, at a given moment, did not hesitate to play at armed struggle with the underlying intention—as would be seen later—of destroying the guerrilla detachments, putting the brakes on revolutionary
action, and imposing their own shameful and ridiculous political schemes, because they were absolutely incapable of carrying out any other line. That is how they justify those who do not want to fight, who will never fight for the people and their liberation. That is how they justify those who have made a caricature of revolutionary ideas, turning them into an opium-like dogma with neither content nor message for the masses; those who have converted the organizations of popular struggle into instruments of conciliation with domestic and foreign exploiters; and those who advocate policies that have nothing to do with the genuine interests of the exploited peoples of this continent.

Che thought of his death as something natural and probable in the process; he made an effort to stress, especially in his last writings, that this eventuality would not hold back the inevitable march of the Latin American revolution. In his “Message to the Tricontinental,” he reiterated this thought: “Our every action is a battle cry against imperialism … Wherever death may surprise us, let it be welcome if our battle cry has reached even one receptive ear, if another hand reaches out to take up our arms …”6

Che considered himself a soldier in the revolution, with absolutely no concern as to whether he would survive it. Those who see the outcome of his struggle in Bolivia as marking the failure of his ideas can, with the same oversimplification, deny the validity of the ideas and struggles of all the great revolutionary precursors and thinkers; this includes the founders of Marxism, who were themselves unable to complete the task and to see in life the fruits of their noble efforts.

In Cuba, [José] Martí and [Antonio] Maceo were killed in combat; Yankee intervention followed, ending the War of Independence and frustrating the immediate objectives of their struggle. Brilliant advocates of socialist revolution, like Julio Antonio Mella, have been killed, murdered by agents in the service of imperialism. But these deaths could not, in the long run, block the triumph of a process that began 100 years ago. And absolutely nothing can call into question the profound justice of the cause and line of struggle of those eminent fighters, or the timeliness of their basic ideas, which have always inspired Cuban revolutionaries.

In Che’s diary, from the notes he wrote, you can see how real the possibilities of success were, how extraordinary the catalyzing power of the guerrilla struggle. On one occasion, in the face of evident signs of the Bolivian regime’s weakness and rapid deterioration, he wrote, “The government is disintegrating rapidly. What a pity we don’t have 100 more men right now.”

Che knew from his experience in Cuba how often our small guerrilla detachment had been on the verge of being wiped out. Whether such things happen depends almost entirely on chance and the imponderables of war. But would such an eventuality have given anyone the right to consider our line erroneous, and, in addition, to take it as an example to discourage revolution and inculcate a sense of powerlessness among the peoples? Many times in history revolutionary processes have been preceded by adverse episodes. We ourselves in Cuba, didn’t we have the experience of Moncada just six years before the definitive triumph of the people’s armed struggle?

From July 26, 1953—the attack on the Moncada garrison in Santiago de Cuba—to December 2, 1956—the landing of the Granma—revolutionary struggle in Cuba in the face of a modern, well-equipped army seemed to many people to lack any prospect for success; the action of a handful of fighters was seen as a chimera of idealists and dreamers who were “deeply mistaken.” The crushing defeat and total dispersal of the inexperienced guerrilla detachment by Batista’s troops on December 5, 1956, seemed to confirm entirely those pessimistic forebodings. But only 25 months later the remnants of that guerrilla unit had developed the strength and experience necessary to annihilate that same army.

In all epochs and under all circumstances, there will always be an abundance of excuses for not fighting; but not fighting is the only way to never attain freedom. Che did not live as long as his ideas; he fertilized them with his blood. It is certain, on the other hand, that his pseudorevolutionary critics, with all their political cowardice and eternal lack of action, will outlive by far the evidence of their own stupidity.

Worth noting in the diary are the actions of one of those revolutionary specimens that are becoming typical in Latin America these days: Mario Monje, brandishing the title of secretary of the Communist Party of Bolivia, sought to dispute with Che the political and military leadership of the
movement. Monje claimed, moreover, that he had intended to resign his party post to take on this responsibility; in his opinion, obviously, it was enough to have once held that title to claim such a prerogative.

Mario Monje, naturally, had no experience in guerrilla warfare and had never been in combat. In addition, the fact that he considered himself a communist should at least have obliged him to dispense with the gross and mundane chauvinism that had already been overcome by those who fought for Bolivia’s first independence.

With such a conception of what an anti-imperialist struggle on this continent should be, “communist leaders” of this type do not even surpass the level of internationalism of the aboriginal tribes subjugated by the European colonizers in the epoch of the conquest.

Bolivia and its historical capital, Sucre, were named after the country’s first liberators [Simón Bolívar and Antonio José de Sucre], both of whom were Venezuelan. And in this country, in a struggle for the definitive liberation of his people, the leader of the Communist Party of Bolivia had the possibility of enlisting the cooperation of the political, organizational and military talent of a genuine revolutionary titan, a person whose cause was not limited by the narrow and artificial—not to mention unjust—borders of Bolivia. Yet he did nothing but engage in disgraceful, ridiculous and unjustified claims to leadership.

Bolivia has no outlet to the sea, and therefore, for its own liberation and to avoid exposure to a cruel blockade, more than any other country it needs revolutionary victories by its neighbors. Che, because of his enormous authority, ability and experience, was the person who could have accelerated this process.

In the period before a split occurred in the Bolivian Communist Party, Che had established relations with leaders and members, soliciting their help for the revolutionary movement in South America. With authorization from the party, some members worked with Che for years on various assignments. When the split occurred, it created a special situation, given that a number of the people who had been working with him ended up in one or another group. But Che did not see the struggle in Bolivia as an isolated occurrence, rather as part of a revolutionary liberation movement that would soon extend to other countries in South America. He sought to organize a movement free of sectarianism, one that could be joined by any-
one who wanted to fight for the liberation of Bolivia and of all the other peoples of Latin America subjugated by imperialism.

In the initial phase of preparing a base for the guerrilla unit, however, Che depended for the most part on the help of a group of courageous and discreet collaborators who, at the time of the split, remained in the party headed by Monje. Although he certainly felt no sympathy for Monje, in deference to them he invited Monje to visit his camp first. He then invited Moisés Guevara, a leader of the mine workers and a political leader. Moisés Guevara had left the party to join in the formation of another organization, the one led by Oscar Zamora. He later left that group because of differences with Zamora, who proved to be another Monje. Zamora had once promised Che he would help in organizing the armed guerrilla struggle in Bolivia, but later backed away from that commitment and cowardly folded his arms when the hour of action arrived. After Che’s death, Zamora became one of his most venomous “Marxist-Leninist” critics. Moisés Guevara joined Che without hesitation, as he had sought to do long before Che arrived in Bolivia; he offered his support and gave his life heroically for the revolutionary cause.

The group of Bolivian guerrillas who until then had stayed with Monje’s organization also joined Che. Led by Inti and Coco Peredo, who proved to be courageous, outstanding fighters, they left Monje and decisively backed Che. But Monje, seeking revenge, began to sabotage the movement. In La Paz he intercepted well-trained communist militants who were on their way to join the guerrillas. These facts demonstrate that within the ranks of revolutionaries, men who meet all the conditions necessary for struggle can be criminally frustrated in their development by incapable, maneuvering and charlatan-like leaders.

Che was a man never personally interested in posts, leadership or honors; but he believed revolutionary guerrilla warfare was the fundamental form of action for the liberation of the peoples of Latin America, given the economic, political and social situation in nearly all Latin American countries. Moreover, he was firmly convinced that the military and political leadership of the guerrilla struggle had to be unified. He also believed the struggle could be led only by the guerrilla unit itself, and not from the comfortable offices of bureaucrats in the cities. So he was not prepared to give up leadership of a guerrilla nucleus that, at a later stage of its develop-
ment, was intended to develop into a struggle of broad dimensions in Latin America. And he certainly was not prepared to turn over such leadership to an inexperienced emptyhead with narrow chauvinist views. Such chauvinism often infects even revolutionary elements of various countries in Latin America. Che believed that it must be combatted because it represents reactionary, ridiculous and sterile thinking.

“And let us develop genuine proletarian internationalism,” he said in his “Message to the Tricontinental.” “Let the flag under which we fight be the sacred cause of the liberation of humanity, so that to die under the colors of Vietnam, Venezuela, Guatemala, Laos, Guinea, Colombia, Bolivia… to mention only the current scenes of armed struggle... will be equally glorious and desirable for a Latin American, an Asian, an African and even a European.

“Every drop of blood spilled in a land under whose flag one was not born is experience gathered by the survivor to be applied later in the struggle for liberation of one’s own country. And every people that liberates itself is a step in the battle for the liberation of one’s own people.”

In the same way, Che believed fighters from various Latin American countries would participate in the guerrilla detachment, that the guerrilla struggle in Bolivia would be a school in which revolutionaries would serve their apprenticeship in combat. To help him with this task he wanted to have, together with the Bolivians, a small nucleus of experienced guerrilla fighters, nearly all of whom had been his comrades in the Sierra Maestra during the revolutionary struggle in Cuba. These were men whose abilities, courage and spirit of self-sacrifice Che knew. None of them hesitated to respond to his call, none of them abandoned him, none of them surrendered.

In the Bolivian campaign Che acted with his proverbial tenacity, skill, stoicism and exemplary attitude. It might be said that he was consumed by the importance of the mission he had assigned himself, and at all times he proceeded with a spirit of irreproachable responsibility. When the guerrilla unit committed a careless mistake, he quickly called attention to it, corrected it, and noted it in his diary.

Unbelievably adverse factors built up against him, such as the separation—supposed to last for just a few days—of part of the guerrilla detach-
ment, a unit that included a courageous group of fighters, some of them sick or convalescent.

Once contact between the two groups was lost in very rough terrain, separation continued, and for endless months Che was preoccupied with the effort to find them. In this period his asthma—a ailment easily treated with simple medication, but one that, lacking the medication, became a terrible enemy—attacked him relentlessly. It became a serious problem, as the medical supplies that had been accumulated by the guerrillas beforehand had been discovered and captured by the enemy. This fact, along with the annihilation at the end of August of the part of the guerrilla detachment he had lost contact with, were factors that weighed considerably in the development of events. But Che, with his iron will, overcame his physical difficulties and never for an instant cut back his activity or let his spirits flag.

Che had many contacts with the Bolivian peasants. Their character—highly suspicious and cautious—would have come as no surprise to Che, who knew their mentality perfectly well because he had dealt with them on other occasions. He knew that winning them over to the cause required long, arduous and patient work, but he had no doubt that in the long run they would obtain the support of the peasants.

If we follow the thread of events carefully, it becomes clear that even when the number of men on whom Che could count was quite small—in the month of September, a few weeks before his death—the guerrilla unit still retained its capacity to develop. It also still had a few Bolivian cadres, such as the brothers Inti and Coco Peredo, who were already beginning to show magnificent leadership potential.

It was the ambush in La Higuera [on September 26, 1967]—the sole successful action by the army against the detachment led by Che—that created a situation they could not overcome. In that ambush, in broad daylight, the vanguard group was killed and several more men were wounded as they headed for a peasant area with a higher level of political development—an objective that does not appear to have been noted in the diary but which is known through the survivors. It was without doubt dangerous to advance by daylight along the same route they had been following for days, with inevitably close contact with the residents of an area they were entering for the first time. It was certainly obvious that the
army would intercept them at some point; but Che, fully conscious of this, decided to run the risk in order to help the doctor [Octavio de la Concepción de la Pedreja (El Médico)], who was in very poor physical condition.

The day before the ambush, he wrote, “We reached Pujio but there were people who had seen us down below the day before, which means we are being announced ahead of time by Radio Bemba [word of mouth]… Traveling with mules is becoming dangerous, we are trying to make it as easy as possible for El Médico because he is becoming very weak.”

The following day he wrote, “At 13:00, the vanguard set out to try to reach Jagüey and to make a decision there about the mules and El Médico.” That is, he was seeking a solution for the sick, so as to get off the road and take the necessary precautions. But that same afternoon, before the vanguard reached Jagüey, the fatal ambush occurred, leaving the detachment in an untenable situation.

A few days later, encircled in El Yuro ravine, Che fought his final battle.

Recalling the feat carried out by this handful of revolutionaries is deeply moving. The struggle against the hostile natural environment in which their action took place constitutes by itself an insuperable page of heroism. Never in history has so small a number of men embarked on such a gigantic task. Their faith and absolute conviction that the immense revolutionary capacity of the peoples of Latin America could be awakened, their confidence in themselves, and the determination with which they took on this objective—these things give us a just measure of these men.

One day Che said to the guerrilla fighters in Bolivia, “This type of struggle gives us the opportunity to become revolutionaries, the highest form of the human species, and it also allows us to emerge fully as men; those who are unable to achieve either of those two states should say so now and abandon the struggle.”

Those who fought with him until the end have become worthy of such honored terms; they symbolize the type of revolutionary and the type of person history is now calling on for a truly challenging and difficult task—the revolutionary transformation of Latin America.

The enemy our forebears faced in the first struggle for independence was a decadent colonial power. Revolutionaries have as their enemy today the most powerful bulwark of the imperialist camp, equipped with the most modern technology and industry. This enemy not only organized and
equipped a new army for Bolivia—where the people had destroyed the previous repressive military apparatus—and immediately sent weapons and advisers to help in the struggle against the guerrillas. It has also provided military and technical support on the same scale to every repressive force on the continent. And when these methods are not enough, it has intervened directly with its troops, as in the Dominican Republic.

Fighting this enemy requires the type of revolutionaries and individuals Che spoke of. Without this type of revolutionary and human being, ready to do what they did; without the spirit to confront the enormous obstacles they faced; without the readiness to die that accompanied them at every moment; without their deeply held conviction in the justice of their cause and their unyielding faith in the invincible force of the peoples, against a power like Yankee imperialism, whose military, technical and economic resources are felt throughout the entire world—without these, the liberation of the peoples of this continent will not be attained.

The people of the United States themselves are beginning to become aware that the monstrous political superstructure that reigns in their country has for some time no longer been the idyllic bourgeois republic the country’s founders established nearly 200 years ago. They are increasingly subjected to the moral barbarism of an irrational, alienating, dehumanized and brutal system that takes from the people of the United States a growing number of victims in its wars of aggression, its political crimes, its racial aberrations, the miserable hierarchy it has created among human beings, its repugnant waste of economic, scientific and human resources on its enormous, reactionary and repressive military apparatus—in the midst of a world where three-quarters of humanity lives in underdevelopment and hunger.

Only the revolutionary transformation of Latin America will enable the people of the United States to settle their own accounts with imperialism. At the same time, and in the same way, the growing struggle of the people of the United States against imperialist policy can become a decisive ally of the revolutionary movement in Latin America.

An enormous differentiation and imbalance occurred in the Americas at the beginning of this century. On one side a powerful and rapidly industrializing nation, in accordance with the very law of its social and economic dynamics, was marching toward imperial heights. On the other side, the
weak and stagnant countries in the Balkanized remainder of the Americas were kept under the boot of feudal oligarchies and their reactionary armies. If this part of the hemisphere does not undergo a profound revolutionary transformation, that earlier gap will seem but a pale reflection of not just the enormous present unevenness in finance, science and technology, but rather of the horrible imbalance that, at an increasingly accelerated rate, the imperialist superstructure will impose on the peoples of Latin America in the next 20 years.

If we stay on this road, we will be increasingly poor, weak, dependent and enslaved to imperialism. This gloomy perspective also confronts, to an equal degree, all the underdeveloped nations of Africa and Asia. If the industrialized and educated nations of Europe, with their Common Market and supranational scientific institutions, are worried about the possibility of being left behind, and contemplate with fear the perspective of being converted into economic colonies of Yankee imperialism, what does the future have in store for the peoples of Latin America?

This is unquestionably the real situation that decisively affects the destiny of our peoples. What is urgently needed is a deep-going revolutionary transformation that can gather together all the moral, material and human forces in this part of the world and launch them forward so as to overcome the economic, scientific and technological backwardness of centuries; a backwardness that is greater still when compared with the industrialized world to which we are tributaries and will continue to be to an even greater degree, especially to the United States. If some liberal or bourgeois reformist, or some pseudorevolutionary charlatan, incapable of action, has a different answer; and if, in addition, that person can provide the formula, the magic road to carrying it out that is different from Che’s conception—one that can sweep away the oligarchs, despot and petty politicians, that is to say, the servants, and the Yankee monopolists, in other words, the masters, and can do it with all the urgency the circumstances require—then let them stand up to challenge Che.

But no one really has an honest answer or a consistent policy that will bring genuine hope to the nearly 300 million human beings who make up the population of Latin America. Devastatingly poor in their overwhelming majority and increasing in number to 600 million within 25 years, they have the right to the material things of life, to culture, and to civilization. So the
most dignified attitude would be to remain silent in face of the action of Che and those who fell with him, courageously defending their ideas. The feat carried out by this handful of guerrilla fighters, guided by the noble idea of redeeming a continent, will remain the greatest proof of what determination, heroism and human greatness can accomplish. It is an example that will illuminate the consciousness and preside over the struggle of the peoples of Latin America. Che’s heroic cry will reach the receptive ear of the poor and exploited for whom he gave his life; many hands will come forward to take up arms to win their definitive liberation.

On October 7, Che wrote his last lines. The following day at 1:00 p.m., in a narrow ravine where he proposed waiting until nightfall in order to break out of the encirclement, a large enemy force made contact with them. The small group of men who now made up the detachment fought heroically until dusk. From individual positions located on the bottom of the ravine, and on the cliffs above, they faced a mass of soldiers who surrounded and attacked them. There were no survivors among those who fought in the positions closest to Che. Since beside him were the doctor in the grave state of health mentioned before, and a Peruvian guerrilla who was also in very poor physical condition, everything seems to indicate that until he fell wounded, Che did his utmost to safeguard the withdrawal of these comrades to a safer place. The doctor was not killed in the same battle, but rather several days later at a place not far from the Quebrada del Yuro [El Yuro ravine]. The ruggedness of the rocky, irregular terrain made it difficult—at times impossible—for the guerrillas to maintain visual contact. Those defending positions at the other entrance to the ravine, some hundreds of meters from Che, among them Inti Peredo, resisted the attack until dark, when they managed to lose the enemy and head toward the previously agreed point of regroupment.

It has been possible to establish that Che continued fighting despite being wounded, until a shot destroyed the barrel of his M-2 rifle, making it totally useless. The pistol he carried had no magazine. These incredible circumstances explain how he could have been captured alive. The wounds in his legs kept him from walking without help, but they were not fatal.

Moved to the town of La Higuera, he remained alive for about 24 hours. He refused to exchange a single word with his captors, and a drunken officer who tried to annoy him received a slap across the face.
At a meeting in La Paz, Barrientos, Ovando and other top military leaders coldly made the decision to murder Che. Details are known of the way in which the treacherous agreement was carried out in the school at La Higuera. Major Miguel Ayoroa and Colonel Andrés Selich, rangers trained by the Yankees, ordered warrant officer Mario Terán to proceed with the murder. Terán, completely drunk, entered the school yard. When Che, who heard the shots that had just killed a Bolivian [Willy] and a Peruvian guerrilla fighter [Chino], saw the executioner hesitate, he said firmly, “Shoot! Don’t be afraid!” Terán left, and again it was necessary for his superiors, Ayoroa and Selich, to repeat the order. He then proceeded to carry it out, firing a machine gun burst at the belt down. A statement had already been released that Che died a few hours after combat; therefore, the executioners had orders not to shoot him in the chest or head, so as not to induce fatal wounds immediately. This cruelly prolonged Che’s agony until a sergeant, also drunk, killed him with a pistol shot to the left side of his body. Such a procedure contrasts brutally with the respect shown by Che, without a single exception, toward the lives of the many officers and soldiers of the Bolivian Army he took prisoner.

The final hours of his existence in the hands of his contemptible enemies must have been very bitter for him, but no one was better prepared than Che to be put to such a test.

The way in which the diary came into our hands cannot be told at this time; suffice it to say it required no monetary payment. It contains all the notes he wrote from November 7, 1966, the day Che arrived in Ñacahuazú, until October 7, 1967, the evening before the battle in El Yuro ravine. There are a few pages missing, pages that have not yet reached our hands; but they correspond to dates on which nothing of any importance happened, and therefore do not alter the content of the diary in any way.

Although the document itself offers not the slightest doubt as to its authenticity, all photocopies have been subjected to a rigorous examination to establish not only their authenticity but also to check on any possible alteration, no matter how slight. The dates were compared with the diary of one of the surviving guerrilla fighters; both documents coincided in every aspect. Detailed testimony of the other surviving guerrilla fighters, who were witnesses to each of the events, also contributed to establishing the document’s authenticity. In short, it has been established with absolute
It was a laborious job to decipher the small and difficult handwriting, a task that was carried out with the tireless assistance of his compañera, Aleida March.

The diary will be published almost simultaneously in France by the publishing house of François Maspero; in Italy by Feltrinelli publishers; in the Federal Republic of Germany by Trikont Verlag; in the United States by Ramparts magazine; in France, a Spanish edition, by Ediciones Ruedo Ibérico; in Chile by the magazine Punto Final; in Mexico by Editorial Siglo XXI; and in other countries.

Ever onward to victory!

Fidel Castro

24. 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UPRISING AT LA DEMAJAGUA

It is not easy to establish a particular date that marks the birth of an idea. Ideas usually take shape through a process that may not be obvious, and which may involve theoretical reflection, social practice and gradual conceptualization and definition. But, if one day, or one moment, in the history of Cuban revolutionary thought over the past 50 years had to be chosen to show with particular clarity the concepts that capture the essence of the Cuban experience, it would be October 10, 1968.

That date was the 100th anniversary of the uprising headed by Bayamo lawyer Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, who, after conspiring with other aristocrats in the eastern part of Cuba against Spanish colonial rule, decided to take up arms and free his slaves rather than be captured and imprisoned. He announced this decision at La Demajagua Sugar Mill at dawn on October 10, 1868.

The Ten Years’ War that ensued was the crucible in which the Cuban nation was forged. It was the cradle of the patriotic, pro-independence traditions handed down to the Cuban people and the medium that produced

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1. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes (1819–74) studied in Europe and was the first to take up arms against Spanish colonial rule. He became the first president of the Republic of Cuba in Arms. Surprised by an enemy force at San Lorenzo in the Sierra Maestra mountains, he was killed in battle on February 27, 1874. Cuba honors him as the Father of his Nation.
such other great figures as Ignacio Agramonte, Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo. This war was also the first great political school for Cuban revolutionaries. Alone, and in the limited territory of a small island, the Cuban people fought a colonialist military power that was greater than all the forces confronted by the Latin American liberation armies at the beginning of the 19th century. The glory and defeat in 1878, when the war ended without achieving sovereignty or the emancipation of the slaves, taught patriots of all times—and particularly José Martí, the brilliant organizer of the liberation war of 1895—the importance of unity and political leadership for the triumph of the revolution.

Naturally, the observance of that 100th anniversary—in the wake of the victorious Cuban revolution, which had already amassed considerable experience in its struggle for survival and in the transition toward socialism—was an appropriate moment for analyzing several key issues.

One of these was the relationship between Cuba’s history and the progressive values and traditions of the nation’s culture, including political thinking, on the one hand, and socialism at the international level and the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and other fighters and theoreticians, on the other.

The world communist and workers’ movement had not been exempt from sectarianism and dogmatism. They had been conditioned by various circumstances, in which patriotism was set against internationalism, the

2. Ignacio Agramonte y Loynaz (1841–73) was one of the main political and military leaders of the Ten Years’ War (1868–78). He represented Camagüey (where he took up arms on November 4, 1868) in the Constitutional Assembly of Guáimaro. Head of the famous Camagüey cavalry, he was killed in battle at Jimaguayú on May 11, 1873.

3. Máximo Gómez Báez (1836–1905) was born in the Dominican Republic. He joined in the Ten Years’ War at the start and was the first to teach Cubans the technique of machete charges. As a major general of the Liberation Army, he helped José Martí organize the new War of Independence in 1895, in which he served as General in Chief of the Liberation Army.

4. Antonio Maceo y Grajales (1845–96) came from a heroic family of AfroCuban farmers and was second in command of the Liberation Army. He fought in the Ten Years’ War and in the War of Independence, in which, together with his commanding officer and teacher Máximo Gómez, he carried out the military feat of extending the fighting to the western part of the country. He was also an outstanding political figure and revolutionary. He was killed in battle on December 7, 1896.
tradition of advanced national thinking was set against Marxism-Leninism, and the great figures of Cuba's history were set against international leaders of the working class and socialism.

This did not happen in the case of Cuba, whose first communist party had struggled against the most pernicious schemes of the Third International since the mid-1930s, and where such outstanding intellectuals and political leaders as Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, Juan Marinello and Blas Roca made the dialectics of national liberation and the democratic and socialist revolution an integral part of the Communist Party. Even so, confusion, narrow criteria and puerile dogmatism persisted, stemming in many cases from ignorance of Cuba's history.

Fidel Castro's address on the night of October 10, 1968, at the ruins of La Demajagua Sugar Mill, which the Cuban people venerate as a symbol of honor and patriotism, marked a definitive step in the formation of Cuban culture and political consciousness. As on other occasions, Fidel resolutely distanced himself from dogmas that resulted from a narrow reading of Marxism and Leninism and helped to define the Cuban essence of the revolution—and, especially, Cuba's determination to think for itself.

5. Carlos Rafael Rodríguez (1913–97) was an outstanding intellectual, political figure and communist revolutionary. He took part in the struggles against the Machado dictatorship in 1930 and was a representative of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP) in the Sierra Maestra mountains. He held several important posts in the Cuban government, including as a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Cuba and vice-president of the Council of State. He wrote many works on history, economics, philosophy, art and politics.

6. Juan Marinello Vidaurreta (1898–1977) was a noted essayist, poet, professor and Cuban communist. He took part in the Protest of 13 in 1923, fought against the Machado dictatorship and was imprisoned. He was a leader of the first Marxist-Leninist party and a delegate to the Constitutional Assembly of 1940. After the triumph of the Cuban revolution, he held several important political, cultural and diplomatic posts.

7. Blas Roca Calderío (1908–85) was a labor leader and communist. Elected general secretary of Cuba's first Marxist-Leninist party in 1934, he held that position until it became part of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI). He was a delegate to the Constitutional Assembly of 1940 and a member of parliament. A member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party since its founding in 1965, he later became a member of its Secretariat and of the Political Bureau. He served as president of the National Assembly of People's Power from 1976 to 1981.
What does October 10, 1868, signify for our people? What does this glorious date mean for the revolutionaries of our nation? It simply marks the beginning of 100 years of struggle, the beginning of the revolution in Cuba, because in Cuba there has been one revolution: that which was begun by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes on October 10, 1868, the revolution that our people are now carrying forward.

There is, of course, no doubt that Céspedes symbolized the Cuban spirit of that time. He symbolized the dignity and rebelliousness of a people—still heterogeneous in nature—which began to take shape as a nation over the course of history...

Perhaps today that decision seems simple, but the decision to end slavery was a most revolutionary measure—the most radical, revolutionary measure imaginable in a society based on slavery.

What makes Céspedes a great man is not only his firm and resolute decision to take up arms, but his actions that followed that decision. His first act after the proclamation of independence was the emancipation of his own slaves. He proclaimed his commitment to end slavery in our country, although initially he hoped for the widest possible support from Cuban landowners.

In Camagüey, the revolutionaries proclaimed the abolition of slavery from the very beginning, and the Guáimaro constitution of April 10, 1869, definitively established the right of all Cubans to freedom, completely abolishing the hateful, centuries-old institution of slavery...

While our sister nations of Latin America which had freed themselves from Spanish domination some decades before were living under servitude, under the tyranny of the social interests which in those nations replaced the Spanish tyranny, our country, absolutely alone and single-handedly—and not the whole country, but a small portion of our country—fought for 10 years against a still powerful European nation which had, and mobilized, an
army of hundreds of well-armed men to combat the Cuban revolutionaries.

It is a recognized fact that Cuba received virtually no help from abroad. We all know the story of the schisms abroad, which obstructed and finally blocked the aid from the exiles to the Cubans-in-arms.

Nevertheless, our people—making incredible sacrifices, and heroically carrying the weight of that war, overcoming great difficulties—succeeded in mastering the art of war and in organizing a small army, which armed itself with the enemy’s weapons.

From the ranks of the poor, from the ranks of the fighters who came from the people, from the ranks of the peasants and the emancipated slaves—for the first time, officers and leaders of the revolutionary movement rose from the ranks of the people. The most worthy patriots, the most outstanding fighters, began to come to the fore, among them the Maceo brothers, examples of these exceptional men.

After 10 years this heroic struggle was defeated—not by Spanish arms, but by one of the worst enemies the Cuban revolutionary movement has always had—by dissension among the Cubans themselves, who sank into quarrels, regionalism, caudillismo. In other words this enemy—which was permanently present in the revolutionary process—destroyed that struggle...

After the Cuban forces had been undermined by the disagreements, and the enemy stepped up its offensive, those weaker revolutionary elements began to vacillate. And it was at the time of the Zanjón Pact that ended that heroic war that Antonio Maceo emerged as the truest representative of the people, coming from the most humble ranks of the people, with all his strengths and his exceptional greatness...

That war brought to the fore many leaders from among the ranks of the people, but that war also inspired the person who was, without doubt, the most brilliant and most universal of all Cuban political figures: José Martí.

Martí was very young when the Ten Years’ War broke out. He suffered imprisonment and exile; his health was not good, but he had an extraordinarily brilliant mind. In his student years, he was a champion of the cause of independence, and when barely 20 years old, he wrote some of the finest documents in the political history of our country.

After the Cuban forces were defeated in 1878, Martí became the main theoretician and champion of revolutionary ideas. He took up the banners of
Céspedes, Agramonte and the heroes who fell in that 10-year struggle, and developed Cuban revolutionary ideas of that period to their highest level. Martí understood the factors that led to the failure of the Ten Years’ War. He analyzed the causes profoundly and dedicated his energies to preparing for a new war. He planned this war for almost 20 years without ever becoming discouraged, developing his revolutionary theory, uniting forces, rallying the veterans of the Ten Years’ War. Ideologically, he fought the autonomists and the annexationists that opposed the revolutionary current in the Cuban political arena.

Martí advocated his ideas constantly and at the same time organized the Cuban émigrés [in the United States]; in fact, Martí organized the first revolutionary party—that is, the first party that united all the revolutionaries. With outstanding tenacity, moral courage and heroism, with no resources other than his intelligence, his convictions and his correct position, he dedicated himself to that task.

We can state that our country had the privilege of having at its disposal one of the richest political treasures, one of the most valuable sources of political education and knowledge, in the thought, writings, books, speeches and all the other extraordinary works of José Martí...

Cubans had fought for 30 years; tens of thousands of Cubans had died on the battlefields; hundreds of thousands perished in that struggle, while the Yankees lost only a few hundred soldiers in Santiago de Cuba. They seized Puerto Rico, they seized Cuba, they seized the Philippine archipelago, 6,000 miles from the United States, and they seized other possessions. This was something that Martí and Maceo had feared the most. Political consciousness and revolutionary thought had already developed to such an extent that the key leaders of the War of Independence in 1895 had very clear, absolutely clear, ideas about the objectives, and fervently rejected the idea of annexation—and not just annexation, but even the intervention of the United States in that war...

It is possible that ignorance, or forgetfulness, or the euphoria of present achievements might lead the present generation to underestimate how much our people owe those fighters.

They were the ones who paved the way; they were the ones who created the conditions; and they were the ones who had to swallow the most bitter dregs: the bitter draft that was the Zanjón Pact, the end of the struggle in
1878; the even more bitter draft that was Yankee intervention, the bitter draft of the transformation of this country into a colonial establishment and a strategic pontoon—as Martí had feared; the bitter draft of seeing opportunists and corrupt politicians, the enemies of the revolution, allied with the imperialists, ruling the country…

It is necessary to go to the archives, to exhume the documents, so that our people, our present generation, can have a clear idea of how the imperialists governed; how, through memorandums and papers, and with great insolence, they governed this country—a country they pretended to call a "free," "independent" and "sovereign" nation. Our people should know what kind of liberators these were and the crude and repugnant methods they used in their relations with this country. Our present generation must be informed about all of this because if it is not informed its revolutionary consciousness will not be sufficiently developed. If this country’s origins and history are not known the political culture of our masses will not be sufficiently well developed. We could not even understand Marxism, we could not even call ourselves Marxists, if we didn’t begin with an understanding of our own revolutionary process and of the process of the development of consciousness and political and revolutionary thought in our country over the period of 100 years. If we don’t understand that, we can know nothing of politics…

As revolutionaries, when we say it is our duty to defend this land, to defend this country, to defend this revolution, we must realize that we are not defending the efforts of just 10 years; we must realize that we are not just defending the revolution of this generation. We must realize that we are defending the efforts of 100 years of struggle. We must realize that we are defending not just that for which thousands of our comrades fell, but that for which hundreds of thousands of Cubans fell during these 100 years!

With the victory of 1959, fundamental questions for our people’s lives presented themselves once again—this time on a much higher plane. If in 1868 one of the matters under discussion was whether or not to abolish slavery, to abolish the ownership of one human being by another, in our era, in our century, with the advent of our revolution, the fundamental question, the essential question, that which can define the revolutionary nature of this era and of this revolution, is no longer the question of the ownership of
human beings, but that of the ownership of other human beings’ means of earning a living...

The revolution is the result of 100 years of struggle, the result of the development of the political movement and revolutionary consciousness, armed with the most up-to-date political thinking, armed with the most up-to-date, scientific concept of society, history and economics—which is Marxism-Leninism—the weapon that completed the wealth, the arsenal of revolutionary experience and the history of our country.

Our people are armed not only with that experience and that consciousness; they are also a people that has been able to overcome the factions that divided it, the group divisions, caudillismo and regionalism, to become a single, undivided revolutionary people. When we speak of the people, we speak of revolutionaries; when we speak of a people ready to fight and to die, we are not thinking of the gusanos [literally: worms], of the few faint-hearted individuals who are still around. We are thinking of those who have the legitimate right to be called Cubans and the Cuban people—the same legitimate right our combatants and our mambises had—a people integrated, united and led by a revolutionary party, a party that constitutes a militant vanguard.

What did Martí do, in order to make the revolution? He organized the party of the revolution, organized the party of the revolutionaries. There was only one revolutionary party. Those who were not in the party of the revolutionaries were in the party of the Spanish colonialists, in the party of the annexationists or in the party of the autonomists.

In the same way today, the people with their party, which is their vanguard, armed with the most up-to-date concepts, armed with the experience of 100 years of struggle, having developed their revolutionary political and patriotic consciousness to the highest level, have succeeded in overcoming age-old vices and have built this unity and this power of the revolution...

The banners that flew over Yara, La Demajagua, Baire, Baraguá and Guáimaro; the banners that presided over the solemn event where slavery was eradicated; and the banners that have led the way throughout the revolutionary history of our country will never be lowered. Our people will defend those banners and what they represent to the last drop of their blood...
We are no longer the people that abolished slavery 100 years ago; we are no longer the last to abolish slavery—the ownership of human beings—today, we are the first people of this continent to abolish the exploitation of one human being by another! It is true that we were the last to begin, but it is also true that we have gone further than anyone else. We have eradicated the capitalist system of exploitation; we have made the people the true owners of their future and their wealth. We were the last to break the chains of the colony, but we have been the first to throw off the chains of imperialism.

25. 10-MILLION-TON SUGAR HARVEST

Cuba’s failure to bring in a record, 10-million-ton sugarcane harvest in 1970 had both immediate and medium-term repercussions in all aspects of the nation’s life.

The goal was both a strategy and a necessity, and it should be understood in that context. The US government was subjecting the Cuban economy to a harsh blockade; it was also waging a dirty war against the island, forcing it to maintain the mobilization of a large military force. Therefore, it had not been possible to concentrate efforts on economic development during the first few years of the Cuban revolution. This became essential, however, as the population was growing, and its demands in all areas multiplied. Resources were badly needed.

Cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries had not yet reached its peak, so the benefits this offered were not as great as they would be later on.

Moreover, that cooperation was reduced as a result of differences with the Soviet Union following the 1962 Missile Crisis and different perspectives on the Latin American revolutionary movements. Even so, the balance of trade between the two countries—which was obviously one-sided—resulted in Cuba’s growing debt to the Soviet Union. The leaders of the Cuban government felt morally bound to pay this debt and also aspired to a greater independence that would allow them to diversify their economic relations with other markets.

This was the background to Cuba prioritizing the sugar industry, the country’s main resource in those years, and the reliance on it as the basic source of income.
Thus, intensive investment in that sector took place in the 1965–70 period, aimed at increasing industrial capacity. This included the use of modern technology in planting and cultivating sugarcane, expanding the areas planted with sugarcane, and beginning to solve the problem of using machinery in the work of harvesting—of which, at that time, there was very little experience anywhere in the world. This task was particularly pressing for Cuba.

The disappearance of the army of the unemployed and the creation of new job options for the rural population, which had traditionally provided the labor for the heavy work of cutting the sugarcane by hand, made it necessary to bring in the harvest by mobilizing soldiers, students and volunteers from the cities, some of whom were less than productive. This raised the cost of the harvest and created other difficulties in the work places from which they had come.

Under these circumstances, the country set about reaching the goal with great spirit and enthusiasm. A state of political and revolutionary effervescence preceded the great challenge. Cuba’s economic and human resources were placed at the service of bringing in a 10-million-ton harvest.

But even though enough sugarcane was planted to make the 10 million tons of sugar, the goal could not be met. Many important industrial investments, aimed at increasing the capacities of the sugar mills, had not been completed by the time of the milling. The mechanization of the harvest fell behind schedule, which made it necessary to mobilize enormous numbers of cane cutters in the fields, at the cost of paralyzing other economic activity. The organization of many aspects of the work also failed, stemming in large measure from the methods of leadership and management of the economy at the time, methods that were later seriously criticized by the leadership of the revolution.

On May 18, 1970, a crowd gathered in Havana to welcome the 11 Cuban fishermen who, a few days earlier, had been attacked and left stranded on a tiny islet in the Bahamas by counterrevolutionaries aboard pirate launches coming from Miami. Fidel Castro and all the other members of the Cuban government took part in their welcome.

One of the fishermen said that, in the midst of their ordeal, they had been encouraged by the thought that the Cuban people would bring in a 10-million-ton harvest. Fidel then said that he had not intended to talk about
the sugarcane harvest that evening, but, on hearing the fisherman, he felt he had to tell the people the sad truth: that it was impossible to bring in a 10-million-ton harvest that year. He then called on workers throughout the country to keep on doing their utmost until the harvest was over and to find the revolutionary strength to turn that setback into a victory.

The 1970 sugarcane harvest wound up with 8.5 million tons of sugar, the highest sugar production figure in the history of Cuba and the greatest production figure for cane sugar in the history of the world.

Still, it was a sad and costly setback. Many illusions were lost that evening, and the nation’s economy was seriously damaged. Nevertheless, people are still debating whether, if the goal had been met, it would have delayed the rectification of the errors of idealism that were being made in the economy. If so, paradoxically, the setback was positive.

The trauma caused by that blow was reflected in the July 26 ceremony that year, when Fidel offered to resign as prime minister, and the people immediately and energetically rejected his offer. It led to deep reflection and the determination to apply more realistic and effective methods, not only in the sphere of the economy but also in the work of the party, the government, the labor unions and the other mass organizations. Viewed strictly objectively, the experience also contained the seed of future negative phenomena, in the form of a tendency to assimilate without criticism the experiences of socialist construction in the Soviet Union.

WE MUST TURN THE SETBACK INTO A VICTORY


I would like to begin by recalling the origins of the plan for producing 10 million tons of sugar.

Our trade relations with the Soviet Union began because of attacks by the United States, which withdrew our sugar quota. At that time, the Soviet Union began to buy the sugar that we could no longer sell on the US market. The first few times it bought our sugar, it paid more or less the same price as that on the international market.
As you know, some of our sugar is sold on what is called the free market, and some is sold by means of agreements with various countries. The price of the sugar sold under those agreements varies. In general, it is higher than the price on the free market. A large part of our sugar is sold through such agreements.

We had to import all the oil we needed and a range of raw materials, foodstuffs and equipment from the Soviet Union, because we had no other way of obtaining those things. Because of this, our imports from the Soviet Union grew considerably, while our payments were limited. The amount of sugar that we could sell was limited, as were the amounts of some other products that we sold to the Soviet Union after the United States imposed the blockade.

Of the products we exported, sugar was the most important. It was followed by mineral exports, tobacco, etc. That is, sugar, nickel, small shipments of tobacco and rum were our country’s main exports...

Because of this and the needs of a developing—and, I could also say, a disorganized—country (the first phase of a revolutionary process in any country entails disorganization) our trade imbalance with the Soviet Union grew larger year by year. At the same time, our need for imports in order to develop the country kept growing—and had to keep growing every year, both to raise the standard of living even modestly and to develop the national economy—we could see that our imports were going to increase considerably and that our exports could not grow...

Sugar was practically our only export product whose production could be increased immediately: first, because there was some underutilized industrial capacity; and second, because there were many sugar mills that, with relatively small investment, could increase their production. Some, for example, had a greater capacity but with various bottlenecks that prevented production from increasing. Moreover, we could extend the sugarcane harvest...

So, we proposed a long-term agreement with the Soviet Union, based on our possibilities for increasing our sugar production. The Soviet government accepted Cuba’s proposal, and we agreed to increase our exports to five million tons of sugar—which would be sold for 6.11, not 4 cents a pound. In our future plans, the value of those exports would increase from 264 million to 672 million pesos a year...
This was why we drew up a great plan for increasing our sugar exports. It was not the result of a whim; it was not aimed at testing our mettle by setting ourselves difficult goals or at covering ourselves with glory. Our production target of 10 million tons of sugar responded to a real need. Moreover, it was the only possibility our country had, the only sphere in which, by making the best possible use of the land, increasing production per hectare, using all our capacity, extending the sugarcane harvest and making some investments, we could increase our annual export earnings by 400 million pesos...

Some people doubted that we could find markets for 10 million tons of sugar, but it is not a problem of markets. Ever since our relations with the socialist camp were fully opened, in spite of the blockade—in spite of the blockade!—our country’s problems haven’t been those of markets, but rather have been problems of production. Our country has and can find markets for as much sugar as we can produce...

The sugar industry had never before been a limiting factor in production—the limits had been set previously by agriculture. In fact, the reason that more sugar was not produced was not that the sugar mills did not have the capacity to process it; it has always been because there was not enough sugarcane. That is, there was not enough raw material to increase the amount of sugar produced...

Three factors have influenced the low yields: first, investments; second, the deficient maintenance in many other sugar mills; and third—and, really, I have to state clearly that this is the main one—the poor operation of the sugar mills...

It was low sugar yields that made us lose the battle of the 10 million tons...

I should also point out one thing that is fundamental to this problem of the 10 million tons: It was not the people who lost this battle. I can state with complete confidence that the people did not lose this battle. Even though I cannot say that the battle for the 10 million tons was won—because it was not—I can say that the people did not lose it. We were the ones who lost that battle—the administrative apparatus and those of us who are leaders of the revolution are the ones who failed.

The people did what was needed to produce 10 million tons of sugar and more—11 million tons. We are the ones who did not do what was needed
to produce that much. I think that this must be said as a matter of justice, because it is the unvarnished truth...

All right—we did produce eight million tons of sugar, and, comparing that figure to the largest amount of sugar produced in the capitalist era [in Cuba]—with the disadvantages I’ve already pointed out—those eight million tons are 702,000 tons more than the largest amount of sugar produced during the capitalist era, which was 7,298,000 tons. That is, it’s 10 percent more than the largest amount of sugar produced in the capitalist era...

What are our main tasks? First, to take all the measures and cut all the sugarcane, to go wherever the sugarcane is and cut every bit of it. We’ll try to produce nine million tons, or, if we do not manage nine million, 8.8 or 8.9 million tons—as much as we can from the sugarcane we have. We will try to increase our record as much as possible. And, if we can increase it by a hundredth of a percent or a millionth of a percent by producing one ton more with the last field of sugarcane, we’ll do that...

That is the first, immediate thing, the main watchword we should adopt. Together with this, the party and the mass organizations should prepare for the task of strengthening the revolution in every sphere. This is very important.

The party had to make a tremendous effort to raise those percentages, planting 536,000 more hectares of land with sugarcane than had been planted two years ago, and there that land is, planted to new varieties, and the other hectares of land will be planted to even better varieties.

We had to throw the party into that task, concentrating on it, so less time was dedicated to political tasks, less time to work with the masses. A task of this sort introduces administrative elements more than leadership ones, and an emergency situation always leads to orderly habits, to doing things administratively.

Why? Because we threw the party into an administrative task, both in agriculture and in industry...

We have to go back to all those questions that were raised when the sectarianists were criticizing us: How should the party work? What is the function of the mass organizations? What is their importance? The party is not a mass organization. The party is selective; the party is a vanguard. If we were to make it a mass organization... That may come one day, in
a communist society, when the party, the masses and the government are almost the same thing. But, in this phase, the party still has to select its members from among the most dedicated people; it has to try to keep on attracting the best workers. The party has to help develop the mass organizations, as has already been stated here. But it should not become a mass organization—not yet…

We must strengthen the political apparatus. The party does not administer anything. It guides, directs, promotes, supports and guarantees the fulfillment of the plans that the leadership of the revolution draws up for each area.

We must strengthen the administrative apparatus and the mass organizations and, above all, strengthen the party. These are matters that I think I should take this opportunity to point out to you…

And the third watchword is to turn the setback into a victory. We must turn the setback into a victory.

That is the key, honorable watchword of our people. We will turn the setback into a real victory. We will work to gain more from the setback than we would have gained from a victory—in terms of commitment, better work, sense of responsibility, duty and more complete dedication to the tasks of the revolution.

In this way, both now and in the months and years to come, we will get more out of the setback than we would have got from a victory.

This is what we mean by turning the setback into a victory. I’m sure we can do it; I’m absolutely certain that we will convert this setback into a victory.

26. ANGOLA: OPERATION CARLOTA

There had been historical ties between the Cuban revolution and the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which had arisen in 1965, when Che Guevara, representing the Cuban leadership, made the first contacts with the MPLA and Dr. Agostinho Neto,¹ its main leader. Since then, Cuban combatants had helped to train members of that anticolonialist force in Angola.

After the “Carnation Revolution” in Portugal (1974), which paved the way for the independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa, the CIA, some NATO countries and the Portuguese colonialists themselves maneuvered to hand over power in Angola to the puppet organizations they had created.

At the same time, imperialism’s main allies in that vast area of Africa—rich in natural resources and with great economic potential—began to make threatening moves.

Sure enough, at the beginning of October 1975, the South African racists sent troops to occupy Cunene, in southern Angola. Forces of the regime in Zaire [Congo] and bands of mercenaries recruited in several European countries and the United States entered Angola from the north and advanced toward Luanda, its capital. Meanwhile, the two main puppet organizations, UNITA² and the FNLA,³ were receiving tens of millions of dollars in arms and financing from the United States and its allies.

¹. Agostinho Neto was the leader of the MPLA and president of the People’s Republic of Angola.
². The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) was headed by Jonas Savimbi.
³. The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) was headed by Holden Roberto.
This was the situation in mid-October 1975, when at the request of the MPLA, Cuba sent some weapons and personnel to instruct the Angolan forces in their use.

On October 23, the South African forces left their bases in Cunene and Namibia and launched a large-scale invasion of Angolan territory. Over 100 tanks, artillery and armored transport vehicles participated in the attack, advancing north toward Luanda at a rate of around 65 kilometers a day. Meanwhile, the regular troops of Mobutu Sese Seko’s regime in the Congo and the white mercenaries that were moving south came to within 25 kilometers of the Angolan capital of Luanda.

On November 3, the first Cuban instructors—who had joined their Angolan students from a military academy—were killed in combat against the racists near Benguela.

On November 5, at the request of the MPLA, the Cuban government decided to provide direct support for the Angolan patriots, who were facing mortal danger. A battalion of special troops of the Ministry of the Interior was the first unit sent to take part in a theater of operations nearly 12,000 kilometers from Cuba. The Angolan puppets had already printed invitations for the banquet they planned to give on November 11, the date set for the transfer of power ceremony, by which time they expected to have occupied the entire country.

The invaders advancing from the north suffered their first crushing defeat at Quifangondo, just outside Luanda. They were also beaten back in Cabinda, a rich oil and forestry enclave. The advance of the South African troops was also contained in the south. The imperialists’ plans were frustrated. On November 11, 1975, while fighting was still going on near Luanda, Agostinho Neto proclaimed Angola’s independence and became the first president of the new African nation.

Following the first unit, Cuban regular forces, whose members had volunteered for this internationalist mission, began to arrive in Angola. In some cases, they were flown in on old Cubana de Aviación Britannia planes that were adapted to increase their fuel-carrying capacity. In other cases, the soldiers and weapons were sent on ships of the Cuban merchant marine. At first, Cuba did this on its own and with its own resources. Later, an agreement was reached with the Soviet Union on cooperation in providing military support to Angola.
On March 27, 1976, the last South African units withdrew from Angola.

The Cuban command called this solidarity mission Operation Carlota, in honor of the black African slave woman in Cuba who led two uprisings against the slave owners and colonialists in the first half of the 19th century. When she was captured in 1843, in the second uprising, her executioners cut her into pieces.

The Cubans did not return home immediately after the initial months of intensive fighting, however, because attacks continued from abroad, as did threats of further invasions. The Cubans had to stay for 13 years, in the course of which over 400,000 men and women went to Angola on internationalist missions. Angola was thus turned into a school of combat and had a lasting effect on the political consciousness and lives of the Cuban people.

“We have helped our Angolan brothers and sisters,” Fidel Castro said, “first of all in response to a revolutionary principle, because we are internationalists, and, secondly, because our people are both Latin American and Latin African...”

FOR THE YANKEE IMPERIALISTS, ANGOLA REPRESENTS AN AFRICAN BAY OF PIGS

Excerpts of the speech by Fidel Castro on April 19, 1976.

In commemorating this 15th anniversary of the heroic and glorious victory at the Bay of Pigs, our people have an additional reason for pride, expressed in their most beautiful internationalist sentiments and which transcends the boundaries of this continent: the historical victory of the people of Angola, to whom we offered the generous and unrestricted solidarity of our revolution.

At the Bay of Pigs, African blood was shed, blood of the selfless descendants of a people who were slaves before they became workers, and who were exploited workers before they became masters of their homeland. And

in Africa, alongside that of the heroic fighters of Angola, Cuban blood also flowed, that of the children of Martí, Maceo and Agramonte, that of the internationalist heirs of Gómez and Che Guevara. Those who once enslaved human beings and sent them to America perhaps never imagined that one of those peoples who received the slaves would one day send their fighters to struggle for freedom in Africa.

The victory in Angola was the twin sister of the victory at the Bay of Pigs. For the Yankee imperialists, Angola represents an African Bay of Pigs. At one time we said that imperialism had suffered its great defeats in the month of April: Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, Cambodia, etc. This time the defeat came in March. On the 27th of that month, when the last South African soldiers crossed the Namibian border after a retreat of more than 700 kilometers, one of the most brilliant pages in the liberation of black Africa was written...

The war in Angola was, in reality, [US Secretary of State Henry] Kissinger’s war. Against the advice of some of his closest collaborators, he insisted on carrying out covert operations to liquidate the MPLA through the counterrevolutionary FMLA and UNITA groups, with the support of white mercenaries from Zaire and South Africa. It is said that the CIA itself warned him that such clandestine operations could not be kept secret. Aside from the fact that the FNLA was supported by the CIA from the time it was founded, a fact now publicly acknowledged, the United States invested several million dollars from the spring of 1975 on, to supply arms and instructors to the counterrevolutionary and separatist Angolan groups. Instigated by the United States, regular troops from Zaire entered Angolan territory in the summer of that same year, while South African military forces occupied the Cunene area in the month of August and sent arms and instructors to the UNITA bands.

At that time there was not a single Cuban instructor in Angola. The first material aid and the first Cuban instructors reached Angola at the beginning of October, at the request of the MPLA, when foreign forces were insolently invading Angola. However, no Cuban military unit had been sent to Angola to participate directly in the fight nor was that projected.

On October 23, also instigated by the United States, South African regular army troops, supported by tanks and artillery, invaded Angolan territory across the Namibian border and penetrated deep into the country, advancing between 60 and 70 kilometers a day. On November 3, they had penetrated
more than 500 kilometers into Angola, meeting their first resistance on the outskirts of Benguela, from the personnel of a recently organized school for Angolan recruits and from their Cuban instructors, who had virtually no means for halting the attack by South African tanks, infantry and artillery.

On November 5, 1975, at the request of the MPLA, the leadership of our party decided to send with all urgency a battalion of regular troops with antitank weapons to help the Angolan patriots resist the invasion of the South African racists. This was the first Cuban troop unit sent to Angola. When it arrived in the country, the foreign interventionists were 25 kilometers from Luanda in the north, their 140-millimeter artillery was bombing the suburbs of the capital and the South African fascists had already penetrated more than 700 kilometers into the south from the Namibian border, while Cabinda was heroically defended by MPLA fighters and a handful of Cuban instructors...

The enemy has talked about the number of Cubans in Angola. It is sufficient to say that, once the struggle began, Cuba sent the troops and the weapons necessary to win that struggle. To the honor of our people we must say that hundreds of thousands of fighters from our regular troops and reserves were ready to fight alongside their Angolan brothers and sisters.

Our losses were minimal. In spite of the fact that the war was fought on four fronts and our fighters fought alongside the heroic MPLA soldiers in the liberation of almost a million square kilometers that had been occupied by the interventionists and their henchmen, fewer Cuban soldiers were killed in action in more than four months of fighting in Angola, than in the three days of fighting at the Bay of Pigs.

Cuba made this decision entirely on its own. The Soviet Union—which had always helped the peoples of the Portuguese colonies in the struggle for their independence—provided besieged Angola with basic aid in military equipment and collaborated in our efforts when imperialism cut off practically all our air routes to Africa. They never requested that a single Cuban be sent to that country. The Soviet Union is extraordinarily respectful and careful in its relations with Cuba. Only our party could make a decision of that nature.

[US President Gerald] Ford and Kissinger lie to the people of the United States and to the world when they try to place responsibility for Cuba’s solidarity actions in Angola on the Soviet Union.
Ford and Kissinger lie when they seek to blame the US Congress for the defeat of the interventionists in Angola, because Congress failed to authorize new funds for the FNLA and UNITA counterrevolutionary groups. Congress made those decisions on December 16, 18 and 19. By that time the CIA had already supplied large amounts in arms, Zairean troops had been repulsed in Luanda, Cabinda had been saved, the South Africans were contained and demoralized on the banks of the Queve River and no shipment of arms from the CIA would have changed the already inexorable course of events. Today those weapons would be in the hands of the revolutionary forces like many of those it supplied earlier.

Ford and Kissinger lie to the US people, and especially to the black population of that country, when they hide the fact that the fascist and racist troops of South Africa criminally invaded Angolan territory long before Cuba sent any regular unit of soldiers there.

There are some other lies promoted by Ford and Kissinger in relation to Angola that need not be analyzed now. Ford and Kissinger know perfectly well that everything I say is true.

In this solemn commemoration ceremony, I will not say what I think of the insolent epithets Ford has used in his political campaign through the south of the United States and of other cynical aspects of his imperial policy; I will confine myself, for now, to saying that he is a vulgar liar.

True, events in Angola resemble those of Ethiopia, but in reverse. In Angola, the imperialists, the racists, the aggressors symbolized by the CIA, the South African troops and the white mercenaries did not achieve victory nor did they occupy the country; the victory was won by those who were attacked, the revolutionaries, the black and heroic people of Angola.

True, events in Angola resemble what happened to Czechoslovakia in Munich, but also in reverse; the people who were attacked received the solidarity of the revolutionary movement, and the imperialists and racists could not dismember the country, divide up its wealth or assassinate its finest sons and daughters. Angola is united, integrated, and today it is a bulwark of liberty and dignity in Africa. The swastika of the South African racists does not fly over the palace in Luanda.

The Cuban economy had been recovering since the beginning of the 1970s, mainly on the basis of an intensification of Cuba’s ties with the Soviet Union and with the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) system of socialist integration—which Cuba joined in July 1972. Combined with this was the greater unity achieved in the Communist Party of Cuba and the advances made in terms of its membership, functioning and methods of work, culminating in the first congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in December 1975.

After consolidating the defense of the revolution and achieving some degree of stability and security, Cubans called for laying the organizational, juridical and institutional foundations for continuing to build the economy more efficiently and for perfecting the construction of the political system. This would facilitate active, democratic participation by citizens in decision-making on public matters.

Thus, the party congress had to take up topics of the utmost importance:

- The drawing up of a new constitution of the republic and the holding of a referendum to approve its text, which had been subjected to exhaustive consultation among the people during the initial stage of its drafting;
- The adoption of a new political-administrative division of the country, replacing the old division of six provinces with 14 new ones and a special municipality—the Isle of Pines, later renamed the Isle of Youth;
- The establishment of the organs of People’s Power, by means of a free and secret vote by citizens, which would involve electing delegates in all the voting districts in the country and then creating the corresponding
municipal and provincial assemblies and the National Assembly of People’s Power, with the Council of State, from which would come the authority of all the bodies of government and administration; and

- The adoption of a system of economic management and planning that would overcome past mistakes; make it possible for the workers and cadres to acquire real economic consciousness; promote strict control and administration of resources; and constantly promote mass participation in reducing costs, raising productivity and achieving good levels of efficiency.

The congress would also draw up long-term priorities and programs in the spheres of socioeconomic development; education; artistic and literary culture; relations with religious institutions and believers; national defense; and ideological tasks in information and communication.

Beginning his Main Report, Fidel Castro said, “There are episodes in great political events that are historic. This opening of the first party congress is one such historic event. We have had the privilege of living at a high point in the revolutionary life of our homeland. We could not have achieved it without the sacrifices made by countless sons and daughters of the Cuban nation over several generations. Many people have given their lives for the noble cause of our people’s independence, justice, dignity and progress. We dedicate our heartfelt memories to them—to those who suffered, fought and died in the wars of independence and in the ignominy of the neocolony, in battle against the former dictatorship and in the consolidation and defense of the revolution. Without their ideas, efforts and blood, this congress would never have been possible.”

Despite the deficiencies that appeared later in the application of the system of economic planning and management as well as in other areas, the first party congress undoubtedly constituted an important step in organizing the country and consolidating the revolution’s achievements.

The 1975 congress was rooted in a belief in the Cuban people’s ability to collectively improve their efforts, their political and moral commitment, and the certainty of being able to count on the support of a socialist community

led by the Soviet Union—which seemed to be extremely stable and was
attaining impressive levels of economic development, great social advances
and notable scientific and technological achievements in those years.

Those external premises changed after the second and third congresses.
The fourth meeting of the highest-ranking body of the party, held in
Santiago de Cuba in October 1991, was faced with the imminent collapse
of the Soviet Union and the regimes that had arisen after the Red Army had
liberated several countries during World War II. The fifth congress, held in
October 1997, summed up the results of the struggle Cuba was waging in
the conditions of the “special period” and laid down the main prospects for
continuing the nation’s recovery, based on its own efforts.

These changing conditions, with their dramatic challenges, confirmed
the need for the Communist Party as the organized vanguard leading the
revolution and put to the test its ability to guide the ship of state through a
rough and stormy sea.

HERE WE ARE AT LAST, WITH ALL,
FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

Excerpts of the Main Report presented by Fidel Castro at the first party

This year of the first congress has been one of great effort for the rev­
olutionary militants and officials, but future years will be no less tense. The
work to be done in the coming years to fulfill the agreements that will have to
be made at this congress will be hard and intensive because of the diversity
of the tasks entailed and the depth and breadth of the transformations it is
necessary to bring about.

But within all these issues to be dealt with, and on which the congress
will pronounce, those that will generate the most substantial, profound
and extensive changes are those relating to the process of the country’s
institutionalization and the reordering of all economic activity.

The new politico-administrative division, the constitution of the organ­
izations of People’s Power throughout the country and the creation of con­
ditions for introducing the Economic Management System, among many other tasks, require organized, responsible and very hard work...

It is necessary to take the requisite steps and to take the measures that are indicated so as to ensure that the following goals are achieved:

- To hold the referendum on the constitution and the Law of Constitutional Transition on February 15 next year, 1976, and to proclaim our socialist constitution on February 24, the date on which the 81st anniversary of the 1895 war of independence is to be celebrated.
- To apply the new politico-administrative division in the municipal organizations in the months of April and May 1976.
- To carry out elections of delegates to local organizations of People’s Power and deputies to the National Assembly in the second half of October 1976, with the aim of holding the first meeting of the National Assembly of People’s Power, the highest body of state power, consisting of the people’s representatives who have been elected throughout the country, on December 2 next year, the 20th anniversary of the landing of the Granma.
- To constitute the local organizations of People’s Power and assign to them the corresponding activities in production and services of local significance, in the months of November and December 1976 and the first months of 1977.
- To reestablish financial relations between companies and the state sector, in accordance with the principles of the Economic Management System, which will have to be submitted to this congress, to apply a new National Accounting System and to bring into operation a national budget as of January 1977.
- To commence in 1978 the introduction of the Economic Management System in a group of selected experimental companies, representing different production and service activities of the country.
- In the final two years of the five-year period, the Economic Management System is to be applied in all spheres of economic activity.
- To ensure the carrying out of all these proposals, which are of extraordinary importance for the consolidation and advance of our economic development and the revolution in general, it is essential to fulfill,
with the requisite quality and within the time set, each one of the tasks contemplated in the Program of Work that has been prepared.

We know that our party will undertake and fulfill, with a firm spirit, all its obligations…

EPILOGUE

This report has now reached its conclusion. We are aware that there may be omissions, that some matters have been given too brief a treatment in the interests of time, and even that there are some superfluous details, but we have done all that is humanly possible to reflect the work of the revolution and its historical meaning. It is not easy to synthesize in a few words the antecedents of our present process and our 17 years of revolutionary power.

What is important, dear compañeros, is that in our political march forward, we have reached the point at which we presently find ourselves. It is impossible not to experience right now the satisfaction of knowing that our nation occupies today an honorable and worthy place in the worldwide revolutionary movement and that a beautiful future awaits us insofar as we are capable and deserving of it.

This congress will be like a bright star to guide us along this path. The party, its norms, its principles, its organization, its strength, will carry us forward, invincible. There will be no difficulty that we will not be able to overcome, no error that cannot be avoided if it can be foreseen, nor that cannot promptly be rectified if it should be committed.

How could we not remember at this point those extraordinary people who accompanied us in our struggle and who today are not physically with us at this congress: Abel Santamaría, Juan Manuel Márquez, Ñico López.

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2. Abel Santamaría Cuadrado was second in command to Fidel Castro in the movement that attacked the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953. He was captured and atrociously tortured and murdered after this action.

3. Juan Manuel Márquez was second in command on the Granma expedition. He was captured by Batista’s army and murdered after landing, in December 1956.

4. Antonio (Ñico) López was an outstanding revolutionary who participated in the actions of July 26, 1953. He was captured and murdered after arriving with the Granma expedition.
Frank País, José Antonio Echeverría, Che, Camilo, Lázaro Peña and other such commendable constructors of our nation’s present? How could we not remember the Central Committee members who gave their lives to the internationalist cause: Vilo Acuña, Eliseo Reyes, and Antonio Sánchez Díaz? How could we not remember those who today are fulfilling these duties, many of them militants of our party, and many even elected deputies of this congress, who are not with us right now?

Presiding over this gathering today, next to the portraits of Che, Camilo and the legendary figure of Julio Antonio Mella, reminds us of the self-sacrificing fighters who dreamed of and died for a day like today.

The images of Martí, Gómez and Maceo, next to those of Marx, Engels and Lenin, symbolize those who fought for our Cuban homeland along with those who wanted to make a great homeland for all humankind. The republic must be “with all, and for the good of all,” the hero of our independence [José Martí] exclaimed, and his words resound in this hall as an echo of the formidable call with which the founders of scientific socialism rocked the world: “Proletarians of the world, unite!” Here we are at last, with all and for the good of all, and with us are representatives of the worldwide revolutionary movement expressing the encouragement and solidarity of communists and progressive people from around the world to our small country; with this are forged the ties of unity between the proletarians of the

5. Frank País García was a leader of the revolutionary underground in Santiago de Cuba. He was captured and murdered by Batista’s forces on July 30, 1957.

6. Lázaro Peña González was a communist and union leader who founded the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC) in 1939. At the time of his death in 1974, he was secretary general of the CTC.

7. Vitalio Acuña Núñez (Joaquín) was a commander of the Rebel Army. He was killed in Bolivia on August 31, 1967.

8. Eliseo Reyes Rodríguez was a combatant in the Rebel Army and was killed in Bolivia as part of Ernesto Che Guevara’s internationalist guerrilla group.

9. Antonio Sánchez Díaz was a combatant in the Rebel Army and was killed in Bolivia as part of Ernesto Che Guevara’s internationalist guerrilla group.

10. A reference to the international contingent that was in Angola, helping to resist the invasion of the South Africans and other mercenary forces at the time the congress was being held in December 1975.

11. This phrase, “With all, for the good of all,” was used by José Martí in his famous speech to Cuban émigrés in Tampa, Florida, in 1891.
world as an impressive demonstration that those earlier visionaries knew how to recognize the future of humanity.

What is happening here, just as what happened yesterday in the heart of the czarist empire, and in so many other countries of the world, is a symbol of the future world.

To all Cuban communists, to all our compañeros in the revolution, we would like to express our gratitude for your confidence and the love with which you have accompanied your leaders in these heroic and decisive years of our country.

May the most absolute honesty, limitless fidelity to principles, altruism, capacity for sacrifice, revolutionary purity, the spirit of overcoming, heroism and merit forever prevail in our party.

28. THE SOCIALIST CONSTITUTION

With the aim of completing the organization of Cuban society as projected by the first party congress, a referendum was held on February 15, 1976, in which the texts of a new constitution of the republic and of the Law of Constitutional Transition were approved. They were proclaimed a few days later, on February 24, 1976, the 81st anniversary of the 1895 declaration of independence.

In an unprecedented demonstration of popular participation, 98 percent of all citizens 16 years old and over voted, and 97.7 percent of them—5.5 million people—voted for the new constitution.

In fact, the people’s participation in the preparation of the constitution had not begun that day. The drafting commission, headed by Blas Roca Calderío, had considered the suggestions and criteria of many leaders, jurists and key figures from all spheres of the nation’s life.

The draft had then been submitted to a process of popular consultation in which around six million workers, armed forces personnel, students and others took part; as a result, the preamble and 60 of the 141 articles of the draft were modified.

Thus, the text submitted to the referendum was the result of a consensus reached by democratic methods and with the active participation of almost the entire Cuban population over 16.

“Never before in the history of our homeland or Latin America,” Raúl Castro said in proclaiming the constitution, “has a constitution of such progressive and revolutionary content been approved. It is a constitution that corresponds in a great degree to the interests of the homeland and the people, consecrating and guaranteeing the principles of equality and social
justice and the rights of the individual in harmony with the interests of society, in close relation to the socioeconomic reality.

“Unquestionably, the constitution that we proclaim today is the manifestation of our people’s will and views, expressed through a process of direct democracy, exercised to its fullest extent.”

The socialist constitution of 1976 was the seventh constitution adopted in Cuba’s history. The first four had been constitutions of the mambi fighters for Cuba’s independence from Spain in the 19th century: the Guáimaro constitution, which followed the uprisings of 1868; the Baraguá constitution, fruit of the historic protest of Antonio Maceo; the Jimaguayú constitution, of September 16, 1895, which was the focus of the new War of Independence that had begun that year; and the constitution of La Yaya, of October 29, 1897.

These were followed by the 1901 constitution, which marked the birth of neocolonial Cuba, shackled by the Platt Amendment. The 1940 constitution, to some extent, was the heir of the revolutionary struggles of the 1930s—thanks largely to the role played by the communist delegates to the Constitutional Assembly of 1940 that drafted it. But the progressive articles of the 1940 constitution were negated by the prevailing political system. Only the 1959 revolution was able to make the principles of social justice expressed in that constitution a reality.

The 1959 revolution did not, however, retain the liberal-bourgeois framework of the 1940 constitution. Advancing toward deeper structural transformation—recovering that part of the nation’s patrimony that had been usurped by monopolies and large landowners, and entering fully into socialist construction—the nation needed a constitution that would provide a legal framework for the important changes to be wrought on the island, and that would also serve as a basis for all the other revolutionary laws and regulations.

“The constitution,” Raúl Castro emphasized, “is, therefore, the most


2. General Antonio Maceo led the protest at Mangos de Baraguá on March 15, 1878, against the Zanjón Pact—a peace settlement of the Ten Years’ War that brought neither independence nor the emancipation of the slaves—declaring his determination to continue the struggle.
important document governing the process of the institutionalization of the revolution.

“By discussing the draft of our constitution and then voting for it, our people have been making decisions about the socioeconomic system in which they want to live; about the institutions through which they believe they should organize their activities and direct their social development; about the role, powers and functions of those institutions; about the rights and freedoms of citizens; and about the duties of all.

“In short, with complete freedom and full consciousness, they have been making decisions about their lives and future. They have been fully exercising their right to govern, which is only possible when the people own the resources and basic means of production, when they have real power, when they are truly sovereign and hold the present and future of their homeland in their hands.”

In 1992, after the constitution had been in effect for 16 years, the National Assembly of People’s Power, using its powers, modified some of the articles of the constitution, in order to adjust it to the new international situation at the beginning of the 1990s and to provide the legal basis for the economic reforms and transformations required so that Cuba could participate in the world market.

CUBA IS A WORKERS’ SOCIALIST STATE

Excerpts from the constitution of the Republic of Cuba, text approved by the National Assembly of People’s Power in 1992.

CHAPTER I
POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES OF THE STATE

Article 1. Cuba is an independent and sovereign socialist state of workers, organized with all and for the good of all as a united and democratic republic, for the enjoyment of political freedom, social justice, individual and collective well-being and human solidarity.

Article 2. The name of the Cuban state is Republic of Cuba, the official language is Spanish and its capital city is Havana.

Article 3. In the Republic of Cuba sovereignty lies in the people, from whom originates all the power of the state. That power is exercised directly or through the assemblies of People’s Power and other state bodies which derive their authority from these assemblies, in the form and according to the norms established in the Constitution and by law.

When no other recourse is possible, all citizens have the right to struggle through all means, including armed struggle, against anyone who tries to overthrow the political, social and economic order established in this Constitution.

Article 4. The national symbols are those which, for over one hundred years, have presided over the Cuban struggles for independence, the rights of the people and social progress:

- the flag of the lone star;
- the anthem of Bayamo;
- the coat of arms of the royal palm.

Article 5. The Communist Party of Cuba, a follower of Martí’s ideas and of Marxism-Leninism, and the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation, is the highest leading force of society and of the state, which organizes and guides the common effort toward the goals of the construction of socialism and the progress toward a communist society.

Article 6. The Union of Young Communists (UJC), the organization of Cuba’s vanguard youth, has the recognition and encouragement of the state in its main duty of promoting the active participation of young people in the tasks of building socialism and adequately preparing the youth to be conscientious citizens capable of assuming ever greater responsibilities for the benefit of our society.

Article 7. The Cuban socialist state recognizes and stimulates the social and mass organizations, which arose from the historical process of struggles of our people. These organizations gather in their midst the various sectors of the population, represent specific interests of the same and incorporate them
into the tasks of the edification, consolidation and defense of the socialist society.

**Article 8.** The state recognizes, respects and guarantees freedom of religion. In the Republic of Cuba, religious institutions are separate from the state. The different beliefs and religions enjoy the same consideration.

**Article 9.** The state:

a) carries out the will of the working people and

- channels the efforts of the nation in the construction of socialism;
- maintains and defends the integrity and the sovereignty of the country;
- guarantees the liberty and the full dignity of man, the enjoyment of his rights, the exercise and fulfillment of his duties and the integral development of his personality;
- consolidates the ideology and the rules of living together and of conduct appropriate to a society free from the exploitation of human beings;
- protects the constructive work of the people and the property and riches of the socialist nation;
- directs in a planned way the national economy;
- assures the educational, scientific, technical and cultural progress of the country;

b) as the power of the people and for the people, guarantees

- that every man or woman who is able to work has the opportunity to have a job with which to contribute to the good of society and to the satisfaction of individual needs;
- that no disabled person is left without adequate mean of subsistence;
- that no sick person is left without medical care;
- that no child is left without schooling, food and clothing;
- that no young person is left without the opportunity to study;
- that no one is left without access to studies, culture and sports;

c) works to achieve that no family is left without a comfortable place to live.

**Article 10.** All state bodies, their leaders, officials and employees function within the limits of their respective competency and are under the obligation
to strictly observe socialist legality and to look after the respect of the same within the context of the whole of society.

Article 11. The state exercises its sovereignty:
   a) over the entire national territory, which consists of the island of Cuba, the Isle of Youth and all other adjacent islands and keys; internal waters; the territorial waters in the extension prescribed by law; and the air space corresponding to the above;
   b) over the environment and natural resources of the country;
   c) over mineral, plant and animal resources on and under the ocean floor and those in waters comprised in the Republic’s maritime economic area, as prescribed by law, in keeping with international practice.

The Republic of Cuba rejects and considers illegal and null all treaties, pacts and concessions which were signed under conditions of inequality, or which disregard or diminish its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Article 12. The Republic of Cuba espouses the principles of anti-imperialism and internationalism, and
   a) ratifies its aspirations to a valid, true and dignified peace for all states, big or small, weak or powerful, based on respect for the independence and sovereignty of the peoples and the right to self-determination;
   b) establishes its international relations based on the principles of equality of rights, self-determination of the peoples, territorial integrity, independence of states, international cooperation for mutual and equitable benefit and interest, and peaceful settlement of disputes on an equal footing; and based on respect and the other principles proclaimed in the United Nations Charter and in other international treaties which Cuba is a party to;
   c) reaffirms its desire for integration and cooperation with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, whose common identity and historical need to advance united on the road to economic and political integration for the attainment of true independence would allow us to achieve our rightful place in the world;
   d) advocates the unity of all Third World countries in the face of the neocolonialist and imperialist policy which seeks to limit and subordinate the sovereignty of our peoples, and worsen the economic conditions of exploitation and oppression of the underdeveloped nations;
e) condemns imperialism, the promoter and supporter of all fascist, colonialist, neocolonialist and racist manifestations, as the main force of aggression and of war, and the worst enemy of the peoples;

f) repudiates direct or indirect intervention in the internal and external affairs of any state and, therefore, also repudiates armed aggression, economic blockade, as well as any other kind of economic or political coercion, physical violence against people residing in other countries, or any other type of interference with or aggression against the integrity of states and the political, economic and cultural elements of nations;

g) rejects the violation of the inalienable and sovereign right of all states to regulate the use and benefits of telecommunications in their territory, according to universal practice and international agreements which they have signed;

h) considers wars of aggression and of conquest international crimes; recognizes the legitimacy of the struggle for national liberation, as well as of armed resistance to aggression; and considers that its solidarity with those under attack and with the peoples that struggle for their liberation and self-determination constitutes its internationalist duty;

i) bases its relations with those countries building socialism on fraternal friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance, founded on the common objectives of the construction of a new society;

j) maintains friendly relations with those countries which—although having a different political, social and economic system—respect its sovereignty, observe the rules of coexistence among states and the principles of mutual conveniences, and adopt an attitude of reciprocity with our country.

Article 13. The Republic of Cuba grants asylum to those who are persecuted because of their ideals or their struggles for democratic rights; against imperialism, fascism, colonialism and neocolonialism; against discrimination and racism; for national liberation; for the rights of workers, peasants and students and the redress of their grievances; for their progressive political, scientific, artistic and literary activities; for socialism and peace.

Article 14. In the Republic of Cuba rules the socialist system of economy based on the people’s socialist ownership of the fundamental means of production and on the abolition of the exploitation of man by man.
In Cuba also rules the principle of socialist distribution “from each according to his capacity, to each according to his work.” The law establishes the provisions which guarantee the effective fulfillment of this principle.

**Article 15.** Socialist state property, which is the property of the entire people, comprises:

a) the lands that do not belong to small farmers or to cooperatives formed by them, the subsoil, mines, mineral, plant and animal resources in the Republic’s maritime economic area, forests, waters and means of communications;

b) the sugar mills, factories, chief means of transportation and all those enterprises, banks and facilities that have been nationalized and expropriated from the imperialists, landholders and bourgeoisie, as well as the factories, enterprises and economic facilities and scientific, social, cultural and sports centers built, fostered or purchased by the state and those to be built, fostered or purchased by the state in the future.

Property ownership may not be transferred to natural persons or legal entities, save for exceptional cases in which the partial or total transfer of an economic entity is carried out for the development of the country and does not affect the political, social and economic foundations of the state, prior to approval by the Council of Ministers or its Executive Committee.

The transfer of other property rights to state enterprises and other entities authorized to fulfill this objective will be prescribed by law.

**Article 16.** The state organizes, directs and controls the economic life of the nation according to a plan that guarantees the programmed development of the country, with the purpose of strengthening the socialist system, of increasingly satisfying the material and cultural needs of society and of citizens, of promoting the flourishing of human beings and their integrity, and of serving the progress and security of the country.

The workers of all branches of the economy and of the other spheres of social life have an active and conscious participation in the elaboration and execution of the production and development plans.

**Article 17.** The state directly administers the goods that make up the socialist property of the entire people, or may create and organize enterprises and entities to administer them, whose structure, powers, functions and the
system of their relations are prescribed by law.

These enterprises and entities only answer for their debts through their own financial resources, within the limits prescribed by law. The state does not answer for debts incurred by these enterprises, entities and other legal bodies, and neither do these answer for those incurred by the state.

Article 18. The state controls and directs foreign trade. The law establishes the state institutions and officials authorized to:

- create foreign trade enterprises;
- standardize and regulate export and import transactions; and
- determine the natural persons or legal bodies with judicial powers to carry out these export and import transactions and to sign trade agreements.

Article 19. The state recognizes the right of small farmers to legal ownership of their lands and other real estate and personal property necessary for the exploitation of their land, as prescribed by law.

Small farmers may only incorporate their lands to agricultural production cooperatives with the previous authorization of the competent state body and fulfillment of the other legal requirements. They may also sell their lands, swap them or transfer them for another title to the state and agricultural production cooperatives, or to small farmers in the cases, forms and conditions prescribed by law, without detriment to the preferential right of the state to the purchase of the land while paying a fair price.

Land leases, sharecropping, mortgages and all other acts which entail a lien on the land or cession to private individuals of the rights to the land which is the property of the small farmers are prohibited.

The state supports the small farmers’ individual production which contributes to the national economy.

Article 20. Small farmers have the right to group themselves, in the way and following the requirements prescribed by law both for the purpose of agricultural production and for obtaining state loans and services.

The establishment of agricultural production cooperatives in the instances and ways prescribed by law is authorized. Ownership of the cooperatives, which constitutes an advanced and efficient form of socialist production, is recognized by the state.
The agricultural production cooperatives manage, own use and dispose of the goods they own, as prescribed by law and its regulations.

Land owned by cooperatives may not be seized or taxed and its ownership may be transferred to other cooperatives or to the state, according to the causes and as prescribed by law.

The state gives all possible support to this form of agricultural production.

Article 21. The state guarantees the right to personal ownership of earnings and savings derived from one’s own work, of the dwelling to which one has legal title and of the other possessions and objects which serve to satisfy one’s material and cultural needs.

Likewise, the state guarantees the right of citizens to ownership of their personal or family work tools. These tools may not be used to obtain earning derived from the exploitation of the work of others.

The law establishes the amount of goods owned by a person which can be seized.

Article 22. The state recognizes the right of political, mass and social organizations to ownership of the goods intended for the fulfillment of their objectives.

Article 23. The state recognizes the right to legal ownership of joint ventures, companies and economic associations which are created as prescribed by law.

The provisions for the use, enjoyment and disposal of the goods owned by the above-mentioned entities are prescribed by law and by accords, as well as by their own statutes and regulations.

Article 24. The state recognizes the right of citizens to inherit legal title to a place of residence and to other personal goods and chattels.

The land and other goods linked to production in small farmers’ property may be inherited by and only be awarded to those heirs who work the land, save exceptions and as prescribed by law.

The law prescribes the cases, conditions and ways under which the goods of cooperative ownership may by inherited.
Article 25. The expropriation of property for reasons of public benefit or social interest and with due compensation is authorized.

The law establishes the method for the expropriation and the bases on which the need for and usefulness of this action is to be determined, as well as the form of compensation, taking into account the interest and the economic and social needs of the person whose property has been expropriated.

Article 26. Anybody who suffers damages unjustly caused by a state official or employee while in the performance of his public functions has the right to claim and obtain the corresponding indemnification as prescribed by law.

Article 27. The state protects the environment and natural resources. It recognizes the close links they have with sustainable economic and social development to make human life more rational and to ensure the survival, well-being and security of present and future generations. The application of this policy corresponds to the competent bodies.

It is the duty of citizens to contribute to the protection of the waters, the air, and the conservation of the soil, flora, fauna and nature’s entire rich potential.

SOURCE:
http://www.cubanet.org/ref/dis/const_92_e.htm
29. PEOPLE’S POWER

On December 2, 1976, the process of political institutionalization culminated in the creation of the National Assembly of People’s Power; the election of the members of the Council of State and president, first vice-president and other vice-presidents; and the ratification of the members of the Council of Ministers. Thus, a new stage in the nation’s political life began.

This project, which was outlined in the constitution that went into effect on February 24, 1976, included the establishment of a new political-administrative division of the nation; the nomination of candidates for delegates at the grass-roots level by the people living in each voting district; the election of delegates; the subsequent creation of the municipal assemblies and their administrative bodies; the election of delegates to the provincial assemblies and the election of the national deputies; the creation of the provincial assemblies; and, finally, the creation of the National Assembly as the highest governing body, endowed with constitutional and legislative powers.

People’s Power was the fruit of many years of review, effort and experience.

In the initial stage of the revolution, the principal task was to dismantle the institutions and foundations of the old power and, at the same time, to defend the new workers’ and farmers’ democracy. A flexible, cohesive state apparatus was required to concentrate the legislative, executive and administrative powers and to be able to respond rapidly to the deep radical changes that were being instituted.

The democratic participation of the people was expressed directly in this stage in their incorporation into a wide range of tasks, in the political
and military mobilizations and in their involvement in the revolutionary organizations. As Raúl Castro pointed out, “There may not be any other case in history in which a revolution, the leaders of a revolution, have had such massive, total support from the people; such inexhaustible and constant confidence and revolutionary enthusiasm on the part of the masses; and such complete unity as [the Cuban] people have offered their revolution.”

The Cuban leaders had always been aware of how important it was—in addition to having these forms of participation—to create representative institutions that would enable all citizens to take part systematically in the governing of society.

The first attempt to solve problems of local government was the creation of the Coordination, Implementation and Inspection Boards (JUCEI) in the 1960s.

Various factors, including the great effort to achieve the gigantic sugar-cane harvest of 1970, led to the postponement of that task. Following the difficult experience of that year, the determination to institutionalize the revolution was given a big boost. The labor unions and mass organizations were strengthened. In 1972, the Council of Ministers was restructured, and its Executive Committee was created. In 1973, the party apparatus was strengthened in the same way, from the grass roots all the way up to the Central Committee.

In the course of this process, concepts based on the Soviet experience were introduced, which later combined with endogenous mistakes to create new problems, such as a top-heavy administrative superstructure, its virtual duplication in the party apparatus, and the party secretariat’s control of the day to day running of the government. But the overall result was an advance toward more efficient, more democratic leadership.

People’s Power was tried out first in Matanzas province in 1974, to see what adjustments might be required and as a means to assess its extension to the rest of the country.

The proposed system was based on several principles: the people, not the party, would nominate and elect candidates, and the party would have

no veto power; the party’s role in the process would be to see that all norms were strictly upheld; voting would be free and secret, and all citizens 16 years old and over, including members of the armed forces, would have the right to vote and to be elected; those elected must report back periodically to their constituents, who may vote them out of office at any time; and the norms of democratic centralism, collective leadership and individual responsibility would govern all the levels of People’s Power.

Fidel Castro had warned of the danger that the simple administrative measures of the early years of the revolution might become bureaucratic procedures. Similarly, there was a risk that the centralism inherent in the revolutionary government at the beginning might become an obstacle to the administration of production and services at the local level and to initiatives by local governments.

Therefore, the creation of People’s Power in 1976 meant not only the establishment of a system of representative institutions that were the product of democratic elections, giving power to administrative authorities at every level, but also an important decentralization of tasks and powers, transferring them from the central government and its ministries to the local bodies in the provinces and municipalities.

This made many activities more rational and effective. In many cases, the central leadership retained the powers of deciding on methodology, establishing norms and making inspections, and the local bodies took over the direct administration.

In July 1992, the National Assembly adopted changes to the constitution that, among other things, recognized the People’s Councils as important links for coordinating and promoting the tasks of government and modified the electoral law, establishing that the deputies to the National Assembly and delegates to the provincial assemblies of People’s Power—who, up until then, had been elected by the members of the level of government immediately below them—would be elected by the people in a free, direct and secret vote, as were the delegates to the municipal assemblies.
IMPROVING OUR DEMOCRACY

Excerpts from the address by Raúl Castro, first vice-president of the Cuban government, to the delegates of People’s Power, Matanzas, August 22, 1974.

During the first few years after the triumph of the revolution, we did not have adequate conditions for creating these institutions [of People’s Power]. Moreover, there was no pressing, vital or decisive need to do so in order to carry out the tasks our revolutionary process confronted in that early period.

Those early years were characterized by thoroughgoing, radical, accelerated, rapid revolutionary changes. During those first few years, we had to confront successive, ever more violent attacks by imperialism and the domestic counterrevolution.

To develop in that situation and to take up the tasks of that period, Cuba needed a state apparatus that could act quickly and effectively; exercise a workers’ dictatorship; concentrate the legislative, executive and administrative powers in a single body; and make quick decisions.

Our revolutionary government, which concentrated the legislative, executive and administrative powers in itself throughout those years, carried out its functions well. In the first phase of the struggle for survival, it eliminated exploitation in our country and successfully waged a political struggle against attacks both from abroad and from within the nation.

During those early years, the shortage of material resources held back the organization of People’s Power, for Cuba lacked even the minimum resources for carrying out the tasks, which included housing, maintenance and repairs, that the people demanded.

It was feared that limited resources would make it too difficult for People’s Power to carry out its tasks and that the idea of its creation, which was basically correct, might be discredited. Moreover, in the first few years after the triumph of the revolution, we were not sufficiently prepared to create those representative institutions. At that time, we did not yet have a strong party, the mass organizations had not developed sufficiently and we did not have all the organizational tools we have now...
The establishment of the representative institutions of our state is an extremely important step forward in our revolutionary process. It completes the elements of our proletarian government. During the first few years of the struggle for survival, this was neither indispensable nor vital—and might even have proved a hindrance to the speed with which the government had to act at that time. Now, in the new conditions, this has become a pressing need, a basic element of our government through which the people’s participation will be given a regular, real and systematic institutional form.

Naturally, this does not mean that the revolution and its leaders have ever been above the people, that the people have been forgotten or that the masses have ever withdrawn their support from the revolution. To the contrary, because the masses of workers and the rest of the people have always supported the revolution and its leaders, the insurrectional struggle was carried out successfully, the [Batista] dictatorship was overthrown, a general strike was held and attempted coups were put down. The thoroughgoing revolutionary changes that were carried out could only have been effected with the support of the people and their massive, enthusiastic participation...

Even before representative institutions were created, our revolutionary government was and has always been democratic.

No matter what its form and structure, a government such as ours is more democratic than any other kind of government that has ever existed in the history of the world, because it represents the interests of the workers; and a government that represents the workers, a government that is building socialism, is—no matter what its form—a government of the majority, whereas all earlier governments have been governments representing exploiting minorities...

Therefore, our government has been and is an essentially democratic one—a government of, by and for the ordinary people, a government of and for all the workers. Therefore, the creation of representative institutions is simply an improvement on our system of government, giving it a complete and definitive structure and improving our democracy.

Socialist representative institutions embody the express will of the people, through their votes. They are a means by which the people not only are represented by the government but also form a direct part of that government and participate directly and systematically in its decisions.
Since the conditions for the creation of these institutions now exist, it is absolutely necessary to create them immediately…

We should remember that, as Fidel said on the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) when referring to this subject, it is a matter of “replacing the purely administrative habits of the early years of the revolution with democratic procedures that replace the administrative procedures that are threatening to become bureaucratic.”

The existence and functioning of the organs of People’s Power—the representative institutions of our socialist government and the highest bodies of state power in the territories over which they exercise jurisdiction—should, without fail, lead to the total eradication of those purely administrative habits and to the complete replacement of those procedures that threaten to become or which, in many—very many—cases, have already become bureaucratic.

The organs of People’s Power at the municipal, regional and provincial levels are taking over many important administrative activities, which have been centrally administered so far. However, the most important thing about these institutions is not their administrative role; rather, it is the fact that they are the basic organs of state power, composed of representatives who have been democratically elected by the masses. They are institutions through which the people can directly participate in governing social matters. The existence of the organs of People’s Power should, necessarily, eliminate the bureaucratic centralism that still exists in much of our government apparatus, replacing it with democratic centralism, which is the Marxist-Leninist basis on which they should function…

You should educate your electors, the masses, in every electoral district about the problems we have, explaining what can and can’t yet be solved. You should explain to them that the organs of People’s Power are not going to work miracles.

We should ensure that false hopes are not raised among the masses. At the same time, you have the responsibility to struggle not to deceive the masses in what they can logically expect of you. You must manage the people’s resources more efficiently, using the same amount of resources to produce more—and better—products and services than in the past. It is within our power to do this. We must strive for greater efficiency, higher productivity, better quality, rigorous controls in the management of
resources, less bureaucracy, solutions for the problems that we can solve and proposed solutions for others that we can’t solve but which can be solved at other levels. We must also strive for the correct functioning of the organs of People’s Power and seek the best specific forms for these institutions in our country.

In spite of intensive communication with leaders and other international figures who visited Cuba in the 1960s, the Cuban revolution remained relatively isolated in that period. In Latin America, after the United States forced Cuba’s expulsion from the Organization of American States, only Mexico maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba. The Caribbean nations were not yet—or had just become—independent. With the Soviet Union, there was a period of differences, which were not resolved until after the events in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1968.

In the early 1970s, Cuba began to respond to a changing world and its international impact grew very strong in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Third World and the nonaligned countries, and the socialist community centered around the Soviet Union.

In 1970, Salvador Allende’s electoral victory in Chile renewed hopes for change in Latin America. In November of that year, after his inauguration, the Chilean socialist leader reestablished diplomatic relations with Cuba and dealt the first powerful blow to the fundamentalist doctrine of the OAS, which had been used as a pretext for Cuba’s expulsion from that forum. Later on, in 1975, the OAS was forced to adopt the principle of ideological pluralism.

Between November 10 and December 4, 1971, Fidel Castro made an extended visit to Chile, making close contact with the Chilean people, which enabled him not only to contribute to the consolidation of that process but also to outline his views on the key strategic problems of Latin America and the world.

In May, June and July 1972, Fidel made a 63-day tour of several African and Arab countries and the Central and Eastern European socialist countries, concluding with a stay in the Soviet Union.
On December 8 of that year, in a demonstration of dignity and independence, the governments of Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago made the collective decision to establish diplomatic relations with Cuba.

In September 1973, for the first time, Fidel attended a summit of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries held in Algiers. After the meeting, he flew to Vietnam. During the flight, he heard the tragic news of the fascist coup in Chile and President Allende’s death.


In this period, several Latin American governments, including that of Omar Torrijos in Panama, changed their policies and decided to reestablish diplomatic relations with Cuba. Many important international political figures visited Havana.


Between March 1 and April 8, 1977, the Cuban president visited Libya, South Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Angola and Algeria. The most important aspects of the trip included his efforts to find a negotiated solution for the Ogaden conflict between Somalia and the new Ethiopian government, his rebuttal of Mobutu’s accusation that Cubans had taken part in the rebellion in Katanga and his meeting in Luanda with leaders of the national liberation movements of South Africa and Namibia. The trip concluded with visits to the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union.

This same year, in October, Fidel visited Jamaica for the first time.

In December 1977, Cuban forces were sent to Ethiopia and helped to push back and defeat the invasion of the Ogaden desert by Somalian troops backed by Western powers and the reactionary governments in the region.

The 11th World Festival of Youth and Students, in which 18,500 delegates from 145 countries participated, was held in Havana from July 28 through August 5, 1978. The next month Fidel made another visit to Ethiopia, Libya and Algeria.

On May 17, 1979, the Cuban president went to Cozumel, Mexico, where he met with Mexican President José López Portillo.
The Sandinista revolution triumphed in Nicaragua on July 19, 1979, after a bloody people’s struggle with which the Cuban revolution had expressed its solidarity in various ways. A few days later, the two governments decided to renew diplomatic relations and to cooperate actively in Nicaragua’s recovery.

On September 3, 1979, Havana hosted the sixth summit of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries. Delegations attended from 138 countries—including representatives of 94 governments and liberation movements that were full members of the movement. This was the largest and most representative meeting of nonaligned countries to be held up to that time. Marshal Josip Broz Tito, president of Yugoslavia and one of the founders of the movement, attended. In his inaugural address, Fidel denied charges that Cuba was trying to turn the movement into a tool of Soviet policy, reaffirmed the timeliness of its historic principles and called on the meeting to express “a firm determination to struggle and to implement specific plans of action. Actions, not just words!” Fidel concluded.

More heads of state and/or government were gathered on Cuban soil to attend that meeting than ever before or since.

As the newly elected president of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries, Fidel went to New York where, on October 12, 1979, he presented a report to the UN General Assembly.

I SPEAK ON BEHALF OF THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD
WITHOUT A PIECE OF BREAD

Excerpts from the address by Fidel Castro to the UN General Assembly on October 12, 1979, representing the Movement of Nonaligned Countries.

On more than one occasion, it has been said that we were forced into under-development by colonization and imperialist neocolonization. The task of helping us to emerge from underdevelopment is therefore first and foremost a historic and moral obligation for those who benefited from the plunder of our wealth and the exploitation of our men and women for decades and for centuries. But at the same time, it is the task of humanity as a whole…

We must therefore mobilize our resources for development. This is our joint obligation…
In addition to the resources already mobilized by various banking channels, loan organizations, international bodies and private finance agencies, we must discuss and decide on the strategy for the next development decade, so that it will include an additional contribution of no less than $300 billion at 1977 real value, to be invested in the underdeveloped countries and to be made in annual installments of at least $25 billion from the very beginning. This aid should be in the form of donations and long-term, moderate and low-interest credits.

It is imperative that these additional funds be gathered, as the contribution of the developed world and of other countries with resources to the underdeveloped world, over the next 10 years.

If we want peace, these resources will be required. If there are no resources for development there will be no peace.

Some may think that we are asking too much, but I think that the figure itself is still modest. According to statistical information, the world’s annual military expenditure amounts to more than $300 billion.

With $300 billion you could, in one year, build 600,000 schools with a capacity for 400 million children; 60 million comfortable homes for 300 million people; 30,000 hospitals with 18 million beds; 20,000 factories with jobs for more than 20 million workers. Or you could build irrigation systems to water 150 million hectares of land, which, with appropriate technology, could feed a billion people. Humanity wastes this much every year on its military spending. Furthermore, consider the enormous waste of youthful human resources, of technicians, scientists, fuel, raw materials and other things. This is the fabulous price of preventing a true climate of confidence and peace from existing in the world.

In the 1980s, the United States alone will spend six times this much on military activities.

We are requesting less for 10 years of development than is spent in a single year by the ministries of war, and much less than a 10th of what will be spent for military purposes in 10 years.

Some may consider our proposal irrational, but true irrationality lies in the madness of our era; the peril threatening humanity...

As revolutionaries we are not afraid of confrontation. We have placed our trust in history and people. But as a spokesperson and interpreter of the feelings of 95 nations, I have the duty to struggle to achieve cooperation
among people, a cooperation which if achieved on a new and just basis, will benefit all the countries of the international community and will especially improve the prospects for peace.

Development in the short term may well be a task entailing apparent sacrifices and even donations that may seem irrecoverable. But the vast world now submerged in backwardness with no purchasing power and extremely limited consumer capacity will, with its development, add a flood of hundreds of millions of consumers and producers to the international economy. It is only in this way that the international economy can be rehabilitated and help the developing countries emerge from crisis...

For this reason, on behalf of the developing countries, we advocate our cause and we ask you to support it. This is not a gift we seek from you. If we do not come up with effective solutions we will all be equal victims of the catastrophe.

Mr. President, distinguished representatives: Human rights are very often spoken of, but we must also speak of humanity’s rights.

Why should some people go barefoot so that others may ride in expensive cars?

Why should some live for only 35 years so that others may live for 70?

Why should some be miserably poor so that others can be excessively rich?

I speak on behalf of the children of the world without a piece of bread. I speak on behalf of the sick who lack medicine. I speak on behalf of those who have been denied the right to life and to human dignity.

Some countries border the coast; others do not. Some have energy resources, others do not. Some possess abundant land on which to produce food, others do not. Some are so glutted with machinery and factories that you cannot breathe the air because of the poisoned atmosphere. And others have only their own emaciated bodies with which to earn their daily bread.

In short, some countries possess abundant resources, other have nothing. What is their fate? To starve? To be eternally poor? Why then civilization? Why then the conscience of humanity? Why then the United Nations? Why then the world?

You cannot speak of peace on behalf of tens of millions of human beings all over the world who are starving to death or dying of curable diseases. You cannot speak of peace on behalf of 900 million illiterate people.
The exploitation of the poor countries by the rich must cease.

I address myself to the rich nations, asking them to contribute. And I address myself to the poor nations, asking them to distribute.

Enough of words! We need deeds!

Enough of abstractions. We want concrete action! Enough speculating about a new international economic order, which no one understands. We must now speak of a real, objective order that everyone understands!

I have not come here as a prophet of the revolution. I have not come here to ask or to wish that the world be violently convulsed. I have come to speak of peace and cooperation among the peoples. And I have come to warn that if we do not peacefully and wisely resolve the present injustices and inequalities, the future will be apocalyptic.

The rattling of weapons, threatening language and overbearing behavior on the international arena must cease.

Enough of the illusion that the problems of the world can be solved by nuclear weapons. Bombs may kill the hungry, the sick and the ignorant; but bombs cannot kill hunger, disease and ignorance. Nor can bombs kill the righteous rebellion of the peoples. And in the holocaust, the rich, who have the most to lose in this world, will also die.

Let us say farewell to arms, and let us, in a civilized manner, dedicate ourselves to the most pressing problems of our times. This is the responsibility, this is the most sacred duty of all the leaders of all the world. This, moreover, is the basic premise for the survival of humankind.

Thank you.

From 1973, the US government stepped up its policy of using Cuban emigration as a weapon in the effort to create internal difficulties for the revolution.

Cuba had released thousands of prisoners who had served time for having committed counterrevolutionary crimes. Most of them wanted to go to Miami as soon as possible. In addition, there were tens of thousands of people in Havana and other cities who had been waiting for years to get visas so they could join their relatives in the United States. There were others who wanted to emigrate for economic reasons, along with many criminal, marginal and declassed individuals who also wanted to leave Cuba.

The US government refused to give these Cubans visas through normal channels but urged them to commit acts of violence and to go to the United States illegally—which, although dangerous, would feed the anti-Cuba propaganda.

Therefore, they were incited to force their way into embassies, the plan being to place the Cuban government in a difficult position and, in effect, to blackmail it. Certain Latin American governments and embassies lent themselves to these maneuvers.

A decisive moment occurred on April 1, 1980, when a group of individuals drove a bus into the gates of the Peruvian embassy on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 72nd Street in Miramar, Havana. Pedro Ortiz Cabrera, a young Cuban guard, was killed in this incident.

Instead of expelling the intruders, who had no grounds on which to request asylum, the Peruvian government allowed them to stay. On April 4,
Cuba decided to withdraw its guards from around the embassy. The Peruvian chargé d’affaires announced that anyone who wished to enter the embassy could do so, and a noisy, disorderly mob of thousands crammed into the mansion, overflowing into its grounds and onto its roof. Chaos reigned there in the days that followed, since there was no control over the behavior of antisocial elements.

The first groups of emigrants via the Peruvian embassy went to Costa Rica; others went to Lima, where they lived in tents erected in a park and were ignored by the government for many years.

In fact, none of the would-be émigrés wanted to go to Third World countries. They all had their sights set on the United States. On April 18, 1980, an editorial in *Granma*, the official organ of the Communist Party of Cuba, stated clearly that Cuba would not oppose those who wanted to go to the United States, and that they could do so directly and safely, in boats sent by their relatives to the port of Mariel. Thus, the crisis boomeranged on the country that had instigated it, the United States.

The following day, while over a million people marched past the Peruvian embassy in what was called the “march of the fighting people,” preparations began for what would be the largest migratory bridge in the history of the conflict between the United States and Cuba. Between April 21, when the first yachts and other vessels from Florida arrived in Mariel, and the end of May, around 125,000 people went to Miami.

On May Day, 1980, the people marched through Havana’s Revolution Plaza. Referring to current events, in his address to the rally Fidel Castro said, “One of our key ideas is that the work of a revolution and the construction of socialism is the task of totally free men and women and totally voluntary.”

On May 17, five million Cubans took part in the second “march of the fighting people” in Havana and in other marches in different parts of the country. In the capital, the enormous column marched past the US Interests Section, on Havana’s Malecón, where some of those opposed to the revolution—most of them former prisoners who had staged a riot near the diplomatic site and forced their way in on May 2—still remained.

The events at the Peruvian embassy and at Mariel, from which Cuba emerged the moral victor, plunged the Carter administration into a crisis. Subsequently, the politics of the “new right” in the United States gained ground with a much more aggressive and dangerous anti-Cuba policy.
A few days ago, US President [Jimmy] Carter publicly appealed to Cuba to establish what he called an orderly sea or air shuttle for taking Cubans who wanted to emigrate from Cuba to the United States. After that, naturally, he set a series of restrictions, saying that only those who already had relatives in the United States could go there. Nobody knows what other country, if any, is willing to accept the others. In short, the US government wants to pick and choose—if possible, to select skilled people with no criminal record, unless they are counterrevolutionary, and leave us the rest of those antisocial elements.

However, the lumpen and all the other antisocial elements want to emigrate to the United States. None of them want to go to Haiti, Santo Domingo, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador or Peru; nor do they want to go to India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Zaire or the Ivory Coast—in short, to any underdeveloped country in Latin America, Asia or Africa. They all want to go to the United States—or at least to a developed European country.

Some of those who went to Costa Rica tried to hijack a plane that would take them to Miami; others, in Peru, tried to stow away on a ship that was going to the United States.

This makes us think that some of the governments that agreed to accept “refugees” were not very serious about it.

The main thing is not the way Cubans leave Cuba or the route they take to get to the United States. The main thing is to analyze and remove the causes that generated those elements and the Cuban emigration to that country.

Generally, emigration from underdeveloped to developed countries for economic reasons is a result of the poverty that the brutal system of colonial and imperialist exploitation has caused in Third World nations. Millions of Mexicans have emigrated to the United States for that reason, and people say that a million cross the border every year, most of them heading for the part of the United States that used to belong to Mexico and which the
United States took by force. For that reason, too, millions of Haitians have tried to emigrate to the United States. Innumerable millions from the rest of Latin America want to do the same, in order to escape from the dreadful socioeconomic conditions in which they live. It does not occur to anybody to call them dissidents. Is this or is this not the result of imperialist rule and exploitation in our hemisphere?

Prior to the triumph of the revolution, people also emigrated from Cuba for economic reasons, but the United States maintained a strict limit on the number of Cubans who could enter that country.

During the past 21 years, no other country in this hemisphere has done more than Cuba to eliminate unemployment, poverty, ignorance, disease, gambling, drugs and prostitution. No other country in the hemisphere has done more to remove the socioeconomic factors that cause people to become lumpen elements and to emigrate. No other country has struggled as selflessly to overcome socioeconomic underdevelopment. We have performed our most sacred duty as a nation for the welfare of Cuban children.

However, the United States has made the greatest effort in history to sabotage our economic plans and our tenacious struggle in the sphere of social development. It wants to keep our country submerged in underdevelopment and poverty, to destabilize the revolutionary government and to starve us into submission.

Following the triumph of the revolution, a new immigration policy with a strict counterrevolutionary purpose was applied to Cuba.

This began when masses of Batista’s torturers and other criminals were granted asylum in the United States. Now, US officials express concern about the possibility that common criminals who have committed crimes of violence might enter their country, but in 1959 they gave a warm welcome to Ventura, Masferrer, Calviño and hundreds of other assassins and torturers who had killed many thousands of Cubans. They welcomed Batista’s henchmen, including officials who had plundered the treasury, stealing hundreds of millions of pesos from the people. Then they opened their doors to all the large landowners, urban landlords, capitalists and all kinds of despicable people and urged doctors, engineers, architects, accountants, artists, professors, teachers at all levels and all kinds of intellectual workers to leave Cuba.

Of the 6,000 doctors in Cuba at the time of the triumph of the revolution,
they took 3,000 from a country that was beginning an epic battle against
disease. They opened their doors wide, to deprive Cuba not only of its
university-educated professionals but even of its skilled workers and pro-
duction technicians. Never before or since has such an enormous, systematic
effort been made to deprive a country of its skilled personnel, to destroy its
economy and to destabilize it politically within the framework of a counter-
revolutionary strategy. This was what created the basis of the veritable
community of residents of Cuban origin in the United States, dividing
countless families who later tried to be reunited in that country.

An abrupt change occurred in October 1962. The United States suspended
all flights. Why? To generate discontent and promote counterrevolutionary
activities by hundreds of thousands of people who were still in Cuba with
their passports ready.

The opening of the port of Camarioca and the Cuban government’s
willingness to negotiate created a partial solution for that situation [in
1965].

But the United States still maintained a destabilizing, counterrevolutionary
policy with regard to our country. Once again, it clamped restrictions on
emigration. Much worse, it encouraged illegal departures from Cuba as a
tool of a dirty imperialist propaganda campaign. Any criminal, lumpen or
antisocial element— to whom they would not normally give a visa—who
arrived illegally was given a hero’s welcome and lots of publicity. Sometimes
such people hijacked vessels and took their crews hostage. The US govern-
ment was warned several times of the negative consequences of such acts.

Our streets teemed with thousands of former counterrevolutionary
prisoners, and the United States, which had urged and led them to commit
counterrevolutionary acts, refused to accept them, even though the Cuban
government authorized them and their families to leave.

The US actions against Cuba were not limited to immigration policy. A
tight economic blockade was imposed to prevent our country from emerging
from underdevelopment and poverty and to defeat our socioeconomic
plans. Moreover, the arsenal of criminal measures imperialism used against
our homeland also included mercenary invasions, pirate attacks, actions
by armed groups, acts of terrorism, acts of sabotage in our industries and
plagues in agriculture.

The United States did its utmost to deprive us of participation in the
international credit agencies and shut off our access to credits from international commercial banks.

The United States forced our country to invest enormous amounts of economic resources and human energy in the nation’s defense against its constant military threats.

The United States still has a naval base in our territory against our will, which violates all principles of international law. That base, which has no global military value, constitutes an enemy beachhead in our homeland and is a deliberate, flagrant attempt to humiliate us.

The United States arrogates to itself the right to violate our airspace whenever it chooses, making use and abuse of its technical resources and thumbing its nose at international regulations.

In contrast, Cuba has demonstrated several times its willingness to seek settlements, even if partial ones. At the time of the departures from Camarioca, we achieved a discussion and a partial solution. When skyjacking began to proliferate (for which the United States was responsible, as it had used that tactic against Cuba just after the revolution) we again agreed to a partial solution of our problems and signed an agreement. This agreement ended when a Cuban plane was blown up in the air near Barbados [in 1976] in a monstrous act of sabotage.

What good have those partial solutions been?

Our country’s socioeconomic conditions still, unfortunately, create lumpen elements and emigration.

Seven thousand families in Havana are living in dormitories because their homes were destroyed in natural disasters; 43,000 houses have been propped up to keep them from collapsing; and tens of thousands of families, many of them exemplary, self-sacrificing poor families, live in overcrowded conditions. And that’s only in the capital.

In spite of our enormous efforts and admirable advances in education and health and in spite of our struggle against unemployment, begging, prostitution, gambling and drugs, our country is still underdeveloped, and underdevelopment engenders lumpen elements and emigration. Developed capitalism also produces lumpen elements—and on a much larger scale—but capitalism, with its corruption and its vices, is the natural medium of lumpen elements; socialism is not.

Right now, the United States is making a great effort to hinder our plans
for development. Throughout the 21 years since the triumph of the revolution, the United States has maintained its cruel blockade, which even prevents sales of food and medicines to Cuba.

Now, it is not doctors, engineers, architects, artists, teachers and technicians who want to emigrate to the United States. The revolution has trained many of them. To their honor and to the pride of our homeland, their attitude en masse is to struggle firmly alongside the people. The few exceptions only serve to prove the rule. Now, almost no former large landowners, urban landlords or refined bourgeois remain. There are only a few vacillating petit bourgeois. Now, the only allies imperialism has in our country are the lumpen and antisocial elements—those who, although not strictly lumpen elements, lack all national feeling and love of their homeland. We are not averse to their going to live in the Yankee “paradise.”

The imperialist blockade against Cuba generates lumpen elements and, therefore, emigration.

The systematic, sustained hostility of the United States against Cuba hinders our socioeconomic development and generates lumpen elements and, therefore, emigration.

The imperialist policy of terror against Cuba generates fear, difficulties, lumpen elements, and, therefore, emigration.

The imperialist monopolies’ exploitation of Cuba for nearly 60 years generated poverty and underdevelopment—and, therefore, lumpen elements and emigration.

The Yankee counterrevolutionary policy against Cuba encourages lumpen elements and, therefore, their emigration to the United States.

Why does the United States discuss the ways of emigrating from Cuba to the United States rather than the deep-rooted causes that gave rise to the problem?

We are willing to discuss and negotiate our problems and global relations with the United States—but not isolated, partial problems, which are of interest only to that country and its strategy against Cuba.

The Mariel-Florida route has proved to be efficient, serious and safe. Even though there were as many as 1,800 vessels in that harbor at times, the operation was perfectly organized. To say anything else is to engage in pure demagogy. For our part, we are not breaking any laws: entries in and departures from the port are free. If the United States wants to impose its
jurisdiction, it should do so in Florida; it can’t do anything in Mariel.

We understand that the United States is in the midst of a period of electoral demagoguery, but others should understand the difficulties a small country has in dealing with a powerful neighbor whose government is unprincipled and whose leaders are immoral.

We have nothing personal against Carter or for Reagan. That would be inconceivable. Not long ago, a prominent US black leader told a representative of Cuba that Reagan was an extreme reactionary, crazy, a fascist, and that if Reagan won the election, the US black leaders might have to seek refuge in Cuba.

Reagan is one of those who have talked of imposing a naval blockade of Cuba, but that would not be our problem. We can hold out against any blockade and repulse any attack. If the people of the United States elect a fascist or a lunatic, that’s their business. Hitler, too, was “crazy,” and look where that got him.

Should we help [President] Carter solve the problem of the Mariel shuttles—which was created by the far from brilliant earlier policy that has been used by counterrevolutionary former prisoners to stage acts of provocation—as he wants, considering only the internal situation of the United States?

Who can guarantee Carter will win [the election]? And, if Carter wins, who can guarantee he will really effect a change in policy toward Cuba?

Moreover, even if we wanted to do so, how could we ignore the fact that the United States has arrogated to itself the prerogative to grant the right of asylum even though, historically, it has refused to sign the corresponding agreement? What will happen if the other Western capitalist nations do the same?

We feel no panic or fear with regard to Reagan or anybody else. We have already struggled against six US presidents, and none of them has frightened or will ever be able to frighten us. We are not going to lower our banners, renounce our legitimate demands—that the blockade be lifted, that the US troops be withdrawn from the [Guantánamo naval] base and that the spy flights cease—or make concessions to help the domestic situation in the United States in the hope that its leaders will become more sensible or that better times will come.

People who are willing to fight to the death do not beg for their rights.
We do not want to be inflexible, but neither do we want to interfere or be used in internal squabbles in the United States. We are willing to continue reviewing the important implications of the present electoral contest for US foreign policy, but we are duty-bound to set forth our position very clearly.

32. THE PANDORA CASE

In January 1981, Ronald Reagan was sworn in as president of the United States. His entire electoral campaign had promoted the idea of a much more active and energetic anticommunist policy that would overcome the “Vietnam syndrome” and reestablish US leadership in the “free world.”

The policy of the new administration on Latin America—and especially Cuba—was contained in a document called A New Inter-American Policy for the Decade of the Eighties (known as the Santa Fe Document). This stated that the Americas were under attack by the Soviet Union, which was using Cuba as a client state. It recommended a series of measures against Cuba—including the installation of a broadcasting station to beam counterrevolutionary information and other programs to Cuba (this became “Radio Martí” in 1985)—and said that troops should be sent to intervene militarily in Cuba if those actions were not effective.

Understandably, these threats led Cuba to take counter measures.

During the preceding 20 years, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba had been working hard to make it unrealistic for the United States to launch a direct attack on Cuba. The Soviet Union’s provision of weapons free of charge and the advice of its military specialists unquestionably contributed to the level of organization and strength achieved in Cuba, which managed to create the strongest armed forces in Latin America, organized as a regular army and ready to wage modern—although conventional—warfare. Cuba had never been dependent for its defense on the Soviet Union or the other Warsaw Pact countries, but felt that the solidarity of its allies should always be an important factor in restraining the United States.

1. The Santa Fe Committee, which wrote the document, had been linked to Ronald Reagan from the time he was governor of California. Its members were Francis Bouchey, Roger Fontaine, David C. Jordan and General Gordon Sumner, Jr.
The new situation created after Reagan took office repeated, to some extent, the period of serious tension preceding the 1962 Missile Crisis. This time, Raúl Castro, Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the second most important figure in the Cuban government and Communist Party, made another trip to Moscow.

Raúl Castro met with Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, the top Soviet leader, on September 15, 1981, a meeting that was not made public for over a decade, after the Soviet Union had collapsed. When the Cuban leader suggested that the threats of the new US administration could be curbed by an official Soviet declaration that the Soviet Union would not tolerate an attack on Cuba, Brezhnev's reply was categorical: “We can’t fight in Cuba, because you’re 11,000 kilometers away. We’d only get a thrashing.”

For years, this bitter truth was a secret that Raúl Castro shared only with Fidel. The Cuban president expressed his opinion about it indirectly, emphasizing in one of his speeches that the people would defend Cuba with their own flesh and blood.

On the one hand, the certainty that the Soviet Union would run no risks for Cuba reflected the deep process of retreat and internal degeneration that was occurring in that immense country; on the other, it confirmed the idea that Cuba could only base its defense on its own forces. In view of Cuba's overwhelming disadvantage in terms of combatants and technology in the case of an eventual large-scale US military attack, the struggle could not be considered simply as a confrontation between two regular armies.

Thus, the process of rectification began in the FAR well before the imminent and far from glorious end of the Soviet Union and the European socialist community could be discerned.

A new military doctrine emerged in Cuba: that of a war of the entire people, based on the criterion that, even though the United States could destroy the country with technological warfare, to achieve its aims it would necessarily have to try to occupy Cuba with human forces. In this situation, the Cuban people—organized in the cities, mountains and other defense areas throughout the country, with tunnels and caves in which to preserve human lives and weapons, and with officers prepared to act in a decentralized way—would begin a war of annihilation and attrition that the invaders would never survive in the long run.

The concept of the troops' self-sufficiency in food and a proposal that
was even more ambitious—the effort to have the FAR gradually finance
themselves—was also developed.

The adoption of the doctrine of a war of the entire people was the
beginning of a long, intensive, sustained effort. During the following years,
special attention was paid to organizing the Territorial Troop Militias and
defense areas; preparing the theater of military operations; carrying out
protection projects, in which hundreds of thousands of members of the
armed forces and workers took part; and, in short, setting up a system linking
the political and military leaderships at every level, the regular and people’s
forces, defense and production.

A BITTER LESSON IN CUBA-SOVIET RELATIONS

Excerpt from the interview with Raúl Castro by Mexican journalist Mario
Vázquez Raña, in which he discusses his meeting with Soviet Premier
Brezhnev on September 15, 1981. This interview was only published in
1993.

Raúl Castro is a man of power because he is a man of secrets. For more
than a decade, he kept a priceless secret of strategic value about the former
Soviet Union’s abandonment of its military alliance with Cuba when it said
it would not participate in Cuba’s active defense if the United States decided
to invade the island during the belligerent stage early in Ronald Reagan’s
first term of office.

The US intelligence services did not become aware of the situation be­
cause of the smoke screen both Moscow and Havana created with previous­
ly prepared symbolic acts; but the fact was that the Soviet Union had
unforgivably changed its military position regarding its ally Cuba.

Now, 12 years later, Raúl Castro tells us about it.

Mario Vázquez Raña: General, now that some secret files from the former
Soviet Union have been made public, you told me that you would make
some comments about Cuba’s relations with that country. What is it all
about?
Raúl Castro: Early in the 1980s, I visited the Soviet Union and had an official meeting with the president of the Supreme Soviet and General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in which the Minister of Defense and the Secretary for Foreign Relations of the Central Committee also took part. At their request, I went alone. The translator was Soviet.

In view of the Reagan administration’s aggressiveness toward Cuba, which started a few weeks after Reagan took office, the purpose of my visit to Moscow was to give the Soviet leaders our opinion about the urgency of carrying out special diplomatic and political actions so as to put a brake on the US government’s renewed intentions of attacking Cuba militarily.

I suggested that such actions might consist of an official Soviet statement to the United States that the Soviet Union would not tolerate an attack on Cuba and a demand that Washington abide by its pledge not to attack Cuba, made at the time of the 1962 Missile Crisis. All this could be backed up with gestures that would show the increased closeness of the political and military ties between Cuba and the Soviet Union.

The response of the top Soviet leader was categorical: “In the case of US aggression against Cuba, we can’t fight in Cuba”—those were his exact words—“because you’re 11,000 kilometers away. We’d only get a thrashing.”

The Soviets informed me that they were not willing to give the United States any kind of warning about Cuba or even to remind Washington of the pledge Kennedy had made in October 1962, which was questioned by each new US administration.

Of course, the Soviet Union offered to always give us its political and moral support and to supply us with armaments, under the five-year program then in effect.

As you will remember, that was the most virulent period of the first Reagan administration, and his arrogant Secretary of State [Alexander] Haig, a former general and supreme commander of NATO, was insisting in no uncertain terms that the United States had to crush the revolutions in Central America and to wipe out their source, which, according to him, was Cuba.

Although I had felt for a long time that the Soviet Union would not go to war for Cuba and knew that we could only depend on ourselves for our defense, it was precisely at that moment of greatest danger that the Soviet
leaders told me solemnly, clearly and officially that, in the case of a military attack by the Pentagon, Cuba would be dramatically alone.

As you can imagine, if the United States had found out about the Soviet position and had known that it had complete impunity, it would have been spurred to attack.

This led to two things: I guarded the secret with the utmost care, so as not to give the enemy any encouragement, and we redoubled our preparations for waging a war of the entire people if imperialism forced it upon us.

That is why, after my return from Moscow, compañero Fidel stated in the meeting of the [Communist Party] Political Bureau in which a general report of the trip was presented, that there was one thing that was so bitter and that would be of such crucial importance if made known that, up until then, only he and I knew it. He proposed to the members of the Political Bureau that they agree that knowledge and handling of the issue be restricted to the First and Second Secretaries [of the Communist Party] for as long as we thought necessary, and all of them agreed to this.

Mario Vázquez Raña: Minister, did the Soviet Union’s admitted abandonment of Cuba in case of foreign aggression produce a cooling of relations between the two countries?

Raúl Castro: Publicly, relations remained the same as always, and even some gestures of closer ties were made, which helped to disinform the enemy about the real Soviet position.

Privately, Fidel and I—and some other compañeros who had to be told about this development (which we called “the Pandora case”) because of their work—suffered in silence from the bitterness. We assimilated the experience and drew new energy in order to prepare ourselves to assume our historic mission alone—alone, as we had always waged our wars of independence.

The fact that the Soviet Union had told us of its decision in no way lessened the dangers we faced due to East-West tensions. For example, even though we were never in favor of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan—which could have led the United States to act in the same way, although with inadmissible purposes, in its own “sphere of influence”—we refused
to add our voice to the hypocritical imperialist chorus that denounced it.

Another example: a “new Afghanistan” in Poland sponsored by the Soviet Union—which, luckily, never came about—would also have considerably increased the danger for Cuba.

In short, we were running the risk of being wiped out because of the ongoing confrontation and would have suffered from any conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, yet the latter was not willing to run any risks for Cuba.

Mario Vázquez Raña: What measures did Cuba adopt at that time, General?

Raúl Castro: We took a series of measures that enabled us to increase all our military reserves to the maximum, and we began to create government reserves, modernize and complete our military industry, improve and modernize the quality of the materiel of our regular troops and acquire the armaments and other things required to supply 100 percent of the units of the Territorial Troop Militias, so as to have everything needed for waging a war of the entire people—which might last for 100 years, if need be—with no help from outside.

Mario Vázquez Raña: What you have just told me is extraordinary.

Raúl Castro: As I was explaining, in our concept, land troops were the decisive forces, since, once the enemy had landed, the fighting would be waged on our soil, soldier to soldier, a rifle shot apart. In this situation, those defending their homeland would have tremendous moral superiority over the hated invaders.

Knowledge of the terrain, which we have studied and prepared, also gave us a great advantage.

We had millions of trained and armed men and women. Faced with that wasps’ nest, could the enemy outnumber us?

The effectiveness of the enemy aviation would be partially wiped out when its soldiers and ours confronted one another on the field of battle.

In a prolonged war, if one out of every two or three of our snipers (and
we had tens of thousands of them) killed a US soldier—preferably an officer—could the invaders absorb so many casualties and keep on fighting? The same could be said of our special troops.

If only 20 percent of our millions of armed and organized fellow citizens fought—and I am sure that the proportion of the brave ones is infinitely higher—the aggressors would be bound to lose the war.

The struggle would be waged with no defined front or rear guard—and in every corner of the country. In addition to the regular troops, we could also call on the Territorial Troop Militias and on the Production and Defense Brigades, which had been set up in every province and in each of the 169 municipalities. The fighting would take place in more than 1,400 defense zones if the enemy were up to it—which was not likely because that would require millions of soldiers. They would be extremely weak, running the risk of stepping on mines or of being wiped out by bullets or grenades, and our ambushes would be a nightmare for them. The ground would burn under their feet, and, after their air strikes, our fighters would come out from the bowels of the earth to settle accounts on the sacred soil of our homeland, which repulses the boots of invaders. So finally, revolutionary power would spring up again.

Even if they seized the capital—which they could do only by paying a very high price—that would not solve the problem; to the contrary, new problems would begin for them, and this would be repeated in every town and city throughout the island.

Our defenses in this situation could not be destroyed; they would be invincible.

I’m not talking about big battles, about large-scale classical confrontations. I’m talking about battles consisting of thousands of small strikes that occur at any time of day or night, wherever it seems propitious, using all kinds of light and heavy weapons.

These include actions both by regular troops and by the Militias and Production and Defense Brigades. For that purpose, fortified regions (points and centers) are being carefully prepared, in all possible directions of action.

Keep in mind, Mario, that we manufacture all kinds of mines: antitank, antipersonnel and naval. A patriotic grandmother—or grandchild—can
lay a mine. Some mines can be triggered at a considerable distance, using a device that we make, as well.

The Cuban people are descendents of the *mambí* who fought for Cuba’s independence against Spain in the 19th century, the sons and daughters of members of the Rebel Army and of internationalist combatants. They have learned heroism at their mothers’ knee, listening to tales of struggle in distant jungles, fighting shoulder to shoulder with other peoples. Hundreds of thousands of our men and women have victorious fighting experience. Keep in mind that most of our regular troops and a large part of our reserves were toughened in victorious combat while carrying out internationalist missions. More than 300,000 fighters were in the People’s Republic of Angola. Any attacker should take this factor into consideration when weighing the balance of forces.

Moreover, I haven’t mentioned the mountains that we have turned into impregnable bastions by applying a program of socioeconomic development we call Plan Turquino, named after the highest mountain in Cuba. The program has three main aspects: electrification, with electricity already supplied to more than 95 percent of the homes; the building of a network of all weather roads; and housing construction.

In the first two years, we managed to halt the exodus of people from those regions. If we had not done this, it would have been impossible to get the support bases needed to ensure the economic development of the mountain areas, which is required in the case of a prolonged war.

The mountain areas would not only provide material support for the troops that would be defending themselves there, but would also serve as support for those who would be continuing the struggle on the plains. From there, unquestionably, after bleeding the enemy white and wearing it down, we would descend victoriously, as we did on January 1, 1959.

The year 1985 was the beginning of one of the biggest international political campaigns to be led by the Cuban revolution and by Fidel Castro specifically. On August 3 the Cuban president addressed the Conference on the Foreign Debt of Latin America and the Caribbean, one of the largest and most representative of the international meetings held in Havana at this time.

In the life of a revolution such as the Cuban revolution, great deeds cannot always be associated with a precise instant, a specific date, because they reflect processes of a political, economic, intellectual or cultural nature that unfold over several years.

This is what happened with regard to the foreign debt crisis. When the price of oil soared following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and inflation grew out of control due to the costs of the US war in Vietnam, causing convulsions in the world economy, the results were a rise in the cost of energy, the exacerbation of unequal terms of trade and the concentration in the Western banks of large amounts of money that were lent liberally to a large number of poor countries. This led Cuba to examine the consequences for the economies of the underdeveloped countries. This topic was discussed thoroughly by the sixth summit of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries, which was held in Havana in 1979.

On October 12 of that year, in his address to the UN General Assembly as president of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries, Fidel said, “We noted that while the inequality of international economic relations is increasing the developing countries’ accumulated foreign debt to over $300 billion, the international financial bodies and the private banks are raising their interest rates, imposing shorter terms of loan amortization, and thus strangling the developing countries financially...”
“The debts of the least-developed countries, and of those in a disadvantageous position, are impossible burdens to bear, and have no solution. They must be cancelled!”

In the following years, the foreign debt grew geometrically and, eventually, it could be seen that, far from being transitory, it was becoming a permanent mechanism of the transnational economy of capitalism and imperialism to superexploit the poor countries.

Paradoxically, in this way debtor countries obtained a potentially decisive weapon, if the problem was approached politically, rather than viewed through a purely economic or technocratic prism. The countries most heavily burdened by debt could have decided to create a great, broad united front—a cartel of debtor nations that would force the financial powers to negotiate with them as a group and to take into consideration the legitimate demands of those countries whose economies and people were being crushed.

It was a historic opportunity that farsighted statespeople who were truly concerned about the destiny of their peoples could have used to obtain the cancellation of the debt and the establishment of a new international economic order.

In view of the inaction of other Latin American governments, Cuba, represented by Fidel Castro, took the initiative and led the struggle to unite all the Latin American and Caribbean countries. His arguments were irrefutable: The foreign debt was morally indefensible and economically unpayable and should be repudiated politically. Most of the capital in the region had wound up in the hands of repressive military regimes, or it had been stolen and was sitting in private accounts in foreign banks. The people, who had not benefited in any way, should not be forced to pay the consequences.

This opportunity, however, was let slip. Even though public opinion was mobilized and broad political, labor union, religious, intellectual and social sectors worked hard to obtain a response in each country, the fact is that most Latin American governments—which were used to obeying, consulting and in no way challenging Washington—proved incapable of taking steps toward concerted action.

They preferred the US formula of bilateral negotiation, in which they

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were bound to lose, to the formula of Latin American unity and solidarity, which would have given them a new voice and authority for discussing their problems with the United States and the rest of the industrialized world.

WHY MUST THE DEBTS OF THE OPPRESSORS BE PAID BY THE OPPRESSED?


The problem must be properly understood: debt is a cancer in the sense that it is a cancer that is multiplying, one that is destroying the organism, and one that will end only with the end of the organism. It is a cancer that requires surgical removal. I assure you, any other attempt to deal with it that is not surgical will not solve the problem. Not a single malignant cell can be left. If malignant cells are left, metastases form and the tumor is reproduced, and this soon finishes off the organism. This has to be understood. It is by now an incurable disease...

Imperialism has created this disease, imperialism has created this cancer and it must be extirpated surgically, and totally. I cannot see that there is any other solution. Any approach that differs from this idea is simply not in touch with reality, and whatever technical formula is used to confront this reality, whatever the palliative may be, rather than bringing about any improvement, will tend to make the disease worse.

On the other hand, the unequal exchange is increasingly unequal. I think that even a child in their first year at school can see this when they learn to count a little and get an idea of what a million means.

This is evident in any analysis of the situation.

So, how do we resolve it? We know there’s a cancer and we ask ourselves how we are going to pay for this operation; this was the first thing I asked myself when I began to ponder the question. Where are the means to do it? It is clear that our world has the resources to cure this cancer that is affecting the lives of thousands of millions of people...
So, are there resources? Yes, there are resources. What are they used for? To bring about death, war, the arms race, military expenditure. A million million! In a single year, the world threw away on war games and military expenditure a million million dollars, more than the foreign debt of all the Third World countries put together. Isn’t there a fundamental logic here? Can’t any human being understand this? Can’t any citizen, no matter what their ideology, understand that it would be a good idea to write off this debt using a small part of this military expenditure? Because we are not just speaking of Latin America’s debt, we are speaking of the debt of the entire Third World. At the very most, and depending on interest rates, 12 percent of this military expenditure would be sufficient to pay off the debt.

Moreover, in this military expenditure, we have the resources needed to create a new international economic order, to be able to establish a system of more just prices for all the products coming from the Third World, to put an end to the ignominious system of unequal exchange. How much would all this cost?

At a rough approximation, it would amount to some $300 billion per year. The purchasing power of Third World countries would increase because they are not going to put the money away now as they are too hungry, they have too many needs. With more money they would invest in industries, they would spend it one way or another. There would still be $700 billion left for military spending, and unfortunately this would be enough to destroy the world several times over; it is all utter madness. Such expenditures on armaments show that the resources exist in the world for us to cure this terrible cancer, which is killing tens of millions, which is disabling so many people each year and which is ruining the lives of so many millions of people. This is why we associate these two issues; the problem is not going be solved just by annulling the debt, by abolishing the debt. We would only be back to square one, because the determining factors are still present. So we have made these two closely associated proposals: abolishing the debt and the establishment of a new international economic order.

We also have other proposals. How can they be implemented? People must be made aware of the debt issue and first we need to create awareness among our own people, in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. But people must be made aware of it in all Third World countries—
and this is what can give us strength. Furthermore, we can even create this consciousness in the industrialized countries, too. The message must be taken to the people in the industrialized world to show them that what is happening is total madness. The message must be conveyed to the workers, to students, to intellectuals, to women, to the middle classes. They have different problems, and perhaps resolving our problem will also help to resolve some of their problems.

It is very important to convey to public opinion in the industrialized countries that these proposals are not going to affect them adversely, are not going to mean increased levies or taxes for them, because that would not be necessary if the resources for military spending are used.

We need to send a message to people who are depositing money in the banks. When they say that any of these proposals will ruin the world financial system, they must be told, “No! That’s a lie.” If the resources for resolving the problem of debt and establishing the new economic order are diverted from military spending, then nobody depositing money in a bank is going to lose it.

We must not forget that there are millions of these people in the industrialized capitalist world, including workers, the middle classes, professionals, a lot of people, who are being told that our proposals are going to bring down the whole banking system and that people who have money deposited in the banks are going to lose it.

The message must be taken to the workers whose scourge is unemployment, which is the scourge of Europe and the scourge of the United States. They should be told, “This proposal will raise the purchasing power of the Third World countries, so the industries will be more active and there will be more employment in the industrialized countries”...

I have no doubt at all that the socialist countries will support this cause. It is very important that we are aware that this is not a struggle of Latin America alone, but it must also be a struggle of all the Third World countries, because this is what gives us strength. They have the same problems and some have worse problems than we do, but Latin America is the zone that can lead this struggle, having more social development, more political development, a better social structure, millions of intellectuals, professionals, tens of millions of workers, of peasants, a certain level of political training, and a common language.
People in Africa are in a more desperate situation. They owe almost $200 billion, but it is even worse than that because they are more dependent on the food that is sent to them from time to time when they experience desperate famines—a situation even more terrible, if such a thing is possible, than in Latin America. But all the Third World countries, those that are struggling in the United Nations, in the Group of 77, that are fighting for a new world economic order, are aware of these problems...

These are basic principles. It is not one idea alone, the single idea of abolishing debt, but it is tied to the idea of the new economic order. In Latin America it is also associated with the idea of integration, because even if we manage to have the debt abolished, even if the new economic order is attained, without integration we will continue to be dependent countries forever. If Europe cannot conceive of living without integration, how can these countries conceive of it, these numerous countries of different sizes and levels of development, some older than others? Brazil, of course, has more possibilities but even Brazil needs this integration. Brazil needs the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean needs Brazil. All the countries of this hemisphere need this integration and so our discussion of economic integration is essential, fundamental.

These are basic ideas. The problem of when and how all this might be implemented is another story. I believe that, to the extent that these ideas are now coming down from the ivory towers, to the extent that these ideas are becoming those of the masses, of public opinion, of the people, to the extent that these ideas are becoming ideas of the workers, of the peasants, of the students and of the intellectuals and the middle classes of Latin America, these ideas will triumph sooner or later and this includes the idea of economic integration...

Another essential idea is the idea of unity that we have proposed from the start: unity within the countries and unity between the countries. This means unity within the countries where there are minimal conditions for unity, and, fortunately, the conditions do exist today in the majority of the countries of Latin America, but not all as I have carefully explained. Nobody can think about unity with a tyranny like [Augusto] Pinochet’s [in Chile] or like [Alfredo] Stroessner’s [in Paraguay], and there are other cases, although not so many of them. This is the idea of internal unity, because this is needed
to fight this battle. Then there is the unity between all the countries of Latin America and between all the countries of the Third World, because strength from outside is also needed. We must seek unity with certain industrialized countries and I am sure that this struggle can count on the help of many of those industrialized countries that are not at the center of world power and which, in one way or another, have also been affected by the mercenary monetarist policies of the present US government...

We have not just been proposing subversive slogans. We have not been proposing social revolution. On the contrary, we have said we cannot wait for socialism to arrive in order to resolve this problem. This is an urgent and immediate problem and it has to be resolved. In order to do this everybody must come together, at all levels, except for the insignificant minority that has sold out to international finance capital, that has sold out to imperialism.

There is room here for everyone, including the industrialists who have spoken in this hall, bankers, businesspeople and farmers. There is room for everyone. This is precisely what is good about this struggle: that it can be and must be a very broad-based struggle in order to resolve the problems that cannot wait until our peoples have a socialist consciousness, until all the subjective factors, which are lagging behind the objective factors right now, come together, although we are advancing fast. In my judgment, it would not be prudent to wait at a time when the decisive battle for the independence of our peoples is already being fought, because how can a government or a country that every month has to discuss with the International Monetary Fund what it must do at home be called independent? This is a make-believe independence, and we see this as a struggle for national liberation, which can truly bring together, for the first time in the history of our hemisphere, all the social strata in a struggle to attain their true independence.

We cannot do this with socialism as a prerequisite.

We are not recommending socialism, of course, but neither are we advising against it, is this understood? It simply does not seem correct to make it the center of the struggle. I think that, in any case, this profound debt crisis is going to raise awareness among our peoples. I do not believe we are moving away from socialism, given the consciousness of the masses. Nevertheless, we are approaching the vision of a more just society, although it would be an error now to propose socialism as the objective,
because the debt is an urgent problem that must be resolved. I think that
if there is consciousness, if the workers, peasants, students, intellectuals
and businesspeople have a clear understanding of the problem, it will be
possible to isolate the traitors, those in the service of imperialism, and it will
be possible to win this battle.

SOURCE: Fidel Castro, *Discurso de clausura en el Encuentro sobre la Deuda
In the late 1970s Cuba’s hard-currency income was falling for several reasons: unequal terms of trade, the drop in the price of sugar, the devaluation of the dollar and rising oil prices. These external factors coincided with growing negative trends within Cuban society. These internal problems were directly related to mistakes made in the application of the economic planning and management system approved by the first party congress in 1975.

That system, based on the experience of the Soviet Union and other European socialist countries, was weighed down from the beginning by schemas that proved to be inefficient, even in the countries that developed them. The main difficulties, however, lay not in whether the system to be applied was backward or not, but in the fact that it was applied badly, in a partial, incomplete and unsystematic manner with no controls.

The main mistake lay in the economist error that it was enough to create certain mechanisms and to apply such concepts as economic calculations, income-yield capacity and profit to have all enterprises begin to function smoothly.

In other words, political work was ignored; the role of ideology was downplayed; the party’s function of political leadership and control was undervalued; and spontaneity and, in many cases, irresponsibility were given free rein.

This was evident in various ways: agricultural cooperatives that dedicated themselves to producing handicrafts, which were not linked to use of the land, and foodstuffs yielding higher profits; companies that gave their workers too many bonuses without their being justified by increased production; and in construction, the replacement of the primacy of finishing a project or a
project’s usefulness with financial considerations. This meant prioritizing jobs that produced greater income for the companies and putting off completing the job; and a lack of attention to building housing, hospitals, polyclinics, children’s day-care centers and old people’s homes.

Behind it all was a tendency of some functionaries to blindly copy the experiences and practices applied in the Soviet Union and other European socialist countries.

On April 19, 1986, in his speech on the 25th anniversary of the Bay of Pigs victory, President Fidel Castro denounced these trends and outlined a strategy—in line with the idea of returning to the experiences and traditions of the Cuban revolution—to give more weight to national realities, both positive and negative, and to revitalize Cuba’s original, creative interpretation of socialism and Marxism-Leninism.

The process of rectifying these errors had, among its virtues, that of trying to dig down to the root causes of problems rather than addressing the most immediate or obvious problems. “Rectification,” Fidel said, “means seeking new solutions for old problems.”

Thus, Cuba’s rectification arose autonomously and was different from what was happening in other socialist countries at the time, in the mid-1980s, such as the Soviet perestroika. Cuba wanted to deepen and improve socialism by defending its history and the work and ideas of the revolution. Thanks to this effort, the country was better prepared, both materially and morally, for meeting the incredible challenge that would come three or four years later, when the Soviet Union and the other European socialist countries collapsed.

THIS COUNTRY WILL NEVER RETURN TO CAPITALISM

Excerpts from a speech by Fidel Castro on the 25th anniversary of the Bay of Pigs, April 19, 1986.

Precise guidelines were set out at the party congress. There was strong and penetrating criticism of persistent problems, and we pledged to struggle against them. As I said before, we are discussing the program. Without
these problems I’m referring to we would have to implement the line set out at the congress, but now with the added problems we have, fulfillment becomes much more important and decisive.

We must be much more intransigent regarding all forms of misconduct and wrongdoing. We must be much more effective in our struggle against problems that persist and new ones that crop up...

We ourselves have brought on some of these problems, and we must set them right in time, because unfortunately, there are people who confuse money earned through work with that earned through speculation and shady deals that border on theft, or are theft.

Some of our heads of enterprises have also become capitalist-like entrepreneurs. The first thing a socialist, a revolutionary, a communist cadre must ask themselves is not if their particular firm is making more money, but how the country can make more. Whenever we have so-called entrepreneurs who worry more about the enterprise than the interests of the country, we have a capitalist in every sense of the word.

The economic management and planning system was not set up so that we can play at capitalism; and some people are shamefully playing at capitalism; we know this, we see it, and this must be set right.

Then there are those who want their enterprises to be profitable by increasing prices and distributing bonuses by charging the earth for something; that way any enterprise can be profitable, right?...

We can’t accept misconduct. We can’t fall prey to confusion. Can anyone here engage in shady deals without the people, the masses, finding out? We don’t want to unleash the masses, I repeat, against the guilty parties. Let them stop such activity of their own accord, because we have the party and the UJC, we have the mass organizations. What we must do is engage in a systematic, serious and tenacious struggle, applying pressure from the top down, and from the bottom up, with great force!...

The revolution has moved forward, has made great advances, has achieved great successes, but those who think that the new generations don’t have equal or greater tasks ahead of them than those of the generation of the Bay of Pigs, or their predecessors, are mistaken. They are truly mistaken!

The struggle will be long and hard; these last 25 years have taught us this. Imperialism’s crimes continue to demonstrate it to us, as we face an imperialism that is ever more aggressive, arrogant and overbearing...
And in the face of foreign enemies and the danger that lies in wait for us beyond our shores, we can also tell our heroes and martyrs, those who gave everything for the revolution and those who by their sacrifice brought pain to their loved ones: The revolution will not only be able to defend itself from weaknesses, its own weaknesses, but also from its foreign enemies; this country will never return to capitalism, and this country will never again be the property of imperialism.

35. THE BATTLE OF CUITO CUANAVALE

It is possible that the international media never made such an effort to silence or distort reports of such an important event, with so many implications for the future of a region and a continent, as at the time of the great victory of the forces of Cuba, Angola and the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) of Namibia at Cuito Cuanavale, on the western front of Angola’s southern flank.

In spite of this, many Africans, Cubans and an ever growing number of other informed, aware people in the world consider this strategic operation to have been the most important turning point in the recent history of the Southern Cone of Africa.

For 13 years after 1975, in response to a request by the legitimate government of Angola, an internationalist force of Cuban volunteers helped to defend that country’s independence. Angola’s independence had been threatened by constant attacks by South African troops that used bases of operations in the illegally occupied territory of Namibia and which were supported inside Angola by armed bands, financed and backed by the main Western powers, headed by the United States.

In the last few months of 1987, acting on the advice of Soviet military advisors—who tended to mechanically apply the concept of large-scale operations using conventional forces to the situation in Angola—the leaders of the People’s Liberation Armed Forces of Angola (FAPLA) launched a large number of troops toward the remote, inhospitable, sandy territory of the extreme southeastern part of Angola in a strike against the general headquarters and leadership of the UNITA forces.

With their fuel and other provisions running out, far from their sources
of supplies, the Angolan troops had to fall back to Cuito Cuanavale without having achieved their objective and were trapped in an encirclement.

Aware of the situation, the South African military command immediately mobilized, sending a large number of troops, long-range artillery and other war materiel to the area. Its aim was to surround and destroy the Angolan forces, certain that the Angolan government would not survive such a defeat.

Thus, an extremely serious military crisis was created that also endangered the small Cuban force, which was defending a line deep in Angolan territory far from the area where these events were taking place.

In this situation, the Angolan government sent an urgent request for assistance to the Cuban government. Soldiers and weaponry were immediately mobilized to try to reinforce the besieged units and to reorganize the weak lines of defense.

On November 15, 1987, Cuba decided to do whatever was needed to guarantee that the invaders would be repulsed and to seek a definitive solution that would ensure Angola’s safety. In Cuba’s view, this meant guaranteeing superiority in forces and materiel, so as to give the combatants as much protection as possible and to carry out the mission successfully.

As a result of this decision, the Cuban internationalist contingent in Angola was increased to over 50,000 men, with around 1,000 tanks, more than 600 armored vehicles and 1,600 pieces of artillery, mortars and anti-aircraft defense. In addition, the fighter planes ensured control of the air and dealt decisive blows to the enemy.

On March 23, 1988—one of several key dates in this episode—an extremely intensive battle was fought at Cuito Cuanavale, in which the aggressors were repulsed and defeated.

The operation was not limited to saving the Angolans who were besieged in the southeastern-most part of the country. Along the southwestern front, a powerful force of over 40,000 Cubans, 30,000 Angolans and SWAPO patriotic forces advanced inexorably toward the border with Namibia.

At that time, the Pretoria regime had seven nuclear weapons. The troops had to be spread out along the southern front in such a way that losses would be minimal if the enemy, enraged by its defeats, should decide to use those arms.

The battle of Cuito Cuanavale put an end to the racists’ incursions in Angola, paved the way for Namibia’s independence and helped to seal the
fate of apartheid in South Africa. It must be considered among the important
events of the century and one of the greatest feats of the Cuban people and
their armed forces in the past five decades.

COMMUNIQUÉ FROM THE MINISTRY
OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES
MARCH 17, 1988

A substantial change has been wrought in Angola’s situation. For the last
three and a half months, using infantry of the counterrevolutionary UNITA
organization, troops of the so-called Territorial Forces of Namibia and
regular units of its own army, South Africa has been fruitlessly trying to
occupy the town of Cuito Cuanavale, located west of the river of the same
name in southeastern Angola. Cuito Cuanavale is 200 kilometers from
Menongue, at the left end of the line that Cuban troops are defending in
southern Angola. In view of the large-scale South African escalation that
took place in October to prevent the defeat of UNITA in the Mavinga region,
around 150 kilometers southeast of Cuito Cuanavale, a group of Angolan
brigades fell back in November toward Cuito Cuanavale, where there is an
airport.

The South Africans intervened with extensive use of infantry, tanks, long-
range heavy artillery and planes. Their final objective in Cuito Cuanavale
was to wipe out the Angolan troops that had taken part in the offensive
against UNITA to the southeast.

There were no Cuban advisors, combat units or military personnel at
that time in Cuito Cuanavale. But at the request of the Angolan government,
Cuban advisors to the People’s Liberation Armed Forces of Angola (FAPLA)
infantry, artillery and tanks were flown into Cuito Cuanavale starting in
early December, as were some specialists in artillery and tanks.

At almost the same time, the Cuban air force in Angola was reinforced
with a group of our most experienced pilots.

In mid-January, in view of South Africa’s persistence in its attempt to
occupy Cuito Cuanavale, Cuban armored infantry, tank and artillery units
were sent there to reinforce the heroic FAPLA combatants, who, with the
cooperation of a limited number of Cuban advisors and specialists, were defending that position.

From the beginning of December until today (March 17), all enemy attacks have been repulsed by the firm Angolan-Cuban resistance.

During this period, the South African long-range, heavy-caliber artillery launched over 20,000 155-millimeter shells against the Cuito Cuanavale area, but they failed to weaken the tenacious resistance.

Every attempt the South African troops and their allies made to occupy Cuito Cuanavale has met with a hail of artillery fire and air strikes. The Cuban-Angolan aviation has played a brilliant, heroic role in the course of the fighting. The pilots have carried out veritable feats, attacking the enemy columns and units without respite. Their actions have been decisive.

South Africa has shattered its forces against the iron resistance encountered at Cuito Cuanavale, the capture of which the enemy had announced on January 23, nearly two months ago.

The Angolan soldiers have demonstrated admirable courage. Since they constitute the bulk of the defending forces, they have done most of the fighting.

Their units have had hundreds of losses (dead and wounded). Between December 5, when the first Cuban personnel reached Cuito Cuanavale, and March 17, the Cuban forces have had 39 losses (dead and wounded), whose relatives have been informed. Most of those losses occurred during the last two months.

According to information from enemy communications and estimates made by the Angolan and Cuban officers, the enemy has been dealt heavy losses (dead and wounded), including hundreds of soldiers of the so-called Territorial Forces of Namibia and the white regular forces of South Africa. The South Africans have made no more attempts to occupy Cuito Cuanavale during the last 16 days.

The South African racists have been taught a lasting lesson. By stopping the troops of racism and apartheid dead in their tracks, the heroic Angolan and Cuban combatants at Cuito Cuanavale have become an outstanding symbol of the dignity of the peoples of Africa and the rest of the world.

As was reported on April 28, in the communiqué that informed our people of the grievous plane accident that occurred in Angola, the last large-scale South African escalation against that sister nation has been practically defeated, starting with the enemy’s disaster at Cuito Cuanavale and the audacious, inexorable movements by the Cuban, Angolan and SWAPO forces on the western flank of the southern Angolan front.

As our people already know from the communiqué issued by the Ministry of the FAR on March 17, 1988, South Africa has been unsuccessfully trying to occupy Cuito Cuanavale since the middle of November last year, using infantry from the counterrevolutionary UNITA organization, troops of the so-called Territorial Forces of Namibia and regular units of its own army, with artillery and air support.

After assessing the gravity of the situation created by the racists’ new adventure, the leadership of our party and government, in complete agreement with the leadership of the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola-Workers Party (MPLA-PT) and the Angolan government, decided to reinforce our internationalist contingent in southern Angola with several dozen experienced military specialists, pilots and cadres, and with the forces and weaponry needed to further guarantee the territorial integrity of that sister nation and the safety of our troops.

The reinforcement operation was carried out with great efficiency and speed. A powerful group of units of armored infantry, tanks and artillery, as well as antiaircraft defense was immediately moved to Angola, creating more favorable conditions than ever for confronting the South African aggression.

The repeated attempts the South African troops and their allies have made to break through the defenses of Cuito Cuanavale have been repulsed. The most recent of those attempts took place on March 23 and constituted a debacle for their forces that, demonstrating their arrogance and impotence, have continued to harass our positions with long-range artillery. This fire has been returned with a hail of artillery fire and air strikes.
In view of the South Africans’ stubbornness and their irrational determination to maintain their occupation of a part of the territory of the People’s Republic of Angola and to continue their attacks on the Cuban-Angolan forces defending Cuito Cuanavale, the Cuban-Angolan-SWAPO forces stationed along the 15th parallel were ordered to begin to move toward the border with Namibia on March 11, and our troops are now more than 200 kilometers south of their prior position.

The courageous, coordinated, admirable action of the Cuban-Angolan troops and the veteran SWAPO combatants in their movement has pushed the racists back almost to the Namibian border, which they occupy. Their troops can no longer act with impunity in southern Angola—as they had been doing in recent years, with utter contempt for the norms of international law.

The response to the South African escalation has been firm, resolute and crushing. Cuito Cuanavale has established itself as an impregnable bastion and as a historic symbol. The Cuban combatants, together with their African brothers, will fully carry out the internationalist mission the party and the revolution entrusted to them.

Our Revolutionary Armed Forces, people, government and party are proud of their valiant, invincible, internationalist combatants.


THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION HAS GAINED GROUND

Excerpt from a speech by Raúl Castro, Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, on May 27, 1991, summarizing the significance of the defeat of the South Africans in Angola.

Toward the end of 1987, thousands of South African soldiers confronted a group of FAPLA combatants who were carrying out an important operation in southeastern Angola. In the course of the unequal fighting, part of the
Angolan group was threatened with being surrounded and wiped out at Cuito Cuanavale. If the South Africans’ designs had been fulfilled, the setback could have brought about a collapse with unforeseeable consequences.

We did not have enough forces in Angola to handle that situation. Using those we already had there to reinforce Cuito Cuanavale might have endangered the general stability of our defenses on the southern front. Therefore, it was absolutely necessary to have reinforcements sent from Cuba. At the same time, we preferred not to engage in a decisive battle at Cuito, because that was the terrain chosen by the enemy, where it had all the advantages. It was essential to organize an impregnable defense there against which the enemy would wear itself out without achieving its objective. The decisive actions should be waged at a time and place we had chosen—that is, when we were stronger and at the enemy’s most vulnerable points: specifically, on the southwestern flank.

To do this, following consultations with the Angolan government and meticulous planning by the general staff of the Revolutionary Armed Forces [of Cuba], directed by our commander-in-chief, the historic decision of reinforcing our troops in the People’s Republic of Angola was reached on November 15, 1987. As is known, the total number of our troops there was increased to 50,000. They had the mission of working in cooperation with the Angolan troops to defeat the invading South African troops. When the time is right, we will explain how it was possible for a Third World country such as ours to carry out that feat of logistics and morale in just a matter of weeks.

We knew that the South African command estimated that it would take us at least six months to transfer the personnel, armaments and other weaponry required for a division. The South African strategists took longer to realize that, by doubling the number of our forces and multiplying the number of them on the southern front several times over, for the first time in 12 years, we had obtained control of the air. This required veritable feats of labor, such as the construction of the Cahama airport in just 70 days, which placed vital enemy targets within our range.

We also deployed a strike force on that front that included 998 tanks; over 600 armored carriers; and 1,600 pieces of artillery, mortars and antiaircraft defense.
From Cuba, in workdays of up to 20 hours and more, compañero Fidel—as he had done on several occasions since 1975—personally directed the work of the General Staff of the Ministry of the FAR, imbuing all of us with his iron determination to achieve victory with minimum losses, combining daring and heroism with the philosophy of not endangering the life of a single person without having first exhausted all other possibilities.

This spirit prevailed throughout those 16 years. It became an ethic and a style that perfected the combat mastery of the chiefs and was expressed in the morale that raised the confidence and courage of the combatants.

Cuito held out. All South African attempts to advance on its approaches were repulsed. Their sophisticated long-range artillery, which never stopped firing day and night, did not terrify the Angolan-Cuban forces and proved ineffective. Meanwhile, a powerful group, which SWAPO units joined, seriously threatened the enemy’s important strategic bases on the southwestern flank. Clashes with detachments of scouts in Donguena and Tchipa and the air strike against their positions in Calueque persuaded the South Africans that it was impossible to achieve a military victory over Angola and the combined Angolan and Cuban forces. Thus, the possibility arose for a negotiated solution that would include compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 435/78 supporting the decolonization and independence of Namibia, which had been postponed several times.

The December 1988 agreements signed in New York, which would have been inconceivable without Operation Carlota, placed the withdrawal of the Cuban internationalist troops in the context of a global solution the key element of which was always the total, prior withdrawal of the South African invaders, first from Angola and then from Namibia.

In the most incredible and unimaginable event since the triumph of the revolution, on June 14, 1989, a note was published in *Granma* from the Ministry of the FAR announcing that Major General Arnaldo Ochoa Sánchez had been arrested, accused of having committed serious crimes of corruption and of dishonest management of economic resources.

The details of the charges, which were difficult to believe at the time, were revealed over the following days: General Ochoa and a small group of close subordinates—who had been charged at first with corruption and the unlawful use, misappropriation and mismanagement of hard currency by means of illicit activities beginning when he was an officer in the Cuban military mission in Angola—were found to have also established criminal contacts with a group of officers in the Ministry of the Interior’s Department MC. This group, headed by Antonio de la Guardia, had for some time been linked to drug traffickers, and had been using Cuban airports and jurisdictional waters—which the members of that department were empowered to use in their delicate mission—for drug trafficking.

The details of the case, which were meticulously published in the Cuban press during the following weeks, showed irresponsible actions, such as Ochoa sending his aide to Colombia, where he met and negotiated personally.

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1. Arnaldo Ochoa Sánchez had been a combatant in the Rebel Army and had carried out several missions. He was a major general and a Hero of the Republic of Cuba.

2. Department MC was established by the Ministry of the Interior to help overcome Cuba’s difficulties in obtaining certain equipment and materials because of the US blockade.

3. Antonio de la Guardia Font was a brigadier general in the Ministry of the Interior and head of Department MC.
with Pablo Escobar, the kingpin of the Medellin drug cartel.

“A true revolution will never permit impunity,” the party and government leadership stated right from the start. “If serious moral or other ills affect an individual, absolutely nobody in our homeland—no matter how great their merits or how high their position—may violate the principles and laws of the revolution with impunity.”

A few days later, on June 22, an editorial in Granma stated: “The international traffic in drugs has dealt us a terrible blow. We can’t even say that the big traffickers in drugs are mainly to blame. Our own people sought them out and easily accepted their first offers. However, we will pull this evil out by the roots. We are the only ones in this hemisphere who can do it, and it won’t even be difficult. Our citizens, our border patrols and combatants in the Ministry of the FAR and Ministry of the Interior and our party members will be much more alert from now on. After this bitter experience, it will be very difficult for new groups like Antonio de la Guardia’s and for conduct such as Ochoa’s and Martínez’s to arise.”

The Cuban people were able to watch the entire process—from the meeting of the Court of Honor, composed of 47 generals of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, to the hearings of the summary trial by the Special Military Court and the session of the Council of State, in which its members deliberated on the use of their powers and on whether or not to apply the death penalty to four of the accused. This was broadcast on television.

As Fidel Castro pointed out, “The revolution has been generous on many occasions, when it could be so without doing mortal damage to itself. Now, the revolution cannot be generous without doing itself serious damage.” As president of the Council of State, Fidel argued that the crimes committed by the defendants hurt the country at its most sensitive points: morale, its capacity to resist and its international credibility. They constituted a stab in the back for Cuba, precisely when it was facing its most difficult trials.

“It is hard to think,” Fidel said, “that some men are going to die as a result of all this and as a result of our decision. It is hard, yes, and bitter, and it pleases no one, but I think, above all, of others who died.


5. Granma, June 22, 1989. Jorge Martínez, a captain in the Revolutionary Armed Forces, was Arnaldo Ochoa’s aide.
“I think of those who gave their lives to build a decent country—and not only those who were killed recently but also those who gave their lives in the past 120 years and more, to create a republic in which law and justice would prevail, a republic where there would be no corruption, where there would be no impunity, where there would be no dishonesty; a republic where there would be no corruption, embezzlement or treason. I think of those who gave their lives for a worthy and honorable nation, those who died in two wars of independence and have given their lives throughout this century, of the many, many excellent compañeros who died. I think of them!”

The 29 members of the Council of State unanimously decided not to exercise their constitutional right of pardon. On July 13, a note in Granma announced that, early on the morning of that day, the death sentence by firing squad had been carried out against Arnaldo Ochoa, Jorge Martínez, Antonio de la Guardia and Amado Padrón.

A few days later, before the echoes of Case One had died away, proceedings were initiated against a group of high-ranking officers in the Ministry of the Interior, who were accused of having made incorrect use of their positions and resources. This led to Case Two of 1989 and to a thorough reconstruction of that ministry.

LET US LEARN FROM THIS AND KEEP MOVING FORWARD

Editorial in Granma, September 2, 1989.

The Military Court has pronounced judgment in Case Two of 1989. The affront to the law and ethics of the revolution has been wiped clean. The guilty parties have received their punishment. The entire nation perceives, however, that the problems confronted in the country this summer go far beyond the fate of a handful of corrupt, disloyal men. The working people, with their infallible wisdom, feel these past months have been decisive and historic.

Therefore, the most important aspects do not end with the court’s decision. It may be only a beginning. The main things are the lessons and

reflections that our entire society and the party should draw from this bitter experience.

Rectification has already achieved some very serious goals. But, unquestionably, we are now entering a much more important stage of this process. In the future, these events that have shaken the country may be seen as a turning point toward the thoroughgoing institutional, political and moral improvement of the revolution.

An essential characteristic of the situation confronting us—first with the eradication of the Ochoa-La Guardia mafia of drug traffickers and now with the no less repugnant or dangerous phenomenon of corruption and failure at the highest levels of the Ministry of the Interior—is that it does not involve activity by enemy agents; rather, it concerns people who have come from our own ranks. What has been dealt with was not a confrontation between revolution and counterrevolution. The serious and harsh lesson of these events is that it shows that, without going over to the enemy, men who have served in our cause can inflict worse damage on us than any counterrevolutionary and, in practice, serve imperialism’s purpose, which is to destroy us.

In this regard, the first and main consequence of this process is that we have categorically reaffirmed a vital principle: respect for the law, which is applicable to all citizens equally, no matter how high their political or governmental rank.

We do not know how many countries in the world can truly—rather than just formally—assert this principle. Cuba can do so, as it has just shown courageously and eloquently.

There is no impunity, nor can there ever be, for those who violate the legal and ethical principles of the revolution, no matter what their merit or position. The greater their political or governmental responsibility, the more obliged they are to behave with dignity and honor, both publicly and privately.

Conscious observance of the law is not merely a juridical matter. This has been said many times, and it’s worth remembering now. Our mambi fighters for Cuba’s independence against Spain upheld this principle in the late 19th century who, when half naked and hungry, asserted the majesty of a Republic in Arms in the fields of free Cuba. They believed that their homeland was worth fighting and dying for; they believed in the legitimacy
of fighting for freedom. In the same way, strict adherence to legality now constitutes the key to profound ideological and political clarity. We believe in patriotism, independence, socialism and the revolution.

How could someone who does not respect the law or morality and who acts as if he belonged to a higher caste, above everyone and everything, be a revolutionary?

What concept of solidarity could anyone have who is not capable of feeling solidarity with his fellow citizens?

How can anyone speak of socialism and revolution when he does not have the sensitivity to realize that privileges, high-handedness, abuse and separation from the masses are some of the main causes of the difficulties now convulsing the socialist system—a system that arose precisely to eradicate those capitalist ills?

These trials have shown something else. Since the law was broken, we have been able to face this delicate, exceptional situation in a strictly legal framework.

There has been no crisis. The revolution has remained firm, sure and serene. It has been true to itself, with its exemplary history, and has placed itself above emotional reactions to these cases of betrayal and disloyalty, which are cause for indignation. The nation’s institutions have carried out their role with morality and authority and have managed to maintain order, punish the guilty parties and begin working to keep such vices from reappearing in the future.

The people’s support has accompanied and encouraged the revolution in these testing months. However, the revolution’s actions were not aimed at satisfying public opinion, nor could it ever have been motivated to act only in that way. Public opinion is important and should be kept in mind in providing information and guidance to the people, but the law cannot be manipulated or violated. In applying the law, it is impossible to go beyond the limits it establishes.

At one point, public opinion temporarily leaned toward benevolence for the principal defendant in Case One [Ochoa]. Some unhappiness was also noted with the punishment requested for José Abrantes and the other

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7. José Abrantes was Minister of the Interior. He was arrested, tried and punished in Case Two.
defendants in Case Two. In the first case, the trial itself and the Council of State rejected that view. In the second case, it has been necessary to explain that the crime that might have brought a more severe punishment was not proved and that both the government attorney’s office and the court and investigators, after examining the facts exhaustively, came to the conclusion that the former Minister of the Interior had not behaved badly with regard to the drug trafficking mafia in Department MC.

The experience of these trials, however, has helped us to understand that our laws must be improved. That is another important conclusion.

Omissions have been noted both in the penal code and in military penal law. The most important ones concern illegal drug trafficking and the manipulation or suppression of information. Obviously, when these laws were written, it was impossible to imagine that such things could occur. The blows received and our interest in protecting our society from such deformations show us the need to make an example of this conduct and to punish it with exemplary severity.

As for Case Two, some people are even asking why we do not change the law and apply more severe punishments. The law is the law, and, luckily, we live in a country that is governed by law. We cannot apply harsher punishments than those established by law, no matter how serious the actions may be, both morally and politically, nor can changes in the law be retroactive.

The case of Abrantes has also made it necessary to consider the advisability and possibility of further increasing the punishments for the crimes of abuse of power and incorrect use of resources, possibly even establishing the death penalty for such crimes in certain circumstances.

Naturally, the appropriate bodies of the party and government, at the right time, must take up this matter.

In view of conduct such as that of Luis Orlando Domínguez, Diocles Torralbas, and now José Abrantes, each of whom was given the most severe punishment established by the law in effect at the time their crimes were committed, many ordinary men and women are asking themselves how

8. Luis Orlando Domínguez was an official punished for corruption in an earlier period.

9. Diocles Torralbas had been Minister of Sugar and vice-president of the government. He was punished for crimes of corruption shortly before Case One.
such things can occur without being discovered sooner.

First of all, our people should understand the very exceptional nature of these cases, involving those who have been given authority, trust and privileges, and recognize that they are different from cases such as Antonio de la Guardia’s gang, which is an expression of the cancer that had begun to eat away at a government institution and even its metastasis into criminal acts such as those committed, as well as petit-bourgeois lifestyles, laxity, favoritism and high-handedness.

Having recognized the exceptional nature, it is essential to admit that this has exposed deeper problems affecting society. We cannot content ourselves with the simplification that attributes all acts of this kind to a lack of control.

Good accounting and correct economic and financial controls are not enough to prevent events such as these. We will always have to delegate a large number of decision-making and other powers to some leaders and cadres, because of the nature of their work. Far from being effective means for preventing the spread of these crimes, super-centralization and generalized distrust may lead to even worse problems.

We must seek real solutions in improving our nation’s institutions and in establishing principles, methods, norms and mechanisms that exclude impunity and make it impossible for conditions that create a culture in which these distortions arise.

Let us state this clearly: several faults involving all the institutions of the revolution, in one way or another, contributed to what happened.

The first proof of this is that, in spite of its extremely delicate tasks, the Ministry of the Interior had no system of internal control. Our political and governmental leaders received information about the rest of the country and the world through the Ministry of the Interior, among other sources, but they did not know very much about what was really going on in that ministry. For their part, the leaders of the Ministry of the Interior did not know about many of the problems and hid others that they were aware of, so as to preserve a false image of integrity and efficiency, which had begun to crumble in many places.

There were times when the top leaders of the party noted signs that certain negative tendencies were developing in the Ministry of the Interior, and warnings were given and specific guidelines issued concerning the
conduct of cadres and officers in order to reinforce the measures of austerity and to turn over to People’s Power the recreation centers, restaurants, polyclinics and other installations that were being created in various provinces. Express instructions were issued that they should not get involved in commercial and business activities that were unrelated to the functions of the ministry. In some cases, those instructions were only partially followed or were given no more than lip service. In other cases, no attention was paid to them whatsoever.

In addition to this defect, there were problems in the party’s functioning in the ministry. The facts show that, in practice, the role of its organizations was blocked or their leadership was placed in the hands of extremists and/or incompetents.

The attempts made in the party by some members and leaders to denounce or seek explanations for the negative tendencies that were flourishing were pushed aside.

Naturally, the party’s responsibility is not limited to the organizations which function in the Ministry of the Interior. It is painful to acknowledge that, in fact, this institution generally acted outside party control.

Deficiencies were noted in the party leaderships in the provinces—where it is essential to find formulas that ensure compartmentalization and the secrecy of the Ministry of the Interior’s work—and in the party’s evaluation of the agency’s activities, its vigilance concerning anything that might have political implications. In the provinces, too, the Ministry of the Interior has given rise to deformations and negative tendencies, which, generally speaking, have not happened in the party.

The leading function of the party at the national level must be to ensure the work of the ministry in a more integral, deeper way, keeping in mind that, by its very nature, this agency exercises a key influence on the stability and political and moral climate of society.

This is not limited to the Ministry of the Interior alone, however. It is also applicable to all governmental agencies and political and mass organizations. The party is called upon to fully exercise its role of leadership, guidance and control, in which there can be no fissures; one of its expressions should be the establishment of norms that make it possible to regulate certain aspects of the conduct of leaders and cadres.

We have an honest, strong party. There is no place in it for corruption
or sponging. As a rule, its cadres are models of austerity, dedication and modest living. This is a decisive guarantee in the process that we are developing, but serious soul-searching should bring us to the idea that the improvement of society also supposes the improvement of the party, and that it is not only the subject but also the object of correction.

The main tasks of the Ministry of the Interior are to defend the security of the revolution and to ensure the stability of the domestic order.

The security of a country such as Cuba is, first of all, an ideological and political matter. It is not limited to the technical and professional work of the combatants who work on that front, although their work is not only important but also absolutely necessary. It also includes the people’s unity with the revolution; their trust in the individuals who exercise power; the leaders’ prestige, morale and authority; and the example of honesty that the leaders set.

The negative phenomena discovered in the Ministry of the Interior led inexorably to a weakening of our security in all these spheres. The psychological and moral impact of these things has been even stronger because of the clash between reality and the institution’s commendable image and historic role. That image, of course, is justified, but it was sometimes promoted and exaggerated by its leaders, perhaps as a justification for giving it special material, social and political status.

This in no way denies the legitimate merits of the combatants in the security and police forces, but it is necessary to understand that, in the life of the revolution, there are things that are already a part of the combat glory of the entire people, such as the Bay of Pigs, the struggle against groups of armed counterrevolutionaries in the mountains and the internationalist missions. But there is no sense in trying to parcel them out and make isolated mention of the contribution of any particular agency.

We understand the embarrassment, bitterness and even momentary bewilderment many compañeros in the ministry may be feeling.

We think of the men and women who joined that institution when they were very young and who have dedicated practically their entire lives to the defense of the revolution. We think of the honest, self-sacrificing combatants who saw that the cadre policy being applied was, in essence, its negation, and who witnessed with pain some individuals’ meteoric promotion to ranks and responsibilities that exceeded their merits and competence, while other
deserving combatants were ignored. We think of the loyal compañeros who witnessed the gradual corruption of chiefs and cadres but were unable to do anything to halt the degeneration of the institution and the proliferation of indulgence, favoritism and complicity and even the creation of interest groups jostling for positions of power and resources.

The mass of honorable men and women constitute the grass roots and a large part of the intermediate-level cadres of the Ministry of the Interior. They should see the current reconstruction of the ministry as a response to their real interests—a sad but urgent necessity.

This is not the time for useless lamentation or for being depressed—much less for letting ourselves be carried away by pointless speculation, resentment and other attitudes typical of petit-bourgeois clergymen. This is a revolutionary moment that offers all loyal combatants in the ministry a place of work and of honor.

The fraternal union of these combatants with the chiefs and cadres of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, who have started working in the Ministry of the Interior as required and as a matter of principle, will be the key to that institution’s recovery from the present setback and to its soon being able to respond with pride to what the people and the revolution expect of it.

Nobody should be afraid that the nation’s security is weakened. The new cadres who are taking up these tasks are capable, well-prepared compañeros who come from a political school that guarantees the application of truly revolutionary methods.

Our sworn enemy—the US government, with its agencies of subversion and aggression—should not miscalculate the significance of what has happened in Cuba. We know that the CIA had information about Cubans participating in drug trafficking operations months before we denounced those activities, but it did not use that information, undoubtedly waiting for the right moment to achieve maximum political impact. Likewise, it would not be surprising if the US special services had evidence concerning some of the cases of officers involved in the problems of corruption and breakdown in the Ministry of the Interior and were waiting for that process to get much more serious. We have acted in time. We have destroyed those expectations. If the imperialists were waiting to find a breach caused by a slackening of principles, they will now come up against an impregnable wall.

Our people have been fully informed about what has happened. Once
again, the party has told them the truth, no matter how disagreeable and distressing it is, placing its trust in the people’s maturity and political development. This has been and will continue to be a matter of principle for our revolution.

We have no doubt that we will emerge from this test infinitely stronger and that, from now on, our revolution will advance with growing strength in every sphere, in spite of our economic limitations and the difficult external circumstances we face.

We must understand, above all, that we are working for the 21st century. Healing society of malignant cells such as these; making our very best effort; and establishing solid institutional, ethical and political foundations for Cuba in the future is a historic task that today’s generations cannot and will not leave half done.

In our country, as Commander­in­Chief Fidel Castro put it, there cannot be two worlds, but only one: that of the workers. There cannot be two truths: the truth of the heroic battle our people are waging for development and against difficulties, and the truth of privileged, venal, wasteful cliques. The great lesson of the past few months is that the party, the people and the Revolutionary Armed Forces are firmly determined to achieve that goal.

Let us learn from these things. Let every revolutionary make a rigorous analysis of his or her own conduct and turn these blows into renewed strength for advancing. This is what we must do.

37. ANGOLA AND OPERATION TRIBUTE

The image was historic, and will not fade with time: At 3:00 p.m. on December 7, 1989, the 93rd anniversary of the death in combat of Major General Antonio Maceo and his aide, Captain Francisco Gómez Toro—who symbolized the mambi fighters for Cuba’s independence against Spain—simultaneous funeral corteges set out in all Cuba’s 169 municipalities, bearing the remains of the internationalist combatants who had lost their lives in Angola during the more than 13 years of Cuba’s solidarity with and assistance to that country and other sister nations, such as Ethiopia and Nicaragua. The internationalist combatants were being taken to their final resting place: the Mausoleum of Defenders.

A total of 2,085 combatants lost their lives while carrying out military missions, and another 204 died on missions of a civilian nature—a total of 2,289 Cuban internationalists who were killed.

The Cuban government and Revolutionary Armed Forces had always been scrupulous in informing relatives in Cuba of those killed in action and those who died as a result of accidents or wounds in Angola. However, it

1. Major General Antonio Maceo, second in command of the Liberation Army, and Captain Francisco Gómez Toro, his young aide, the son of General Máximo Gómez, were killed at Punta Brava on December 7, 1896. They were buried together in El Cacahual, Cuba’s most prestigious pantheon, near Havana.

2. The Spanish colonialists used the term mambi to refer derisively to those fighting for Cuba’s independence. It has subsequently come to denote honor.

3. A Cuban internationalist contingent helped Ethiopia combat Somalia’s invasion of the Ogaden. Cuban combatants also participated alongside the Sandinista insurgents in the final stage of the war against the Somoza dictatorship and later in defending the Nicaraguan revolution against the dirty war run by the CIA.
was impossible to think of repatriating their bodies and burying them in their hometowns while the war continued in distant Africa. But this was an important part of Cuban tradition and culture, linked to the pride of parents, sons, daughters, wives, brothers and sisters, for whom they had given their lives, upholding the principles of the revolution and fraternity among the peoples.

Fidel Castro had stated that, when the war was over, the Cubans would bring back from Angola only the satisfaction of duty fulfilled and the bodies of their fallen compañeros. That opportunity came after the peace agreements of December 1988, which put an end to the South African racists' incursions into Angolan territory and made possible Namibia's independence. The peace agreements also made an important contribution to the internal political process that, in the following years, would end the opprobrious system of apartheid.

Operation Tribute, as it was called, was a model of organization and logistical precision. A mausoleum was built in every Cuban municipality to receive the remains of the fallen. In those places that lacked a band, one was created in just a few months. Solemn ceremonies, unprecedented in the life of the nation, were organized to the last detail.

No description can do justice, in human and patriotic terms, to what happened, starting the night of December 6, when the urns and coffins, each draped with a Cuban flag and with a photograph of the internationalist who had died, were brought to public places. The members of each family reached the end of a long road of grief and hope and, surrounded by friends and relatives, gave their loved one a formal farewell that had been postponed for years. Those fallen ceased to be theirs alone but became a part of the entire nation, related to all fathers and mothers, all sisters and brothers, all wives and children.

When the time for the funeral cortege arrived on December 7 and the funeral march sounded, the units that served as guards of honor responded to the command with a martial pace and flags were raised gracefully. The entire Cuban people lined the streets to pay tribute to that part of themselves that was traveling its last road, and the entire Cuban people shed tears of grief. Thus, the sense of victory, the reaffirmation of the significance of an effort that helped to change the history of Africa, was combined with the grief for those who had died.
Operation Tribute also embodied something else: It symbolized the end of one era in the life of the revolution and the beginning of another. It coincided with the already evident collapse of the European socialist countries and the inexorable disaster in the Soviet Union, which would lead to the dismemberment and disappearance of that country two years later. Cuba had to regroup its forces for a battle in which its main internationalist mission and principal service to the revolutionary movement would be to defend itself and preserve its independence and socialism.

The main ceremony bidding farewell to the fallen combatants was held at El Cacahual, Havana province, at the tomb of Antonio Maceo and Panchito Gómez Toro. Once more, Fidel spoke on behalf of all the Cuban people.

WE WILL FOLLOW THEIR EXAMPLE!

Excerpt of a speech given by Fidel Castro on December 7, 1989, for the Cuban internationalists who died while carrying out military and civilian missions.

This date, December 7, the date on which Antonio Maceo, the most illustrious of all our soldiers, and his young aide-de-camp were killed, has always been very meaningful for all Cubans. Their remains lie here, in this sacred site of their homeland.

By choosing this day for laying to rest the remains of our heroic internationalist fighters who have died in different parts of the world—mainly in Africa, the land of birth of Maceo’s ancestors and many of our forebears—we make it a day for honoring all those Cubans who gave their lives while defending their country and all humankind. Thus, patriotism and internationalism—two of humanity’s most treasured values—will be joined forever in Cuba’s history.

Perhaps, some day, a monument will be erected not far from this site to honor them.

The remains of all the internationalists who died while carrying out their missions are being laid to rest in their hometowns all over Cuba right now.

The imperialists thought we would conceal the number of our combatants
killed in Angola during that complex, 14-year-long mission—as if it were a dishonor or a discredit to the revolution. For a long time they dreamed that the blood shed had been to no avail, as if those who died for a just cause had died in vain. Even if victory were the way to measure the value of people’s sacrifices in their legitimate struggles, they also returned victorious.

The Spartans used to tell their fighters to return with their shields or on them. Our troops are returning with their shields...

The final stage of the war in Angola was the most difficult. It demanded our country’s total determination, tenacity and fighting spirit in support of our Angolan brothers and sisters.

In fulfilling this duty of solidarity, not only to Angola but also to our own troops fighting under difficult conditions there, the revolution did not hesitate to risk everything. When the imperialist threats against our own country became very serious, we did not hesitate in sending a large part of our most modern and sophisticated military equipment to the southern front of the People’s Republic of Angola. Over 50,000 Cuban troops were in that sister nation—a truly impressive figure, in view of the distance and our country’s size and resources. It was a veritable feat by our Revolutionary Armed Forces and our people. Such chapters of altruism and international solidarity are very rare...

The hundreds of thousands of Cuban who carried out military or civilian internationalist missions have earned the respect of present and future generations. They have honorably upheld our people’s glorious fighting and internationalist traditions.

On their return, they have found their country engaged in a tremendous struggle for development while continuing to confront the criminal imperialist blockade with exemplary dignity. This is in addition to the current crisis in the socialist camp, from which we can only expect negative economic consequences for our country.

People in most of those countries aren’t talking about the anti-imperialist struggle or the principles of internationalism. Those words aren’t even mentioned in their press. Such concepts have been virtually removed from their political vocabulary. Meanwhile, capitalist values are gaining unheard-of strength in those societies...

I believe that revolution cannot be imported or exported; a socialist state cannot be founded through artificial insemination or by means of an
embryo transplant. A revolution requires certain conditions within society, and the people in each individual nation are the only ones who can create it. These ideas don’t run counter to the solidarity that all revolutionaries can and should extend to one another. Moreover, a revolution is a process that may advance or regress, a process that may even be derailed. But, above all, communists must be courageous and revolutionary. Communists are duty-bound to struggle under all circumstances, no matter how adverse they may be. The Paris communards struggled and died in the defense of their ideas. The banners of the revolution and of socialism are not surrendered without a fight. Only cowards and the demoralized surrender—never communists and other revolutionaries...

In Cuba, we are engaged in a process of rectification. No revolution or truly socialist rectification is possible without a strong, disciplined, respected party. Such a process cannot be advanced by slandering socialism, destroying its values, casting slurs on the party, demoralizing its vanguard, abandoning the party’s guiding role, eliminating social discipline and sowing chaos and anarchy everywhere. This may foster a counterrevolution, but not revolutionary changes.

The US imperialists think that Cuba won’t be able to hold out and that the new situation in the socialist community will inexorably help them to bring our revolution to its knees.

Cuba is not a country in which socialism arrived in the wake of the victorious divisions of the Red Army. In Cuba, our people created our socialist society in the course of a legitimate, heroic struggle. The 30 years in which we have stood firm against the most powerful empire on earth that sought to destroy our revolution bear witness to our political and moral strength.

Those of us in our country’s leadership aren’t a bunch of bumbling parvenus, new to our positions of responsibility. We come from the ranks of the old anti-imperialist fighters who followed [Julio Antonio] Mella and [Antonio] Guiteras; who attacked the Moncada barracks and came on the Granma; who fought in the Sierra Maestra, in the underground struggle and at the Bay of Pigs; who were unshaken by the October [Missile] Crisis; who have stood firm against imperialist aggression for 30 years; who have performed great labor feats and have carried out glorious internationalist missions. Men and women from three generations of Cubans are members and hold posts of responsibility in our battle-seasoned party, our marvelous
vanguard young people’s organization, our powerful mass organizations, our glorious Revolutionary Armed Forces and our Ministry of the Interior. In Cuba, the revolution, socialism and national independence are indissolubly linked.

We owe everything we are today to the revolution and socialism. If Cuba were ever to return to capitalism, our independence and sovereignty would be lost forever; we would be an extension of Miami, a mere appendage of US imperialism; and the repugnant prediction that a US president made in the 19th century — when that country was considering the annexation of Cuba— that our island would fall into its hands like a ripe fruit, would prove true. Our people are and will always be willing to give their lives to prevent this. Here, at Maceo’s tomb, we recall his immortal phrase: “Whoever tries to conquer Cuba will gain nothing but the dust of her blood-soaked soil—if they do not perish in the struggle first!”...

These men and women whom we are honorably laying to rest today in the land of their birth gave their lives for the most treasured values of our history and our revolution.

They died fighting against colonialism and neocolonialism.
They died fighting against racism and apartheid.
They died fighting against the plunder and exploitation to which the Third World peoples are subjected.
They died fighting for the independence and sovereignty of those peoples.
They died fighting for the right of all peoples in the world to well-being and development.
They died fighting so there would be no hunger or begging; so that all sick people would have doctors, all children would have schools, and all human beings would have jobs, shelter and food.
They died so there would be no oppressors or oppressed, no exploiters or exploited.
They died fighting for the dignity and freedom of all men and women.
They died fighting for true peace and security for all nations.
They died defending the ideals of Céspedes and Máximo Gómez.
They died defending the ideals of Martí and Maceo.
They died defending the ideals of Marx, Engels and Lenin.
They died defending the ideals of the October revolution and the example it set throughout the world.
They died for socialism.
They died for internationalism.
They died for the proud, revolutionary homeland that is today’s Cuba.
We will follow their example!

The term “special period in time of war” was added to Cuban military doctrine in the 1980s. At that time, the country was preparing to confront the warlike policy of the extreme right in the United States, and one of the possibilities was that the US administration, under any pretext that came to hand and taking advantage of its naval and air superiority, would impose a military blockade on Cuba that would make it extremely difficult for food, fuel and medicine to reach its coasts.

Such a situation was only expected to occur in a state of war, in whatever form that might take.

However, the events which led to the collapse of the European socialist community and, finally, to the collapse and self-destruction of the Soviet Union itself—which had been not only unforeseeable but inconceivable earlier—meant the “special period” (a strategy for withstanding an extraordinarily serious situation) became associated not with a direct military attack by the United States but with the loss of Cuba’s main allies. This is how the “special period in time of peace” arose.

The following facts help to explain what it meant: At the time of the triumph of the revolution, Cuba was completely dependent on the US market, where it sold its sugar and the small quantities of other export products and from where it bought fuel, food, medicine, equipment and spare parts. The imposition of the blockade between 1960 and 1962 forced the island to redirect its foreign trade completely; to change its technologies; and, over a period of more than three decades, to establish a system of fairer, more equitable and mutually advantageous relations with its new economic partners.

The catastrophe that hit Eastern and Central Europe in the late 1980s...
and early 1990s—which was totally unrelated to Cuba—meant the shield that had been protecting Cuba, to some extent, from the deadly effects of the US blockade disappeared, practically overnight.

Thus, in the short period of about 30 years, Cuba was once again faced with the pressing need to restructure and completely refocus its participation in the world economy. It did so this time with the added difficulty of receiving no solidarity from abroad, although it did have the support of progressive organizations and people in many countries. It was also subjected to the unfair prices of North-South trade after losing the markets and sources of supplies and financing on which its development had been based. In addition, Cuba faced the growing hostility of the US government.

Only a revolutionary, united nation endowed with a tremendous fighting spirit could have confronted such a challenge successfully.

The acute economic crisis into which the country was plunged by its loss of sources of oil, other raw materials, equipment, spare parts, food and credit had a sharp impact on development and the standard of living. The Gross Domestic Product plummeted by 35 percent in about two years. Even more revealing for a country like Cuba, with an open economy and dependent on foreign trade to solve all kinds of needs, the island’s import capacity in 1992 was reduced to about a quarter of what it had been in 1989. That is, in a short period of time, Cuba lost close to 75 percent of its purchasing power.

It is admirable that, in this adverse situation, the nation did not fall apart, did not let itself be plunged into chaos, but instead protected all its citizens, preserved the strategic programs of the revolution and not only stood firm but also gradually, in a relatively short period of time, restored the growth capacity of its economy.

In order to do this, it was absolutely necessary, in consultation with the workers and the entire population, to draw up a series of measures that placed the initial emphasis on putting the nation’s finances on a sound footing (that is, restoring the value of the peso, which had been considerably devalued); establishing guaranteed employment; ensuring supplies of basic foodstuffs for workers’ families; and defending the revolution’s social policies, such as public health, education and the system of social security.

At the same time, in a short period, other decisions were implemented to adapt economic management to the new reality, making the most of Cuba’s natural resources and increasing sources of hard-currency income.
Those measures included turning large state agricultural enterprises into cooperative units of a new kind, legalizing the people’s possession and use of hard currency, decentralizing foreign trade, reorganizing the central administrative apparatus of the government, promoting foreign investment, immediately developing tourism and providing greater possibilities for self-employment.

These economic mechanisms played an important role in the practical response to the crisis. They implied making some concessions to capitalist formulas—up to a certain point, and only in those areas determined by the government—but the revolutionary government never renounced its right and its duty to oversee the economy as a whole.

“Special period” policies included more than just the economic sphere. They were based, above all, on a broader, more creative and dynamic approach to political and ideological work—especially the capacity for self-sacrifice and commitment by the workers and the people as a whole. They were founded on the honor, patriotism, fighting spirit and socialist consciousness of the masses.

What date marked the beginning of the “special period”—and, with it, the beginning of an inevitably long phase in the history of the revolution?

It is not easy to determine this. January 1, 1992, was the day Fidel Castro told the National Assembly of People’s Power that 1992 would be “the first year of the special period.” The Soviet Union had just been dissolved with the stroke of a pen, there was no guarantee that any of the agreements then in effect between Cuba and the Soviet Union would be kept, and Cuba was preparing to begin the new year in a situation of tremendous uncertainty.

**CUBA HAS WHAT WE NEED TO MOVE FORWARD...**

Excerpts from the televised speech made by Carlos Lage, secretary of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers, explaining Cuba’s economic situation, November 6, 1992.

We need to refer here to Fidel’s speech in Camagüey on the anniversary of July 26, in 1989. As early as this, if we think about the vertiginous unfolding
of events afterwards, [Fidel Castro] warned of the dangers that could face us as a consequence of what was then occurring in the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc.

I recall that he stated that even if one day we should receive the news that the Soviet Union had disappeared, we would continue to construct and defend socialism. Even before this date, in our internal working sessions, he warned of the dangers of some measures being taken, of some tendencies, of some currents that were starting to appear, and the consequences these might have in the Soviet Union and in the economic relations between our country and the socialist bloc and the Soviet Union.

It must be said that, even though we were warned and had begun to prepare our country, the subsequent events happened so precipitously, and the disintegration, first of the socialist bloc and then of the Soviet Union, occurred so fast that it was impossible to prevent the consequences of these events being felt in our economy and in the lives of our people.

All our people know, because we have explained, the reasons for the difficulties we are experiencing today and how we must meet them. The economic impact on our economy caused by the interruption of these relations has been explained very clearly.

It has been said that Cuba’s import capacity has been reduced by more than $8.1 billion per year to about $2.2 billion; that is to say, $8.1 billion in 1989 when it was still possible to regard our links with the community of socialist countries as fully developing, and $2.2 billion as the estimate for Cuba’s import capacity in 1992. This means that the country has had to live this year with 73 percent less of the imported resources that were sufficient for the normal functioning of the country’s economy and peoples’ lives.

But the consequences of the situation we are going through are not limited to this. It has to be said that in addition to all this, we used to have an intense commercial exchange with the countries of the socialist community, and principally with the Soviet Union. Eighty-one percent of our exports went to those countries while 85 percent of our imported goods came from the socialist bloc.

This means that with the rupturing of these commercial relations, Cuba lost more than three-quarters of its markets, both the market supplying the primary materials for our national production and consumer goods, as well as the market for our export products.
Thus, it is possible to see an additional impact: it means trying to exist, all of a sudden, with less resources, while the economy must keep functioning and seeking new markets.

If we make a balance sheet of what has happened in the year 1992, Cuba’s commerce with the former Soviet Union and the countries of the former socialist bloc would be around $830 million in these two areas, that is both exports and imports, including an estimate for the last two months of the year. This means that our commerce will be only 7 percent of what was previously developed with these countries.

From this it might be concluded that not only have we lost Cuba’s preferential conditions for commerce with the socialist countries, along with credits, prices in accordance with bilateral agreements, and with an economic order in these relations that was much more than just those in the current international economic order, but we also now have the fact that commerce is almost broken off, reduced to a minimum, almost zero.

A good part of this 7 percent is the million tons of sugar we export to Russia in return for 1.8 million tons of petroleum. This represents more than half of the commerce I mentioned. Cuba now has to function with these reduced resources and, besides that, has to find new markets for its import and export products.

Another factor we might indicate is that our relations with the socialist bloc were not only relations with a great volume of commerce, and Cuba’s most important commercial relations, but they were also relations of economic integration. In other words, over the years our economy has become integrated into the economies of the countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).

Many investments, many programs, many developments taking place in the country, which required considerable resources and effort, were happening in accordance with the responsibilities Cuba had to discharge within the CMEA, with the commitments Cuba had to honor within the CMEA, and with the market that this community of countries offered to our nation. So the tie that was broken went much deeper than a mere commercial tie but also related to our need, not only of finding new markets, but also of strategically orienting the development of our country’s economy toward completely new circumstances.

Parenthetically, was it the correct choice to have developed this relation-
ship? Is it historically correct? What are the origins of this relationship and this integration of our economies? The origin lies in the imperialist blockade at the start of the revolution.

When the blockade began, when our trade with the United States was interrupted, when pressure was applied and the Latin American countries broke political, economic and commercial relations with Cuba, the socialist bloc, and the Soviet Union in particular, appeared as an alternative for our nation’s commerce and development. And not only was it an alternative market, but it was an alternative that offered increasingly advantageous and increasingly appropriate conditions for our country, through which we were able to develop commercial relations in which we obtained preferential prices for our products in relation to world market prices, and we obtained credits for development, which the imperialist blockade denied us in other areas of the world.

This corresponded to a policy, mainly in the solidarity shown by the Soviet Union, an internationalist policy, for which we will be eternally grateful. In other words, historically speaking, our high degree of integration into the socialist bloc has its origins in the blockade, and Cuba obtained advantages from this alternative trade.

It has often been said outside Cuba that our country was subsidized and that now that this subsidy is lost, problems are emerging because our economy has to operate in a normal market situation. This analysis is not correct because, in fact, there was no subsidy, but rather a policy of a more just international exchange, corresponding to the kind of exchange that ought to exist between the developed countries and underdeveloped countries, something that even the UN has proclaimed. We managed to have these relations in our trade with the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc to a greater degree than other underdeveloped countries had with the rest of the community of developed countries.

This is what occurred in our relations with the Soviet Union and, at a certain point in these relations, it was agreed that, to the extent that the prices of the products we imported were increasing, the prices of the products we exported would also increase. This is why there was a time when the price of sugar went as high as $800 a ton. In other words, it was the result of this agreement with the Soviet Union, which was a just agreement, and an agreement that we appreciated because it corresponded to the needs of the
underdeveloped world and also the just demands of the underdeveloped world.

When these relations were broken off, these commercial exchanges were cut, after we had been part of this system for 30 years. Thus, in all essential aspects, the technology of our country had been socialist technology, mainly from the Soviet Union. In our equipment and machinery, if we review everything, it is obvious that all our planes are Soviet, all the mechanization of our sugar industry, its technology, its combine harvesters, are Soviet, and more than 60 percent of our electricity generation is Soviet, a good part of it coming from the socialist bloc with the Czechoslovak technical teams now working in the thermoelectric centers.

This means that there is no branch of the economy where there is not a significant proportion of technology from the socialist bloc, and once economic relations were interrupted, technical assistance and our ability to obtain spare parts for the functioning of this machinery were also cut off. This is happening and yet the conditions in which Cuba is participating in the world market and its relations with other countries are not normal. Cuba is facing a market where it has been fighting for 30 years against a blockade imposed by the United States.

The blockade has always been present, but there is no doubt that our relations with the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc contributed to attenuating the effects of the blockade on Cuba’s economy. A blockade that affects 15 percent of our economy is not the same as a blockade that affects 100 percent of our economy.

The consequences of this rupture of our relations with the socialist bloc now confront our country with a commercial sphere that is blocked to us, where our commercial relations have to operate under the effects of the US blockade at a time when the hegemony of that nation is even stronger. In other words, the US capacity for pressuring us, and its capacity for successful action in imposing the blockade is greater just at the time when Cuba must confront this new commercial situation, and when the United States has decided to intensify the blockade.

The blockade has been intensified and measures are being taken against our country, one after the other, the most recent being the Torricelli [Cuban Democracy] Act. Pressure is exerted on governments and businesspeople. At this juncture, pressures of all kinds are being exerted...
[Fidel Castro] has explained that 1992 is “year one of a special period,” in the sense that, for the first time now, in 1992, we are faced with the effects of these problems. Between 1990 and 1991 the situation became progressively worse, but at the end of 1991 the Soviet Union totally disappeared. In 1991, we still had bilateral agreements with the Soviet Union, with preferential prices for our products, not as high as previously, but still better prices than on the world market—although this did not operate the whole year but for only the first quarter and part of the second quarter. In 1992, for the first time, the socialist bloc is no more, the Soviet Union is no more, there are no more agreements, no more preferential prices, and we must now face the consequences of this situation, in all their harshness...

I believe that it is not possible to define how long this “special period” will last and to state when it will end; it would not be serious to try to do that. If we consider it carefully, we will be aware, first of all, that the seriousness of the problems will not permit us to put this behind us quickly. However great the effort, however major the measures we will have to take and are already taking, whatever effort we make and whatever we do, this will take time. As Fidel said in the assembly: “This will take a long time.”

Along with this is the idea that if we see that in these circumstances we are much more vulnerable to the influence of the international market and the international situation—and even more so considering the effects of the blockade imposed by the United States and the pressures exerted by the United States—we must also see that, for the duration of this “special period,” these external factors will play a significant role and, depending on the ways in which they affect our economy, throughout this time when we will have to be live and work with these limitations and restrictions.

We have no doubt that Cuba has what we need to move ahead, and I believe the greatest proof that this is possible is the fact that we are here, that we have come as far as today, and that we have resisted until today.

39. THE WORK PLACE PARLIAMENTS

By the end of 1993, the most important mechanisms to soften the effects of the economic crisis had been put in place. It was time for decisive action toward an integral program that emphasized both financial recovery and deficit reduction. In short, it was time for a concerted strategy of economic recovery accompanied by essential restructuring.

The appropriate government departments outlined a plan that was presented to the National Assembly of People’s Power in its December 1993 session.

Despite the urgency with which the entire country looked for economic recovery, Fidel Castro warned the legislators against haste. He advocated a broad discussion of all measures with the workers and the public to avoid a technocratic approach to such complex problems. Without the understanding and support of the population and without a common consensus based on solid argument, there could be no lasting solution and no effective response to the crisis.

At that time Cuba could draw on over three decades of social participation and revolutionary experience. This was the crucial difference between Cuba and other countries; in Cuba there was no ruling oligarchy obeying international financial institutions and imposing brutal economic measures to solve the crisis without consultation, regardless of the social impact such structural adjustment packages might have.

The beginning of 1994 saw the birth of a unique experience: the work place parliaments.

Statistics show that more than 85,000 assemblies were held over 45 days with the participation of approximately three million workers.

These parliaments were not limited to the work place; they also involved the participation of students, farmers and members of the armed forces.
These meetings brought together union leaders, whom Fidel had instructed to "jump in at the deep end," the president and representatives of the National Assembly, members of political, popular and social organizations and government employees from all levels.

The leadership of the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC) described this experience, saying: "The whole country became one huge politics and economics class and everyone was learning. But the most important thing we realized was that there was still so much more to study, learn and improve in the field of work place economics."

The government's entire program was analyzed and numerous suggestions were made about how to improve it. This was no mere formal exercise; if the workers did not approve measures they were not implemented. This was the case with the proposal to make a one percent direct contribution from salaries to social security reserves.

The work place parliaments were exceptional in other ways. Delegates did not limit themselves to an analysis of national problems; rather, their key focus was on specific and local shortcomings. This generated internal strategies to tackle local problems, or at least moderate their negative effects within a set period. Many obstacles, particularly those of a subjective or organizational nature, were overcome through the concerted effort of administrators, union activists and political organizations.

In this way, the parliaments engendered a key union institution during the "special period": the Efficiency Assemblies.

A PRACTICAL VEHICLE FOR POPULAR PARTICIPATION

Report on work place parliaments presented by the secretary general of the Cuban Workers Federation (CTC), Pedro Ross, to the extraordinary session of the National Assembly of People’s Power, May 1–2, 1994.

We are here today to analyze the current and future importance of a particular experience in democratic practice. A practice that, in a relatively short period of time, has earned a reputation for usefulness, and which has demonstrated its role as a practical vehicle for popular participation in the
search for real solutions to our most pressing economic problems.

We are faced with a grueling yet inspiring task—one that stimulates enthusiasm and confirms the belief that each and every Cuban citizen must take up the challenge of resolving today’s dire economic situation. Only those solutions that are based on the broadest and most informed consensus will enable collective action toward an efficient economy that will protect and improve our socialist society.

Three million Cuban citizens participated in the assemblies to discuss the economic problems of every work place and outline a veritable arsenal of measures to bring about financial recovery. We are delighted to report that in practically every resolution made in every work place across the country, the patriotism, honor and determination of Cuban workers to do whatever it takes to save their revolution was clearly evident. These qualities are precisely what Fidel called on the workers to demonstrate during his speech in the previous general session of this assembly.

The union movement was responsible for calling the work place parliaments and may congratulate itself for its lucid and swift interpretation of the ideas of Fidel and the conclusions drawn from the fourth plenary session of the party’s Central Committee. All concurred that a technocratic approach to the problems, without the understanding and support of the people, would not generate an effective response and a lasting solution to the crisis.

During the brief period between the end of December [1993] and the present we prepared our officials, convened the workers parliaments and held meetings with more than 80,000 union boards. Every parliament received the full support of the party and the government as well as the active participation of our congressional representatives and the president of the National Assembly of People’s Power.

We believe the management of all work places made marked improvements on past efforts by cooperating fully in this process and they have won the workers’ recognition for the quality of the reports they presented and for their generation of sincere and realistic debate about local problems.

The whole country became one huge politics and economics class and everyone was learning a lot. But the most important thing we realized was that there was still so much more to study, learn and improve in the field of work place economics.
The press played a key role by presenting rigorous arguments and an accurate reflection of the debate. The media both stimulated and strengthened popular participation in this process and facilitated a deep understanding of the complexities of the situation. It emphasized the need to take considered measures in order to revitalize the economy, such as the production of goods of a higher quality and the use of available resources during the “special period.”

The majority of the parliaments agreed that companies should strive for profitability on the basis of a more efficient use of labor and greater material and financial productivity, without recourse to price increases. Above all, they agreed costs should be minimized.

Many of the meetings called on enterprises to increase income through the optimization of those byproducts that generate better utilization of material and human resources without affecting the principal industrial activity...

The theme of Cuba’s domestic recovery gained impetus in the work place parliaments as time went on. Opinions about the payment of entitlements, price adjustments, taxes and so on generated more conflict than those concerning economic efficiency. The ongoing debate nevertheless clarified the imperative need for efficient measures toward domestic recovery.

The vast majority of Cuban workers across the length and breadth of the country overwhelmingly concurred on one issue—that education and health care in our society must continue to be predominantly free. These are seen as essential achievements that the revolution must safeguard.

Despite this, many meetings proposed the introduction of payment for cosmetic surgery and some suggested that dental care should no longer be free of charge. The idea of making those responsible pay for the medical cost incurred as a result of a traffic accident or a physical attack was also raised.

The possibility of charging for school equipment and uniforms was revived, although the idea to charge only for lost items predominated. Some suggested supplying nonreusable material free at the beginning of the semester and charging affordable prices for the remainder of the school year. Some parliaments recommended that equipment be paid for at middle- and high-school levels whereas others debated a variable charge dependent on parental income.

Some parliaments discussed the possibility of introducing fees for further
studies, postgraduate degrees, language study and other courses that are considered non-core. Some delegates considered charging for unfinished courses or obliging those students who did not go on to work in their specialized field after graduation to pay for their studies.

A further proposal was to charge for school-based day care, as is already the case with kindergartens. Fees for course changes and accommodation and food costs were also proposed.

A common theme discussed by the work place parliaments concerned nonessential benefits in other areas. Many assemblies concurred in their call for the government to consider retaining some benefits while a small minority of meetings recommended the total abolition of all such perks.

Among the benefits considered by the workers to be nonessential (aside from those already mentioned in the areas of health and education) were the cost of services offered in registry offices, certain fumigation services and the food and household goods provided to workers in select sectors. Some assemblies recommended increasing vehicle tax and charging reasonable prices for safety equipment, public bathrooms and some funeral services. Other suggestions included the distribution of a vitamin supplement through pharmacies on payment of a small fee and the introduction of a bicycle tax and tolls in tunnels and on freeways.

Many work place parliaments suggested charging entrance fees for cultural activities, with the exception of children’s tickets. Some meetings specified that such activities would be indoors and would involve professional performers. The proposal to sell tickets to sporting events was proposed, although some assemblies opposed this idea.

Many agreed that leisure activities should also carry some cost, with emphasis placed on the need to expand the current options, particularly those available to children and young people. One idea was to convert disused cinemas into video arcades.

How to reduce the number of vehicles in circulation was discussed. In-house marketing of products was analyzed together with the application of charges to all services connected with state vehicles, including those with red license plates. One idea was to place collection boxes in state automobiles that would offer a percentage incentive to all drivers.

There was a consensus to avoid public transport fare increases, although some parliaments saw this as a necessity. Price increases were proposed for
gasoline, lubricants and vehicle accessories.

Many workers concluded that alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and cigars should be removed from the list of subsidized products and sold at higher prices on the open market. Some assemblies defended the subsidization of these products and recommended no, or only modest, price increases.

Numerous parliaments counseled the retention of the basic cigarette ration, the elimination of additional entitlements and the stabilization of prices on the open market.

Another consideration was the reestablishment of savings accounts for workers and farmers as well as overall reforms to the People’s Savings Bank such as the introduction of higher interest rates in order to attract new customers.

Prices in the network of restaurants and cafeterias were assessed, with closer correspondence between quality and cost recommended. Overall price increases were proposed and restricted access to some services for specific groups was discussed. The cost of meals in workers’ canteens was revised, with emphasis placed on a correlation between quality and price. Many parliaments completely rejected price rises in this area.

Again the idea of charging for water supply, particularly for those found to be wasting water, was discussed. Price increases for electricity were strongly recommended, particularly for use that exceeds a set quota. Higher telephone rates linked to service improvements were discussed.

Some parliaments were totally opposed to higher water and electricity charges.

The majority of assemblies opposed the introduction of income tax. Numerous meetings suggested subsidizing low-income families to offset possible price rises. Many parliaments proposed consideration of self-employed workers’ incomes when applying taxes. Some meetings argued such taxes should be high. A sliding scale of taxes on farmers’ incomes was also proposed.

The complicated issue of currency reform produced many diverse approaches that have not yet been fully examined and reported. Some parliaments opposed such a reform on the basis that the country was not prepared for radical currency change and that this measure alone was insufficient to resolve the financial crisis.

Practically every parliament agreed that all illicit funds and goods from
dubious sources should be confiscated.

Many workers’ assemblies examined the question of penal code reform and stressed the imposition of more severe sanctions for economic criminals.

The workplace parliaments demonstrated their value as tools for analyzing the basic problems confronting both workers and managers. Through them, the search for collective solutions that fuse individual, management, union and government participation was undertaken.

It now remains for us to extract the salient lessons from this process. The first lesson is the need to open more accessible channels of communication and establish a constant presence in the workplace. This will favor a closer relationship with our members and empower the unions to analyze workers’ problems and assist them in the search for solutions.

The lessons of the workplace parliaments must be permanently implemented in union methods and approach. This implies the revitalization of the union movement, making full use of its natural authority as the representative of the true owners of the means of production. In turn, this will involve an ideological offensive against attitudes that might frustrate Cuba’s development and the drive for efficiency.

In other words, we advocate a ceaseless struggle against all factors negatively affecting workers, whether these are indiscipline or recklessness in the workplace, excessive red tape (which smothers proactive problem solving and engenders apathy), irresponsibility or the waste of resources.

The drive toward efficiency is not a temporary slogan to be raised only in times of economic crisis, but rather a central pillar that supports the work of the unions and our own CTC.

Responding to workers’ demands, the CTC’s National Secretariat has decided to transform the Production and Service Assemblies into Efficiency Assemblies. These will meet whenever necessary to focus attention on this decisive element in our current development.

We must strive to honor the spirit of the workplace parliaments in every union project and campaign. Primacy must be given to frank analysis, open criticism and self-criticism that do not seek to excuse the inexcusable, but rather to work toward realistic solutions, which involve active worker participation.

In light of Cuban workers’ unshakable loyalty to the revolution (con-
firmed in tens of thousands of work place parliaments across the country), and considering their commitment to defend the integrity of their homeland and the successes of socialism, despite current privations and sacrifices, it is the union movement’s duty to fortify our pledge to Fidel and the Cuban people as a bastion of revolutionary spirit and an unquenchable source of resistance and triumph.

In the second half of the 1970s, under the Carter administration, the US government was forced to reconsider and adjust some of the presidential decisions made in earlier eras to isolate and strangle the island economically. In part, this was proof of the blockade’s failure, but it also reflected the strength of Cuba’s growing relations with the socialist countries and the US strategy adopted at the time on “human rights” and its attempt to legitimize a “peaceful opposition” to the revolution inside Cuba.

When Ronald Reagan moved into the White House in the early 1980s, the potential to ease tensions in the US-Cuba conflict was blocked, and a long period began, characterized by the escalation of measures aimed at strengthening the blockade. At the same time, an avalanche of propaganda was released, including the establishment of “Radio Martí” and, later, broadcasts via “TV Martí.”

When the Eastern and Central European socialist countries collapsed and the Soviet Union was dismembered and dissolved in late 1991, the ultraright political forces in the United States, intimately linked to the most reactionary sectors of Cuban émigrés in that country, assumed that Cuba would not be able to withstand the blow; that, alone, the island would fall an easy victim to US policy; and that, therefore, the time had come for seizing the initiative and taking steps to ensure Cuba’s liquidation.

These were the premises that gave rise to the Torricelli [Cuban Democracy] bill, which President George Bush, Snr., signed into law in October 1992. It not only exacerbated the blockade but also updated all the other US policies against the Cuban revolution.

A key aim of this legislation was to cut off Cuba’s trade with US subsidiaries in third countries. After the collapse of the European socialist
countries, that trade had nearly tripled, amounting to $705 million a year, nearly all of which was purchases of food, medicine and supplies for agriculture.

The law also tried to block the sending of all kinds of merchandise to Cuba, stating that any ship that touched a Cuban port would not be allowed to enter US territory for six months.

Along with these measures, which sought to kill the Cuban people through starvation and disease, the Torricelli Act allowed the US executive to use a second line of attack—"Track Two"—a communications, information and ideological campaign against Cuba.

The failure of that law, in spite of the damage it did to Cuba’s economy, plus the measures that President Bill Clinton decreed on August 20, 1994, stemming from the "rafters crisis," led the extreme right in the US Congress to come up with a new plan, the Helms-Burton ["Libertad"] bill, a synthesis of several similar proposals that had been raised in this period.

Clinton, who had criticized the bill as being both excessive and unnecessary, signed it after the incident of February 24, 1996, when two small planes belonging to the Brothers to the Rescue paramilitary group based in Miami, which had repeatedly violated Cuban airspace in provocative acts, were shot down by Cuban pursuit planes.

Above all, the Helms-Burton Act established a qualitative difference in US policy on Cuba by setting forth a detailed, explicit program for the recolonization of the island under US trusteeship. Such policies, which had been the prerogative of the president, were transferred to Congress.

The main target of the Torricelli Act was Cuba’s trade with US subsidiaries. The Helms-Burton Act placed its main emphasis on discouraging, obstructing and preventing foreign investment in Cuba. For this purpose, it used the pretext of demanding compensation for the US property nationalized in 1959 and 1960, arbitrarily including that of Cubans who later became US citizens and whose property was expropriated after January 1, 1959. This obviously included Batista’s henchmen and others who had escaped revolutionary justice.

Never before in the history of the world had there been a law that so arrogantly tried to force individuals and corporations of third countries to obey the laws of the United States, on pain of punishment and humiliation of various kinds.
Faced with this attempt by the United States to extend its hegemony beyond its borders, several other countries promulgated “antidote” laws. However, not all countries were consistently steadfast in standing up against the empire.

For its part, Cuba submitted the Law of Reaffirmation of Cuban Dignity and Sovereignty to the people for consultation and then, on December 24, 1996, to the National Assembly of People’s Power for approval. The outrageous US legislation was condemned internationally as well as in this legal response from the Cuban government.

LAW OF REAFFIRMATION OF CUBAN DIGNITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

Republic of Cuba
National Assembly of People’s Power
December 24, 1996

I, RICARDO ALARCÓN DE QUESADA, President of the National Assembly of People’s Power of the Republic of Cuba,

MAKE KNOWN that, in its session held on December 24, 1996, Year of the 100th Anniversary of Antonio Maceo’s Death in Combat, corresponding to the Seventh Session of the Fourth Legislature, the National Assembly of People’s Power approved the following:

WHEREAS the Helms-Burton Act, whose purpose is the colonial reabsorption of the Republic of Cuba, has been put into effect in the United States of America;

WHEREAS Cuba has suffered from the imperialist policy of the United States of America, which is bent on seizing it, using various means—including attempts to purchase the island from Spain; the application of the theory of Manifest Destiny and of the “ripe fruit,” reflected in the Monroe Doctrine; attempts to systematically hinder our struggles for national liberation; and intervention in 1898, which frustrated the independence for
which the Cubans had been fighting with machetes, courage, intelligence and bravery—and on making Cuba its colony;

WHEREAS, through the Platt Amendment and continued interference and intervention in the internal affairs of the country, the United States of America usurped part of our national territory, where it installed the Guantánamo Naval Base; imposed corrupt and despotic regimes at its service, including the opprobrious and bloody Machado and Batista dictatorships; and, since 1959, has systematically attacked Cuba with the ostensible purpose of putting an end to its independence, doing away with Cuban nationality and subjecting the people to slavery;

WHEREAS the Cuban people—true heirs to the legacy of the *mambi* fighters for Cuba’s independence from Spain in the 19th century and of the workers, farmers, students and intellectuals who have opposed and will continue to oppose the pretensions of their century-long enemy—are willing to make the greatest efforts and sacrifices to maintain the sovereignty, independence and freedom that they won definitively on January 1, 1959;

WHEREAS the process of nationalization of the wealth and natural resources of the nation, which was implemented by the revolutionary government on behalf of the Cuban people, was carried out in accordance with the constitution, the laws in effect and international law; without discrimination; for the public good; and with appropriate compensation provided, the amount of which was agreed to by means of bilateral negotiation with all the governments that were involved, except for that of the United States of America, which refused to negotiate because of its policy of blockade and aggression, thus seriously injuring its nationals;

WHEREAS the Cuban people will never allow the future of their country to be governed by laws dictated by any foreign power;

WHEREAS the international community has rejected the Helms-Burton Act almost unanimously because it violates the principles of international law recognized in the Charter of the United Nations and because its extraterritorial application, seeking to arbitrarily and illegally dictate rules to be obeyed by other nations, goes counter to international norms;
WHEREAS a large number of foreign businesspeople have demonstrated their confidence in Cuba by investing in the country or negotiating concerning potential investments, and it is a duty to use all possible legal formulas to help to protect their interests; and

WHEREAS the National Assembly of People’s Power, representing the entire people, rejects the Helms-Burton Act and declares its firm decision to adopt measures within its power in response to that anti-Cuba legislation and to claim the compensation to which the Cuban government and people are entitled,

THEREFORE, making use of the powers granted it in Article 75, Paragraph B, of the constitution of the republic, the National Assembly of People’s Power has approved the following:

LAW 80
LAW OF REAFFIRMATION OF CUBAN DIGNITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

Article 1. The Helms-Burton Act is declared unlawful, inapplicable and with no legal effect whatsoever.
   As a result, any claim based on it that is made by any individual or corporate body, no matter what their citizenship or nationality, is considered invalid.

Article 2. The resolution of the government of the Republic of Cuba expressed in the laws of nationalization promulgated over 35 years ago concerning adequate, fair compensation for the assets expropriated from individuals and corporations that at that time had US citizenship or nationality is reaffirmed.

Article 3. The compensation for the US property nationalized through that legitimate process—which was validated by Cuban law and international law—referred to in the preceding article may form part of a process of negotiation that is held between the government of the United States of America and the government of the Republic of Cuba on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

   The ratios of compensation for the nationalization of that property
should be examined together with the compensation to which the Cuban government and people are entitled, for the damage caused by the blockade and acts of aggression of all kinds for which the government of the United States of America is responsible.

**Article 4.** Any individual or body corporate of the United States of America that uses or resorts to the procedures and mechanisms of the Helms-Burton Act or tries to use them to the prejudice of others will be excluded from any of the negotiations referred to in Articles 2 and 3 which may be held in the future.

**Article 5.** The government of the Republic of Cuba will adopt whatever additional powers, measures and/or provisions may be required for the complete protection of current and potential foreign investments in Cuba and for the defense of their legitimate interests against actions which may stem from the Helms-Burton Act.

**Article 6.** The government of the Republic of Cuba is empowered to apply and/or authorize the formulas required for the protection of foreign investments against the application of the Helms-Burton Act, including the transfer of the interests of the foreign investor to fiduciary companies, financial bodies or investment funds.

**Article 7.** At the request of foreign investors, the appropriate government bodies, as authorized by the government of the Republic of Cuba and carrying out the provisions of the legal regulations in effect, will provide those investors with all available information and documentation they need for the defense of their legitimate interests against the provisions of the Helms-Burton Act.

Likewise, they will offer all of that available information and documentation to foreign investors who request it for use in lawsuits in courts in their own countries, under the legal provisions that protect their interests or that have been issued to prevent or limit the application of the Helms-Burton Act.

**Article 8.** Any form of cooperation, whether direct or indirect, with the application of the Helms-Burton Act is declared illegal. Among other things, cooperation is understood to mean the following:
Seeking—for any representative of the government of the United States of America or another person—or supplying to any such person information that may be used, either directly or indirectly, in the possible application of that law or helping another person to seek or supply such information;

Requesting, receiving, accepting and/or facilitating the distribution of, or benefiting in any way from financial, material or any other kind of resources that come from or are channeled by the government of the United States of America, through its representatives or in any other way, whose use would promote the application of the Helms-Burton Act;

Making known, spreading and/or helping in the distribution of information, publications, documents and/or propaganda material from the government of the United States of America, its agencies, its branches or any other source in order to promote the application of the Helms-Burton Act; and

Cooperating in any way with radio and/or television broadcasting stations and/or other mass media to promote the application of the Helms-Burton Act.

Article 9. The government of the Republic of Cuba will present to the National Assembly of People’s Power or to the Council of State, when applicable, proposed laws which are needed to penalize all of those actions which, in one way or another, involve cooperation with the purposes of the Helms-Burton Act.

Article 10. It is confirmed that remittances of money from individuals of Cuban origin who live abroad to their relatives who live in Cuba will not be taxed. The government of the Republic of Cuba will adopt as many measures as it deems convenient to facilitate those remittances.

Individuals of Cuban origin who live abroad may have bank accounts in convertible currency or in Cuban pesos in banks in the Republic of Cuba, and the interest they receive on those accounts will not be taxed.

Likewise, they may take out insurance policies from insurance agencies naming permanent residents in Cuba as beneficiaries. The beneficiaries may receive those benefits freely, without paying any taxes.

Article 11. The government of the Republic of Cuba will keep up-to-date information on the compensation which the government of the United
States of America should pay for the effects of the economic, commercial and financial blockade and for its acts of aggression against Cuba and will add to these claims the damage caused by thieves, embezzlers, corrupt politicians, and the torturers and assassins of the Batista tyranny, for whose actions the government of the United States of America has made itself responsible with the promulgation of the Helms-Burton Act.

**Article 12.** The individuals who have been victims of the actions sponsored or supported by the government of the United States of America that are referred to in the following paragraph—either because they or their property or because their relatives or their relatives’ property has been adversely affected by those actions—may claim compensation before the Claims Commissions that the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Cuba will create and establish, which will be empowered to rule on the validity and amount of claims and the responsibility of the government of the United States of America.

The actions referred to in the preceding paragraph will include the deaths, injuries and economic losses caused by the torturers and assassins of the Batista tyranny and/or by saboteurs and other criminals at the service of US imperialism against the Cuban nation since January 1, 1959.

The Ministry of Justice is empowered to control the handling of the claims referred to in this Article and to issue other provisions to this effect.

**Article 13.** The National Assembly of People’s Power and the government of the Republic of Cuba will cooperate and coordinate matters with other parliaments, governments and international agencies to promote as many actions as are considered necessary to prevent the application of the Helms-Burton Act.

**Article 14.** All the people of Cuba are called upon to continue the thorough, systematic examination of the government of the United States of America’s annexationist, colonial plan that is included in the Helms-Burton Act, so as to ensure that the people in each territory, community, work place, study center and military unit fully understand the specific consequences which the implementation of that plan would entail for every citizen and to guarantee the active, aware participation of all in applying the measures required to defeat it.
FINAL PROVISIONS

FIRST: The government of the Republic of Cuba and the appropriate government agencies are empowered to issue as many provisions as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this Law.

SECOND: All legal provisions and regulations that go counter to the provisions of this Law—which will go into effect as soon as it is published in the Official Gazette of the Republic—are hereby repealed.

National Assembly of People’s Power
Havana, December 24, 1996

41. THE POPE’S VISIT

Throughout Cuba’s history, from the arrival of the conquistadores five centuries ago (and their forcible imposition of a new faith) up to 1998, no pope had ever visited Cuba. That was not unusual in the long centuries during which the highest-ranking representatives of the Catholic church seldom ventured outside Rome, but it became noticeable with the pontificate of John Paul II, a pope who imbued the Vatican with great dynamism, developing a project of a new evangelism that he carried to dozens of countries, vigorously projecting the Church’s social views on the most important current topics.

Cuban Catholics and the rest of the population, as well, wanted Pope John Paul II, a world-renowned figure, to come to Cuba.

When the recently elected pope made his first trip abroad—to the Bishops Conference in Puebla, Mexico, in 1978—President Fidel Castro invited him to visit Cuba or at least to make a stopover, but it was not possible at that time.

In the following years, the possibility of a papal visit was postponed time and again for various reasons.

The tense relationship between the Cuban government and the Church hierarchy in Cuba, which dated from the period after the triumph of the revolution, was renewed with the collapse of the European socialist countries, and a visit became less likely. Thus, in spite of Cuba’s good official relations with the Vatican and the admiration Cubans felt for Pope John Paul II on many issues, Cuba was one of the few countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that the pope had not yet visited.

This situation changed in November 1996, when the pope and Fidel had their first, cordial meeting at the Holy See, when the Cuban president was in Rome to attend the World Summit on Food. The Cuban president repeated
his invitation and the pope accepted, saying that he would travel to Cuba as soon as it was feasible to do so.

On January 21, 1998, the pope kissed Cuban soil at Havana’s José Martí International Airport, beginning a five-day visit that had an enormous international impact and highlighted the Cuban people’s cultural maturity, organizational ability and sense of discipline.

In Cuba’s specific circumstances, subjected to tremendous external pressures, Pope John Paul II’s trip—in spite of the warm relations and sincere desire of both the Vatican and Havana that it be a success—was the object of constant manipulation by some international media and by the inveterate enemies of the revolution. They attempted to inject politics and ideology into a visit that was, by definition, pastoral, and they did their utmost to portray the pope’s presence in Cuba as a kind of flaming thunderbolt that would do away with Cuban socialism.

All this turned the visit into a challenge, which Cuba took up with both grace and firmness, determined to make the Holy Father’s trip to Cuba as near perfect as possible.

The Church mobilized its believers, and thousands of other Cubans were also mobilized for every activity in which Pope John Paul II participated—welcoming him along the 20-kilometer route from the airport to the capital; attending the masses that were held in Santa Clara, Camagüey, Santiago de Cuba and Havana’s José Martí Revolution Plaza, and the meetings with the “world of grief” and the “world of culture”; witnessing his contacts with religious figures; and greeting him as he went through the streets. Throughout the visit, the Cuban people expressed their hospitality and affection for him as a spiritual leader with whom they agreed on many essential points and to whom they listened with respect, even on those topics on which they did not share the same views.

All the pope’s homilies and statements were broadcast in full over Cuban TV and in other media. The people themselves maintained order; during the pope’s visit, there were no armed police in the streets, and no unpleasant incidents, either.

The pope’s visit to Cuba may truly be described as a historic event. It also had an important effect in Cuba, on both believers and nonbelievers, and it will be long remembered. It projected a vision of the future, of the universal
struggle for a more just world and of Cuba’s struggle to break its isolation against the efforts by powerful forces to strangle it. His Holiness’s call to “globalize solidarity” and his plea for Cuba to open its doors to the world and for the world to open its doors to Cuba bear this out.

**THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD WILL EVENTUALLY CONSTRUCT ONE HUMAN FAMILY**


Your Holiness,

I believe we have given a good example to the world: you, in visiting what some have called the last bastion of communism and ourselves, in receiving a religious leader who is attributed with having brought about the destruction of communism in Europe. And there was no lack of those who foresaw apocalyptic events. There were even some who dreamed of them.

It was cruelly unjust that your pastoral journey should have been associated with mean hopes of destroying the noble aims and the independence of a small country, subjected to a blockade and a veritable economic war for nearly the last 40 years. Cuba, Your Holiness, now confronts the mightiest power in history, a kind of a new David, a thousand times smaller and who, with the same sling of biblical times, is struggling to survive against a huge Goliath of the nuclear age, one who is trying to prevent our development and make us submit through illness and hunger. If that story had not already been written, it would have to be written today. This monstrous crime cannot be ignored and there are no excuses for it.

Your Holiness: How many times have I heard or read the calumnies against my country and my people, invented by those who adore no other god than gold. I always recall the Christians of ancient Rome, so atrociously slandered, as I noted on the day of your arrival, and I remember, too, the fact that, throughout history, calumny has often been the great justification for the worst crimes against people. I also think of the Jews exterminated by
the Nazis, or the four million Vietnamese who died in attacks of napalm, chemical weapons and other explosives. Whether people are Christians, Jews or communists, nobody has the right to exterminate them.

Thousands of journalists have conveyed to thousands of millions of people around the world every detail of your visit and every word that has been pronounced. An infinite number of our citizens and foreigners have been interviewed all over the country. Our national television channels have transmitted live and direct to our people all the masses, sermons and speeches. Never before, perhaps, have so many opinions and so much news about such a small nation been broadcast, in such a short time, to so many people on our planet.

Cuba does not know fear, despises lies, listens with respect, believes in its ideas, unshakably defends its principles and has nothing to hide from the world.

I am moved by the effort Your Holiness has made to create a world that is more just. States will disappear, and their peoples will eventually constitute one human family. If the globalization of solidarity that you have proclaimed should reach all corners of the earth, and the abundance of goods that humans can produce with their talent and their labor were equitably shared among all human beings now inhabiting the planet, it might be possible to create a world that is truly for all, without hunger or poverty, without oppression or exploitation, without humiliation or contempt, without injustice or inequality, where everyone might live in full moral and material dignity, in true liberty — this would be a more just world! Your ideas on evangelization and ecumenism would not contradict this.

For the honor you have done us in visiting us, for all your expressions of affection toward the people of Cuba, for all your words, even those with which we may not agree, in the name of the entire population of Cuba, I wish to express our thanks to Your Holiness.

SOURCE:
THE BLOCKADE IS UNJUST AND ETHICALLY UNACCEPTABLE

From the farewell speech of His Holiness John Paul II at the José Martí airport, January 25, 1998.

I ask God to bless and reward all those who have cooperated in bringing this long-desired visit about. Please accept my gratitude, Mr. President, and the authorities of this nation, for your presence here today and for the cooperation you have offered in the course of this visit, in which the greatest possible number of people have participated, whether it be attending the masses or following them through the public media. I would like to express my recognition of the efforts and pastoral devotion with which my brother bishops here in Cuba have prepared my visit and carried out all their work among the people prior to it, the fruits of which were at once manifest in the warm welcome I have been given, and this must be continued somehow.

As successor to the Apostle Peter, and in keeping with the word of the Lord, I have come as a messenger of truth and hope, to confirm you in the faith and to leave behind me a message of peace and reconciliation in Christ. Therefore, I urge you to continue working together, urged on by the highest moral principles so that the well-known dynamism that distinguishes this noble people will produce abundant fruits of well-being and spiritual and material prosperity to the benefit of everyone.

Before leaving this capital, I should like to say goodbye, from the depths of my heart, to all the sons and daughters of this country—to those who live in the cities and in the countryside, to the children, the young and the old, to families and to each individual—trusting that you will continue to preserve and promote the most genuine values of the Cuban spirit that, true to the legacy of your elders, must know how to demonstrate, even amidst the difficulties, its trust in God, its Christian faith, its bond with the Church, its love of the culture and the traditions of this country, its desire for justice and freedom. In this process, all Cubans are called upon to contribute to the common good, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and with a profound sense of solidarity.
In our times, no nation can live alone. Thus the Cuban nation must not be deprived of its links with other peoples, which are necessary for economic, social and cultural development and, above all, when isolation indiscriminately affects the population, increasing the difficulties of the most vulnerable among you in the basic aspects of their lives such as food, health and education. Everyone can and should take specific steps in order to bring about change in this regard. May other nations, in particular those that share the same Christian heritage and the same language, work effectively by extending the benefits of unity and harmony, by joining their efforts and overcoming obstacles so that the Cuban people, the leading player in its own history, can maintain international relations that will always work in favor of the common good. Thus it may be possible to overcome the anxiety caused by poverty, material and moral, among the causes of which may be unjust inequalities, the restriction of basic freedoms, depersonalization and the dispiritedness of individuals, and the restrictive economic measures imposed from outside the country that are unjust and ethically unacceptable.

My dear Cubans, on leaving this beloved country, I take with me an indelible memory of my days here and a great confidence in the future of your country. Build it up with hope and enthusiasm, guided by the light of faith, with all the vigor of hope and the generosity of fraternal love and using your abilities to create an atmosphere of greater freedom and pluralism, and in the certainty that God loves you very dearly and remains true to His promises. The fact is, “For this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (I Tim. 4, 10). May He shower you with his blessings and may He let you feel His nearness to you at all times. Jesus Christ be praised!

A final word about the rain. Now it has stopped, but earlier, during my visit to the Havana cathedral, it was raining quite heavily. I wondered why, after these hot days and after Santiago de Cuba where it was so hot, the rain should have come. This may be a sign: the sky of Cuba is weeping for the pope is leaving us behind. This would be superficial hermeneutics. When we sing in the liturgy “Rorate coeli desuper et nubes pluat justum,” it is the Advent. This seems to me a more profound hermeneutics. This rain during
the final hours of my stay in Cuba may mean an Advent. I would like to express my earnest desire that this rain is a good sign, that of a new Advent in your history.

Thank you very much.

On June 29, 2000, the dramatic events that began in the treacherous waters of the Florida Straits and captured the attention of the whole world came to a dramatic conclusion.

A light aircraft landed at the José Martí Airport in Havana and Juan Miguel González emerged from the door clutching his six-year-old son, Elián González Brotons. As waiting relatives ran to embrace them, the hundreds of children gathered there began to sing the Cuban national anthem.

So ended seven months of tense struggle over a little boy from Cárdenas. Elián had returned from his perilous adventure of illegal emigration to the United States, taken by a mother under the sway of an unscrupulous partner.

Of the 14 people who had taken to the water in their fragile craft, only three survived. This might have been just another news story on the cruel consequences of the Cuban Adjustment Act. But before the little boy’s mother died in the terror of the dark night, she tied her son to the inner tube on which he was found and rescued from the sea on November 25, 1999.

Upon arrival in Miami, the little boy attracted a great deal of attention. Some of his relatives in the United States put money before morality, viewing the boy as a potential gold mine. Counterrevolutionary exile organizations and ultraright-wing terrorists saw a chance to convert the child into a political symbol in their propaganda campaign against the revolution.

The propaganda machinery soon began to turn. Elián was treated as an object, a puppet whose forced smile in Miami was broadcast around the world. He appeared on television with Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen attempting to drape him in a US flag. The house where Elián was being held
became a Mecca for opportunists. The libelous El Nuevo Herald could not contain its delight and the Hispanic television channels flooded screens with images beamed from their permanent encampment in front of the house.

But Elián had a devoted, humble father, a worker in the tourist resort of Varadero who was wracked with concern for his son. Fidel met Elián's father, Juan Miguel, and asked whether he was prepared to fight to recover his child and defend his legal and moral right to custody of his son. Juan Miguel's answer was a definite and resolute "Yes."

Thus began one of the most remarkable legal and political battles the Cuban people have ever waged. Cuban students were the first to issue the rallying cry on December 5, 1999. The seafront plaza in front of the US Interests Section in Havana thus became the site of a permanent protest. Millions of Cuban men and women participated in meetings, marches, protests and other activities to demand the return of the kidnapped child.

Teachers and psychologists spoke on television discussing the damage being inflicted upon Elián by his captors. This marked the beginning of the televised Round Table discussions.

An arduous legal battle began on January 5, 2000, when the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) recognized Juan Miguel's right to custody of his son.

Countless obstacles and contemptible tricks were placed in the path of Elián's family. On January 21, his grandmothers Raquel and Mariela traveled to the United States to reclaim their grandson. It took five days and numerous appeals for them even to be allowed to see the boy, and then for just a few hours, before returning to Cuba without him.

On April 6, Juan Miguel traveled to Washington. It took 16 days before Elián was returned to him after a federal rescue operation and the father could at last embrace his son.

The US Supreme Court finally reached a verdict on June 26, granting the boy and his father permission to return to Cuba from the farmhouse near Washington where they had been detained.

The saga of Elián's rescue was neither a simple nor an ephemeral episode. It was a crucible that forged the determination to undertake a longer, more complex and far-reaching battle—a battle to eliminate the pernicious Cuban Adjustment Act; the economic blockade imposed on Cuba by successive US administrations; and to counter all other acts of aggression
and subversion against the island. On February 19, following the clamor of mass demonstrations over the previous months, the historic savanna of Baraguá (the site of the declaration of Cuban independence in 1878) echoed with the solemn oath that launched the revolution’s new battle, this time not with arms but a “battle of ideas.”

THE OATH OF BARAGUÁ:
“WE WILL SEE WHO CAN RESIST THE LONGEST”
FEBRUARY 19, 2000

Despite constructive declarations about the kidnapped child released by the US Secretary of State in the House of Representatives on Thursday, the Cuban American mafia, the extreme right in Congress and even the US government itself (which has exposed the political impotence of this administration) are convinced that Cuba grows weary. They believe our strength is ebbing and that we no longer have the will to confront these gross injustices. They convince themselves that they see the first signs of exhaustion among our people, as expressed in a recent government press release in the United States.

How little they know the Cuban people!

In Cuba there is an unprecedented mobilization of people and ideas. Imperialist forces, accustomed to committing crimes and atrocities with complete impunity, could never have predicted such an energetic and unexpected counteroffensive. Never before has such a contest of ideas and ethics unfolded between an omnipotent nation and the people of a small island, just 90 miles from their enemy’s shore. The whole world watches this contest with growing amazement. This is not simply the struggle to bring home a kidnapped child; this is a fight for the right of every child not to be torn from their closest, dearest and most legitimate family; the right not to be swept from the country and culture where they spent their first and fondly remembered years. This is a fight for their right to stay with those who taught them their first words and watched them grow; a fight to maintain the friendships they formed during childhood. Elián even had torn from him the natural beauty of the landscape that first fired his imagination.
Although he finished kindergarten in innocence, he was not allowed to finish even three months of first grade—an essential building block in the development of any human being. This crime before us was hateful and arbitrary and touched every parent and close relative of every single child in Cuba and throughout the world, including in the country where this boy was held captive: the United States. Human beings may disagree on many things, but on one matter everyone concurs: a child’s innocence and their right to protection.

Elián was psychologically tortured and shamefully exploited and manipulated. With thousands of cameras pushed in his face, he was converted into a political trophy, one more scalp to add to the collection. Attempts were made to buy him, like the millions of slaves who were bought and sold at public auctions for centuries in that “noble” nation colonized and created to allow just such a practice. In Elián’s case it was not his body, but his soul they attempted to auction. This is an insult to the world, and especially to its impoverished majority who reject the idea that their children can be bought by trips to Disneyland or sophisticated toys produced in consumer societies. The belief that the custody of a child can be decided by the relative wealth of the countries in dispute is offensive to human sensibility. An appalling process of character assassination was used against that little boy. “Experts” were brought in employing sophisticated, even brutal, techniques to remove every last vestige of love and attachment Elián felt for his father, his little brother and his four grandparents. The boy’s captors decided when he could speak to his family by telephone. When this was permitted he was constantly pressured with shouting, loud noises, pinching and audible threats leaving both Elián and his family on the other end of the line in despair. The idea was simple: to create terror and rejection of his own family in Elián’s mind to such a degree that he would dread even the infrequent phone calls. The captors’ primary aim was to make the child reject his own father, using Pavlov’s infamous methods to create a conditioned reflex in little Elián.

The kidnapped boy was made to sign his name on documents selecting an attorney and opting for US citizenship. To vote for president, legislators, mayors, state judges or any other major or minor official, US citizens must be at least 18 years of age. In the case of a kidnapped Cuban child they pretended that six is old enough to decide whether or not to return to Cuba. Even more horrifying was the claim that Elián, who was only just learning
to use his powers of reason was old enough to decide whether to return to his real family and the father who had so long and so passionately yearned for a child, a child he now cherished with all his heart. In short, Elián was callously kidnapped, and then exposed to psychological torture and daily physical abuse.

The US authorities were repeatedly reminded of their duty to intercede immediately in the case, to halt the crime and return the boy *ipso facto* to his family in Cuba. This is what the law of both countries requires. It is totally unjustifiable to assign this task to US courts, whose interminable and anti-constitutional methods give the kidnappers time to achieve their terrible goal of manipulating Elián’s mind. The US courts not only lack jurisdiction in the case but will also prove unable to reach a decision with the urgency necessary to avoid irreversible consequences for the child’s health. This role belongs wholly and solely to the US government.

Anyone in the United States who is sufficiently misguided to think that the Cuban people grow weary of this just and dignified fight belongs in a mental institution. In this battle to liberate a kidnapped child there are fundamental values and principles at stake that Cuba will never sacrifice.

The US authorities have let this situation persist for far too long, despite ample warning of its consequences. Our government has already declared that if the child is not returned to his family and his country as soon as possible, a wave of national and international condemnation will break over the United States, damaging its prestige forever.

Our people understood from the outset that this would be a long and arduous struggle. Our strength is colossal, but it is still necessary to use it intelligently and flexibly to conserve our energy for the road ahead. The hardest task in the early days was to ensure that those who attended the open forum meetings and marches were only those who had been specifically invited.

Over time our discipline has increased immeasurably and our experience has matured beyond belief. What is even more decisive is that the revolutionary consciousness of our population has been reaffirmed as never before. Throughout this historic confrontation the energy of the population and the tactics and tools used in our struggle have multiplied significantly. We are much stronger than we were at the beginning of December. A growing number of teams of experts share the responsibilities. Day by day our
activities are gaining in effectiveness and decisiveness. Legions of children, young people, workers, intellectuals, artists, veterans and leaders of all ages expend their energy, talent and power of communication, provoking amazement in our visitors and pride in our country. This seed, planted by an exemplary social and human project, is called revolution.

The entire country has become a stage for mass mobilization, marches and open forums, and professional and non-professional artists and speakers are discussing the most relevant questions of politics, education and national and international culture in our Round Tables.

Cuba is discovering itself, its geography, its history, its homegrown genius, its children, youngsters, teachers and doctors. An incalculable human triumph has survived throughout the last 40 years of heroic struggle against the most powerful country in the world. Cuba believes in itself more than ever, understanding its modest yet rewarding and essential role in today’s world. Our invincible weapons are our revolutionary, humanist and universal ideas. These ideas are impervious to nuclear bombs, military technology, the monopolization of mass media and the political and economic might of imperial powers. We live in a world weighed down by ever more exploitation, yet it grows increasingly rebellious and defiant as it shakes off fear and takes up devastating intellectual arms.

The fight to rescue the kidnapped Cuban child became the first skirmish in a much longer war. The seizure and torture of the little boy marked the beginning of the great battle ahead to tear up by the roots such a cruel and painful episode. What value would the rescue of this boy have if tomorrow, next week, next month or next year, another Elián, ten, hundreds, thousands of Eliáns were lost in the turbulent sea in a desperate and illegal attempt to enter the United States? What purpose would it serve if children can be separated from one or both parents with no authority or hope of ever recovering them?

How many more terrible tragedies have occurred during the last 33 years in which the Cuban Adjustment Act has been in force? This act bestows great benefits on those prepared to violate all norms of safe and legal migration in the knowledge that their chances of obtaining a US visa are practically nonexistent. How many deaths has this US inducement to illegal emigration caused in their desperate efforts to destabilize Cuba? Have they not employed enough destructive energy since the beginning to drain away
highly qualified Cubans in huge numbers? By stealing teachers, professors, doctors and other highly skilled workers they have sought only to thwart our economic and social development by offering a “promised land” of high salaries and material benefits, incentives that a country exploited, invaded and maintained in a state of underdevelopment for more than half a century could never hope to match.

No one has forgotten the despicable crime committed by US intelligence agencies in an operation that spread the terrible lie that Cuban parents’ *Patria Potestad* [custody of their children] was under threat by the revolutionary government (the same lie they promote so cynically today). This false propaganda led the parents of 14,000 young Cubans to smuggle their children to the United States in the early years of the revolution.

Threats against our national security; acts of terrorism; economic war and blockade; subversion, ideological warfare, sabotage and internal destabilization; the Helms-Burton and Torricelli laws and countless amendments that stiffen the blockade and seek to crush our people through hunger and sickness (defined as acts of genocide in peacetime by international conventions to which both the United States and Cuba are party) severely distort our development and provoke emigration.

We have a right to peace and respect for our sovereignty and our most sacred interests. Forty years of infamy have not extinguished our fighting spirit. We have not, and will not, grow weary.

Ten capable intellectuals are sufficient to hold a Round Table discussion on any theme of cultural or political interest, and in Cuba we have tens of thousands of them.

From every corner of our country; from every historical site; every union, every grass-roots committee and group; from every school, college and scientific or cultural institution, comes the fervent cry for the chance to participate in this fight through our open forum meetings. Thousands of voices pledge their support for long years of struggle:

- Down with the Cuban Adjustment Act!
- Down with the Helms-Burton Act!
- Down with the Torricelli Act!
- Down with the amendments manipulated into congressional law that compound our country’s suffering!
Down with the entire blockade and the criminal economic war against Cuba!
Down with the threats, subversion and plans to destabilize our country!
And when this fight is won, let the Cuban people demand their inalienable right to have the illegally occupied territory of Guantánamo returned to them!

In the meantime the open forums that have emerged during this historic struggle to rescue the kidnapped child and safeguard the rights of our nation will continue. This battle of ideas, this creation and reinforcement of a solid revolutionary consciousness, this fight for knowledge and the highest level of cultural excellence and integrity will never cease. Our fight will continue as long as injustice persists and the imperialist system survives. When imperialism is vanquished we will continue to struggle for a more unified and humane world. This fight will adopt a thousand forms and tactics. Our people will always be ready, their ideas will always be heard and their strength will be forever primed for the decisive hour.

Some of us grow impatient and call for more drastic and diverse measures, including violence, to save the kidnapped boy and release him from his torment. An excuse for armed conflict between the United States and Cuba is exactly what the most cowardly traitors desire. That superpower is only superior in the field of battle. In the battle of ideas it is helpless and naked. Our intelligence will win this war.

We will annihilate their grotesque hypocrisy, their scandalous lies and their repulsive and selfish imperialist doctrines with which they plan to rule the world. We will strip them of every last shred of credibility and they will no longer be able to fool anyone in this country or in the rest of the world.

In the midst of this battle of ideas our lives will continue. We will never relent in our epic effort to overcome all difficulties and pursue economic and social development for our country. If the day should come that our enemies embark on the foolhardy and impossible task of destroying our nation by force, they will not know a single day of truce or tranquility, and nothing will ever be the same for them again.

Our children and young people will never lack safe and happy places to play, grow and enrich their minds and lives. Our people’s right to happiness, which is eternally linked to their moral and spiritual growth, is guaranteed.
Through these qualities, our intelligence and dedication, we will safeguard our well-being.

No one will surrender! For a true Cuban patriot and revolutionary, to weary of this fight is more shameful than surrender. We will see who defends the truth and who is more prepared to fight for it!

We will see who grows weary first!

We will see who can resist the longest!

Baraguá and the immortal glory of Maceo will guide us today and always!

43. WASHINGTON ON TRIAL

The Cuban government and the Cuban people could not limit their response to the countless acts of hostility and aggression against the island since January 1, 1959—such as the blockade, slanderous propaganda campaigns and other attacks—to only a political and moral condemnation of the US government.

A thorough legal analysis of this aggression, the damage it caused and the historical reasons for such behavior was also necessary. Careful examination of the facts and deliberation by competent courts were required to make an accurate assessment of the compensation due to the Republic of Cuba.

This is what occurred from May 31, 1999, to January 3, 2000, when legal representatives of leading Cuban grass-roots and social organizations, in which the vast majority of the population are involved, filed claims against the US government for both human and economic damages.

This was not merely a cold-blooded or technical formality. On the contrary, it triggered a process of collective historical memory that had millions of Cubans of all ages fixed to their television sets. Long lines of witnesses testified to the court about the terrible price the Cuban people have paid in death, pain and sacrifice for their simple rights to liberty and self-determination.

The figures are shocking: 3,478 people dead and 2,099 left with serious disabilities as a direct result of terrorist attacks organized, or at least tolerated by, the US government, and US$121 billion in damages and loss as a result of the economic blockade, acts of sabotage, biological attacks and other attempts to destroy the Cuban revolution.
The court found in favor of the claims filed and set damages for the first claim at more than US$181 billion, coupled with a public apology from the accused for the moral damage to the victims and their families. Damages in the second suit were set at US$121 billion.

Counsel for the accused failed to appear at either of the trials, which were held in the Provincial People’s Court of Havana. The archives will expose the scornful and arrogant US response, which referred to the legal processes as “acts of propaganda” by the Cuban government.

This is of no consequence. The trials held in Havana at the close of the last century, and the penalties issued in conformity with the law, were historic and have a bearing on the future, insofar as they established an important legal precedent. At some point in this new century or the new millennium the day will come when all outstanding debts must be settled. These are the incalculable debts of sweat, blood and lives stolen from the Cuban people.

CUBA’S CLAIM FOR HUMAN DAMAGE

DETAILS OF THE CLAIM

That the court finds the defendant guilty and bearing civil liability for the irreparable loss of 3,478 lives. Through the application of the concept of reparation for material damage, the defendant is obliged to pay an average sum of US$30 million in compensation for every life lost, giving a total of US$104.34 billion. Similarly, the defendant is liable for illegal damage to the physical well-being of 2,099 people, where such harm is irreparable in integrum, and an average sum of US$15 million will be sought in compensation for every disabled person, giving a total of US$31.485 billion.

Pursuant to the concept of compensation for damage, as repayment of the welfare assistance Cuban society has been obliged to accept, as well as other unforeseen expenses assumed by the victims and their families due to the events already outlined ut supra, the court orders the payment of a total of US$34.780 billion, equivalent to an average of US$10 million per life lost, plus US$10.495 billion, equivalent to an average of US$5 million for every victim rendered disabled.
In accordance with the aforesaid, the court orders one sole payment of US$181.1 billion.

Likewise, pursuant to our statutory law, the defendant is hereby ordered to publicly apologize for the moral harm to which both the victims and their families were exposed by the actions described herein.

That it be recorded that the compensation set for the loss of 3,478 Cuban lives and the permanent incapacitation of 2,099 others is significantly less than the sum fixed by Mr. Lawrence King, civil judge of the South Florida district, who in case numbers 96-10126, 96-10127 and 96-10128, ordered the Republic of Cuba to pay US$187,627,911 for the deaths occurring close to Cuban shores of pilots Armando Alejandre, Carlos Alberto Costa and Mario M. de la Peña, in an incident provoked by countless violations of Cuban airspace over many years. An average sum of US$62,542,637 was claimed for every life lost, being the sum of reparations awarded for [the application of] two concepts: compensatory damages and punitive damages, as required by US law. This can be compared to the average US$40 million Cuba demands for each life lost, also for the application of two concepts: reparation for material harm and compensation for damage, as required by our law.

Had we applied the same basis for calculation as Justice Lawrence King our claim for damages would have amounted to US$217.523 billion, or US$78.403 billion more than our current demand.

THEREFORE

WE REQUEST THAT THE COURT: Accept this written complaint together with its copies and accompanying documents that justify the claim and the law we invoke, thereby recognize the bringing of this suit in ordinary session for Reparation for Harm and Compensation for Damages, where the defendant is the government of the United States of America, to be subpoenaed by the Rogatory Commission to appear within a strictly limited period of time to appear and respond to legally presented charges. That, upon completion of all appropriate procedures, the court finds in favor of this claim and awards damages as described in our claim.

FURTHERMORE: We request that the Court, pursuant to the provisions of Article 170 of the Law of Civil, Administrative and Industrial Procedures, remit a
report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba requesting
the subpoena be served on the defendant.

Juan Mendoza Díaz, attorney
Leonardo B. Pérez Gallardo, attorney
Magaly Iserne Carrillo, attorney
Ivonne Pérez Gutiérrez, attorney

Havana, May 31, 1999

CUBA'S CLAIM FOR ECONOMIC DAMAGE

DETAILS OF THE CLAIM

That the government of the United States of America be declared having
civil responsibility for the illegal acts perpetrated against Cuba, and that
said government be obliged to compensate the Cuban people to the sum of
US$121 billion for the harm and damage caused by such acts.

THEREFORE

THE COURT IS REQUESTED: Where it accepts the current claim together
with its copies and accompanying documents that justify this claim and the
law invoked, that it similarly accepts our appearance in the name of those
we represent and empowers us to execute all procedures and notifications
pertinent to the case.

To accept the case in ordinary session on the Civil Responsibility for
Damages and Claim for Compensation for harm caused by illegal actions
against the Cuban people.

To give due warning to the defendant to appear and respond to the
claim, where the subpoena is issued through the Rogatory Commission.
And ultimately, upon satisfaction of all legal procedures, to find in favor of
this claim and pass sentence on the civil responsibility of the government of
the United States of America for illegal acts perpetrated against Cuba and
seek compensation for the Cuban people to the sum of US$121 billion for
the harm and damage caused to the said people. We therefore request that the Court, in virtue of Article 170 of the Law of Civil, Administrative and Industrial Procedures, remit a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba requesting the subpoena be served on the defendant.

Mirna Nides Domínguez, attorney
Disney Cabrera Zayas, attorney
Tania Josefina Manzanares Ayala, attorney
Abel Alejandro Solá López, attorney

Havana, January 3, 2000

SOURCE:
44. THE CASE OF THE CUBAN FIVE

On December 29, 2001, an extraordinary session of the Cuban parliament debated the proposal of the president of the Council of State and voted to award the honorary title of Heroes of the Republic of Cuba to Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, Ramón Labañino Salazar, Fernando González Llort, René González Sehwerert and Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez.¹

Just a few days before, their sentence hearings in Miami had come to a close. The trial had lasted more than three years and had totally disgraced the vainglorious US justice system. The court handed down a double life sentence plus 15 years to Gerardo, life plus 18 years to Ramón, life plus 10 years to Antonio, 19 years to Fernando and 15 years to René. Almost immediately the prisoners were taken away to begin their sentences, separated in penitentiaries spread across five US states in an attempt to prevent any contact or communication between them.

At that moment, the fight for a fair trial and freedom for their heroes became the banner and battle cry of the Cuban people.

This struggle encapsulates the fundamental conflict between Cuba and the US government. The five young men, professionally and intellectually brilliant, were arrested and hauled before an unscrupulous court for carrying out the dangerous mission of penetrating Cuban American terrorist groups based in South Florida. These groups emerged from years of CIA plots against Cuba and were tolerated and even encouraged by successive US

¹ The correspondence of the Cuban Five with their families has been published in Alice Walker (ed.), Letters of Love and Hope: The Story of the Cuban Five, (Melbourne and New York: Ocean Press, 2005).
administrations. No effective action has ever been taken against these groups by US authorities.

As the men themselves testified before the court, they never committed any act that could have endangered the security of the US people. They testified that they had never carried out intelligence operations against military installations or official institutions, citing the obvious futility of such actions.

Far from threatening US security, by fighting against terrorist sects linked to the Cuban American National Foundation [CANF] and other violent and extreme right-wing counterrevolutionary groups that had already caused serious harm, these Cubans helped to protect the United States from real danger.

It was significant that the final stages of the trial took place as the smoke rose from the ruins of the World Trade Center in New York. The government in Washington declared war on terrorism at the same time as events in the “Banana Republic” of South Florida highlighted the flagrant hypocrisy of the US system. In Miami, committed terrorists and crooks organized media campaigns and applied strategic pressure. They were even present in the courtroom baying for the blood of the five antiterrorist activists.

The trial should never have taken place in Miami. It is inconceivable that an impartial legal process could occur in such a venue. The ultrareactionary Cuban American mafia and the fascist elements in the United States who support them saw the trial as an opportunity to reap revenge for their humiliation in the case of the kidnapped boy, Elián González, and a chance to express the twisted hatred they feel toward Cuba.

This first error of the venue would later be compounded by dozens of irregularities and flagrant breaches of the US constitution. The most outrageous element of the entire process was the inclusion of the charge of “conspiracy to murder” against the defendants eight months after their arrest following unsubstantiated accusations. This charge aimed to prove individual responsibility, where absolutely none existed, for the action by the Cuban government that led to the downing of a light aircraft belonging to the paramilitary group Brothers to the Rescue on February 24, 1996.

In his defense, Antonio Guerrero quoted the great US poet Walt Whitman’s verse, “Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.” He was not alone. Five brave and robust souls, although trapped behind bars, still reach
into millions of Cuban homes every day with messages of courage and hope. If any proof is necessary, these men clearly demonstrate Cuba's sense of justice. A country that can produce such sons is worthy of great respect. But over and above all their virtues, there is one simple truth: they are innocent. As Fidel said, "Their innocence is absolute... and I will tell you one thing: They will return!"

THE SUN NEVER SETS

The following is the preface to Con honor, valentía y orgullo, a book of speeches of the Cuban Five by Cuba's president of the National Assembly of People's Power, Ricardo Alarcón.

Early on the morning of September 12, 1998, the FBI informed Congress members Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Lincoln Díaz-Balart, both of whom are politically linked to terrorists and the pro-Batista mafia in Miami, that five suspected “spies” living in that city had just been arrested.

Although the congressional delegation from Florida has 25 members, none of the others received this information about the investigation. At the time, the FBI did not know the identity of three of the suspects, while the other two were confirmed US citizens. Moreover, the two legislators contacted do not hold positions in Congress related to security or intelligence matters, so why were they given this information? Why were they privy to details of a case not yet made public?

Although formal charges were not filed until four days later, it was apparent from the outset that this was a politically motivated operation that pandered to the most aggressive and violent groups in Miami, the same groups that have turned South Florida into the headquarters of their war against Cuba since 1959.

The counterrevolutionary sects, and the politicians and officials linked to them, immediately launched a frenetic and hysterical campaign that vilified the young prisoners. In a region where practically all media is controlled, or at least bullied into line, by the Cuban American mafia, not a single day passed without articles, reports and official statements being published or
broadcast that defamed or slandered the five prisoners and presented them as enemies of society.

The true motivation behind the unjust arrest of these men was obscured. Nothing was published about their distinguished and exemplary lives in Cuba and the United States as students, workers, fathers and citizens; nothing was broadcast about the committed and admirable sacrifice they were willing to make for their homeland and their people. Details were not released about what had happened to those men since the night of [their arrest on] September 12, the brutal conditions they suffered in one of the most horrific prison systems the world has ever known.

Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, Antonio Guerrero and René González are victims of abominable injustice and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. This is a gross offense to their human rights and is irrefutable proof of the arbitrary nature and total illegitimacy of the legal process used against them. From the day of their arrest until February 3, 2000, 17 months in total, they were each kept in solitary confinement, isolated from each other and from other prisoners. They spent this entire time in “the hole,” a fitting epithet for the most notorious of punishments the United States reserves for “select” prisoners. Only through the tenacious insistence of their defense counsel were the defendants finally integrated into the regular prison system. This does not detract from the totally unjustified atrocity committed against the men, one that breaches even US penitentiary regulations, which stipulate solitary confinement as a means of punishment for acts committed during incarceration, with a 60-day limit for the most serious offenses, such as murder. Obviously, the defendants could not have broken any prison rules before entering jail and they had certainly never killed anyone. We must never forget that these five men spent 17 months in total isolation.

Throughout those long months, it was impossible for the men to maintain contact with their lawyers, which was necessary to prepare a proper defense. If even the slightest trace of justice existed in Miami, this isolation of the men alone would have provoked the court to grant the men their freedom and order the US government to pay the appropriate damages. But in Miami, in all matters regarding Cuba, not even the faintest semblance of justice exists.

We must highlight the commendable efforts, despite all obstacles, of the defense attorneys. The defendants had no lawyers and no money to
hire any. Subsequently, public defense attorneys, with whom the men had no personal links, were nominated to represent them. Nevertheless, as these lawyers got to know their clients they came to appreciate the moral motivation, dignity and heroic conduct of these men. Despite deep ideological differences, which were apparent during the trial, the lawyers were convinced of their clients’ innocence and presented a committed and professional defense.

While the five heroes stoically resisted in the shadows of absolute solitude, their cowardly enemies ranted against them before cameras and microphones and in newspapers, threatening their families and friends in a display of true Miami “justice.” The tabloid press published details of the case, including new accusations that the district attorney’s office would only formally file months later. This was how the world was informed about the most abhorrent, absurd and utterly false accusation of “conspiracy to murder” presented by the district attorney in May 1999, when the men had already spent eight months in solitary confinement. This charge emerged as a result of a press campaign by the pro-Batista and terrorist mafia and through public and private meetings between district attorneys and mobsters.

It was absolutely inconceivable that anything like normal legal proceedings could be held in Miami. This had been clearly demonstrated, even before the jury was selected. But the repeated requests by the defense counsel to move the trial to another venue were rejected by Joan Lenard, the Miami federal judge to whom the case was assigned.

Around this time something occurred that captured international attention. Disturbed by the open threats of violence, the organizers of the Latin Grammy Awards decided to move the ceremony, originally to be held in Miami, across the country to Los Angeles. If it was not possible to guarantee the safety of Cuban artists in a concert in Miami, as organizers publicly stated, how could anyone imagine that a balanced and impartial trial might take place for individuals lambasted in a slanderous campaign and presented as “dangerous” agents of the Cuban revolution?

Judge Lenard gave no explanation as to why the trial could only be held in Miami. But her March 16 statement to the press offered a key to comprehending her intransigence when she said, “This trial will be better than any TV show.”
Local television was certainly key to understanding what happened. Luckily the court-appointed defense attorneys were not thrown in “the hole” like their clients. They could read the newspapers, watch television and listen to the radio, so it was through the media, not through official channels, that the defense lawyers learned about the district attorney’s investigation, the “evidence” presented, the possible charges the defendants would face and the response to motions they themselves had presented in an effort to introduce some legality to such arbitrary and fraudulent proceedings.

As if all this was not enough, numerous procedural irregularities emerged in the court sessions that further tainted a trial that was rigged from the outset. The defense attorneys did not have access to all the “evidence” supporting the charges. Despite numerous protests, the district attorney’s office repeatedly presented hundreds of pages of new documents without prior warning, or blocked full analysis of written evidence. The defense’s request to submit evidence including official documents that threw crucial light on the alleged acts was denied. The district attorney, in full view of the judge and jury, openly menaced some witnesses and they were threatened with prosecution if they testified on certain issues. The court handed down over 1,400 pages of carefully selected documents to the most vociferous counterrevolutionaries, who grossly manipulated the information in the local press, fuelling their campaign to demonize the defendants. The media and the terrorist sects that operate with impunity in Miami organized public demonstrations in order to place pressure on the judge and jury.

Despite their attempts to undermine justice, the mafia was seriously concerned about developments within the trial. Fully aware of the falsity of the charges, they were terrified the verdict would go against them. They were particularly concerned by the talented and professional efforts of the defense attorneys, which had exposed the district attorney’s corruption and placed the Cuban American mafia itself in the dock.

The evidence and argument of the defense was irrefutable. They exposed the terrorist activities that had been launched against Cuba from Miami with the complicit tolerance of authorities. They demonstrated that the Cuban people had to defend themselves through heroic action, just like the five who were on trial had done. The defense proved that the men had never sought information that could jeopardize US national security or
posed a threat to anyone. The FBI and US Southern Command made official declarations to that effect. Top military personnel who had held positions of great authority within the US armed forces, such as General Charles Wilhelm, ex-commander-in-chief of the Southern Command, Edward Atkeson, ex-vice head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in charge of intelligence, Admiral Edward Carroll, ex-vice chief of naval operations and Colonel George Buckner, who held a top post in the US Air Defense Command System, all confirmed the defense’s claim. Even James Clapper, ex-director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), who appeared before the court as one of the district attorney’s experts, admitted that the defendants had not been involved in espionage against the United States.

After five months of legal wrangling in the midst of the extreme hostility that reigned in the courtroom, the total innocence of Gerardo, Ramón, Fernando, René and Antonio, and the guilt of their accusers was beyond doubt.

The defendants had not been involved in espionage and had neither sought nor obtained information related to US security, defense or any other national interest. They had caused no harm to the United States or to any of its citizens. No witness had come forward who could support any of the allegations.

Cuba’s efforts were solely focused on infiltrating terrorist groups and reporting their activities. They never tried to hide this fact. The trial proved that numerous terrorist actions had been launched against Cuba from Florida and that the US authorities had done nothing to stop them. Consequently, Cuba was forced to exercise its inviolable right to self-defense against attacks that, as was also proved, have caused loss of life and serious damage to the United States itself.

The most serious charge was against Gerardo Hernández. He was accused of “conspiracy to murder” in relation to an incident on February 24, 1996. This was the most outrageous slander and unprecedented stupidity. There is a long history of light aircraft taking off from Miami and violating Cuban airspace, perpetrating multiple crimes. These include armed attacks, sabotage and the dropping of substances used in toxic and bacteriological warfare. Evidence of all these crimes was presented to the court along with Cuba’s prior warning that it would no longer tolerate any such violations. Cuba’s defensive action against individuals who had again breached Cuban
airspace just a short distance from the capital Havana was completely within international law. Notwithstanding this fact, Gerardo had absolutely nothing to do with decisions taken by the Cuban air force. He did not participate in any way in what took place that day. To use this incident [of the shooting down a hostile aircraft] to accuse him of first-degree murder and impose a second life sentence is the height of infamy and stupidity. Never before had anyone been condemned in such a way, without a single witness, without proof and without even the suggestion of circumstantial evidence.

In its desperation, the terrorist Cuban American mafia publicly admitted its defeat and stepped up its virulent and vociferous campaign to intimidate the court as it prepared to make its judgment. It was under such circumstances that the jury issued its verdict. After announcing with uncustomary precision the exact day and minute the verdict would be given, the jury reached a unanimous decision in record time, without asking a single question or requesting any clarifications: the five men were found guilty on every single charge.

It is worth making a comment with regard to the jury. From the time of its selection the jurors were exposed to pressure and influence in the poisoned climate of Miami, a city devoid of any legality. The counterrevolutionary spokespersons made no effort to hide this manipulation. On December 2, 2000, for example, *El Nuevo Herald* published an article entitled “Afraid to be a Juror in Spy Trial.” The article confirmed, “The fear of a violent reaction from the Cuban exiles if the jury decides to acquit the five men accused of spying for the island’s regime has made many potential candidates ask the judge to excuse them from their civic duty.” The newspaper quoted one such candidate as saying, “Yes, I’m afraid for my safety if the verdict doesn’t please the Cuban community.”

This fear was not unfounded. The jury members lived in a community that had just survived months of violence and anxiety when a band of delinquents had publicly kidnapped six-year-old Elián González. They had offered armed resistance to federal authorities, defiled the US flag, destroyed property and taken to the streets with threats to burn down the city, but not one of them had been prosecuted. The jurors were well aware of the verbal and physical attacks, threats and bombs used against anyone who dared to differ from the gang leaders of those “exiles.” If they were prepared to do all this in broad daylight and in front of the television cameras, what would
they do behind the scenes to bribe and bully a dozen terrified jurors?

The party began in the courthouse itself. District attorneys and mafiosi, FBI officials and terrorists all mixed together in a confusion of hugs and handshakes. The celebrations continued later in bars and offices of counterrevolutionary organizations. They flooded the airwaves with their shameless diatribes and bald-faced threats against anyone in Miami who dared to oppose anti-Cuba crimes. The local FBI chief was even widely praised alongside the most notorious criminals on “Cuban radio” [Radio Marti] that openly incites war and terrorism on a daily basis.

Meanwhile, between June 26 and August 13 the five Cubans were once again confined to “the hole.” They had broken no rules. Nothing could justify this new violation of their rights. This was simply an act of vengeance against the men’s fortitude, and a form of torture with the specific aim of weakening the defendants and preventing them from adequately preparing for the final phase of the trial: the sentence hearings scheduled for the following month. The first 17 months of solitary confinement were designed to make an organized defense impossible. The further 48 days of isolation attempted to prevent them from preparing for the only opportunity they would have of speaking directly to the court. When they were returned to their cells after insistent demands from their attorneys, the men were deprived of access to telephones and most of their possessions, leaving them barely a pen and paper on which to write. First, they were prevented from defending themselves, and then they were robbed of the means with which to denounce the crimes committed against them.

Judge Lenard had originally scheduled sentencing for September, but after the terrible attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, her delicate sensibilities forced her to postpone the homage that she, as a resident of Miami, planned to render to terrorists.

Sentencing finally took place in December. Judge Lenard handed down maximum sentences to all five defendants. She rejected all defense pleas for leniency, accepted all aggravating factors proposed by the district attorney and acted in faithful reflection of the hatred and anti-Cuba prejudice that poisoned the entire judicial process. She succinctly expressed this in her words and in her irrational lack of moderation when passing sentence. For Gerardo Hernández, two life sentences plus 15 years; for Ramón Labañino, one life sentence plus 18 years; for Fernando González, 19 years; René
González, 15 years and for Antonio Guerrero, life plus 10 years.

But the men’s voices were not silenced. The long, brutal and blatantly unjust incarceration did not daunt them; the psychological torture and torment did not weaken them; the absence of their families and friends did not undermine their steadfast resolution. Lacking even the most basic tools and conditions necessary to gather their thoughts and record them on paper, the men were still able to rise above the filth that attempted to smother them and pronounce some formidable speeches.

Far from bowing to the cowardly tradition that US law offers the accused and contritely begging for last-minute mercy from their judges, the five young men denounced and unmasked their accusers, exposed the spurious and arbitrary nature of a trial that had been fixed from the start and reaffirmed their unshakable loyalty to their homeland, their people and their ideals.

The five heroes were again separated, isolated and thrown into “holes” whose whereabouts are not fully known. Gerardo will be sent to Lompoc prison in California; Ramón to Beaumont, Texas; Fernando to Oxford, Wisconsin; René to Loreto, Pennsylvania and Antonio to Florence, Colorado. If we study a map of the United States we will see that the five most dispersed points in US territory have been selected. This is an attempt to sever any communication between the men, to make contact with their relatives in Cuba practically impossible and to prevent Cuban diplomats, who have a right to access by international convention, from visiting the prisoners.

These are five maximum-security prisons that undoubtedly house the most notorious criminals. Aware of the brutality of the authorities in the federal detention center where the men awaited trial, one can only imagine the cruelty to which they will be exposed in the toughest prisons in the United States. What is particularly disturbing and worthy of condemnation is the fact that Washington has ignored all universally accepted principles, norms and practices in its refusal to award the status of “political prisoner” to the five heroes of the Republic of Cuba.

The scandalous behavior of the US authorities in this case exposes their true attitude toward terrorism and their absolute hypocrisy regarding the terrible attacks of September 11, 2001. The five young Cubans are being punished precisely because they risked their lives to fight terrorism. The authorities that deprived these men of liberty, and abused and degraded,
them did so simply because they had the courage to stand up to the ruthless criminals created and protected by those very same authorities. Every moment they spend in prison is an affront to the memory of those who died on September 11, to all victims of terrorism, to all who believe in dignity and human decency. The Cuban people will not rest until these men are released and can return to their homes and homeland. To this end, we urgently request solidarity from moral and ethical men and women across the planet.

The voices of Gerardo, Ramón, Antonio, Fernando and René will survive the test of time. Millions of people will respond to them with passion and gratitude. Beyond the merits of content and form that their speeches inarguably contain, they are all the more admirable when we remember the hellish conditions in which they were conceived. Their speeches are testimony to the best of humankind and the good within all of us. They transmit a message of resistance, hope and victory. They are like the sun that melts the densest fog—the sun that never sets.

Havana, February 11, 2002

SOURCE: Ricardo Alarcón’s preface to Con honor, valentía y orgullo, (Havana: Oficina de Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, 2002).
When did this Cuban “battle of ideas” begin? Some consider it began with the first murmurings of national identity at the beginning of the 19th century. Others point to the events surrounding October 10, 1868, and Guáimaro, while others say the battle has raged since Martí’s struggle for Cuba’s independence against annexationist and autonomist tendencies. Perhaps this battle of ideas began in the 1920s when the popular revolutionary movement rose once more against Machado’s tyranny, or with the attack on Moncada and the program outlined by Fidel, or the liberation war or the last five decades of conflict between the revolution and the hostile US empire.

All are accurate. For centuries Cuba has traversed a difficult path toward the formation of a nation, fighting for her independence, justice, equality and solidarity. Cuba has always been engaged in this battle of ideas, but the term has acquired a specific significance since the mid-1990s.

In essence, the concept expresses the fact that the most important and decisive battles with Cuba’s historical adversary have occurred in the field of ideas. At the same time, the battle of ideas represents a strategy developed within Cuban society itself.

Of course, this does not mean that Cuba believes that ruling circles in the United States have renounced their determination to resolve the conflict with the island through armed force and violence, as US politicians are always quick to state “all options” are open. The fascist tendencies within the apex of the extreme right in the United States have increased the risk of armed conflict in recent years. During this time, Cuba has neither let down its guard nor underestimated the importance of armed self-defense.

What the battle of ideas means is that under all circumstances Cuba’s
greatest strength will never be material, economic or military, but rather ideological—Cuba’s ideas form the basis of the cause it defends. As Fidel said: “There is no weapon more powerful than profound conviction and a clear sense of what is to be done. The Cuban people will continue to be better equipped with this type of weapon, a weapon that does not require fabulous sums of money, but only the capacity to create and transmit values and just ideas... Our strength lies in our ideas, and the greatest power of these ideas is that of example.”

The collapse of European socialism brought about a period of demoralization, uncertainty and confusion to popular and progressive movements around the world. Imperialism grew bold and intensified its campaign across the globe.

The Cuban battle of ideas is a sign that the revolution is taking the offensive, defying the technological and financial arrogance and totalitarianism of its enemies. It is a symbol of the determination to present Cuba’s opinion to the world and take a stand against hegemonic domination, for the benefit of both Cuba and humanity as a whole.

An intense campaign of subversion, penetration and cultural and ideological attrition has been waged against Cuba since the mid-1980s. The “new right” that carried Ronald Reagan to power emphasized the use of the media as a weapon. Subsequent administrations have placed their faith in the supposed generation gap in Cuba and in the blanket use of psychological warfare and propaganda. After the collapse of the Eastern European and Soviet camps there was a resurgence of tactics similar to the “Track II” and “people to people” policies against Cuba.

The battle of ideas involves a total rejection of these policies, not from a defensive position, but through the intelligent deployment of all the resources and energy required, including modern communications technology.

It was during the fight to rescue Elián, the child kidnapped by the Miami Cuban American mafia, that the core principles of the battle of ideas emerged. At that point Cuba understood the importance of continuing to struggle against the causes of similar tragedies.

The Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) and the Cuban

Journalists Union congresses in November 1998 and March 1999 respectively contributed significantly to the appreciation of the formulas and methods to be employed in the battle of ideas.

It is worth noting that from the outset the concepts were applied through concrete programs such as the Open Forums and the televised Round Table discussions. Every new program highlighted the need for further action and other projects. This led to the identification and investigation of a range of issues, such as crime, young school leavers and the unemployed; the improvement of social justice; the stimulation of widespread and universal culture and the urgent need for new specialized sectors within society to support new educational and cultural projects.

Three years after the epic battle to rescue Elián González, more than 150 media programs and open forums were running.

This approach to the development of socialism sowed the seeds of a new understanding of well-being and the role of social policy.

Cuba does not ignore the need to satisfy the basic material needs of its population. Many of these, such as housing, transport and access to consumer goods in general, have been under great strain since the beginning of the “special period.” Although severe restrictions are still imposed on the investment capital necessary to resolve shortages, swift and profound improvements can be made to the spiritual life of Cuban society and countless social problems can be tackled using human capital and modest economic resources.

A BAY OF PIGS THEY WILL NEVER FORGET AWAITS THE IMPERIALISTS

From the speech by Fidel Castro in an Open Forum at the Eduardo Saborit Stadium in Havana, March 31, 2001.

Exactly 15 months and 26 days ago, the largest mass mobilization our country has ever seen began in Havana.

The brutal kidnapping of a Cuban child who had not even reached his sixth birthday was the spark that ignited this great battle. The Oath of
Baraguá [February 19, 2000] amplified our struggle as we pledged never to relent until the criminal blockade and economic war against our people are over; until the Torricelli and Helms-Burton laws and all the cynical amendments that aggravate existing statutes and impose a political culture of never-ending hostility and aggression have been repealed. We will not rest until the murderous Cuban Adjustment Act that for the last 40 years has claimed the lives of young and old alike, of mothers and their children, of men and women of all ages, is abolished. We will never cease until that piece of our soil, Guantánamo, which has been illegally occupied for 100 years, is returned to us.

The fight that began on December 5, 1999, and that today has become the immense battle of ideas, will never cease while imperialism exists. There is hardly any room left in our capital city today to bring together any more of our people. This sea of Cubans gathered in the largest area that could be found for this Open Forum in the municipality of Playa (just one of the 15 municipalities of Havana), is a demonstration of the unity and strength we have achieved. We are the same “enslaved” people whose human rights the “democratic” empire of the United States purports to defend in Geneva. The United States dares to criticize Cuba just three months after electoral fraud led to the most scandalous seizure [by George W. Bush] of the highly prized presidential throne that the United States has ever seen.

At no other point in the political life of our nation has the ideology of imperialism been subject to such devastating, poignant and heartfelt criticism.

The disappearance of the socialist camp in Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union delivered a harsh blow to progressive ideas and the just desire for social change throughout the world. Despair, confusion, even demoralization and some notable desertions appeared within the ranks of the left. At the end of the Cold War, as the only surviving superpower extended its hegemonic domination across the planet, many believed that the Cuban revolution would perish in a matter of days, weeks, or months at the most. But Cuba’s heroic resistance showed the whole world that righteous ideas, defended with honor and determination by a small island just a few miles from a monstrous imperial power, can never be crushed.

Our people have withstood more than 40 years of blockade, mercenary attacks, the threat and very real danger of nuclear attack, unjust war, economic and political warfare and all imaginable kinds of subversion and
destabilization, not to mention the hundreds of failed assassination attempts aimed at destroying our political process.

We Cubans should feel proud of the historical responsibility we consciously accepted during this long battle for liberty and justice. We possess a spirit of internationalism that was forged during 42 years of war against the most powerful empire the world has ever known. This has bestowed upon us a keenly felt knowledge of, and a deep empathy with, Martí’s remarkable legacy—his declaration “Homeland is humanity.”

We will never abandon the principles we have made our own in the struggle to bring justice to our entire nation and to eradicate exploitation. We are forever inspired by the history of humanity, by the eminent thinkers who advocated that a socialist system of production and wealth distribution is the only way to create a truly equitable and human society—Marx and Engels, and later Lenin. We have not forgotten their names, unlike so many other traitors and cowards.

As early as April 16, 1961, on the eve of the imperialist attack at the Bay of Pigs that aimed to occupy a piece of our territory and install a government with the goal of preparing for the bloody invasion of our country by foreign forces, I had the privilege of declaring the socialist character of our revolution.

For that sacred cause, our people’s blood was spilled. And again, during the October Missile Crisis of 1962, Cubans preferred to risk their very existence rather than make cowardly concessions. With this same courage our people volunteered for international missions to fight colonialism and the repugnant regime of apartheid, a regime that had so much in common with Nazism, but which remained a close ally of Western powers until its collapse. Cuban people readily gave their lives in this battle against South Africa despite the fact that Cuba does not have a single investment or possess a single square meter of land or even one nut and bolt in a factory in Angola or in any other part of Africa. This is what makes us so different from the imperialists and their allies. This is what elevates our morality so far above that of our enemies in this battle of ideas.

Those currently waging this battle of ideas no longer witness the 30 percent illiteracy the revolution inherited on January 1, 1959. None of their children lack teachers or schools or opportunities to study the most diverse aspects of science and culture. Seven hundred thousand of them are
university graduates. Others are eminent intellectuals and artists. Today we strive for an ever more universal culture. Over the next 10 years we will quadruple the knowledge that we have acquired during the last 42 years.

The University for All, the Round Table discussions, the art teacher academies (recently inaugurated in every province and including schools of the plastic arts, music, dance, theater and other cultural activities), the thousands of public libraries and our audio-visual mass media will make Cuba the best educated and most cultured country in the world. Cuban children will not only demonstrate great professional, scientific, technical and artistic expertise and the ability to speak several languages, but they will also be well versed in a broad spectrum of political, historical, economic and philosophical ideas that will equip them for the challenges of the future. Very few around the world will dare to doubt our ability to fulfill our educational and cultural commitments.

Nothing and nobody can frustrate our destiny, either through the use of weapons, ignorance, lies or demagogy. We will tear their cynical and hypocritical lies to pieces. It may take years, but the imperialists will face defeat after defeat and will never savor any but the most pyrrhic of victories. Just 19 days before the 40th anniversary of the unforgettable battle at the Bay of Pigs, a battle in which we bravely defended Cuba’s independence and the inviolable right to a true revolution, in this battle of ideas, we dare to declare that a Bay of Pigs they will never forget awaits the imperialists.

SOURCE:
EPILOGUE:
THE CUBAN REVOLUTION
AFTER FIDEL

On November 17, 2005, Fidel Castro gave a lengthy address to students and professors at the Aula Magna of the University of Havana. In this speech, Fidel discussed the bitter experience of the loss of the “first socialist state,” the Soviet Union, and the spread of corruption, inefficiency and inequality in Cuba. He stated that the primary threat to the revolution today came from within and not from outside Cuba.

ARE REVOLUTIONS DOOMED TO FALL APART?

Excerpts from the speech by Fidel Castro at the University of Havana, November 17, 2005.

Is it that revolutions are doomed to fall apart, or do human beings cause revolutions to fall apart? Can individuals or society prevent revolutions from collapsing? I could immediately add another question: Do you believe that this revolutionary socialist process can fall apart, or not? Have you ever given this any thought or deeply reflected about it?

Were you aware of all these inequalities [in Cuba] that I have been talking about? Were you aware of certain generalized habits? Did you know there are people who earn 40 or 50 times the monthly salary of one of the doctors over there in the mountains of Guatemala, who are part of the
“Henry Reeve” Contingent? Or in far-off Africa, or in the Himalayas at an altitude of thousands of meters, saving lives and earning 5 or 10 percent of what one of those dirty little crooks earns selling gasoline to the nouveau riche, diverting resources from our ports in trucks by the ton-load, stealing in the dollar shops, stealing in a five-star hotel by exchanging a bottle of rum for another of lesser quality and pocketing the dollars for which that person sells the drinks.

Just how many ways of stealing do we have in this country?...

I asked you a question, compañero students. I ask this in light of historical experience and I ask you all, without exception, to reflect on it: Can the [Cuban] revolutionary process be reversed, or not? What are the ideas or what level of consciousness would make the reversal of the revolutionary process impossible? When those who were the forerunners, the veterans, start disappearing and making room for new generations of leaders, what will happen and what will be accomplished? After all, we have witnessed many errors, and we did not recognize them.

A leader has tremendous power when he enjoys the confidence of the masses, who have complete trust in his abilities. The consequences of errors committed by those in authority are terrible, and this has happened more than once during revolutionary processes.

Such is the stuff for meditation. One studies history, one meditates on what happened here or there, on what is happening today and on what will happen tomorrow, on where each country’s process might lead, what path our own process will take, how it will get there, and what role Cuba will play...

Our country has endured limitations in resources, many limitations; but this country has also wasted resources thoughtlessly... Some thought that socialism could be constructed with capitalist methods. That is one of the great historical errors.

I do not wish to discuss this; I do not want to theorize. But I can give any number of examples of many things that could not be resolved by those who called themselves theoreticians, who immersed themselves from head to toe in the books of Marx, Engels, Lenin and many others.

That was why I commented that one of our greatest mistakes at the beginning of, and often during, the revolution was our belief that someone else knew how to build socialism.
In my opinion, today, we have relatively clear ideas about how to go about building socialism, but we need to be extremely clear and you will need to find answers to many questions because you will be the ones responsible for the preservation of socialism in the future.

How can we not be aware of this, so that our heroic island, this heroic people, this nation, which has written pages in the history books like no other nation in the history of humankind, might preserve the revolution? Please, do not think I am speaking as a vain man or a charlatan, or someone inclined to bluff.

Forty-six years have passed and the history of this country is well known, and the people of this nation know this history well. They also know our neighbor very well, the empire’s size and power—its strength and its wealth, its technology and its control over the World Bank, the IMF and the entire world of finance. That country has imposed on us the most incredible, ironclad blockade, which was discussed recently at the United Nations where 182 nations supported Cuba, despite the risk entailed in voting against the empire.

The island has survived, not just during the days when the European socialist countries stood together with us, but after the socialist camp disappeared and the Soviet Union had fallen apart. We forged this revolution alone, against all risks, for many long years. We realized that if the day ever came when we would be directly attacked by the United States, no one would ever fight for us and we would never ask anyone to do so...

The empire might have tanks to spare, but we have just what we need, not one to spare! All their technology will collapse like ice cubes in the noonday sun in summer. Once we possessed only seven guns and a handful of bullets. Today, we possess much more than those seven guns. We have a people who have learned how to handle weapons; we have an entire nation, which, in spite of our errors, has such a high degree of culture, education and consciousness that it will never allow this country to become a colony again.

This country can self-destruct, this revolution can destroy itself, but they can never destroy us. We can destroy ourselves, and that would be our fault...

Let there never be a Soviet situation here, or a broken, dispersed socialist bloc! The empire will not come here to set up secret jails in which to torture
the progressive men and women from other parts of this continent who are rising up today to engage in their second and final fight for independence!

Before we go back to such a repugnant and miserable existence there had better not be any memory—not even the slightest trace—of our descendants or us.

I said we are more and more revolutionary and I said this for a reason. Now, we understand the empire much better, and we are increasingly aware of what they are capable of…

We have to be resolute: we must defeat these deviations and strengthen the revolution by destroying any illusions the empire may have. That is to say: either we radically defeat these problems or we die. We must repeat the motto: *Patria o muerte!* [Homeland or death!]

There must be an end to stupidity in the world, the abuses and the empire based on might and terror. It will disappear when all fear disappears. Every day there are more fearless countries. Every day there will be more countries that will rebel and the empire will not be able to keep its infamous system alive any longer.

Salvador Allende once spoke of things that would happen sooner or later. I believe that sooner rather than later the empire will disintegrate and the US people will enjoy more freedom than ever; they will be able to aspire to more justice than ever before; they will be able to use science and technology for their own benefit and for the betterment of humanity; they will be able to join all of us who fight for the survival of the species; they will be able to join all of us who fight for the human species.

It is only just to struggle for that cause, and that is why we must use all our energy, all our effort and all our time to be able to say with the voice of millions, or hundreds of thousands of millions of people: It is worthwhile to have been born! It is worthwhile to have lived!

**SOURCE:**
MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

On February 18, 2008, Fidel Castro announced he would not seek reelection as president of the Council of State. Subsequently, Cuba’s National Assembly of People’s Power elected Raúl Castro as president of the Council of State on February 24.

Dear compatriots:

Last Friday, February 15, I promised you that in my next reflection I would deal with an issue of interest to many compatriots. Thus, this now is rather a message.

The moment has come to nominate and elect the Council of State, its president, its vice-presidents and secretary.

For many years I have occupied the honorable position of president. On February 15, 1976 the socialist constitution was approved with the free, direct and secret vote of over 95% of the people with the right to cast a vote. The first National Assembly was established on December 2 that same year; this elected the State Council and its presidency. Before that, I had been a prime minister for almost 18 years. I always had the necessary prerogatives to carry forward the revolutionary work with the support of the overwhelming majority of the people.

There were those overseas who, aware of my critical health condition, thought that my provisional resignation, on July 31, 2006, from the position of president of the Council of State, which I left to first Vice-President Raúl Castro Ruz, was final. But Raúl, who is also minister of the [Revolutionary] Armed Forces on account of his own personal merits, and the other compañeros of the party and state leadership, were unwilling to consider me out of public life despite my unstable health condition.

It was an uncomfortable situation for me vis-à-vis an adversary which had done everything possible to get rid of me, and I felt reluctant to comply.

Later, in my necessary retreat, I was able to recover the full command of my mind as well as the possibility for much reading and meditation. I had
enough physical strength to write for many hours, which I shared with the corresponding rehabilitation and recovery programs. Basic common sense indicated that such activity was within my reach. On the other hand, when referring to my health I was extremely careful to avoid raising expectations since I felt that an adverse outcome would bring traumatic news to our people in the midst of the battle. Thus, my first duty was to prepare our people both politically and psychologically for my absence after so many years of struggle. I kept saying that my recovery “was not without risks.”

My wishes have always been to discharge my duties to my last breath. That’s all I can offer.

To my dearest compatriots, who have recently honored me so much by electing me a member of the parliament where so many agreements should be adopted of utmost importance to the destiny of our revolution, I am saying that I will neither aspire to nor accept, I repeat, I will neither aspire to nor accept the positions of president of the Council of State and Commander-in-Chief.

In short letters addressed to Randy Alonso, director of the Round Table national TV program—letters which at my request were made public—I discreetly introduced elements of this message I am writing today, when not even the addressee of such letters was aware of my intention. I trusted Randy, whom I knew very well from his days as a student of journalism. In those days I met almost on a weekly basis with the main representatives of the university students from the provinces at the library of the large house in Kohly where they lived. Today, the entire country is an immense university.

Following are some paragraphs chosen from the letter addressed to Randy on December 17, 2007:

“I strongly believe that the answers to the current problems facing Cuban society—which has as an average of 12th-grade education, almost a million university graduates, and a real possibility for all its citizens to become educated without their being in any way discriminated against—require more variables for each concrete problem than those contained in a chess game. We cannot ignore one single detail; this is not an easy path to take, if the intelligence of a human being in a revolutionary society is to prevail over instinct.
“My elemental duty is not to cling to positions, much less to stand in the way of younger persons, but rather to contribute my own experience and ideas whose modest value comes from the exceptional era that I have had the privilege of living in.

“Like Niemeyer, I believe that one has to be consistent right up to the end.”

[And in my letter of] January 8, 2008, [I wrote]:

“...I am a firm supporter of the united vote (a principle that preserves the unknown merits), which allowed us to avoid the tendency to copy what came to us from countries of the former socialist bloc, including the portrait of the one candidate, as singular as his solidarity towards Cuba. I deeply respect that first attempt at building socialism, thanks to which we were able to continue along the path we had chosen.”

And I reiterated in that letter “I never forget that ‘all the glory in the world fits into a kernel of corn.’”

Therefore, it would be a betrayal to my conscience to accept responsibility requiring more mobility and dedication than I am physically able to offer. I say this without any drama.

Fortunately, our revolution can still count on cadres from the old guard and others who were very young in the early stages of the process. Some were very young, almost children, when they joined the fight in the mountains and later they have given glory to the country with their heroic performance and their internationalist missions. They have the authority and the experience to guarantee the replacement. There is also the intermediate generation that learned together with us the basics of the complex and almost unattainable art of organizing and leading a revolution.

The path will always be difficult and require everyone’s intelligent effort. I distrust the seemingly easy path of apostolics, or its antithesis, self-flagellation. We should always be prepared for the worst. The principle of being as prudent in success as we are steady in adversity cannot be forgotten. The adversary to be defeated is extremely strong; however, we have been able to keep it at bay for half a century.

This is not my farewell to you. My only wish is to fight as a soldier in the
battle of ideas. I shall continue to write under the heading of “Reflections by compañero Fidel.” It will be just another weapon you can count on. Perhaps my voice will be heard. I shall be careful.

Thank you.

Fidel Castro Ruz
February 18, 2008

SOURCE:
http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/2008/ing/f180208i.html
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Domination, Crisis, Popular Movements, and Political Alternatives
Roberto Regalado
As resistance to Washington’s imposition of neoliberal policies grows, Cuban intellectual Roberto Regalado provides a sharp analysis of the issues underlying the conflicts between the United States and Latin America. Regalado describes a resurgent Latin America struggling anew to break free from its history of domination and exploitation, and addresses the key question for Latin America today: reform or revolution?
THE CUBA PROJECT
CIA Covert Operations Against Cuba 1959–62
Fabián Escalante

An intriguing tale of a regime change project that failed, this is the secret war the CIA lost. The “Cuba Project,” initiated to remove Fidel Castro after the 1959 revolution, included assassination plots, sabotage and terrorist activities, paramilitary invasion plans and psychological warfare schemes. This account reads almost like a crime novel, but as the former head of Cuban counterintelligence, Fabián Escalante was actually a key protagonist in this drama.

EXECUTIVE ACTION
638 Ways to Kill Fidel Castro
Fabián Escalante

Cuba’s former counterintelligence chief Fabián Escalante reviews the more than 600 CIA plots to assassinate Fidel Castro, a project code-named “Executive Action.” Although melodramatic and at times almost comical, these plans were deadly serious—and illegal—as subsequent US government inquiries concluded.

MY EARLY YEARS
Fidel Castro

Fidel Castro, one of the century’s most controversial and private figures, reflects on his childhood, youth and student activism, discussing his family and the religious and moral influences that led to his involvement in politics from an early age. This book also includes excerpts from Fidel’s letters from prison after the failed Moncada attack and an introductory essay by Gabriel García Márquez.

FIDEL & RELIGION
Conversations with Frei Betto on Marxism and Liberation Theology
Fidel Castro

In an intimate 23-hour dialogue with Brazilian liberation theologian Frei Betto, Fidel Castro revealed much about his personal background and candidly discussed his views on religion. The resulting book went on to sell over a million copies worldwide, paving the way for Pope John Paul II’s historic visit to Cuba in 1998 and the Cuban Communist Party’s decision to accept as members those practicing their religious faith.
Teacher, journalist, revolutionary and poet, José Martí interweaves the threads of Latin American culture and history, fervently condemning the brutality and corruption of the Spanish colonizers as well as the increasingly predatory ambitions of the United States in Latin America.

Referring to the United States shortly before his death, Martí wrote: “I have lived inside the monster and I know its entrails; my sling is David’s.”

This book features bilingual text of some of Martí’s best-loved poems.

José Martí was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1853. At 17 he was imprisoned for treason by the Spanish. He subsequently lived most of his life in exile, traveling throughout Latin America. Martí lived in New York for 14 years before returning to Cuba where he was killed during the War of Independence against Spain in 1895.

“Not only was Martí one of the most brilliant literary figures in the history of Latin American letters, but also—as the relevance of his observations more than a century later shows—he was one of the most underrated political thinkers of modern times.”
—John Kirk, José Martí: Mentor of the Cuban Nation

“Martí transformed rebellion into revolution… Like a master weaver, he pulled together all the separate threads of Cuban discontent—social, economic, political, racial, historical—and wove them into a radical movement of enormous force.”
—Louis A. Pérez, Jr., José Martí in the United States: The Florida Experience

Also available from Ocean Press

CHE GUEVARA READER
Writings on politics and revolution
Edited by David Deutschmann

This bestselling anthology, prepared in association with the Che Guevara Studies Center in Havana, is the most complete and authoritative collection to date of the work of Che Guevara.

Recognized as one of Time magazine’s “icons of the 20th Century,” Ernesto Che Guevara became a legend in his own time and has now reemerged as a political symbol for a new generation of political activists.

More than just a guerrilla strategist, Che Guevara was a profound thinker who made a lasting contribution to revolutionary theory.

This Reader includes four sections: the Cuban revolutionary war (1956–58); the years in government in Cuba (1959–65); Che’s views on the major international issues of the time, especially a vision of the Latin American revolution; and a selection of letters written by Che, including his farewell letters to Fidel Castro and his children and family.

An unprecedented source of primary material on Cuba and Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s.

“Che was the most complete human being of our age.”
—Jean-Paul Sartre

“The powerful of the earth should take heed: deep inside that T shirt where we have tried to trap him, the eyes of Che Guevara are still burning with impatience.”
—Ariel Dorfman

FIDEL CASTRO READER
The voice of one of history’s greatest orators
Edited by David Deutschmann and Deborah Shnookal

The voice of one of the 20th century’s greatest orators is captured in this unique selection of Castro’s key speeches over 50 years.

Fidel Castro has been an articulate and incisive—if controversial—political thinker and leader, who outlasted 10 hostile US presidents.

*Fidel Castro Reader* opens with Fidel’s famous courtroom defense speech following the Moncada attack in 1953 and includes more than five decades of his speeches, right up to his recent reflections on the prospects for the Cuban revolution “post-Fidel.”

With the wave of change now sweeping Latin America, this book sheds light on the continent’s past as well as its future.

As the first selection of Fidel Castro’s speeches to be published since the 1960s, *Fidel Castro Reader* is an essential resource for both scholars and general readers.

“Fidel’s devotion to the word is almost magical.” —Gabriel García Márquez

“Fidel is the leader of one of the smallest countries in the world, but he has helped to shape the destinies of millions of people across the globe.” —Angela Davis

“Fidel Castro is a man of the masses… The Cuban revolution has been a source of inspiration to all freedom-loving people.” —Nelson Mandela