

[Speech given by Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba Central Committee and President of the Council of State and Council of Ministers at the ceremony on the 40th Anniversary of the triumph of the Revolution, held at Cespedes Park in Santiago de Cuba on January 1st, 1999 \[1\]](#)

Date:

01/01/1999

People of Santiago,

Fellow countrymen throughout Cuba,

My recollections take me back to that night on January 1st, 1959. Again I am living all the excitement and every detail as if it was all happening at this very moment. It does not seem real that destiny has provided us with the strange privilege of addressing the people of Santiago de Cuba again from the same place forty years later.

That day before dawn when we had news that the tyrant and the main bosses of his shameful regime had escaped from the irrepressible advance of our forces, for a few seconds I felt surprisingly hollow. How could that incredible victory have been possible? A little over 24 months had passed from the time when we could again gather seven rifles, on 18 December 1956, after the extremely hard setback that practically annihilated our group.

We had resumed the struggle against a combined military force of 80,000 men under arms with thousands of academy graduate commanding officers, a high morale, attractive privileges, the unquestioned myth of invincibility, an infallible advisory and steady supplies from the United States. However, the ideal of justice embraced by a brave people made possible the military and political miracle and subsequent baseless and ridiculous attempts to save what was left of that exploiting and oppressive system were swept away by the Rebel Army, the workers and the rest of the people in 24 hours.

Our passing sadness at the victory was actually a nostalgia for the experience we had lived through, the fresh memory of the comrades who fell throughout the struggle, the full awareness that those extraordinarily difficult and adverse years forced us to be better than we had been before and to turn those years into the most fruitful and creative of our lives. We were to abandon our mountains, our fields, our habits of absolute and necessary austerity, our stressful life always on the alert against an enemy that could show up at any time, by land or air, during the 761 days the war lasted; the tough but healthy, pure life of shared sacrifices and dangers which brings men together as brothers and makes their best qualities flourish together with the infinite capacity for devotion, selflessness and altruism that every human being carries within himself.

The wide gap between the enemy and ourselves in terms of means and forces obligated us to do the impossible. Suffice it to say that it was with rifles and anti-tank mines that we won the war, fighting in every important action the artillery, the armored vehicles and especially the enemy aviation which immediately showed to support them.

The rifles and semiautomatic and automatic light-infantry weapons we had were those that we could take from the enemy in combat. The explosives used in our rudimentary workshops to produce the mines against the armored vehicles and the accompanying infantry we obtained from the numerous bombs they dropped on us, some of which did not explode. The unbeatable tactic of attacking the enemy while in movement was a key factor. Our commanding officers grew skillful in the art of provoking the enemy to move out of their well fortified and, generally, unassailable positions.

The operational enemy units or their garrisons were besieged and their coming reinforcements destroyed; then, they were forced to surrender out of hunger and thirst. They were constantly fired upon by our marksmen who, day by day, tightened the circle avoiding live-costly head on attacks since we lacked the suitable means and weapons for that. What we learned in the mountains and heavy forests we ended up applying right on the plains next to paved roads, under the shadow of citrus plantations, fruit groves and even sugar-cane plantations useful to camouflage those troops usually inexperienced, given the accelerated growth of our ranks as more weapons were seized, although they were always commanded by more experienced fighters to strike on the reinforcements by surprise. Later, the same method was applied in the cities to isolate the different military positions.

That was how the city of Palma Soriano was occupied in only three days and the plan devised to attack and overcome the 5000 troops force in the Santiago de Cuba garrison town with only 1200 rebel combatants. A hundred weapons from those seized in Palma had already been introduced through the Santiago bay to start the uprising on the fifth day after unleashing the operations that would successively encircle the four battalions defending the periphery. I am leaving out more precise details about the plan. I will rather point out that there was one rebel combatant for every four enemy soldiers. We had never had a more favorable balance of forces!

At Guisa, a few kilometers from Bayamo, the combat engagements began with 180 men who had to fight the reinforcements sent through a paved road and other routes from that city where the headquarters of the army operational forces and thousands of its best troops with the support of heavy tanks were deployed. Guisa fell in our hands on November 30, 1958, after eleven days of intense combat when our forces grew with the weapons seized and some additional reinforcements.

This battle was a further demonstration of the extraordinary fighting morale of our troops and their expeditiousness. Five months before, on June of that same year, the enemy had launched its last apparently unbeatable offensive against the General Command at La Plata, in the Sierra Maestra mountains. However, we were no longer the inexperienced fighters who had landed on December 2, 1956 although, again, there were not many of us. The defense was undertaken with about 170 men but four weeks later we came to around 300 fighters with the still very small forces headed by Che [Guevara], Camilo [Cienfuegos], Ramiro [Valdes] and [Juan] Almeida who had previously been instructed to move toward the positions occupied by Column 1, the strategic objective of our enemy's offensive, that is, all our columns except the forces of the Second Eastern Front commanded by Raul [Castro] which were too far away in the northeast mountains to support our front. Hundreds of young volunteers without weapons were training in the draftees' school at Minas del Frio.

After 74 days of intense combat, the enemy battalions sustained close to one thousand casualties --dead, injured and prisoners combined-- 440 of them remained our prisoners and were returned a few days later through the International Red Cross. I am writing based on my own recollections. Perhaps, historians will be able to further check this information with our documents that have been preserved and with those found later in the enemy's archives. I can assure you that over 500 weapons were seized and given to the draftees from the school as they were taken from the enemy when the fighting was over, without losing any time. Thus, with only 900 armed men marching in different directions the rebel columns invaded the territory controlled by the enemy up to the center of the island, except for the extensive eastern area firmly held by the Frank Pais Second Eastern Front, and opened new war fronts that quickly developed. I was to stay back in the headquarters with a few men. It was against this background that Che and Camilo, with approximately 140 and 100 men respectively --as far as I

remember and without consulting any documents-- carried out one of the greatest deeds among the many I have known through the history books. They left after a hurricane had hit the area and marched over 400 kilometers from the Sierra Maestra to the Escambray mountains. They had to cross lowlands and marshy terrain infested with mosquitoes and enemy soldiers under constant air surveillance, with no guides and no food, without the logistic support of our underground movement weakly organized in the area of their long route. They had to break from sieges, ambushes, successive lines of containment and bombardments but they reached their goal. Such was our confidence in the combatants who defeated the enemy offensive; and, most important of all, such was the infinite confidence they had in themselves and their legendary leaders. They were men of iron! To the young people I recommend reading and re-reading the beautiful accounts contained in the Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War written by Che.

Since I have almost unwillingly been making these observations about our struggle in the mountains, I shall now complete the story of the events that led me once more to this beloved city on that January 1st, whose 40th anniversary we are commemorating today. It was on 11 November that I left La Plata with 30 armed men and 1,000 unarmed recruits.

Those courageous and selfless youths were better trained in enduring hunger, bombardment and a shortage of everything than they were in handling weapons since there was never a single bullet available for live-shooting training. They arrived in the school from all over the country in enthusiastic waves but in those days only one out of ten could withstand the conditions. Still, they filled our ranks and were more audacious than our old fighters; taking inspiration from the traditions and stories they heard they wanted to do in one day what others had done in years.

Gathering small rebel units along the way, in addition to the weapons from two enemy platoons which joined our ranks following their Commander [Jose] Quevedo, our honorable and brave adversary in the Jigüe battle, on the understanding that they would not fight against their former comrades-in-arms, our long column brought together a vanguard force of 180 men with war weapons. In Guisa, Baire, Jiguani, Maffo and Palma Soriano, settings of numerous actions, the recruits could realized their fighting dreams as we advanced supported by other forces. Covering some casualties from death, injuries or diseases of already equipped combatants and with the weapons seized, my estimate is that once Palma was conquered all the recruits who had left La Plata with me six weeks before were armed and made up a formidable troop. Just in Palma, 350 weapons had been seized.

I should point out, however, that not all the weapons that helped turn the youths from our school at Minas del Frio into front-line fighters were exclusively war trophies. In mid December, we received what I considered the most precious aid in weapons from abroad: 150 semiautomatic rifles and an automatic FAL [light assault rifle] for myself sent on behalf of the Venezuelan people by Rear Admiral Larrazabal and the revolutionary junta that took power in that country months before the Cuban triumph. As may be assumed, those weapons were soon in action at the battles of Jiguani, Maffo and Palma Soriano.

That is why when we took over Palma and Maffo we had plenty of weapons to provide the unarmed combatants and still send 100 for the uprising in Santiago and a substantial number to Belarmino Castilla with instructions to cut off the retreat of the battalion in Mayari.

Since I have mentioned the Venezuelan aid, I should say that in our revolutionary struggle we did not receive weapon supplies and munitions from abroad except in very few cases of which by far the most numerous, almost as much as all the rest that I remember or have heard mentioned, was that of Venezuela. More than 90 percent of the weapons and munitions we used to wage and win the war were seized from the enemy in combat. They were only a few thousands but it was an unbreakable principle that absolutely all of them were at all times in the front-line.

These events have all been commemorated throughout the past year. I have recalled just a few of them.

Eternal honor and glory, infinite respect and affection to those fell then to make possible the definitive

independence of the homeland; to all those who wrote that epic in the mountains, the countryside and the cities, both guerrillas or underground fighters; to those who, after the triumph, died in other glorious missions or loyally gave up their youth and their energy to the cause of justice, sovereignty and the redemption of their people; to those who have already died and those who are still alive. On that January 1st we could speak of the triumph achieved five years, five months and five days after 26 July 1953; on this anniversary, taking the same date as reference, we can speak of a heroic and admirable struggle of 45 years, five months and five days. (Applause.)

Even today, for the younger generations, the Revolution is hardly beginning. A day like this would be meaningless if we did not speak for their benefit.

Who are those present here? The vast majority are not the same men, women and youth from that day. The people I am addressing is not the same people from that January 1st. They are not the same men and women. They are other, different people and still the same eternal people. (Applause) Neither is the person talking from here like this the same man from that day. It is someone much less younger who bears the same name, dresses the same way, thinks the same and dreams the same. (Applause.)

Of the 11,142,700 people who make up the current population of the country 7,190,400 had not been born yet; 1,359,698 were under 10 years old. The vast majority of those who were 50 years old and who would now be at least 90 have died, although there are growing numbers of people reaching that age.

Some 30 percent of those fellow countrymen did not know how to read or write. I think that maybe another 60 percent did not have a sixth grade of schooling. There were only a few dozen technical schools and senior high schools --not all within reach of the people-- a few teachers' colleges, three public universities and one private. There were 22,000 grammar and junior high school teachers. Perhaps 5 percent of adults, that is, about 250,000 people, had more than a sixth grade of schooling.

I remember some data.

Today, the number of grammar and high school teachers with a much higher level of education is over 250,000; doctors, 64,000; university graduates, 600,000. There are no illiterates. It is very difficult to find anyone with less than a sixth grade. Education is compulsory up to ninth grade and after that they can continue, without exception and free of charge, toward higher middle education. It is not worth the trouble to look up for absolutely precise and exact data. There are facts that nobody dares deny. Today, we can proudly state that we are the country with the world's highest number per capita of educators, doctors and physical education and sport teachers and with the lowest rate of infant and maternal mortality in the Third World.

I do not intend, however, to talk about these and many other social advances. There are much more important things than these. The fact of the matter is that the people of today does not compare with the people of yesterday.

However, the illiterate and semiliterate people of yesterday with barely a minimum of political culture were capable of making the Revolution, defending the homeland, then achieving an extraordinary political consciousness and starting a revolutionary process that has no parallel in this hemisphere or the world. These words are not inspired in a ridiculous chauvinism or the absurd pretense that we are better than other peoples but rather on the fact that the Revolution born on that January 1st has been subjected, by chance or fate, to the toughest test that any revolutionary process in the world has been subjected to.

Our heroic people of yesterday and today, our eternal people with the participation of three generations now, has resisted 40 years of aggression and blockade, of economic, political and ideological warfare by the richest and mightiest imperialist power that history has known. The most extraordinary page of patriotic and revolutionary steadfastness and glory this people has written in the years of the special

period when we were left absolutely alone in the Western hemisphere 90 miles away from the United States and we decided to carry on forward.

Our people is not better than other peoples. Its enormous historic valor derives from the peculiar fact that it has been subjected to that test and it has resisted. It is not just a great people but a people that has uplifted its spirit with the noble ideas and the justice of the causes it defends. There are no other causes like these and there never have been. Today, it would not make sense to selfishly defend a national cause. In today's world an exclusively national cause cannot in itself be a great cause. As a result of its own development and historical evolution our world is rapidly going global, uncontrollably and irreversibly so. Regardless of national and cultural identities and the legitimate interests of the people in each country, no cause is more important than a global cause, that is, the cause of Humanity itself.

It is not our fault, nor can we take credit, if the struggle that began on January 1st must inevitably become for the people of today and tomorrow other people's struggle for the benefit of all mankind. No people on their own however great and rich they might be, much less a middle size or small country, can solve their problems by themselves and on their own. This reality can only be denied for lack of a forward-looking approach, out of political shortsightedness or blindness or a total absence of concern and sensibility for the human destiny.

Solutions for mankind will not come from the goodwill of those who now take possession of the world to exploit it, even though they cannot dream or conceive of anything but the perennial nature of what is heaven for them and hell for the rest of humanity, a real hell without any possible remedy.

The economic order prevailing in the world today will inevitably fall. Even a schoolboy can understand that if he knows enough of adding, subtracting, dividing and multiplying to pass a simple test in arithmetic.

Many resort to the childish argument of calling skeptics those who talk about such issues. There are even those who dream of establishing colonies on the Moon or on planet Mars. I do not criticize them for dreaming; if they make it, that could perhaps be a place for some people to take refuge in case the brutal and growing aggression to this planet is not stopped.

The current system is not sustainable because it is upheld by blind, chaotic and ruinous laws that destroy society and nature.

The very theoreticians of neo-liberal globalization, the best academics and articulate advocates of the system are uncertain, hesitant and confused. There are a thousand questions that cannot be answered. Saying that the freedom of man and the absolute freedom of the market are inseparable concepts is deceitful as if the laws of the market which have given rise to the most selfish, unequal and merciless social systems man has known were compatible with the freedom of the human being turned by the system into simple merchandise.

It would be much more accurate to say that without equality and fraternity, the sacred slogans of the bourgeois revolution, there can never be liberty and that equality and fraternity are absolutely incompatible with the laws of the market.

The tens of millions of children in the world forced to work, to exercise prostitution, to give up body organs or sell drugs to survive; the hundreds of millions of jobless people, the extreme poverty, the drug trafficking, the smuggling of immigrants and human organs, like colonialism yesterday and its current dramatic aftermath of underdevelopment, every social calamity in the world today originated in systems based on those laws. It should not be forgotten that the fight for markets led to the dreadful carnage of two world wars in this century.

It cannot be ignored that market principles are an inseparable part of the historical development of

mankind but any rational man has every right to reject the supposed perpetuity of said social principles as the basis for the subsequent development of the human species.

The market's most fanatical advocates and followers have ended up making it a new religion. Thus arises the theology of the market. Its scholars are theologians rather than scientists. For them, it is a matter of faith. Out of respect for the genuine religions honestly practiced by billions of people in the world, and for the genuine theologians, we might simply add that the theology of the market is sectarian, fundamentalist and anti-ecumenical.

For many other reasons the current world order is not sustainable. A biotechnology expert would say that in its genetic map there are numerous genes marked for its own destruction.

New and unsuspected phenomena arise which escape the control of governments and international financial institutions. It is no longer a matter of artificially creating fabulous riches unrelated to the real economy. Such is the case of hundreds of new multimillionaires who made their fortunes when the stock prices in the United States Stock Exchanges multiplied in the last few years, like an enormous balloon inflated to absurd levels with the serious risk that, sooner or later, it will explode. That already happened in 1929 giving rise to a deep depression that lasted a whole decade.

In August of this year, the simple financial crisis in Russia which produces only 2 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product made the Dow Jones --a standard index in the New York Stock Exchange-- drop 512 points in one day. Panic spread. There was the threat of a Southeast Asia contagion in Latin America, thus a great risk for the US economy. So far they have been able to hold back the catastrophe but not without great difficulties. Among those stocks quoted on the Stock Exchanges are the savings and pension funds of 50 percent of Americans. At the time of the 1929 crisis, it was only 5 percent and there were many suicides.

In a global world, whatever happens anywhere has an immediate impact on the rest of the planet. The recent shock has been considerable. Following the United States call the resources of the world's richest countries were mobilized to put out or dampen the fire. However, they want to keep Russia on the edge of the abyss and they keep imposing unnecessarily harsh conditions to Brazil. The International Monetary Fund is not moving a millimeter apart from its fundamentalist principles. The World Bank is mutinying and denouncing.

Everyone talks about an international financial crisis. The only ones who have not heard about it are the Americans: they have spent more than ever and their savings are below zero. That does not matter, their transnational companies keep investing other people's money. The growing trade deficit already amounting to 240 billion does not matter either. Such are the privileges of the empire that prints the world's reserve currency! In times of crisis, speculators take refuge en masse in the Treasury bonds. Since the domestic market is big and more is being spent the economy seems to be in good shape although corporate profits have dropped. Megamergers; euphoria; stock prices rise back. Again, the Russian roulette is the game. Everything will be all right for ever. The system's theoreticians have discovered the philosopher's stone! All access has been blocked so that no ghosts can get in to disturb their dreams. It is no longer impossible to square the circle. There will never be a crisis!

But, is it perhaps the inflated balloon the only threat and the only speculative game? Speculative operations with currencies constitute a daily growing phenomenon reaching huge and uncontrollable heights. The amount involved is at least a trillion dollars a day. Some say it is 1.5 trillion. Barely fourteen years ago, this speculative figure was only 150 billion in a year. There might be confusion with the figures. They are hard to express and even harder to translate from English into Spanish. What we call billon in Spanish is a trillion in English. On the other hand, a billion in English equals 1,000 million in Spanish. Now, they have come up with the millardo which means 1,000 million in Spanish and French. The language difficulties show how hard it is to follow and understand the huge figures reflecting the scope of speculation in the prevailing world economic order. The vast majority of peoples in the world are paying for this with the constant risk of a downfall. When they least expect it, the speculators

attack causing the devaluation of their currencies; in a matter of days they are left without the hard currency reserves it took them perhaps decades to accumulate. The existing world order has created the conditions for this. No one is safe, absolutely no one. Supported by advanced computer software, the packs of wolves know exactly where to attack, when and why.

A Nobel Laureate in Economics proposed 14 years ago, when these speculations were two thousand times lower, a 1 percent tax on every speculative operation of this kind. Today, that 1 percent would bring in enough resources to develop all the Third World countries! It would also be a way of regulating and discouraging such harmful speculation. But, did I say regulate? That contradicts the purest fundamentalist doctrine! Certain words cannot be uttered in the temple of the fanatics of the imposed world order, such as, regulation, public company, economic development program, the least of planning and State involvement or influence in the economy. All that disturbs the idyllic dream of the free market and the private company paradise. According to them, everything must be deregulated even the labor market. Unemployment benefits must be reduced to an indispensable minimum, so as not to support "layabouts" and "loafers", and the pension system restructured and privatized. The State must only look after the police and the army to preserve law and order, to suppress protests and make war. It should not even be allowed to take part in the monetary policies of the Central Bank which must be absolutely independent. Louis 14th would really hurt a lot because if he once said: "I am the State", he would now have to say: "I am absolutely nothing."

Apart from the amazing speculation with currencies, the so-called hedge funds are growing at an incredible and accelerated pace along with the derivatives market --another rather new term. I will not try to explain it. It is complicated. It would take time. Suffice it to say that it is another system of speculative games, another huge casino where they bet everything on everything based on sophisticated risk estimates made with computers by high-level software experts and eminent economists. They exploit uncertainty and use the savers money in the banks in a practically unrestricted way. They can obtain huge profits and bring about catastrophes.

The fact that the existing economic order is untenable is proved by the very vulnerability and weakness of the system which has turned the planet into an enormous casino and millions of people, sometimes whole societies, into gamblers distorting the function of money and investment, since what they seek at all costs is not production or the increase of the world riches but to turn money into more money. Such a distortion will lead the world economy to an inevitable disaster.

A recent event in the United States has been the source of scandal and deep concern. One of the hedge funds I mentioned and tried to basically explain, precisely the most famous in the United States --the Long-Term Capital Management where two Nobel Prize Laureates in Economics and some of the world's best software specialists work and where annual profits exceed 30 percent-- was on the brink of a bankruptcy whose consequences would apparently have been incalculable.

Relying on the prestige it had gained, and blindly trusting the infallibility of its famous software specialists and Nobel Prize Laureates in Economics, while its own funds amounted to only 4.5 billion dollars it mobilized funds from 75 different banks amounting to 120 billion dollars for its speculative operations. That is, it borrowed over 25 dollars for every dollar in its own fund. Such action broke all the parameters of the so-called financial practice. The calculations and the computers' software failed. The losses were considerable; bankruptcy --a dramatic word in that field-- was inevitable. It was just a matter of days. The United States Federal Reserve System came to the rescue of the hedge fund. This contradicted everything the United States preaches and the neo-liberal philosophy it upholds on the basis of what is considered irresponsible behavior by such an institution. According to common procedure, the famous hedge fund would have gone bankrupt and the law of the market would have taught it a lesson by imposing the appropriate punishment. The scandal broke out and the U.S. Senate summoned [Alan] Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve System, to testify. This senior official, a product of Wall Street, is considered one of the most knowledgeable and outstanding executives in the United States economy. He has received most of the credit for the economic successes of the current administration and, at the moment, he is receiving special tribute in financial circles and the press as

the man who halted the crisis in the United States stock market by reducing the interest rates three consecutive times. He is considered the most important person in the country, second only to the President. Now then, this famous and appreciated chairman declared at the Senate that if the fund was not bailed out an economic disaster would follow afflicting the United States and the whole world.

How sound is an economic system where the actions --described as hazardous and irresponsible-- of a speculative entity that possessed only 4.5 billion dollars can lead the United States and the world to an economic meltdown?

Such weakness and failure in the immunology system would suggest a diagnose very similar to AIDS. On this occasion I rather not elaborate further on this. There are many other problems in the world economy.

The prevailing order is suffering from inflation, recession, deflation, a possible overproduction crisis and sustained falls in commodity prices. Countries as wealthy as Saudi Arabia now have budget and trade deficits, even though Saudi Arabia is a country exporting 8 million barrels of oil a day. Optimistic growth forecasts are vanishing. There is not the slightest idea as to how the problems of the Third World will be solved. Where are the capital goods, technologies, distribution networks and export credits they need to find markets, be competitive and export? Where are the consumers of their products? Where will the resources be found for health care in Africa whose 22 million HIV sufferers would require 200 billion dollars a year at current prices to control a single disease--? How many will die before a protective vaccine or a drug to cure the disease is produced?

The world needs a certain leadership to confront its current realities. We are already six billion people on Earth. It is almost certain that in only five more decades we will be 9.5 billion. It will be an enormous challenge to provide food, health care, education, employment, clothing, footwear, housing, drinking water, electric energy and transportation to such a great number of people who will live in precisely the poorest countries. The first thing will be to determine consumption patterns. It is not possible to continue introducing tastes and ways of life inspired in the squandering model of the industrial societies; it would not only be impossible but suicidal.

The development of the world needs to be planned and that task cannot be left to the transnational companies and the blind, chaotic laws of the market. The United Nations provide a good basis with its accumulation of information and expertise. We must simply struggle to democratize it, to put an end to dictatorship by the Security Council and within the Council itself which should at least be expanded with new permanent members so that the Third World is duly represented with all the prerogatives of the current permanent members and a change of rules for decision-making. The duties and authority of the General Assembly must also be expanded.

I wish it would not be as a result of catastrophic economic crises that solutions are found. Billions of people in the Third World would be the most affected. A basic understanding of the technological realities and the destructive power of modern weapons makes us think about the duty to prevent that the conflicts of interests that will inevitably break out lead to bloody wars.

The existence of a single superpower and a stifling world economic order make it difficult, perhaps even impossible, for a revolution like ours to survive were it to emerge today and not when it had a mainstay in a then bipolar world. That is how our country had the necessary time to develop an invincible capacity for resistance and deploy worldwide the strong influence of its example and heroism waging a great battle of ideas from every rostrum.

The peoples will struggle and the masses will play a significantly decisive role in those struggles which will essentially be their response to the poverty and sufferings imposed on them. Thousands of creative and ingenious forms of political action and pressure will arise. Many governments will be destabilized by the economic crises as they will be trapped within the established international economic system.

We are living times where awareness on afflicting realities is lagging behind events. We must sow ideas and expose deceit, sophism and hypocrisy with means and methods that counteract the institutional lies and disinformation. The experience of 40 years of slanders falling on Cuba like heavy rain has taught us to trust the instinct and intelligence of the peoples.

The countries of Europe have given the world a good example of what can be achieved with rationality and intelligence. After centuries of fighting one another they understood that even rich industrial countries like them would not survive in isolation. [George] Soros, a well-known character in the world of finances, and his group launched a speculative attack that brought Great Britain to its knees. That country had been the master of a great empire, the unquestioned queen of finances and owner of the reserve currency; a role now played by the dollar and the United States.

The franc, the peseta and the lira also suffered the scourge of speculation. The dollar and the euro are carefully watching each other. A prospective adversary has emerged to challenge the privileged US currency. The United States is anxiously betting on its difficulties and failure. We shall follow events closely.

In anguish, uncertainty and doubt some are looking for eclectic alternatives. However, the world has no other alternative to the morally and socially indefensible, ecologically and economically unsustainable and inhuman neo-liberal globalization but to establish a fair distribution of the wealth that human beings can create with their industrious hands and fruitful intelligence. The tyranny of an order that imposes blind, anarchic and chaotic principles leading the human species toward an abyss must be stopped. Nature must be saved. National identities must be preserved. The culture of every country must be protected. Equality, fraternity and true liberty must prevail. The unfathomable gap between the rich and the poor countries, and within each country, must not continue to widen it must rather diminish until one day it ceases to exist. Let it be the merits, the ability, the creative spirit and what man can contribute to the well-being of humanity that determine their differences and not theft, speculation or the exploitation of the weaker. A humane spirit should truly be proclaimed, not with hypocritical words but with deeds.

Dear fellow citizens,

The people waging a heroic struggle in the conditions of the special period to save their homeland, the Revolution and the achievements of socialism are adamantly advancing toward their goals like the combatants who marched with Camilo and Che from the Sierra Maestra to the Escambray. As [Julio Antonio] Mella said, any time in the future must be better. This must be proven through the goals we have set ourselves for 1999. We must consolidate our achievements, we should study, work, struggle and fight in the spirit of our heroic comrades in Uvero, in the glorious days of the huge enemy offensive, in the battles and the events that we have recalled today. The setback at Alegria de Pio is already behind us, we have passed by Cinco Palmas and rallied our forces. Now we are ready to triumph just like 300 triumphed over 10,000. We are much stronger now and victory is certain. (Applause)

I assure you all, especially the youth, that the next 40 years will be decisive for the world. You have incomparably more complex and difficult tasks ahead of you, new and glorious goals. The immense honor of being Cuban revolutionaries demands it of you. We will be fighting for our people and for Mankind, and our voice will be heeded at a great distance.

Today's battle is hard and difficult. In ideological warfare there are also casualties like in hot wars. Not everyone has the heart to endure rough times and difficult conditions.

I was reminding you today that during the war, under the bombs and enduring all sorts of hardships, one out of every ten young volunteers who enrolled in the school was able to withstand it but that one youth was worth ten, a hundred, a thousand. Building awareness, shaping the character, educating in the tough school of life in our times, instilling solid ideas, using irrefutable arguments, preaching by the example and trusting man's honor can create a situation where, out of every ten, nine will remain at

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their combat position alongside the flag, alongside the Revolution and alongside the Motherland (Applause).

Socialism or death!

Homeland or death!

We will win!

(Ovation)

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