

[Speech given by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the closing session of the Young Communists League 8th Congress, held in the Havana Convention Center, Havana, 5 December 2004 \[1\]](#)

Date:

05/12/2004

Dear delegates, guests and attendees to the Young Communists League 8th Congress:

Communists:

Some of the concepts I will touch upon today have already been discussed and published; some have been developed in the heat of the struggle; others refer to goals we have attained; others are just reflections.

Today, when you have invited me to address you, I shall try to explain how and why this day is very special for all of us.

Unfortunately, the responsibility I have shouldered throughout this intense and difficult revolutionary process and, in particular, my relation with the Battle of Ideas, oblige me to make reference to my own speeches, ideas and concepts, something which in no way pleases me, so I beg your indulgence in advance.

I have never believed that ideas orbit around public figures; rather, it is the latter that ought to orbit around ideas.

The fact that I dared to make so many predictions that, today, people are recognizing as irrefutable truths stems exclusively from the experience I have accumulated. I could have died young, as did many other Cuban revolutionaries throughout our history. Yesterday's and today's enemies did everything humanly possible to achieve this aim, but I had the privilege of having struggled for many years, since early 1953, when we had the idea of seizing the Santiago de Cuba Regiment's weapons to initiate the struggle. The credit for this privilege is not mine; the true credit belongs to those who stood by their beliefs and were willing to sacrifice even their lives for the aims we espoused.

Only three days ago, when some congratulated me, reminding me of the 48th anniversary of the Granma landing, my first reaction was one of surprise. How much time has gone by and how much has occurred!

Engrossed in our present duties, some of us who took part in that action have hardly a second to look back on the beginning of that long march on which we were embarking in the days of Moncada and Granma. I would describe it all as a long learning process; it is amazing how ignorant we were when we set out on that unknown road.

Allow me to give you a concise summary, often using quotes, of the essentials of what I expressed on three different occasions prior to the Battle of Ideas, whose spirit today reigns over the 8th Congress of

our prestigious Young Communists League.

On October 8, 1997, in the Central Report to the Party's 5th Congress, I said:

"It is obvious that we need to work more closely and intensely with our youth organizations, as these times and this Party need a continuous influx of young cadres and members.

"Now more than ever, more than at any other juncture --this being the most difficult, the toughest of times-- I believe we must devote special efforts to our young people and their education, because those who come after this generation must be better.

"We want them to be fully conscious of their role, of what they can do for their country, of what they can do for the Revolution, of what they can do for their future".

On October 10, 1997, in my remarks about youths in the closing session of the Party's 5th Congress, I pointed out:

"We have the Party, we have our wonderful young people --yes, that's what I said, wonderful young people-- whom we will of course ask to do more and more political work, political work which is not the same as parroting a slogan. For a long time, the Party was also, at times, simplistic and dogmatic, working with slogans instead of arguments.

"We must work directly with the people, on a one by one basis; this means more than the work done through the press and television, through conferences or political meetings. The work of convincing and persuading human beings, one by one, is historic. Religions were created this way and have lasted thousands of years.

"We revolutionaries must do the same. Our cadres and young people must work like this and never consider anyone a lost cause.

"Based on the profoundest conviction that we are right and that we are defending what is fairest, most beautiful, most human, we must discuss things for as long as we need to, explain things as many times as necessary, we must teach and educate. Political work cannot be done in the abstract. We must delve more deeply into knowledge, into ideas, into what happens here and in the world. We must be frank, courageous, and truthful.

"There are 780, 000 Party members, and then there are all of the revolutionaries who are not Party members. It is everyone's job to make what is in many cases an exception the rule and our best experiences the norm. How could we not achieve this? What are we? What is our worth, if we cannot achieve it? Given everything we know today, and all of the possibilities open to us, we must do it. That would be the true victory of ideas".

On December 10, 1998, at the YCL's 7th Congress, I said:

"We must meet, in the heat of battle, with the leading cadres to discuss, analyze, expand on and draft plans and strategies, to take up issues and elaborate ideas, as when an army's general staff meets.

"We must use solid arguments to talk to members and non-members, to speak to those who may be confused or even to discuss and debate with those holding positions contrary to those of the Revolution or who are influenced by imperialist ideology in this great battle of ideas we have been waging for years now, precisely in order to carry out the heroic deed of resisting against the most politically, militarily, economically, technologically and culturally powerful empire that has ever existed. Young cadres must be well prepared for this task.

"In this ideological struggle, ideas are our fundamental weapons; our most important ammunition are

also ideas. We have to arm our cadres with ideas so that they, in turn, can pass these on to the young and to all of the people.

"This army knows the plan and the strategy; let the enemy learn what these are as it goes along. I am again comparing this struggle to a great battle waged by a vanguard army, an elite troop of the Revolution. I put the Revolution and the Party first; they are, after all, one and the same thing.

"In a short meeting with the new National Committee, I was able to talk to you more freely as fewer comrades were present, and we could speak even more freely and take up more discussion and opinions at a meeting with the National Bureau.

"This 7th Congress", I said then, "has been an excellent congress, one where discussions covered the broadest range of topics, where nothing led us to shy away from any issue; on the contrary, we were constantly urged to take up all of the issues, no matter how thorny or complex, in order to make the most of this meeting, and I feel we have accomplished this.

"This has been possible, we must say this categorically, thanks to the extraordinary work that has been done over the course of a year, under the leadership of the YCL's National Bureau. In fact at this point, where thanks are usually given, we should sincerely and wholeheartedly acknowledge the comrades in the Bureau and the numerous cadres who, under Otto's leadership, have been working from the time the congress was called up to this very minute.

"All of us have learned something; not only you, we have learned too.

"The Congress," I added, "shows that the YCL has become increasingly strong and that it is better organized, has more experience, greater prestige and influence than ever in key, truly strategic sectors of today's society and --even more so-- in tomorrow's society, tomorrow's Cuba. It is organized in the way these times, this historic moment, require!

"One of the extraordinary things about our Revolution is that, ever since it came into being --and it could be said that our Revolution's ideas were begotten on that university hill-- the Revolution and our young people have been as closely bound as identical, one could even say Siamese, twins. I invite you to try and find in any other country in the world a bond as strong as it has existed, exists and shall always exist in this profoundly revolutionary process. Our Revolution is reborn each day, because the ideas we stand for, the justice that we defend, the cause we fight for, is today the cause, and there can be no cause other than that of the billions of people who live on this planet.

"I say ideas because the struggle we are speaking about will not, in essence, be a war, but rather a battle of ideas. The world's problems shall not be solved through the use of nuclear weapons --this is impossible-- nor through wars. What's more, they shall not be solved through isolated revolutions that, within the order installed by neo-liberal globalization, can be crushed within a matter of days, weeks at the most.

"We cannot, however, neglect defense for even a minute, because given the unavoidable crises, a change of government, a fascist-like or far-right party in power is all it will take to return the empire to its adventuristic ways of old. We cannot overlook the risk of a military invasion. Today, the real battle is the battle of ideas.

"The Revolution was able to hold out because it sowed ideas.

"The world is rapidly being globalized; an unsustainable and intolerable world economic order is rapidly being established. Ideas are the raw material from which consciousness is forged; they are the raw material of ideology par excellence. I prefer to call them the raw material of consciousness to emphasize that it is not a question of strict and rigid ideology, but rather of an advanced consciousness, that is to say, a conviction that hundreds of millions and billions of people on this planet will inevitably

arrive at, and that it will constitute, without a doubt, the best instrument to secure the victory of those ideas throughout the world.

"Not weapons but ideas will decide this universal battle, and not because of some intrinsic value, but because of how closely they relate to the objective reality of today's world. These ideas stem from the conviction that, mathematically speaking, the world has no other way out that imperialism is unsustainable, that the system that has been imposed on the world leads to disaster, to an insurmountable crisis, and, I dare say, sooner rather than later.

"It is based on these premises and these convictions that I evaluate what we have analyzed and what we are doing these days. It is not the only way of doing it, far from it, but it is valuable because it is essential.

"This battle you are waging cannot be lost. Without the tasks you must complete, without the work you will carry out --and you will be totally successful, I have no doubt of that-- we could not even speak of our dreams, not only dreams for our compatriots, but also for all of the people in this world.

"Never before, or anywhere else, has a people done what the people of Cuba are doing today. And what it is doing today with ideas, sowing ideas, cultivating and developing ideas; this cannot lead to anything but the victory of ideas, to the firm belief that this Revolution shall not disappear nor crumble, because it is firmly planted in deeply rooted and ideas that are constantly evolving.

"Just ideas are invincible. Of them, Martí said: 'Trenches made of ideas are stronger than those made of stones' and 'a just cause --even one buried in the depths of a cave-- is mightier than an army'.

"Ideas are not simply an instrument to build consciousness and lead people to fight. Today, they have become the main weapon in the struggle, not a source of inspiration, not a guide, not a directive, but the main weapon of the struggle.

"We are not dogmatic nor can we be dogmatic, we are to avoid any sort of dogmas, as we believe in truly dialectical and flexible minds, which does not mean to admit even the slightest opportunism or pragmatism.

"We are flexible and dialectical because of our most rigid adherence to the principles and objectives of our revolutionary process and the new goals which we didn't ask anybody for, which we didn't hope or plan for, but which life and the history of these past decades have imposed on our country and our revolutionaries. And, this being the case, we have no other option but to fight with all our strength, thinking not only of ourselves but also of the well-being that the fruits of our struggle might bear for so many people around the world".

As fate would have it, the colossal Battle of Ideas that our people has been waging for exactly five years today began just one year after those words were spoken.

On July 5, 2000, on bestowing the "Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Order" on Miguel González, I looked back on how I had met him a year before, on December 2 to be precise, and how the battle for Elián's return had begun. That day, I said:

"I asked him a number of questions and, although he was obviously hurting and sad, he answered them with persuasive arguments and irrefutable proof of his affectionate, faultless and steadfast relationship with his son.

"At every moment, I could see in his face the features of a noble, sincere and serious man.

"I told him that I was convinced that the boy would never be returned through legal procedures. This was a case in which the U.S. courts had absolutely no jurisdiction, and it was the duty of the U.S.

immigration authorities to proceed with the immediate repatriation of his son. But, I was well aware of the arrogant, arbitrary, biased and conspiratorial behavior of the U.S. authorities with regard to any misdeeds and crimes committed against our people. The return of this boy could only be accomplished through an intense national and international political battle of public opinion".

The following day --as I said at that ceremony-- I spoke with other Party leaders and, without wasting a minute, I got in touch with leaders of the Young Communists League and the University Student Federation. Young people and students would be in the vanguard of this struggle, with the full support of all revolutionary forces.

Forty-eight hours later, on a Sunday evening like today exactly five years ago, one thousand young people from the Youth Technical Brigades who were just concluding a national conference took part in the first protest march held outside the US Interests Section.

Thus began the epic struggle for Elián's freedom. The battle for a child quickly became a battle for justice and the happiness of all our children and all of our people.

Guided by the profoundest conviction, already expressed in my closing remarks to the 7th Youth Congress I mentioned above, that ideas are the most important weapon in humanity's fight for its own salvation, the battle we began was not only one of thoughts, discussion, arguments and counter-arguments, but also of concrete facts and actions as well.

As part of the Battle of Ideas' work group, the Young Communists League has coordinated and spurred on nearly 200 revolutionary programs that have been created as a result of this struggle.

In these past few years, I have devoted over seven thousand hours of fruitful and unforgettable labor to the tasks of exchanging ideas, analyzing and giving guidance to this group, the majority of whose members are YCL leaders and workers', students' and women's representatives, as well as CDR-members and peasants led by our Party.

We have worked all this time to develop a critical rather than self-indulgent vision of our undertaking and our historical objectives. We have put into practice revolutionary concepts, which sweep away formalism and conformism and accelerate the transformation processes needed for our country's future.

Some have been taken from the very notes taken by YCL cadres and by others who participate in our meetings. They include:

- * No youth should be abandoned and no person should be left alone to face his fate. The YCL must work with every youth. Behind every category and every percentage is a man, a woman, a child or senior citizen.
- * There is a solution to every problem; it is a question of finding alternatives.
- * Any coordination work must be based on continuous analysis and up-to-date information so that decisions take precise account of the details; every action must be thought through, one must act quickly and never lose a minute.
- * New coordination methods and mechanisms must be found so that all bodies and organizations participate with the understanding that the nation's interests are over and above bureaucratic contradictions, cravings for power and institutional jealousy.
- * Secure high levels of involvement and commitment from those cadres and workers who participate in each and every one of the programs.
- * To exercise criticism and reflection wherever needed.

* Every idea always leads to a new idea and this new idea leads to more and more ideas. A new idea, no matter how good it seems, must be previously tested and undergo thorough experiments under real conditions.

* Discretion and compartmentalization are basic principles in program coordination and orientation. Programs shall be made public only after they have become realities; this way, we shall avoid promises that cannot be kept or that are kept and then ignored, forgotten or cast aside.

* Participating companies should neither make profits nor bear losses. Works must be executed quickly, within the budget, with quality and an optimal use of resources.

* Maintenance for equipment and facilities made available to these programs shall be provided. Everything must always be as good as new.

To this small sample of what remained in the cadres' minds, we could add hundreds of examples of what the cadres came up with when faced with the need to act swiftly and guarantee success. We had to make up for all the time lost in routine, simplistic thinking and other habits that hinder progress and frustrate the objectives that only a truly socialist system can achieve.

One day, literally said:

"Notwithstanding the rights and guarantees offered to all citizens of any race and background, the Revolution has not been as successful in its struggle to eradicate differences in the social and economic status of Cuba's black population, even though this sector plays an important role in many highly significant areas, including education and health".

These were the very words I said with no hesitation whatsoever, on February 7 last year, at the closing session of the International Pedagogy Congress 2003, which took place in the heat of the Battle of Ideas. This idea about the sad legacy of slavery, class society, capitalism and imperialism was something I had been carrying inside me and wanted to declare publicly.

Nowhere has there ever existed equality of opportunities. The possibility of studying, obtaining higher qualifications or a university degree was the exclusive privilege of the more knowledgeable and economically powerful sectors. It was only the exception among the poor who was able to beat the system.

The huge strides made by socialism had created the foundations, but we still had to take the great leap forward. Thanks to the Battle of Ideas, we can today say that the lives of children, teenagers, young people and the Cuban family is not the same as it was five years ago.

Today, a primary school teacher is responsible for only 20 pupils, something which allows him or her to provide better quality teaching, differentiated attention to each of his or her pupils and their families, thus, a more comprehensive education.

They have television sets, VCRs and computer labs at their disposal. These are incredibly efficient instruments that, used as teaching tools, greatly expand our children's knowledge. Not one child in Cuba is without access to these modern tools. Schools with no electricity are equipped today with solar panels that power computers, televisions and VCRs.

Computer science has begun to be taught at pre-school level. 12, 958 teachers of basic computer science trained in intensive courses and assigned to teach in our classrooms and all primary school teachers were given specially designed courses in the subject.

Children with special educational needs have also been taught using these new and modern educational

tools. The first School for Autistic Children, a group that has been overlooked in nearly every country in the world, was inaugurated two years ago.

Today, children begin to study English through audio-visual courses from the third grade on. They learn to play chess at school and receive cultural and artistic instruction from the first 3, 271 art instructors who graduated this past October 20. A similar or greater number of instructors shall graduate every year and work not only in the educational sector but also in cultural and social institutions in the community.

We have improved meals in schools that have a school lunch program; these are now the immense majority of those that need this program.

Systematic attention is accorded to all children found to have nutritional situations when the first program designed to weigh and measure all children aged 15 and under was conducted in 2001.

Recently, a comprehensive study of the entire infant population was completed. Aspects such as nutritional condition, schooling, family and living environment, which were measured in the study, are now being properly addressed.

All of these transformations have allowed us to implement an authentic full-day study program and have made it possible for our children in primary school to learn 2.2 times more Mathematics and 1.5 times more Spanish than they did four years ago. These figures should grow as our educational system continues to develop as planned. Opportunities for learning and for physical and intellectual development are equal for all children, regardless of where they live, skin color or social background.

The extraordinary changes that are taking place in primary school education have been accomplished with few resources cleverly used, following concepts of equality and justice and, above all, with a view to offering the same opportunities to all children throughout the country.

We shall continue to work just as intensely toward improving and developing the other levels of education.

Radical transformations have also been made to junior high schools by implementing a different educational model for children and adolescents in seventh, eighth and ninth grades—which are facing a grave crisis in other countries. This model breaks with previous educational concepts.

At this school level there is now a general all-round teacher who is responsible for 15 students and who teaches all subjects except English and Physical Education. He or she is a tutor, an educator, a mentor for each student; this gets rid of the excessive number of teachers for the various subjects under which system it was impossible to integrate the different branches of knowledge and the educational influences needed at this decisive stage of life.

Thanks to this step, the school's relationship with the family has improved qualitatively which means they can cooperate more extensively and changes have even operated in the way many parents behave towards and treat their children.

Mathematics, Spanish, History, English and Physics classes are taught using videos whose contents have been designed by the most prestigious educational specialists in the country. This gives considerable reinforcement to the efforts made by the teachers and increases the quality and depth of the classes taught.

The frequency of Mathematics, Computing, Spanish and History classes has been raised, which means the students receive more information and improve their knowledge of these subjects.

The new art instructors are also working in our junior high schools, promoting culture and bringing the

best of Cuba and the world's traditions to our adolescents.

There is a program to provide free school snacks or lunch to junior high school students. This allows them to receive the nourishment needed to sit through the double session of classes and means the students of this level are safer because they don't have to leave the school grounds until the end of the school day.

On December 2, 2004, 307,339 students and 38,246 workers in 591 urban junior high schools were receiving free school snacks. The students of 83 junior high schools still have to join the program; they will be receiving the benefits from this program in the first three months of next year.

The Behavior School also has social workers working with the students. These are responsible for organizing the way society can act to modify the causes and conditions from which social disadvantage and behavioral problems arise.

These far reaching transformations have also targeted our young people, from the age of 16 on.

We founded the social worker schools from which more than 21,485 youths have already graduated. These constitute a veritable detachment of social support and solidarity that is now working with almost all of Cuba's People's Councils. Every year another 7,000 youths are trained using new educational concepts, and not only in the schools designed for that purpose but also in their own municipalities, in what we call Home-Schools, using television, videos, and computers under the guidance of experienced teachers and in direct contact with the social conditions in their own communities. When they graduate, all have direct access to many university degree programs related to their multifaceted activity.

We set up the secondary school upgrading courses for young people aged 17 to 30 who, once they had completed ninth grade, which is now the general level for these ages, ceased to either study or work.

This has allowed more than 150,000 youths to study in these secondary school upgrading programs and receive an income appropriate to their age and needs.

The results obtained have meant that 48,406 graduates from these courses have already enrolled in various university programs --including that of medical science-- and achieved very positive results.

Throughout the Battle of Ideas we have made an old dream come true: the universalization of higher education, thus making universities accessible to all the young people who graduate from the Revolution's programs and to workers in general.

This program has given unheard of opportunities to young people and adults who were not previously able to attend higher education institutes but who now can join in the revolutionary aim of having all citizens, regardless of the work they do, obtain a comprehensive education.

The result of these programs is that the country today has the highest number of students registered in higher education than at any other time in its history: 380,000 students, of whom 233, 011 are being educated in the 938 university chapters that already exist in the country's 169 municipalities.

The 65,427 teachers and tutors working in this universalization program, who have given a committed, determined response to this call of the Revolution, are part of more than 700,000 professionals educated by the Revolution who work in Cuba, despite the constant brain drain which victimizes Third World countries.

Our aspiration of having higher education centers for excellence resulted in the creation of the University of Information Sciences, the first institution of this kind to be created during the Battle of Ideas.

Just two years and three months after it was opened, more than 6,000 youths from every municipality in the country study in this already prestigious university where novel concepts and revolutionary working methods are used; these have obtained significant achievements in teaching and productive activity in a very short space of time.

The spirit and concepts applied in the University of Information Sciences are those we must also use in those polytechnics where this subject is taught. They are educating almost 40,000 mid-level information science technicians throughout the country, thus securing Cuba's future development --something that is only possible thanks to the vast human capital created by the Revolution over more than four decades.

This recently approved project for Information Science Polytechnics is only the latest of the Battle of Ideas' programs for the 2000-2004 period. We shall allocate the necessary material resources and equipment to it. The ministry of Education, the ministry of Information Sciences and Communication and the Young Communist League have already received the relevant instructions.

The Battle of Ideas has done much for the Cuban family, for the safety and the mental and physical development of their children, without exceptions.

With regards to such an important field as healthcare, these families benefit from the large amounts of money invested in our 444 polyclinics, 107 of which have been completely remodeled and 34 of which are in the process of being remodeled. On top of this, reconstruction and modernization work is going on in 27 hospitals, as part of a program that will affect all of them equally and 217 physiotherapy wards are being opened in the polyclinics, all of which will offer this service by the end of next year. 24 new facilities offering hemodialysis have been opened, as have 88 offering optician services and 118 intensive therapy centers in those municipalities which, because they have no surgical hospitals, did not have this extremely valuable medical resource which has already saved thousands of lives to date.

The program of technical refurbishment now in full swing will bring benefits to all of the primary and secondary services we have and will have the added benefit of bringing the most important and highest quality medical services closer to the population's homes and places of residence.

In the same token, 1905 television rooms have been opened in isolated rural settlements having no electricity, thus providing access to information, recreation and to educational television programs to more than half a million Cubans who live in those areas and who were the only ones who still did not have these services.

Extending the Youth Clubs (Joven Club) to 300 facilities has allowed 436,753 Cubans to learn about computing, that is, since the beginning of April 2001, when the new Youth Clubs were opened thus raising the number of computers allocated to 3,000. This excellent program is being expanded with another 100 additional clubs already completed, the aim being to double the existing 300 facilities.

The Book Fairs have turned into a huge festivity for the Cuban family. In 2002, they spread from their traditional home in Havana to 19 other Cuban cities and this year they will extend to 34. Nine and a half million people visited the last three Fairs, with more than 15 million books on sale.

The Family Library made the best of Cuban and world literature available to our people at reasonable prices. 100,000 copies of 25 titles were produced, and a second collection is ready to go to print.

Two new, modern, high capacity printers have been bought, one of which is working to full capacity and the other is being installed. Resources have been allocated to repair and modernize all the equipment in the National Print Works.

The University for All, broadcast on television, which went on air on October 2, 2000 has become the biggest university in the country, the one offering the widest variety of subjects. 43 courses with 1,721

content hours have been taught using this resource. Six courses are being broadcast now. 775 professors, of whom 265 are PhDs and 134 have Master's degrees, have taught courses.

The programs developed to turn prisons into schools have had a marked impact on the inmates' families by helping to strengthen the bonds between the young offenders and their relatives.

Studies made of people with disabilities have made it possible to resolve some of the crises in the care offered to them and their families. They have allowed us to warn the families about hereditary diseases and have made it possible for 6,052 mothers to devote themselves full-time to looking after their children with serious disabilities since they receive a salary for doing so.

A total of 366,864 people with physical and motor, sensory, organic and other disabilities, including mental disabilities were studied. More than 30,000 science professionals and management and support staff took part in the nation-wide study.

On August 5, 2003 the New National Center for Genetic Medicine was established.

As a result of this huge effort to attain the highest possible level of justice for our people and to provide full equality of opportunities for all, more than 380,000 jobs have been created, the outcome of the Revolution's Programs, most of which basically benefit the youths.

According to information received from the ministry of Labor, by the end of this year unemployment had fallen to less than 2%, something that is absolutely impossible in any industrialized capitalist country.

In only three years, more than 44,979 new primary and junior high school teachers have been trained. This is equal to eleven years output from the teacher training institutes' regular day courses between 1988 and 2000.

As I already said, we have 21,485 social workers. In 2000, when the Battle of Ideas began, Social Security had only 795 social workers in all of Cuba.

As of November 20, 5,810 building, rebuilding or expansion public works had been completed; 1,732 of these were for education, 1,537 for health, 32 for major cultural institutions, including major rebuilding and expansion work on the Higher Institute of Art, and 2,508 for other of the Revolution's programs. 913 schools have sustained capital repairs while 32 new schools have been built. Our country has today 5,270 new classrooms.

Over 25 million cassettes have been produced in about a year and a half and another new cassette factory is under construction.

The agreements we have just signed with China mean we will be able to acquire 100,000 computers annually; these will be used mainly for the education of children, young people and adults and for retraining our country's growing number of university graduate technicians and professionals.

The day will also come when computers will be widely used to dialogue with the world. When one takes into account this country's political education, the growing efforts to give Cubans a good command of English and other languages, there is no other people which has more things to give information about nor more training to be able to do so in a better way.

The first million television sets we bought from the People's Republic of China has meant that 827,322 families in Cuba have a top quality 21-inch color television which uses 20 watts less electricity than a LG color television and 120 watts less than a Soviet black and white television. This has had a profound and widespread impact on our people's level of culture and information and on its recreational opportunities. The rest of the television sets were given to education, health and other of the country's social programs; 80,000 of them were used for international cooperation, and we will be getting another

300,000 21-inch television sets from China. Several thousand 29-inch televisions, which are now being used in education, are not from China.

Our educational system has 109,117 television sets and 40,858 VCRs in the classrooms; these have become excellent teaching aids.

Two new educational channels have been established, which combined with Cubavision and Tele Rebelde broadcast 394 hours of educational programming weekly. This is 62.7% of the total hours broadcast by Cuban television. 247 of these hours are devoted to courses on the curricula.

If at the last YCL Congress we expressed our concern about the low output of books and other publications for our children and youths, we can today announce that 457, 840,862 copies of books, newsprint editions, pamphlets and other printed material have been produced for our various programs and projects.

These include:

41, 025, 778 books, newsprint editions, and pamphlets for educational programs.

15, 979, 198 books for the Book Fairs.

35,371,157 newsprint transcripts of Round Tables and Open Forums.

15,905,758 newsprint study materials for University for All.

In 1999, there were only eight visual art schools in the country. Today this type of education has spread to all the provinces, with visual art schools in 17 cities.

The registration in the new National Ballet School that can take 300 students has been extended to students from all provinces.

Today, 4,021 students from all of the capital's municipalities attend vocational workshops given in the National Ballet School twice a week. Other dance schools offer similar courses.

6,789 public and school libraries have received encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases and other books with which they have renovated their bibliographic stock.

2,365,234 children and youths have been given a book as a prize in their graduation ceremonies.

About 10,900,000 Cubans have taken part in the 161 Open Forums that have taken place.

11, 800,000 people have joined in the 18 marches we have had.

1,030 Round Tables have been aired to date. These have become a kind of political university offering up-to-the-minute relevant information and profound and truthful analyses of the empire's crude lies and perfidious aggression against our people, while also discussing important aspects of international politics, economics, culture, sciences, sports and other issues of interest.

Since the Battle of Ideas is --as I once said-- "the battle of humanism against dehumanization, the battle of brotherhood and sisterhood against the most blatant form of selfishness [...] the battle of justice against the most brutal form of injustice, the battle for our people and the battle for other peoples" we at this time have 23,413 doctors and health technicians working on humane missions of solidarity in 66 countries. A very large number of them are working in the poorest neighborhoods in Simón Bolívar's great homeland, which is at this moment in the midst of revolutionary changes under the leadership of an amazing new political leader, a follower of Bolivar and Marti, a beloved friend of Cuba, Hugo Chávez

Frías.

The impact of the Battle of Ideas, its principles and work methods have not only transformed our educational system, and the lives of our people, but have also strengthened and increased the prestige of the Young Communist League, which, at the moment this Congress is taking place, has the highest number of YCL members in the last decade: 557,298, which is 104,692 more than at the 7th Congress.

Today our youth organization has 49,054 local chapters, 8,756 more than in 1998.

If we criticized the YCL at the last Party Congress for its weaknesses in grooming members for our vanguard party, we are today happy to see that the attention they gave to this crucial matter and the growing strength of the organization itself have resulted in the YCL supplying the Party with 63 of every 100 members who have come to their 30th birthday. So, in total, if we count those young members who are under 30 who were allowed to join under a special plan, the YCL has strengthened the Party with 133,283 new members. This is their concrete response to the fair criticisms they received.

Those chiefly responsible for these results have been the young cadre. This battle has demanded that they increase their capacity for action and their readiness and has obliged them to make a qualitative change in their working methods so that they may devote their attention to the internal functioning and daily work of the YCL and may also take up the new tasks that stem from the Revolution's programs.

The organization's experience, perseverance and its achievements have meant that it has been able to provide the Party with more cadres. In the last two years, 215 YCL cadres have become professional Party workers.

What we have achieved to date is the result of our people's and our wonderful youths' heroic efforts. We still have a lot left to do. You know where the old and new problems are.

We must ensure that the teachers working in our classrooms today stay working there, we must add to their reserves, jealously guard the young human resources we have trained over the last few years, paying special attention to their professionalism and up-grading. We must continue to analyze the inescapable changes that our technical professional and senior high school education must undergo; we must improve the way higher education is made accessible to all and we must make sure that all of the country's universities move forward from this idea towards the academic and revolutionary excellence that the country demands from its university students and professors.

We must do further more intensive political work with all of our health workers, so that the quality of the services offered to the public are in step with the investments in buildings and technology made in this sector and with the prestige that Cuban medicine has obtained by sending its doctors and technicians to other parts of the world in solidarity.

We have to continue with the task of promoting healthy, enlightened and useful recreational opportunities for our young people, which make use of all the opportunities and resources we have today thanks to the Revolution's programs.

We will have to continue to wage our hard-fought battle against corruption, social indiscipline, and any surge in drug use.

The highest possible integration of all the institutions involved in public broadcasting must take place. These are the institutions, which can and must be completely at the service of knowledge, culture, recreation, and the most dearly held values and interests of our people.

There is still a lot to repair, build and improve in our social institutions. We have proof that this is possible.

As I once said, "perhaps the most useful of our modest efforts in the struggle for a better world will be to demonstrate how much can be done with so little when all of society's human and material resources are placed at the service of the people".

The hard currency cost of the Battle of Ideas, including, the buildings, materials of all kinds, the thousands of pieces of top quality, standardized medical, dental and optician's equipment, the computers and videos, including payments made for the credit to buy televisions for the population and for institutions and other similar payments is less than 2% of the country's total hard currency expenditure in the last five years.

To this we must add, as an example of the best use of scarce resources, that the

cost of the million Chinese television sets is almost completely offset by the saving in electricity that will be achieved in the 8 years needed to repay the credit obtained.

When we look back on these heroic years of intense labor and not a few challenges, we cannot help but feel proud of our youth, of its values, of its caliber, of its mettle.

Men like Juan Miguel, who has discharged his duties as a father and a patriot in such an exemplary manner, was a member of the YCL.

Our five heroes imprisoned by the empire were members of the YCL, they who are the victims of vengeance and hate, who are suffering through cruel and unjust prison terms in American jails without letting anyone stain their honor, break their integrity and loyalty to the Revolution and to our people.

They are symbols and serve as inspiration to those who will change the world. We shall not rest for a second until justice be done and they are returned to our country. Sooner or later, with support from the rest of the world, we shall win that battle, too!

The information I have given in these remarks which are my reply to your invitation may astound many people, some might not even believe them, others will totally ignore them.

The empire will be furious and announce with incredible cynicism that Cuba must be liberated and democracy brought to this enslaved people and what is more, teach it to read and write, as they announce in their 'program for the transition to capitalism'. The masses, still partially deceived by the hail of lies and invectives coming from the powerful imperialist media, will believe us more and more, as they begin to awaken to what is in store for them and to understand the huge difference between our system and the one advocated by the empire.

Capitalism has lost any humanist essence; it lives from waste and to waste; it cannot escape from that congenital, incurable disease. Suffice it to say that Cuba has 450 doctors in Haiti, the poorest country in the hemisphere; the industrialized countries cannot send even 50, for they have finance capital but lack human capital.

Neither aggression nor blockade, terrorist acts or the disintegration of the socialist block, unipolar dominion over the world or the extreme right's rise to power in the United States which we, in 1998, warned was possible and in fact likely, have been able to break our heroic people's spirit of struggle.

We have known true independence and real freedom. We shall never resign ourselves to living without them! We are willing to pay the necessary price of which Martí spoke.

We shall continue to create and to struggle. No one now will ever be strong enough to push back into the bottle the genie of a people which has escaped for ever from plunder, humiliation and ignominy.

As Camilo Cienfuegos, that extraordinary fighter who is there with Mella and Che on the Cuban YCL

badge and who was only 27 when he died, said in his last speech on October 26, 1959: "We shall kneel down once and we shall bow our heads once, and that will be on the day when we reach the land that watches over 20,000 Cubans and say to them, 'Brothers and sisters, the Revolution is complete, your blood was not shed in vain'".

Long ago, the Cuban people said Homeland or Death! And it will carry on its Battle of Ideas to its logical conclusion.

Long live the people that have faced up honorably to the most powerful empire ever to exist!

Eternal life to the example the Cuban youths are setting for the world today!

Long live socialism forever!

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