

## [Speech by Commander-In-Chief Fidel Castro on his arrival in Havana on 8 January 1959](#) **[1]**

### **Date:**

08/01/1959

Fellow countrymen,

Speaking here tonight, I'm presented with perhaps one of the most difficult tasks in this long struggle, which began on November 30, 1956, in Santiago de Cuba.

The people are listening, the revolutionary fighters are listening, and the regular troops - whose fate is in our hands - are listening also.

I believe this to be a turning point in our history: the tyranny has been overthrown. The rejoicing is immense. But there is still much to be done. We mustn't fool ourselves into believing that the future will be easy; everything may be more difficult in the future.

Telling the truth is the first duty of all revolutionaries. Deceiving the people, raising false hopes, always brings the worst consequences, and I feel it's necessary to warn everyone against over-optimism.

How did the Rebel Army win the war? Telling the truth. How did the tyranny lose the war? Deceiving the troops.

When we suffered a setback, we announced it over Radio Rebelde, criticizing the mistakes any officer may have made, and warning all the comrades to make sure they didn't let the same thing happen to any other unit. That was not the way with the army units. Many of them repeated the same mistakes, because the officers and troops were never told the truth.

That's why I mean to start - or rather continue - with the same system: that of always telling the people the truth.

We have made headway, maybe taken a big step forward. Here we are in the capital, here we are in Columbia: the revolutionary forces have apparently prevailed; a government has been formed and recognized by several countries in the world; it seems the peace has been won. Nevertheless, we mustn't be complacent. While the people were laughing today, while the people were cheering, we were worrying; and the bigger the crowds that came to welcome us, and the greater the jubilation of the people, the more we worried, because also the greater was our obligation to history and to the people of Cuba.

The Revolution is still being led by an army in battle order. Who, now and in the future, may be the enemies of the Revolution? Who, standing before this victorious people, could be the future enemies of the Revolution? The worst enemies which the Cuban Revolution could face in the future are us, the revolutionaries.

This is what I always told the rebel fighters: when we no longer have the enemy before us, when the war is over, we ourselves are potentially the only enemies of the Revolution; that is why we said, and I repeat, that we will be tougher on the rebel soldiers than on anyone else, more demanding than with

anyone else, because the triumph or failure of the Revolution will depend on them.

There are many kinds of revolutionaries. We have been hearing talk about revolution for a long time: up to 10th March, they were saying that a revolution was under way, "revolution" was on everyone's lips, and everything was "revolutionary". The soldiers were assembled here and were told about the "10th March Revolution" (LAUGHTER).

We've been hearing talk about revolutionaries for a long time. I remember my first notions of the revolutionary, before study and a certain maturity made me aware of what a revolution really was, and what a revolutionary really was. Our first impressions of revolutionaries were gained as children, and we were told: so-and-so was a revolutionary, fought in this or that engagement, or this or that operation, or placed bombs; or some other Joe was a revolutionary. "Revolutionary" even became a class. At that time there were revolutionaries who saw revolution as a living, who wanted a living based on having been a revolutionary, on having placed a bomb, or two bombs. And maybe those that talked the most were the ones who'd done least. But the fact is that they applied to the ministries for jobs, so as to live parasitic existences, to reap the rewards for what they had done at that time, for a revolution which sadly never got off the ground. It seems to me that the first revolution with a real chance of succeeding is this one, so long as we don't let it slip through our fingers... (SHOUTS OF "No!" AND APPLAUSE).

The revolutionary of my childhood went about with a .45-calibre gun in his belt and wanted to live on the respect it commanded. He was to be feared: he was capable of killing anyone. He would arrive at the office of high officials with the air of a man who must be listened to. In reality, we wondered: where is the revolution these people fought? Because there was no revolution, and very few revolutionaries.

The first thing that we, the protagonists of this Revolution, must ask ourselves, is what did we expect to achieve? Whether in any of us lurked ambition, a desire to command, some ignoble purpose; whether there was an idealist in each of those who fought in this revolution, or was it someone who was using idealism as a pretext for pursuing other ends; whether we undertook this revolution thinking that as soon as the tyranny was defeated, we would take over the reins of power; whether we were all going to drive around in limousines; whether we were all going to live like kings, whether we would all have mansions, and that life for us would be a stroll in the park, on the strength of having been revolutionaries and having vanquished the tyranny; whether what we were planning was to oust certain politicians; whether what we were planning was simply to remove certain men and put others in their place; or whether we were all truly disinterested, whether we all acted out of a spirit of self-sacrifice, whether all of us were willing to give our all and receive nothing in return, and whether, beforehand, we were ready to give up everything and continue on the austere path of the genuine revolutionary (PROLONGED APPLAUSE). We must address that question, because such soul-searching could have far-reaching implications for the future destiny of Cuba, of ourselves and of the people.

When I hear mention of columns, when I hear mention of battle fronts, when I hear mention of more-or-less heavy troop concentrations, I always think: I have our strongest column right here, our best troops - the only troops able to win the war alone - right here. Those troops are the people! (APPLAUSE).

No general is a greater asset than the people; no army is a greater force than the people. If you asked me what troops I prefer to lead, I would say I prefer to command the people (APPLAUSE), because the people are invincible. And it was the people who won this war, because we had no tanks, we had no planes, we had no heavy artillery, we had no military academies, we had no recruitment and training camps, we had no divisions, or regiments, or companies, or platoons, or even squads (PROLONGED APPLAUSE).

Well then. Who won the war? The people, the people won the war. This war wasn't won by anyone except the people - I say that in case anyone thinks he won it, or if some troop unit thinks they won it (APPLAUSE). And so the victor's crown goes to the people.

But there's another thing: the Revolution doesn't affect me as a person, or any other commander as a

person; or any captain, or any column, or any company. Who the Revolution affects is the people (APPLAUSE)

It's the people who gain or lose with the Revolution. If it was the people who suffered the horrors of these seven years, it is the people who must now consider whether in 10, 15 or 20 years they, and their children, and their grandchildren, are going to go on suffering the horrors the Republic of Cuba has suffered from its inception, crowned with dictatorships like those of Machado and those of Batista (PROLONGED APPLAUSE).

The people are greatly affected by whether we're going to make a good job of this revolution, or if we're going to make the same mistakes as in the last revolution, or the one before that, or the one before that. And so we'll suffer the consequences of our mistakes, since there are no mistakes which do not affect the people, no political mistake which does not have to be paid for, sooner or later.

Circumstances alter cases. For instance, I think the present opportunity offers more chances than ever before for the Revolution to fully meet its aims. Perhaps that's why the people are so jubilant, forgetting somewhat the toil and sweat that still lie ahead.

One of the nation's main desires, a reflection of the past horrors of the repression and the war, is the yearning for peace, for peace with freedom, for peace with justice, for peace with rights. Nobody wants peace on other terms: Batista talked about peace, about order, but no-one wanted that peace, because its price was subjugation.

Now the people have the sort of peace they wanted: peace without dictatorship, peace without censorship, peace without persecution (PROLONGED APPLAUSE).

Perhaps the greatest joy at this moment is felt by Cuban mothers. Mothers of soldiers, mothers of revolutionaries, mothers of any citizen, are now basking in the knowledge that their sons are finally out of danger (APPLAUSE).

The worst crime that could be committed now in Cuba, would be a crime against the peace. The thing that nobody in Cuba could forgive now would be if someone conspired against the peace (APPLAUSE).

Anyone who acts now against the nation's peace, anyone who threatens the peace of mind and happiness of millions of Cuban mothers, is a criminal and a traitor (APPLAUSE). Anybody who is unwilling to give up something for the sake of peace, who is unwilling to give up everything for the sake of the nation's peace at this juncture, is a criminal and a traitor (APPLAUSE).

Since that's how I see things, I say and I swear before my compatriots that if any of my comrades, or our movement, or I myself, prove to be the slightest obstacle to the nation's peace, from this very moment the people may do with all of us what they will, and tell us what we must do (APPLAUSE). Because I'm a man capable of self-sacrifice, as I have demonstrated more than once in my life, and have passed on to my comrades; I believe I have earned the moral right and have the standing and authority to speak at such a moment as this (APPLAUSE AND SHOUTS OF "Long live Fidel Castro!")

And those to whom I should speak first are the revolutionaries, in case of the need - or rather, because of the need - to get the message across early.

The decade following the Machado's fall is not far behind us. Perhaps one of the greatest evils of that struggle was the spawning of bands of revolutionaries, which promptly started shooting at each other (APPLAUSE). And as a result, what happened was the arrival of Batista, who stayed in power for 11 years.

When the 26th July Movement was organized, also when we started this war, I thought that although the sacrifices we were making were great, although the conflict would be long - and it has been: over two

years, two years that were no picnic for us, two years of hard struggle, from when we restarted the campaign with a handful of men, until we arrived at the capital of the Republic. Despite the sacrifices that awaited us, we were comforted by an idea: it was clear that the 26th July Movement had the overwhelming support and sympathy of the people (APPLAUSE); it was clear that the 26th July Movement had the almost unanimous support of Cuba's youth (APPLAUSE). It seemed that, this time, a large, powerful organization would be able to calm the anxieties of our people, and would forestall the terrible consequences of the proliferation of revolutionary organizations.

I think we should all have belonged to a single revolutionary organization from the outset, either ours or someone else's - the 26th, the 27th or the 50th or whatever. If in the last analysis we were all the same, whether we fought in the Sierra Maestra or in the Escambray or in Pinar del Río, and were young men, and men with the same ideals, what was the point of having half a dozen revolutionary organizations?

Ours was simply the first; ours was simply the one which fought the first battle at the Moncada barracks, the one which landed from the 'Granma' on 2nd December (APPLAUSE), and which fought alone against the tyranny's entire force for over a year (APPLAUSE); which had a mere 12 men, kept the rebel flag flying, showed the people that it was possible to fight and to win; which put paid to all the false notions in the country about revolution. Because here everyone was conspiring with the corporal, with the sergeant, or bringing weapons into Havana, which were seized by the police (APPLAUSE), until we arrived and showed that that wasn't the way to fight, that a different approach was needed, that new tactics and strategies had to be invented, that it was the strategies and tactics which we had put into practice which led to the most remarkable victory in the history of the Cuban people (APPLAUSE).

And I want the Cuban people to tell me honestly whether or not this is true (APPLAUSE AND SHOUTS OF "Yes!")

And another question: the 26th July Movement had a clear majority of the people's support - is that true or not? (SHOUTS OF "Yes!"). And how did the struggle end? I'll tell you: the Rebel Army (which is what our army is called), from what was started in the Sierra Maestra, by time of the fall of the tyranny, had taken the whole of Oriente, the whole of Camagüey province, part of Las Villas, the whole of Matanzas, La Cabaña, Columbia, the police prefecture and Pinar del Río (APPLAUSE).

The end of the conflict was determined by the coordination of our forces: not for nothing our columns crossed the Camagüey plains - pursued by thousands of troops with air support - and reached Las Villas; and because the Rebel Army had Comandante Camilo Cienfuegos (PROLONGED APPLAUSE) at Las Villas, and because it had Comandante Ernesto Guevara at Las Villas (PROLONGED APPLAUSE) on 1st January, following Cantillo's treachery (SHOUTS OF "Down with traitors!")... Because it had them there, on the 1st, I was able to order Comandante Camilo Cienfuegos to advance with 500 men on the capital and attack Columbia (APPLAUSE); because it had Comandante Ernesto Guevara at Las Villas, I was able to tell him to advance on the capital and take La Cabaña (APPLAUSE).

All the regiments, all the significant military strongholds, were in the hands of the Rebel Army. And nobody gave them to us; nobody said to us: "Go there, go there, go there". It was our efforts and our sacrifice, our experience and our organization, which led to those results (APPLAUSE).

Does this mean the others didn't fight? No. Does this mean that the others deserve no credit? No. Because we all of us fought, because the whole people fought. There was no Sierra in Havana, but there are hundreds of dead comrades, murdered for doing their revolutionary duty. There was no Sierra in Havana, but even so the general strike was a decisive factor in the completeness of the Revolutionary victory (APPLAUSE).

In saying this, all I'm doing is putting things in context: the role of the 26th July Movement in this struggle, how it guided the people in those moments when elections and electioneering were talked about here. Once I had to write an article from Mexico entitled "Frente a Todos", because we were at odds with the general opinion, defending our revolutionary manifesto, the strategy of this revolution,

which was drawn up by the Movement; and the culmination of this revolution, which was the crushing defeat of the tyranny, with its key strongholds in the hands of the Rebel Army, organized by the 26th July Movement.

The 26th July Movement not only devised the guidelines for war but also established how the enemy was to be treated during the hostilities. This has been perhaps the first revolution in history in which not a single prisoner of war has been murdered (PROLONGED APPLAUSE); in which no wounded have been abandoned, in which no-one has been tortured (APPLAUSE); because that was the standing order established by the rebel Army. And another thing: this is the only revolution in the world which has not produced a general (APPLAUSE) or even a colonel, because the rank I took or my comrades assigned to me was that of comandante [major], and I haven't changed it, despite our having won numerous battles and having won the war; I'm still a comandante, and I don't want any other rank (APPLAUSE).

And the moral effect, the fact that we who started this war chose a particular rank within the military hierarchy, was that no-one dared to rank themselves above the level of comandante - although by the look of things, this has resulted in a surfeit of comandantes.

I think the people agree with my not mincing words, because having fought as I have for the rights of every citizen at least gives me the right to tell the truth out loud (APPLAUSE). And also because the interests of the homeland are in play: I won't countenance the slightest compromise with risks threatening the Cuban Revolution (APPLAUSE).

Does everyone have the same moral right to speak? I say that those to whom more credit is due have more right to speak than those less meritorious. I think that men who seek equality of moral prerogatives should first earn equality of merit. I believe the Revolution has culminated as it should, with Comandante Camilo Cienfuegos - veteran of two years and one month of fighting - (APPLAUSE), as the chief of Columbia; with comandante Efigenio Ameijeiras, who lost three brothers in this war and is a veteran of the 'Granma' and comandante by virtue of the battles he has waged (APPLAUSE), as the Republic's Chief of Police; and with Ernesto Guevara - true hero, member of the 'Granma' expedition and veteran of two years and one month of fighting in Cuba's highest and toughest mountain terrain - as chief of La Cabaña (APPLAUSE); and with each regiment in the various provinces commanded by the men who have sacrificed most and fought hardest for this revolution. And if that's the way things are, no-one has the right to object.

First and foremost, merit must be recognized; those who do not recognize merit are mere upstarts (APPLAUSE), lacking the merits of others but seeking the same prerogatives.

The Republic, or the Revolution, is entering a new stage. Would it be right for ambition or the cult of personality to emerge and threaten the destiny of the Revolution? (SHOUTS OF "No!"). What is it that interests the people, because it is the people who have the last word here? (SHOUTS OF "Freedom! Freedom!"). They are interested first and foremost in freedoms, in the rights they were deprived of, and in peace. And they've got them, because they now have all the freedoms, all the rights that the tyranny took from them, and they have peace (APPLAUSE).

What do the people want? An honest government. An honest government: isn't that what the people want? (SHOUTS OF "Yes!"). They have it here: an upright judge as President of the Republic (APPLAUSE). What do they want - young and honest men as ministers in the revolutionary government? (SHOUTS OF "Yes!"). They have them here: examine the ministers of the revolutionary government one by one, and tell me whether there's a thief or a criminal or a scoundrel among them (SHOUTS OF "No!").

There are many men eligible to be ministers in Cuba by virtue of their integrity and ability, but they can't all be ministers, because there can be only 14, 15 or 16. And the people don't care who so-and-so is, but that whoever he is, that he is young and honest (APPLAUSE). And here the important thing is that those who've been appointed have those qualities, and not whether so-and-so is in or out, because the so-and-so's don't matter a damn at this juncture, to the Revolution or to the Republic (APPLAUSE).

Can anyone, aspiring to be a minister, seek to shed blood in this country? (SHOUTS OF "No!"). Can any group, having been denied three or four ministries, shed blood in this country or undermine the peace? (SHOUTS OF "No!"). If the governing team which the Cuban people have now is no good, the people will have the opportunity of throwing it out - not voting for it at the polls, but ousting it in an election (APPLAUSE). This isn't a case where the way to get rid of a mediocre government team is for someone start a revolution or carry out a coup d'état, since everybody knows that elections will be held and if the administration is no good, the people will have the last word, without let or hindrance. Not doing what Batista did, 80 days before an election, saying that he was fighting the government and making a series of accusations against that government, saying that it was his mission to get rid of it and that this was the patriotic thing to do. Coups d'état and attacks on the constitution and rule of law are gone forever from here (APPLAUSE).

These things need to be said, to prevent the emergence of demagoguery and misinformation and attempts to divide us; to ensure that the first sign of vaunting ambition by anyone is recognized at once by the people (APPLAUSE). And for my part, I say that since who I want to command is the people, because they are the best troops, and that I prefer the people to all the armed columns put together; I say that the first thing I will always do when I see a threat to the Revolution, is to call on the people (APPLAUSE). Because by talking to the people, we can avoid bloodshed. Because here, we should call on the people a thousand times before firing a shot, and talk to the people so that the people, without shoot-outs, solve the problems. I have faith in the people, and I know what the people can do and I believe I have demonstrated it; and I say that if the people so choose, there will never be another shot fired in this country (APPLAUSE). Because public opinion has tremendous strength and has tremendous influence, especially when there's no dictatorship. Under dictatorship, public opinion is nothing; in times of freedom, public opinion is everything, and the guns must yield and kneel before public opinion (APPLAUSE). How am I doing, Camilo? (SHOUTS OF "Long live Camilo!")

I am speaking to the people in this way because I have always liked to look ahead, and I think that talking to the people ahead of events can protect the Revolution from the only remaining future threats; while these are not great, I want to make sure that the Revolution can take root without the shedding of another drop of Cuban blood (APPLAUSE).

My main concern is that abroad, where the Revolution has caught the imagination of the whole world, it must not be said that, within three weeks, or four weeks, or a month, or one week, more Cuban blood has been shed to consolidate this Revolution, because in that case this Revolution would not be an example (APPLAUSE).

I would not have talked like this when we were a group of 12 men, because when we were a group of 12 men all we had to look forward to was fighting, fighting, fighting. And in those circumstances, fighting was right. But now, when we've got the planes, the tanks, the artillery and the immense majority of men under arms, and a navy, several army companies and enormous military power (SHOUTS OF "And the people!" "And the people!") People ... What I'm saying is: now that we have all that, I'm alarmed by the idea of fighting, because now there's no merit in fighting. I'd rather go back to the Sierra Maestra, with 12 men, to fight all the tanks, than come with all the tanks to shoot at anyone here (APPLAUSE).

And those I ask to give us much help, those I beg to help me, are the people (APPLAUSE), public opinion, so as to disarm the power-hungry, to denounce immediately those who are now beginning to show their true colors (APPLAUSE).

I'm not today going to embark on personal or specific attacks, because it's early days, too soon to start public controversies - although when the time comes, I don't mind, because I have no inhibitions about plain speaking when it's necessary - and because the people are rejoicing, and because among the body of fighters - I'm not saying among all their leaders, but certainly most of their leaders - and there's Carlos Prío Socarrás, for example, who came to Cuba with the aim of helping the Revolution with no strings attached, as he says, absolutely without any ulterior motive (APPLAUSE); he has made no protest

about what's happened, not the slighted protest, has not made the least complaint, or expressed the least disagreement regarding the cabinet; he knows the cabinet is composed of honest men and of young men, who well deserve a vote of confidence in their work.

And then there are the leaders of other organizations, equally prepared. And there's another thing: the bodies of fighting men, the men who fought and who were motivated solely by ideals, the men who fought, in all the organizations: they are figures of high patriotism, with strongly revolutionary, noble sentiments, who will always think the way the people think; I'm sure that whoever commits the lunacy of trying to spark a civil war will incur the condemnation of the entire people (APPLAUSE) and will lose the support of the rank-and-file fighters, who will not follow him. And it would be lunacy indeed, to challenge not only our forces in their present condition, but also to defy reason, the law of the land and the entire Cuban people (APPLAUSE).

And I'm saying all this because I want to ask the people a question: I want to ask the people a question that interests me greatly, and interests the people greatly; so tell me: To what end, at this juncture, are clandestine weapons being stockpiled? Why are weapons being hidden in various parts of Havana? What are weapons being smuggled in for, at this juncture? What for? I'm telling you there are elements of a certain revolutionary organization who are hiding weapons (SHOUTS OF "Let's find them!"), who are stockpiling arms and are smuggling arms. All the arms captured by the Rebel Army are in the barracks, where not a single weapon has been touched, nobody has taken any home, or hidden any. They are in the barracks under lock and key. It's the same in Pinar del Río, in La Cabaña, in Columbia, in Matanzas, in Santa Clara, in Camagüey, and in Oriente. Nobody has loaded up trucks with weapons to hide them anywhere: these weapons are in the barracks.

I'm going to ask you a question, because speaking frankly and analyzing problems is how you solve them, and I'm ready to do everything in my power to solve them as they should be solved: with reasoning and intelligence, and with the influence of public opinion, which is in charge, and not with force. Because if one believes in force, if problems had to be solved by the use of force, there would be no need to talk to the people, or to put this problem to them, but to go and look for those arms (APPLAUSE).

And what we must try to do here is persuade the revolutionary fighters, the idealists, who could be misled by such machinations, to turn their backs on the treacherous honchos who are involved in these activities, and align themselves with those they serve first and foremost - the people.

I'm going to ask you a question: Weapons for what purpose? To fight whom? To fight the revolutionary government, which has the support of the entire people? (SHOUTS OF "No!"). Is the Republic's present Urrutia administration the same as the Batista administration? (SHOUTS OF "No!"). Weapons for what purpose? Is there a dictatorship here? (SHOUTS OF "No!") Are they going to attack a free government that respects the rights of the people? (SHOUTS OF "No!") Now, when there's no censorship, when the press is completely free, freer than it's ever been, and has the certainty of knowing that it will always be free, that censorship is gone forever? (APPLAUSE). Now, when the whole people can assemble freely? Now, when there's no torture, no political prisoners, no murders, no terror? Now, when there's nothing but joy, when all the traitorous union leaders have been sacked and we're on the point of holding elections in all the unions? (APPLAUSE). When all the citizen's rights have been restored, when elections are to be called as soon as possible - arms for what? Hiding arms to what end? To blackmail the President of the Republic? To threaten the peace? To set up gangster organizations? Are we to go back to daily shoot-outs in the streets of Havana? Arms for what?

Well, I can tell you that two days ago, elements of a certain organization went to a barracks - the San Antonio barracks which were under the jurisdiction of Comandante Camilo Cienfuegos and under my jurisdiction as Commander-In-Chief of all the forces - and made off with the arms stored there; they took 500 small arms, 6 machine guns and 80,000 cartridges (SHOUTS OF "Let's find them!").

And I tell you frankly there could not have been a worse provocation. Because to do this to men who've

been fighting for this country for years, to men who are now tasked with keeping the nation's peace and are trying to do things properly, is a shameful act and an unjustifiable provocation.

And what we've done is not to go looking for those guns, exactly because - as I said earlier - what we want is to talk to the people, use the influence of public opinion, so that the honchos behind these criminal operations find themselves without men. So that the idealistic fighters - they're true idealists, the men who fought in all the organizations here - know about it, so they can demand accountability for these acts.

And that's why we haven't even allowed ourselves to be provoked, why we have kept our cool despite this stealing of weapons - an unjustifiable theft because here there is no dictatorship; no-one is afraid that we're going to turn into dictators - and I'll tell you why: those who become dictators are those who don't have the support of the people, who have to resort to force because they don't get votes at election time (APPLAUSE). We couldn't become dictators, we who have evoked such affection - universal, total and absolute affection - among the people. Not to mention our principles, which would never allow us the effrontery of holding onto a position by force, because that disgusts us - it's not for nothing that we have been the standard bearers in a struggle against an ugly, repellent tyranny (APPLAUSE).

We will never need to use force, because the people are with us, and also because the day the people frown on us will be the last day they do so: we'll quit (APPLAUSE). Because we see this as duty, not as a pleasure; we see this as work, which may mean that we go without sleep, without rest, without food, traveling around the island and working honestly to serve our country. It means something that we have nothing, and that we will always be men who have nothing (APPLAUSE AND SHOUTS OF: "You have the people!"). And the people will never see us commit acts of immorality or grant privileges to anybody or tolerate an injustice or steal or make ourselves rich or anything of the kind. Because we see power as self-sacrifice, and believe me, if it were not so, after all the show of affection I've had from the people, all this tremendous demonstration today, if one were not committed to performing a duty, one should depart, or retire, or die, because after so much affection and so much trust, not doing one's duty to this people is simply unthinkable! (PROLONGED APPLAUSE).

And if it weren't for this duty, if it weren't for this duty - I'm telling you - what I would do now is take my leave of the people and keep with me always the affection I've received today, and have people address me with same terms of encouragement with which they have addressed me today.

However, I know that power is a burdensome, a complicated affair, that our missions and tasks are difficult, like this very problem which has confronted us, which is a really difficult one, a hard nut to crack, and one tackles it because the one thing one is not going to say to the people at this juncture is "I'm leaving". (SHOUTS OF "Long live the father of the homeland!" FOLLOWED BY AN OVATION).

There is another reason we're not interested in using force: on the day anyone takes up arms here, I would go so far as to call on my worst enemy, on the person who was the most inimical to me and, assuming he was prepared to do the will of the people, I would tell him: "Look, take all these forces, all these troops and all these arms" and I would be so easy in my mind, because I know that the day there's an armed uprising, I'll head straight back to the Sierra Maestra and we'd see how long the new dictatorship stayed in power (APPLAUSE).

I think there are more than enough reasons for everyone to see that we have no interest in exercising power by the use of force.

The President of the Republic has entrusted me with the thorniest of tasks, that of reorganizing the Republic's armed institutions, and has assigned to me the post of Commander-In-Chief of all the nation's air, sea and land-based forces (APPLAUSE AND SHOUTS OF "You deserve it!"). No, I don't deserve it, because it's a sacrifice for me, and it's absolutely no reason for pride, no reason for vanity; for me, it's a sacrifice. But I want the people to tell me whether they think I should take the job (PROLONGED



APPLAUSE AND (SHOUTS OF "Yes!").

I think that if we created an army with 12 men, and those 12 men are now in positions of command, I think that if we taught our army that no prisoner can be murdered, that the wounded can never be abandoned, that no prisoner can ever be beaten, we are the men who can teach the Republic's armed institutions the same things that we taught that army (APPLAUSE). To have armed institutions in which not a single one of their men ever again beats a prisoner, or tortures one or kills one (APPLAUSE). And also because we can serve as a bridge between the revolutionaries and the decent soldiers, the ones who have not stolen or murdered, because those soldiers, the ones who have not stolen or murdered, have the right to remain in the armed forces (APPLAUSE); by the same token, there'll be no escape from the firing squad for those who have committed murder (PROLONGED APPLAUSE).

Moreover, all the revolutionary fighters who want to belong to the Republic's regular forces have the right, whatever organization they belong to, to keep their existing ranks ... The doors are open to all the revolutionary fighting men who want to pitch in, who want to do something useful for the country. And if that's the case, if there are freedoms, if there is government by honest young men, if the country is satisfied, if it trusts that government and the men in command of the armed forces, if there are going to be elections, if the doors are open to everyone, why stockpile weapons?

I want you to tell me whether what the people want is that we make peace, or whether they want a guy with a gun on every street corner; I want you to tell me if the people are in agreement with or believe it to be right that everyone here who wants a private army can have one, and can stop following his superior's orders (SHOUTS OF "No!"); and whether that's the way to get order and peace in the Republic of Cuba (SHOUTS OF "No!").

(SOMEONE SHOUTS: "Purging of the armed forces!")

'Super-purging', not purging (APPLAUSE).

(SHOUTS OF: "Tell us about Raúl!"). Raúl is at the Moncada barracks, which is where he should be now.

And these are the issues I wanted to raise with the people today. As soon as possible the guns must leave the streets, the guns must disappear from the streets (APPLAUSE). Because there is no longer an enemy confronting us, because there's no longer any reason to fight anybody. And if one day it becomes necessary to fight a foreign enemy or a movement that attacks the Revolution, it won't be some limited engagement, it'll be the entire people that fight (PROLONGED APPLAUSE).

The weapons belong in the barracks. Nobody has the right to a private army here (APPLAUSE).

The elements carrying on these suspicious operations have maybe found an excuse for these in the fact that I've been appointed, together with my comrades, to do a job assigned to us by the President, and have suggested the existence of a political army. A political army? As I've been saying, the entire people are with us; does that really make ours a political army?

I want the people to know, I want Cuban mothers to know, that I will always do whatever is in our power to solve the country's problems without shedding a drop of blood (APPLAUSE). I want Cuban mothers to know that not another shot will be fired here on our account; and I want to ask the people, and to ask the press, and to ask every sane, reasonable man in the country, to help us solve these problems with the support of public opinion; not with horse-trading, because when people arm themselves and make threats in order to get something, that is immoral and I'll never have truck with it (APPLAUSE). Now that certain elements have started stockpiling weapons, I can assure you that I won't accept the slightest concession, because that would be debasing the ideals of the Revolution (APPLAUSE). And what needs to be done is to get those who don't belong to the Republic's regular forces - to which every revolutionary fighting man has the right to belong - to return the weapons to the barracks, because weapons are superfluous here, now there's no tyranny, and it's been demonstrated that arms are only

appropriate when there's a good reason for having them and the people are behind you; otherwise, all they're good for is murder and kidnapping (APPLAUSE).

I want to tell the people also that they can be sure that the law of the land will be respected, that there'll be no gangsterism here, nor street gangs, nor banditry, simply because there will be zero tolerance. The Republic's weaponry is now in the hands of the revolutionaries. I hope those arms will never have to be used, but on the day when the people orders their deployment to ensure peace, law and order, or the exercise of their rights, when the people so order, when the people so desire, in the presence of a real need, then the arms will do their job, will do their duty, simply (APPLAUSE).

Let no-one think that we're going to respond to provocation; because we're too level-headed to respond to provocation, because we have responsibilities too important for us ever to take hasty measures or engage in saber-rattling or anything of that kind, and because I'm acutely aware of the need to exhaust - and I will always exhaust - every means of persuasion, every reasonable means, every human means to avoid the shedding of another drop of blood in Cuba. So as far as provocations are concerned, no-one needs to worry that I'm going to go off the deep end; because when the patience of all of us has run out, we'll get some more patience, and when that runs out, we'll get even more. That will be our rule (APPLAUSE). And that must be among the standing orders of every man bearing arms and of those wielding power: never tire of forbearance, never tire of accepting abuse and provocations of all kinds, except in cases threatening the most sacrosanct interests of the people. But then only when the case is clear-cut, only when demanded by the whole nation, the press, the civic institutions, the workers' organizations, and the people as a whole; when they call for action, and only then. And what I will always do in these circumstances, is come to the people and explain: "Look, this has happened".

On this occasion, I've avoided naming names, because I don't want to poison the atmosphere, and because I don't want to add to the tension; all I want is, simply, to avoid these dangers to the people, because it would be very sad if this Revolution, bought at the price of so much sacrifice - not that it's going to be thwarted, because there's no way this Revolution could be thwarted, because it's known that the people are behind it, and given everything it offers to the people, there's not the slightest risk - but it would be very sad if after the example we have shown Latin America, another shot was fired here.

It's true that in almost every revolution, after the conflict ends, comes another, and another. Consider the history of all revolutions, in Mexico and everywhere. However, it seems that this one is going to be an exception, as it has been an exception in every other respect. It has been extraordinary in every other respect, and we would be gratified if it were extraordinary in the sense that not another shot was fired here. And I think that will be the case, I think the Revolution will triumph without another shot being fired. Do you know why? Because it is truly laudable, the degree of integrity which has evolved in this country, the civic-mindedness of this people, the discipline of this people, the spirit of this people; really, I'm proud of the entire people, I have tremendous faith in the people of Cuba (APPLAUSE). It's worthwhile, making sacrifices for this people.

Today I had the satisfaction of giving an example in front of the entire press. There was a crowd in front of the presidential palace, and they were telling me it would take 1,000 men to be able to get away from there. So I stopped, and I asked the people to form two ranks. There was no need for even one man, I said, and that I was going to get there by myself. And in a few minutes, the people formed two ranks, and we passed through without the slightest difficulty. That's the people of Cuba, and that demonstration was performed in front of the entire press corps (APPLAUSE).

From now on, no more bouquets and ovations. From now on, for us: work. Tomorrow will be a day like any other, as will all the rest, and we'll get used to freedom. Now we are content, because we were without freedom for a long time, but within a week we'll be worrying about other things: whether we've got enough money to pay the rent, the electricity, to buy food. These are the problems the revolutionary government should really be solving, the million problems of the people of Cuba, and to that end it has a council of ministers composed of young men I know to be fired with enthusiasm, who I'm certain are going to change the Republic of Cuba - I'm certain (PROLONGED APPLAUSE). Also because there's a

president who is securely installed in office, who is free of any danger, because the dangers I was talking about were not such as to overthrow the regime - nothing remotely of the kind - but the danger that another single drop of blood might be shed. But the President of the Republic is secure, already recognized by all the nations - well, not all, but he is quickly being recognized by all the countries in the world - and has the support of the people, and our support, the support of the revolutionary forces; and real support - support with no strings attached, support without asking for or claiming anything, because we have fought here for the foundations of civil power, and we are going to show that for us, principles take precedence over every other consideration and that we were not fighting out of personal ambition.

I think we've given enough proof of having fought without personal ambition. I don't think a single Cuban has the slightest doubt on that score.

So now we've got a lot of work to do. For my part, I'm ready to do everything I can for the benefit of my country, as I know all my comrades are, as I know are the President of the Republic and all the ministers, who will work tirelessly. And I can assure you that anyone who leaves Cuba today and comes back in two years' time, won't recognize this Republic.

I see a tremendous spirit of cooperation all over the country. I see the press, the journalists, all sectors of the nation, eager to help; and that's what's needed. The Cuban people have learned a lot: in these seven years, they've learned as if seventy years have gone by. It was said that the coup d'état set the country back 25 years; if that was the case - and it was indeed a setback of that magnitude - we've now brought about an advance of fifty. The Republic is unrecognizable: no politicking, no vice, no gambling, no stealing. We began just a few days ago, and already the Republic is virtually unrecognizable.

Now there remains a major job to be done. All the problems concerning the armed forces are issues with implications for our future activities, but, moreover, we will always do whatever is in our power for the entire people. I'm not a professional soldier, or a career soldier, or anything of that nature. I'll be here for the minimum time, and when I've finished here I'll move on to other things because, frankly, I won't be needed here for this (EXCLAMATIONS). I mean that I won't be needed within military-type operations, and that I have other aspirations of different kinds. And exactly that, among other things: the day I feel the urge to start shooting, fight, pursue a new interest, there's plenty of space here for doing stuff (APPLAUSE).

(SHOUTS OF: "We need to create jobs!"). If we don't solve these problems, this is no Revolution, comrades, because I think the basic problem of the Republic at this juncture, which will soon be a necessity for the people, when the euphoria of victory has faded, is work - a decent means of earning a living (APPLAUSE).

But that's not all, comrades: there are a thousand other things which I've been discussing throughout these days, which I assume you, to varying degrees, have heard about through the radio and the press and otherwise, because we're not going to deal with all the issues in a single evening.

Let's confine ourselves to thinking about the problems I've talked about today, and wind up a long day - I may not be tired, but I know you have to get back to homes that are a long way away (SHOUTS OF: "It doesn't matter, carry on!").

I had a date to appear on the Ante la Prensa ["Face the Press"] program tonight at 10.30 or whatever time it was, and now it's 1.30 (SHOUTS OF: "Tomorrow!"). OK, I'll leave it till tomorrow.

You will get the opportunity to hear the ministers, through the press, the radio and all the media possible.

All the friends of mine of such a long time, wherever they've come from: from the school, from the neighborhood. I can almost say I know every Cuban ...

I was saying you'll have the opportunity to hear the ministers, each of whom has his plans and will set out his program; all the men on the Council of Ministers have a close rapport with all the revolutionary elements.

The President of the Republic, with the rights attaching to his post - because he was elected without conditions - has filled most of the ministerial posts from the 26th July Movement. He exercised his right, and having asked for our cooperation, he received it fully, and we accepted responsibility for this revolutionary government.

Something I've said elsewhere: nobody should imagine that the issues will be resolved overnight. The war wasn't won in a day, or in two or in three days, and it was an uphill struggle; nor are we going to do everything that needs to be done in a day. Also, I've told the people on earlier occasions not to run away with the idea that these ministers are sages. For a start, none - or hardly any of them - has been a minister before. So none of them know how to be a minister - it's something new for them. What they are is full of good intentions. And in this I say the same as I say of the rebel commanders: look, Comandante Camilo Cienfuegos knew nothing about war, or how to handle a gun - absolutely nothing. Che Guevara knew nothing; when I met him in Mexico, his occupation was dissecting rabbits and doing medical research. Raúl didn't know anything either. Neither did Efigenio Ameijeiras. At the beginning, they knew nothing of war; at the end, I could say to them, as I in fact said, "Comrade, advance on Columbia, and take it", "Comrade, advance on La Cabaña, and take it, "Advance on Santiago, and take it", and I knew that they would succeed ... (PROLONGED APPLAUSE). Why? Because they'd learned.

Perhaps the ministers will not be able to do great things now, but I'm sure that within a few months they'll know how to solve the problems posed to them by the people, because they have what counts most: the desire to get things right and to help the people. And above all, I'm sure that not one of them will ever commit one of the classic offenses of ministers. You know which, don't you? (SHOUTS OF "Stealing!", "Stealing!"). Aha! How did you know?

Well, above all, this: the morality, the integrity of these comrades. They may not be sages, because no-one here is a sage, but I can assure you there's no shortage of men of integrity, which is what the situation calls for. Isn't that what the people have always called for, an honest government? (SHOUTS OF "Yes!"). So then, let's give them a vote of confidence, let's do that and let's wait (SHOUTING). Yes, most of them are from the "26th" , but if they're no good, they'll be replaced by others from the 27th or the 28th. We know that there are a lot of qualified people in Cuba, but they can't all be ministers. Or maybe the 26th July Movement doesn't have the right to try its hand at governing the Republic? (SHOUTS OF "Yes!").

So that's all for today. Really, there's just one other thing ... If you knew, that when I meet with the people, I lose the need for sleep, for food. You lose the need for sleep too, don't you? (SHOUTS OF "Yes!")

The important thing, or what I need to tell you, is my belief that what the people of Havana have done today, today's huge concentrations, this gathering stretching for miles - because this has been amazing, you saw it, it appeared in the films, in the photographs - I think, frankly, that the people have gone too far, because this is much more than we deserve (SHOUTS OF "No!").

I also know that never again in our lives will we see such a gathering, except on another occasion - on which I'm sure the crowds will mass again - and that's the day we die, because when the time comes to bury us, on that day, as many people as today will be here, because we will never disappoint our people!

(OVATION)

Translation of the stenographic version, filed at the Prime Minister's offices.

## **Speech by Commander-In-Chief Fidel Castro on his arrival in Havana, Delivered in Ciudad L**

Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.comandanteenjefe.biz>)

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Translation of the stenographic version, filed at the Prime Minister's offices

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