FIDEL CASTRO:
Birán to Cinco Palmas

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INTRODUCTION

Fidel Castro, the maximum leader of the Cuban Revolution, is known throughout the world for his rebellious spirit, his clear and profound thinking, his vibrant use of language, his immense culture, his absolute sincerity and his unlimited generosity and solidarity. As Ernesto "Che" Guevara said, Fidel is "a leader of world stature at a height seldom known to history."

Approaching the life and works of Fidel does not merely signify coming into contact with the most noble and revolutionary ideas and actions of the contemporary world, but also with moments in the history of Cuba and the Americas that, at times, would appear to have been taken from a fabulous adventure story: It is to know a man of principles, an exceptional man.

Fidel Castro: Birán to Cinco Palmas is a book of impassioned passages that brings us closer to the fertile life of the Cuban president and arouses our interest in further research on this man, as sensitive as he is a revolutionary. That is, in essence, the supreme objective of this work.

Fruit of meticulous bibliographical research and selection, this book compiles excerpts from interviews with the Commander in Chief of the Cuban Revolution and his closest comrades in study and in arms, which give the book an intimate and colloquial tone. Also included in its pages are excerpts from Fidel's letters, speeches, indictments, defenses and charges, together with press notes, research material by eminent academics, and testimonies from collaborators, workers and campesinos whom he helped in difficult circumstances.

All the documented memoirs in the book have been published and their references are to be found at the end of each chapter, so that interested readers can have access to the sources and further explore the distinct stages or facets of Fidel's life.

In order to promote understanding of the text and make it easier reading, short paragraphs have been inserted to connect the diverse material compiled.

On account of the book's particular characteristics and because we are not in the presence of a complete or completed work, the historical

events narrated do not always appear in rigorous chronological order, although they have been organized with a certain time orientation.

In such a context, this book, which covers the first three decades of Fidel's life, begins with details of his birth on August 13, 1926, in Birán, an almost forgotten point in the geography of the former Oriente Province; moves through distinct facets related to his childhood and adolescence, studies and hazardous life as a revolutionary combatant; and concludes on December 5, 1956, the date of the reencounter with his brother Raúl in Cinco Palmas after the Alegría del Pío dispersal, where Fidel, optimistic and confident in the power of his ideas and Cuban dignity, confirmed that seven rifles were enough to win the Revolution.

So, enjoy your reading of these pages that lead us, in Fidel's hand, along the glorious route from Birán to Cinco Palmas.

THE EARLY YEARS

I WAS BORN A GUERRILLA

Birán, a farm located in the former province of Oriente, not far from the Bay of Nipe, was the geographic point where, in the summer of 1926, the family of Ángel Castro Argiz and Lina Ruz González was increased by the birth of their third son, whom they named Fidel Alejandro.

Many years later, as a prominent statesman, Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz referred to his birth and life in that remote place, asserting he was born:

On August 13, 1926. If you want to know the time, I think it was around 2:00 in the morning. Maybe that had something to do with my guerrilla spirit, with my revolutionary activities. Nature and the time of my birth must have had some influence. There are other factors that should be taken into account now, right?—what kind of a day it was and whether or not Nature has anything to do with the lives of men. Anyway, I think I was born early in the morning—I think I was told that once. Therefore, I was born a guerrilla, because I was born at around 2:00 in the morning.[1]

My father was the son of an extremely poor farmer in Galicia. At the time of Cuba's last war of independence, which began in 1895, he was

sent here as a Spanish soldier to fight. So here my father was, very young and drafted into military service as a soldier in the Spanish Army. When the war was over, he was shipped back to Spain, but it seems he'd taken a liking to Cuba. Along with many other immigrants, he left for Cuba in the early years of this [20th] century. Penniless and with no relatives here, he got himself a job.

Important investments were made in that period. U.S. citizens had seized the best land in Cuba and had started to destroy forests, build sugar mills and grow sugarcane, all of which involved big investments in those days. My father worked in one of the sugar mills.

. . . Later, he apparently got a group of workers together. He managed them and contracted the men to work for a U.S. firm. He set up a sort of small enterprise that, as far as I can remember, cleared land to plant sugarcane or felled trees to supply sugar mills with firewood. It's possible that, as the organizer of that enterprise with a group of men under him, he began to make a profit. In other words, my father was clearly a very active, enterprising person, and he had an instinctive sense of organization.[2]

My maternal grandparents were also very poor; they came from a very poor family. My grandfather hauled sugarcane in an ox cart. He, like my mother, was born in the western part of the country, in Pinar del Río Province. During the early years of the century he and the rest of the family moved to what used to be called Oriente Province, 1000 kilometers away from his home, in an ox cart, and settled there.

. . . Two of my mother's brothers also worked there as ox-cart drivers.[3]

. . . she [his mother] learned how to read and write when she was practically an adult.

. . . My mother was practically illiterate. She learned how to read and write all by herself. I don't remember her ever having a teacher other than herself. She never mentioned one. With great effort she tried to learn. I never heard of her ever having gone to school.[4]

. . . So like my mother, he [his father] also learned how to read and write all by himself, through sheer determination.[5]

NOT LANDOWNER STOCK

I was born into a landowning family, but not of landowner stock. What do I mean by that? My father was a Spanish campesino from a very humble family, who came to Cuba at the beginning of the century as a Spanish émigré.

He began to work in difficult conditions. He was an enterprising man, who made his mark and came to occupy a certain leadership position in early-century labors. He gradually accumulated money and set about acquiring land. In other words, he was successful in business and came to be the proprietor of a certain amount of land, around 1000 hectares if I remember correctly. That was not so hard in the early period of the Republic. Then he rented more land. And when I was born, it's true that I was born into the heart of what could be called a landowning family.

Now, on the other hand, my mother was a very humble campesino, very poor. For that reason the traditions of what we could call an oligarchy in the heart of my family did not exist. Nevertheless, objectively speaking, our social position at that moment was of a family that had relatively plentiful economic resources. It was an owner of land and had all the comforts—we could say—and the privileges enjoyed by a landowning family in our country.[6]

There was no bourgeois or feudal society in Birán. There weren't twenty or thirty landowners whose families would get together, always forming the same group. My father was an isolated landowner. Sometimes a friend would visit him, but we hardly ever visited anybody. My parents usually stayed home; they didn't go to visit other families. They worked all the time. So, the only people we saw were the ones who lived there. I used to go to the Haitians' quarters, to their huts, and sometimes I was scolded for it but only because I ate the dry corn they cooked. I got into trouble because I ate with them—for health, not social reasons. Nobody at home ever said, "Don't go near so-and-so." Never. They weren't class conscious; they didn't have a rich people's or landowners' mentality.[7]

… The school was a small, nondenominational school. About fifteen to twenty children went there. I was sent there because there wasn't any nursery school. I was the third oldest child in my family, and my nursery school was that school. They sent me there when I was very

young. They didn't have anything else to do with me, so they sent me there with my older sister and brother.

I can't remember when I learned how to read and write. All I remember is that they used to put me in a small desk in the front row, where I could see the blackboard and listen to everything that was being said. So, it may be said that I learned in nursery school—which was the school. I think it was there that I learned reading, writing, and arithmetic. How old was I then? Probably four, or maybe five.

Religion wasn't taught in that school. You were taught the national anthem and told about the flag, the coat of arms and things like that. It was a public school.[8]

LIFE OF THE POOR

Even before being baptized I was sent to Santiago de Cuba. My teacher had led my family to believe that I was a very industrious student. She made them believe that I was smart and had a talent for learning. That was the real reason why they sent me to Santiago de Cuba when I was around five; I was taken from a world in which I lived without any material problems and taken to a city where I lived poorly and was hungry.[9]

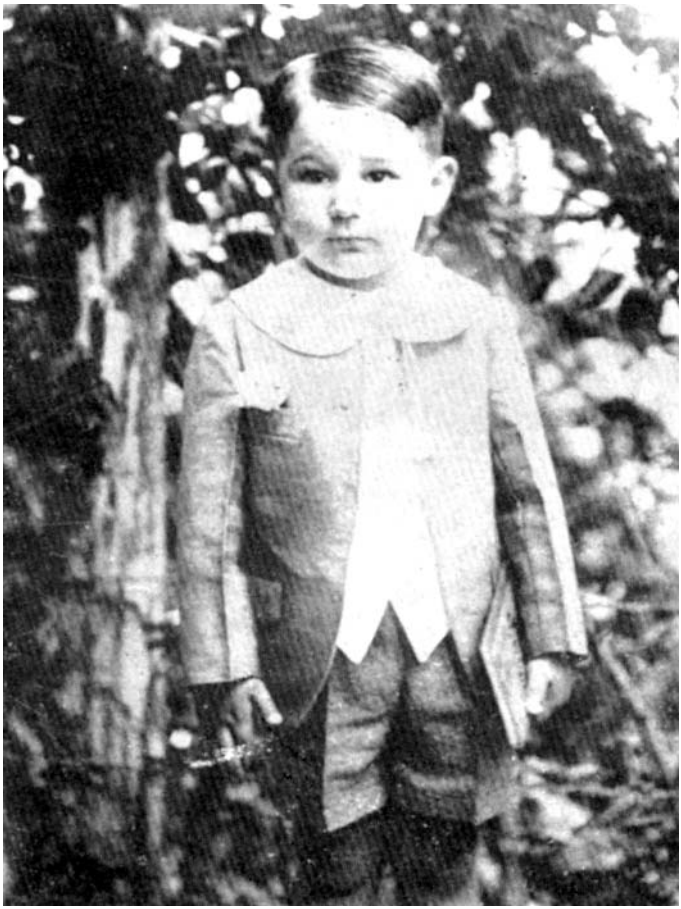
. . . Thus I could say that I went hungry, that I was left virtually barefoot, that I had to stitch up my shoes when they broke.

I was in that situation for a year or so. It could be said that on that occasion I knew poverty.

Could that have had an influence on me? Really, I don't know, I can't be sure of that.[10]

I was poor because the teacher's family was poor. She was the only one earning any money. That was during the economic crisis of the thirties, around 1931 or 1932. The family consisted of two sisters and their father, and one of the sisters was the only one who had a job. Sometimes she wouldn't be paid or would be paid only after a long wait. During the great economic crisis of the early thirties, salaries often weren't paid and the people were very poor.

I went to Santiago de Cuba to live in a very small frame house that leaked like a sieve when it rained. The house is still there; it's still standing.



Aged just three, Fidel Alejandro clutches a book in his hands. One of the first photos to be taken of Ángel and Lina's little son.

During the school year, the teacher kept working in Birán, and her sister had to live on that salary. My family sent forty pesos for my board, an amount that had the same purchasing power as 300 or 400 pesos now. There were two of us, my older sister and me. In view of that situation of poverty, their not receiving salaries, and the fact that they wanted to save, not much money went for food. There were five people to be fed—later six, because my brother Ramón came too, a few months later.

We got a small container with a little rice, some beans, sweet potatoes, plantains, and things like that. The container arrived at noon, and it was shared first by five and then by six people, for lunch and dinner. I used to think I had a huge appetite; the food always seemed delicious. Actually, it was just that I was always hungry. It was a rough period.

Later, the teacher's sister married the Haitian consul in Santiago de Cuba. Since I happened to be there at the time and my wealthy godfather hadn't materialized and the baptism hadn't been performed—I was around five years old and, as they said, a "Jew" because I hadn't been baptized and didn't even know what it meant—a solution had to be found for the problem. I guess that this use of the term *Jew* is also linked to some religious prejudices that we can discuss later on. Anyway, finally I was baptized, and the Haitian consul became my godfather, because he'd married the teacher's sister, Belén, who was a good and noble person. She was a piano teacher, but she didn't have any work or students.[11]

… During the period I told you about, I was sent to Santiago de Cuba while still very young. I had many unmet needs and went through a lot of hardships. Around a year later, things started to improve somewhat. At one point, my parents became aware of the difficulties I was facing. They protested and even made me return to Birán. But, after the protests, the teacher's explanation, and the subsequent reconciliation, I was sent back to her house in Santiago de Cuba. The situation, of course, improved after the scandal. How much time did I spend there in all? At least two years.

In the beginning, I wasn't sent to school; my godmother gave me classes. Those classes consisted of having me study the addition, subtraction, multiplication and division tables that were printed on the cover of my notebook. I learned them by heart. I believe I learned them so well I've never forgotten them. Sometimes I can calculate almost as quickly as a computer.[12]

. . . Most of the people who have played a role in our history had mentors, outstanding teachers, or professors. Unfortunately, I've had to be my own mentor all my life. How grateful I would have been if somebody had taught me about politics, if somebody had taught me revolutionary ideas![13]

That's how it was. I had no textbook, only my notebook and some notes. And of course I learned arithmetic, reading, writing and taking notes. My spelling and handwriting must have improved a little. I think I spent around two years there just wasting my time. The only useful aspect was the experience of tough, difficult conditions, hardships, and sacrifices. I think I was the victim of exploitation, in view of the income that family got from what my parents paid them.[14]

I SHOULD HAVE BEEN A MUSICIAN

In one of his conversations with Frei Betto, evoking the days of his childhood, Fidel confessed to the eminent Brazilian friar:

I also remember the Three Wise Men. One of the beliefs that was inculcated in five-, six- and seven-year-olds was that of the Three Wise Men. . . . I must have been three or four the first time the Wise Men came. I can even remember the things they brought me: some apples, a toy car—things like that—and some candy.

January 6 was the Epiphany. We were told that the Three Wise Men, who'd traveled to pay homage to Christ when He was born, came every year to bring children presents.

I spent three Epiphanies with that family. Therefore, I must have been there at least two and a half years.

FREI BETTO: So the capitalist Santa Claus never became popular in Cuba?

FIDEL CASTRO: No, never. What we had were the Three Wise Men, who rode camels. Children wrote letters to the Three Wise Men: Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar. I can still remember my first letters. I wrote when I was five and asked them for everything—cars, trains, movie cameras, the works. I wrote long letters to the Three Wise Men on January 5, we looked for grass, and I put it under my bed with some water. The disappointments came later.

FREI BETTO: What's that about the grass?

FIDEL CASTRO: Since the Three Wise Men rode camels, you had to provide them with some grass and water, which you put under your bed.

FREI BETTO: All mixed up?

FIDEL CASTRO: Either mixed up or the grass and water next to each other.

FREI BETTO: How interesting! I didn't know that.

FIDEL CASTRO: You had to provide food and water for the camels, especially if you wanted the Three Wise Men to bring you lots of presents, everything you'd asked them for in your letter.

FREI BETTO: And what did the Three Wise Men eat?

FIDEL CASTRO: Well, I don't know. Nobody remembered to leave food for the Three Wise Men. Maybe that's why they weren't very generous with me. The camels ate the grass and drank the water, but I got very few toys in exchange. I remember that my first present was a small cardboard trumpet; just the tip was made out of metal, something like aluminum. My first present was a small trumpet the size of a pencil.

For three consecutive years, three times, I was given a trumpet; I should have become a musician. After all—The second year, the Three Wise Men brought me a trumpet that was half aluminum and half cardboard. The third time, it was a trumpet with three small keys, made completely of aluminum.[15]

MY FIRST REBELLION

Once I started attending school the education was systematic, but the most important thing was the material and environmental improvement; for the first time I had teachers, classes, friends to play with, and many other activities that I'd lacked when I was a single student studying arithmetic from the cover of a notebook. That new situation lasted up until I launched my first act of rebellion, when I was still very young.[16]

When Frei Betto asked him about the reasons that impelled him to take this decision, the leader of the Cuban Revolution replied:

I was tired of the whole situation. At the teacher's house, I'd be spanked every so often, and if I didn't behave perfectly, they threatened to send me to boarding school. Then one day I realized that I'd be better off in boarding school than in that house.[17]

Those people had had a French education. They spoke perfect French. I guess that's how they got to know the consul. I don't

remember exactly how it was they'd gotten a French education. I don't know if they'd been to France or had attended a school in Haiti. They knew how to speak French and had perfect manners. Of course, I was taught those manners when I was very young. Among other things, you weren't supposed to ask for anything. The very poor children used to have a penny to buy a *rayado* or *granizado*, which is what they called snow-cones, but I couldn't ask them for anything; that was forbidden, according to the rules of French education. If I asked another boy to give me some, the children, with the selfishness characteristics of that age and the desperate poverty in which they lived—they knew the rules I had to follow—used to say, "You're begging! I'm going to tell on you!"

That family had its code, and I'm not criticizing it. You had to do this and that and the other thing. You were subjected to a lot of discipline. You had to speak in an educated way. You couldn't raise your voice. Naturally, you couldn't use any improper language. When they threatened to send me to boarding school, I was already tired and had become aware of what had happened before. I even realized that I'd been starving and that I hadn't been treated fairly. I haven't told you everything in full detail, because I don't want to make this an autobiography; I just want to touch on subjects you're interested in. So one day when I got to school, I deliberately started to break all the rules and regulations. In what amounted to a conscious act of rebellion aimed at having them send me to boarding school, I raised my voice and said all the words I'd been forbidden to use. That's the story of my first—though not my last—rebellion, which took place when I was in the first grade. I must have been seven at most; my age could be verified.[18]

A VIOLENT CONFRONTATION

In the conversation with Frei Betto, Fidel confided they sent him to boarding school:

Yes, and I began to be happy. For me, boarding school meant freedom.

FREI BETTO: How long were you at La Salle boarding school?

FIDEL CASTRO: Nearly four years. I was there for the second half of the first grade, second grade and third grade. Because of my good grades,

I was promoted to the fifth grade straight from the third grade, so I made up for one of the years I'd lost.[19]

However, although the organization of the teaching wasn't bad, serious conflicts arose and Fidel made his second rebellion. He referred to the La Salle School:

. . . Those people hadn't had the training that the Jesuits had. Moreover, they used really reprehensible methods at times. Some teachers or authorities at the school hit the students every so often. My conflict there was over that, because of an incident with another student. It was a small quarrel typical of students of that age. I had the opportunity to see how violence is used against students in what would now be called bad teaching methods. That was the first time the brother monitor in charge of the students hit me with a fair amount of violence. He slapped both sides of my face. It was a degrading and abusive thing. I was in the third grade, and I never forgot it. Later, when I was in the fifth grade, I was hit on the head twice. The last time I wouldn't put up with it, and it ended up in a violent personal confrontation between the monitor and me. After all that, I decided not to go back to that school.[20]

MY BATTLE TO STUDY

I began as a day student at the school, after Christmas vacation—and also after arguing a lot at home. I had to argue at home and demand that I be sent away to study. That's when I launched my battle to study. I had to struggle, because the people at my old school had told my parents that I'd behaved badly, and those arbitrary reports had influenced my family. I said I wouldn't accept not being allowed to study. I knew what the problem was and what was behind the conflict. It stemmed from an abusive, violent act, the physical punishment of a student. I think I had very clear ideas about the matter—the result of instinct; because of some notions of justice and dignity that I was acquiring; or perhaps because, when I was still quite young, I'd begun to see some incorrect, unfair things by which I was victimized. I began to acquire values. I was very aware of them, and I had to demand very firmly that I be sent away to study—perhaps not so much out of a love of study but rather because

I felt an injustice had been committed against me. And I was sent away to study; my mother supported me. I convinced her first, and then she convinced my father. They sent me to Santiago de Cuba again, but as a day student. . . .

Summer came and they left me there because my older sister was there studying. A black teacher from Santiago de Cuba came to tutor my sister. She was very well trained. Her name was Professor Danger. She became interested in me. Since I had nothing else to do during my vacation, I went to class with my sister, who was preparing for high school. I answered all the questions in all the subjects the teacher taught, and this made her genuinely interested in me. I wasn't old enough to enter high school, so she began to draw up a study plan for both before and during the first year of high school at the same time. Then, when I got old enough, I could take the exams. She was the first person I ever met who encouraged me; who set a goal, an objective, for me; and who motivated me. She got me interested in studying when I was that young. I think you can stimulate children at that age with a specific objective. How old was I? Ten or maybe eleven.[21]

When I was in the fifth grade, then, I went to live in the home of a businessman's family. I couldn't say they were bad people, but they weren't my family; they couldn't have the same interest, and they applied some strict—even arbitrary—rules. For example, they didn't take into account the fact that I'd had problems in my other school, as I've already explained, and that I'd transferred to a more rigorous school. They didn't consider the psychological factors involved in the adaptation to a new, more demanding school and new teachers. They wanted me to get the highest grades; they demanded it. If I didn't get the highest grades, I didn't get that week's ten cents for going to the movies, five cents to buy an ice cream after the movies and five cents on Thursday for buying some comic books. I remember that clearly. There were some comic books that came from Argentina, a weekly called *El Gorrión* (The house sparrow). I read some novels there, too. *De tal palo, tal astilla* (Like father, like son) was one of them. Five cents. The normal weekly allowance was twenty-five cents. If you didn't get the highest grades, you didn't get the twenty-five cents. That measure was arbitrary and completely unfair, because they didn't take my new circumstances into

account. It wasn't the right psychological approach for an eleven-year-old.[22]

. . . I decided to create a situation in which they had no alternative but to send me to school as a boarder. Thus, between the first and sixth grades, I had to wage three battles to solve three problems.

By the time I started to board in the sixth grade, I was getting excellent grades, and in the seventh grade I was among the top students in my class. I also gained a lot in other ways, because the world of sports and trips to the countryside and the mountains were within reach. I liked sports a lot—especially basketball, soccer and baseball.[23]

Now, certain factors contributed to develop a certain spirit of rebellion in me. We could say that I rebelled in the first place against the unjust conditions in the house of the family where I was sent at the age of five. In the very schools to which I was sent I also felt a rebellious impulse against certain injustices. We could say that during the period of my childhood, I felt the sensation of things that appeared to me unjust and that fomented a feeling of rebellion in me approximately three times. Those factors could have contributed to developing a relatively rebellious nature. That spirit of rebellion could also have manifested itself in later life.

My social relations as a boy, during school vacations, were with very poor children from the place where I lived.

I could say that in spite of my family's economic situation, in the country where I was born, I always mixed with the children of the poorest families, as there was no aristocratic tradition in my family. Third, that the process of my childhood and adolescence led me more than once to adopt an attitude of opposition and rebellion against things that I believed were unjust. Although we received the education that goes with those particular schools, our training also contained a preeminence of certain principles of rectitude.

Now, while a character, a spirit might have been developed in all that phase of my life, I did not acquire any political awareness. It was as a university student that I acquired the political awareness that helped me to interpret life, helped me to interpret the world, helped me to interpret society and helped me to interpret history. Principally when I came into contact with Marxist literature, which exercised an extraordinary influence

over me, and helped me to understand things that otherwise I never would have understood.

Thus I can state that I acquired my political awareness through study, through analysis, through observation, not through class origin. But I do not believe in any way that class origin is an insuperable factor, I believe that people's conscience can raise them above their class origins.[24]

WITH THE HAVANA JESUITS

Fidel recalled details of his student life, affirming:

At that school, on my own, I decided to go on to the Jesuits' school in Havana. I hadn't had any conflicts there; I was completely successful academically and in sports. I had no problems in the sixth or seventh grades or in the first and second year of high school, as I was there until the end of the year. I consciously decided to seek new horizons. I may have been influenced by the prestige of the other school in Havana, by its catalogues and buildings and the books written about it. I felt motivated to leave the school I was in and go to the other one. I made the decision and suggested it at home, and I was allowed to transfer to the other school.

. . . The Colegio de Belén. It belonged to the Havana Jesuits and was the best Jesuit school in the country—perhaps the best school in Cuba in general, because of its material base and facilities. It was a huge place, a center with great prestige, where the cream of the aristocracy and the Cuban bourgeoisie went.[25]

I joined the basketball team and some other teams in the sixteen-year-old age group. I began to take an active part in sports and became quite good in basketball, soccer, baseball and track and field—nearly everything—right from the start. When I arrived, I found a wide range of activities. My favorites were sports and Explorers. I maintained my old love of the mountains, camping, and things like that, which I continued to do on my own. There was an Explorers' group there. It seems that during our first excursions, the teachers decided I was good, and they promoted me, until one day they made me the head of the school's Explorers—the Explorers' general, as it was called.[26]

While at this school, I climbed the highest mountain in the west. We had a three-day holiday, and I organized a trip to Pinar del Río Province with three of my friends. The expedition lasted five days instead of three, because the mountain was in the north and I didn't know where it was exactly. We went out to look for it and to explore it. We took a train that went south, but the mountain was in the north. We began the trip at night and hiked for three days before reaching the mountain—Pan de Guajaibón, which was quite a difficult one to climb. We reached the top but got back to school two days after classes had started.[27]

Many years later, Fidel recounted some of his experiences as a pupil of the Jesuits, of whom he said:

. . . I am very grateful to them because they taught me some things that helped me in life, above all, to have a certain fortitude, a certain sense of honor, and specific ethical principles that—while at a far remove from the political and social ideas I might have now—the Spanish Jesuits inculcated in their pupils.

But I came out of there an athlete, an explorer, a mountain climber and entered the University of Havana as a political illiterate, without the fortune of a revolutionary preceptor, which would have been so useful to me in that part of my life.[28]

A GOOD STUDENT?

I had some duties at school, because students used to be assigned specific tasks. If you were in charge of a classroom or study hall, you had to turn out the lights and close the doors and windows. I was in charge of the main study hall where we stayed a while for a while after dinner before going to bed. During exam time, I had to be the last to leave. I used to stay there for two, three, or four hours, going over my notes. Even though it wasn't exactly right, it was allowed—perhaps because it didn't hurt anybody. During exam time I studied all the time—before and after lunch and during recess. I studied the textbooks to learn everything I was supposed to know but didn't about mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. I'm self-taught in all those subjects; somehow I managed to

understand them. I developed a capacity to unravel the mysteries of physics, geometry, mathematics, botany, and chemistry with textbooks alone. I usually got excellent grades, which were often higher than those obtained by the best students.[29]

. . . So the teachers came and gave their exams, which were usually tough. It seems that my specialty was those exams given by the state teachers. Often when the best students became confused and didn't answer correctly, I managed to get the highest grades in subjects that were considered difficult. I remember when I got the only high grade on a Cuban geography exam; it was ninety. Our school complained to the state high school teachers, pointing to the low marks and they replied, "The textbook the students used isn't very good." Then our teachers said, "Well, there's one student who used that same textbook and got a ninety." The thing is, I used a little imagination and made an effort to explain the answer. For me the exams were a question of honor.

In short I was very involved in sports, the Explorers, all kinds of outdoor activities, and cramming during that period, but I got good grades.

I also made a lot of friends among my fellow students. Without trying—and without even realizing it I became popular as a sports enthusiast, an athlete, an Explorer, a mountain climber, and also as an individual who in the end got good grades. Some political virtues may also have been apparent without my being aware of them.[30]

Was I a good student? No, I wasn't a good student, and I should start by saying that I cannot present myself before this generation as a good student. I went to classes, that's true, and as Professor Delio was telling you—much to his displeasure because he wanted me to have been a model in everything—the teacher was in the classroom and I was there physically, but my mind was elsewhere. I explained to him that I was seated there with the rest of them, the teacher was explaining something and I was thinking about goodness knows what: mountains, sports, or any other of those things that boys, and girls, think about sometimes.

So I became a last-minute student, the worst recommendation that could be given to anybody; now, I was a good last-minute student. In that, I think I could maybe compete with Ana Fidelia [Quirot, Cuban runner] in her last race when she won the World Championship, because

the rest of them were ahead and finally, I devoted all my time to studying: recreation, lunch, evening meal, like a self-taught pupil.

I told Delio that I even studied mathematics, physics and science on my own account near the end of the year, when I finally obtained good grades, often above those of the best year students. That was my final effort. The Jesuit teachers applauded me strongly in the championships period, forgave me everything and criticized me at the end of the year, when they wrote home predicting that I would definitely fail the year.

I haven't forgotten a teacher of great character, he was an inspector, and it was him that called me up one time, along with a gentleman that represented me there, a representative of my father, and informed him right there that I was going to fail the year. Of the three years, I don't even remember if it was the second in that school. He voiced his complaints. I studied like I always did, and I recall that one day, leaving the dining room, that strict inspector said to me: "Do you know how many marks you scored in physics?" with a Spanish accent.

I acted dumb and said to myself: There's something going on here to explain why he came out with that question, but I knew I'd done well in the exam, so I said: "No." He said: "One hundred!" The best pupil scored 90, the school's most brilliant student had scored 90 when he had to go to the state school for the exams or the teachers from the state schools went there for the exams.

They didn't manage to inculcate the habit of studying every day in me and, as I said, they consented to everything in relation to sports medals, they treated me better than the Cuban team. Criticism was left to the end. They didn't teach me the habit of really studying every day.[31]

In other aspects school life turned out well for me in terms of sports, explorations, excursions, all those things. I had good relations with the other boys, excellent relations, which I realized on the last day, really by the way they responded when they gave me the high school leaving certificate at the school.

I never imagined that I had so many friends in the school. I think that was the result of the kind of relations I had with the others, without practicing politics or far less; but when I went up to University, what did I know about politics?

What had I brought from school, what had I maybe brought from my home, what had I brought? A profound sense of justice, a specific ethic that was acquired over time. Those ethics must inevitably have Christian precepts, those that you learn in one way or another, those that you learn fighting against injustice from a very early age, fighting against abuses from a very early age, combined with a sense of equality in my relations with everybody from a very early age and, moreover, indisputably derived from a rebellious temperament or character—however you want to describe it. I reacted, I never resigned myself to abuse and things being imposed by force.[32]

I KNEW VERY LITTLE ABOUT POLITICS

I should say that when I went up to University, I knew very little about politics. What did I know about politics in that period? The most I remember is that I had a brother, or a half-brother, who was nominated as a representative for the Authentic Party, there in Oriente Province. I remember that at that time, there were forty-two representatives for Oriente, and that each party had its candidates. I was about fourteen years old, and I went about teaching people how to vote; there I was with some ballot slips touring the huts and houses of Birán, teaching people how to vote for Pedro Emilio Castro. I don't recall the exact number of candidates on the ballot slip, but I had to give an explanation to those people, who were almost all illiterate: the place, the party and everything, where they had to mark a cross.

But don't start thinking that I was a revolutionary at fourteen, or that I was a politician at fourteen and had chosen a specific political option; it was only that the candidate was my brother and he had offered me a horse if he won the elections. Really, it was a campaign—yes, yes, that was in 1939—what I did was hardly altruistic. But he talked to me, he was kind enough to take notice of me; boys always like to be taken notice of, to be taken into account, and he gave me that task which I carried out up until election day, when all my efforts came to nothing; the rural guard arrived and prevented everyone from voting.[33]

I REGRET NOT HAVING ALL MY LIFE TO READ AND STUDY

I have read as many books as I could in my life and it pains me not having more time to read. I suffer when I see libraries, I suffer when I look over a list of the titles of all kinds of books, and I regret not having all my life to read and study.

I have read all kinds of literature.

My initial readings, those that most attracted me, were of history books: Cuban history, universal history and many biographies; I have read almost all the basic classical biographies. At school, at the high school leaving certificate, I came into contact with literature, basically with the classics of Spanish literature.

The Bible was not missing from my classical works, of course. Anyone who analyzes my terminology will find biblical vocabulary, because I studied for twelve years in religious schools, like La Salle Brothers and fundamentally with the Jesuits. I was at La Salle Brothers from first to fifth grade, and continued with the Jesuits from fifth grade until I obtained the high school leaving certificate. They put me very much in contact with Spanish literature above all, not so much with universal literature. It was later when I had the opportunity to read many works, and then when I was in prison. The most time I had for reading was during the close to two years when I was in prison from 1953 and 1955.

Let me say that I have always maintained an interest in Cuban history, for anything in relation to our independence fighters, in first place Martí, and everything on Martí's works.

The first books I really deeply immersed myself in were Martí's literature, Martí's writings; I don't think there's anything written by Martí—including his political declarations, his speeches, comprising two thick volumes of 2000 pages or more—that I didn't read either studying for the high school leaving certificate or at University. Then, the biographies of our patriots: Máximo Gómez, [Carlos Manuel de] Céspedes, [Ignacio] Agramonte and [Antonio] Maceo; I drank in all that literature, everything related to those figures! I could say that I obtained my first political training reading Cuban history, still as a student; but even after graduating, I always read a lot. I always liked and still like

reading, and am fanatical about any literature that refers to our Wars of Independence, or to the figures of our fight for independence.[34]

DURING VACATIONS

Fidel recalls:

During my vacations I had to work. When I was an adolescent, my father used to take me to the office or have me work at the store. I had to spend part of my vacation doing that work, which wasn't at all voluntary—I had no alternative. I'll never forget the many poor people who came there—barefoot, ragged and hungry—looking for a chit so they could buy at the store.[35]

Lots of people in Birán have many memories of the times when Fidel returned to the land of his birth. Among them, a well-built man of exceptional height: Gilberto Suárez, better known as Llane, recounts:

On one occasion he was in the cockpit with a group of boys who almost always met there from the early hours to fight. When Mongo arrived he called me over: "Hey, you'd better put gloves on with Fidel." I told him: "Well, kid, I can see that the fights go on for a long time and I can't spend much time here; a little while, yes, but that's it, because Fidel always likes to prolong the fights." Mongo, who acted as Fidel's second, convinced me by telling me not to worry, that it was just going to be a quick bout, nothing more.

I put the gloves on, but he noticed I didn't tie them. He came over and said: "Tie your gloves," and I told him: "No, kid, I'm not going to, because when I want to take them off, I can do so, and when they're tied, that means a long time fighting."

I could see that Fidel was squaring up to have a good fight with me. We began to lock with each other. Somehow, he managed to catch me off guard and gave me a powerful blow. Then we started to go for each other until I connected with his head. Fidel would have been about fifteen and me, twenty.

Mongo quickly put Fidel in his corner and told him: "O.K. That's enough," and he replied straight off: "What's enough?" and with that

Fidel liked to explore and hunt while on vacation in Birán.

came back to me. It was then that I took off running, and everyone behind me, because at that time he went about with rifles and things like that and we thought he was going to kill us.

One day in the store, I heard someone climbing the stairs and when I looked, I saw it was Fidel and Lina. I immediately tried to hide, but the store-owner, a friend of Fidel's, called him over and said: "Hey, kid, what happened between you and Llane?"

"Don't tell me anything Bartolo, this black guy shows promise, he's got a fantastic punch, he gave me a blow here that still hurts," Fidel answered, resting his head on a block of ice that they'd brought to the store. Then he said: "I'm going to take him to Havana; I'm going to train him to really box there in Vedado."

That fight between Fidel and me was on a Thursday coming up to 4:30 P.M. Really, the fight took place because Mongo knew that if he didn't find a fighter, he'd have to put on the gloves again with Fidel, which he was constantly doing. Those were days when Fidel was on vacation in Birán.[36]

A journalist asked Llane about a baseball game when Fidel made a triple play.

"I didn't play in that challenge, but I remember it well, because a lot of us went to see the encounter. There was a tremendous hit, I think it was the Galician Iglesias who connected. Mongo's team was winning 1-0 in the ninth inning, no outs, when the rival team managed to fill the bases. Everything was ready for some sensational play: that man sounded a master hit, a fly that landed in the bushes, I think it was a *guásima* tree. In a split second Fidel came out of those bushes with the ball in his glove, threw in rapidly and the rest is easy to guess: triple play and victory for Birán.

On another occasion, Fidel demonstrated his qualities as a pitcher. My brother Felipe was the catcher in that game in which he pitched out fourteen strikers.[37]

FIDEL IS AN UNCUT DIAMOND. THE ARTIST HAS THE SPARK

From fifth grade in elementary school to the second year of high school, René Fernández Bárzaga and Fidel Castro Ruz shared the pleasant

concerns of childhood and youth in the religious educational institution belonging to the Jesuit order, together with Balbino Pérez Suárez, the son of a prosperous businessman who owned the Puerto Padre El Encanto store. A firm friendship budded and developed between those adolescents, which has lasted for life.

Fidel, René and Balbino met four years ago in Las Tunas Province at a glass-bottling factory. Balbino showed the leader of the Revolution a photo capturing a trip to the country in which they appear with other classmates from the Santiago school.

Fidel, with lucid precision, set about identifying the members of the group, children in that period: Mastrapa, Prada, Martínez, René, Balbino, all of whom, with time, went their different ways. Fidel and his brother Raúl, both pupils at Dolores School, threw in their lot with the poor of the earth.[38]

René affirmed that Fidel was the precursor of mountaineering and camping in Dolores and in Santiago de Cuba, and showed us a photo with Fidel and other students wearing scout uniform.

"One of our first expeditions was in Puerto Boniato, then in El Cobre, El Caney... Fidel scaled the highest mountain, he was the first to make the ascent and the last to come down; sometimes the bus that took us to the countryside had to delay its return to Santiago by two to three hours because Fidel was still up in the mountains."

After a pause, Fernández Bárzaga relates:

"Out of the whole group, Fidel was the mountain climber par excellence. He thrilled with emotion and joy every time we had an expedition to a mountainous area."[39]

René and Balbino likewise highlighted Fidel's role in sports, even as a young boy. On various occasions he was declared best student athlete of the year, mainly in Belén. Once he won the 800-meter inter-school competitions; he demonstrated skill in basketball and practiced all sports: soccer, swimming and baseball.[40]

"Escapades? Those of our age and class background. Despite the discipline imposed by the Jesuits, they allowed us to get away with some fooling about because we were our daddies' sons, and daddy was a rich trader, landowner or politician and paid well for our education.

"There were exceptions in order to change our attitudes and Brother Salgueiro is recalled today with much affection, without forgetting that he came down hard on any indiscipline. Fidel, for example, recounted that he quickly became an expert in long division because instead of lines, Brother Salgueiro used to give out division sums with six figures in the dividend and three in the divisor as a general rule, and twenty sums for each punishment.

"The teacher in this story of ours was Spanish, short but with a fearsome character; he didn't swear out of respect for his habit, but when he got into a bad mood he fumed and was unashamed of it, but he was very noble. He was in charge of the boarding students.

"Salgueiro has lived in the Dominican Republic for many years, we have a letter from him here in which he evokes the days of Dolores School when we called him 'Twenty sums.' And there's a piece of story that Fidel has related of that episode: 'At the end of vacations one year we brought a parakeet from Birán for the father Prefect, who really liked those little creatures, and prepared a perch in a little garden outside the study room where Brother Salgueiro supervised us.'

"Taught by the boarders, the first thing the parakeet learnt to say was 'Salgueiro, twenty sums, twenty sums!' And it was always repeating 'Twenty sums!' Salgueiro didn't kill the bird because he was one of the Prefect. He ended up giving the parakeet to the San José home, where the nuns taught it to pray, and people speak wonders of it."[41]

Fidel distinguished himself in the Jesuit School in Havana, where he studied for his high school leaving certificate. A large number of references to the boy born in Birán appear in the Ecos de Belén *yearbooks published between 1942 and 1945.*

At the end of the account of the 1944-45 course, the Jesuit School yearbook contains a report on Fidel by Father Amado Llorente, which reads as follows:

Fidel Castro Ruz

Always distinguished himself in all subjects related to letters. Showing excellence and sociability he was a true athlete, defending the School flag with courage and pride. He has won the admiration and affection of everyone. He is to follow a Law Degree and we have no doubt that he

will fill the book of his life with brilliant pages. Fidel is an uncut diamond. The artist has the spark.[42]

ENDNOTES

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3. Ibid., 77.
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5. Ibid., 68.
6. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR (FAR Military History Study Center), *Moncada: la acción* [Moncada: the Action], 2d edition, Vol. 2 (Havana: Editora Política, 1985), 3-4.
7. Frei Betto, op. cit., 109.
8. Ibid., 75.
9. Ibid., 79.
10. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, op. cit., 4.
11. Frei Betto, op. cit., 79-80.
12. Ibid., 84.
13. Ibid., 111.
14. Ibid., 84.
15. Ibid., 84-85.
16. Ibid., 86.
17. Id.
18. Ibid., 86-87.
19. Ibid., 87.
20. Ibid., 90-91.
21. Ibid., 93.
22. Ibid., 92.
23. Ibid., 94.
24. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, op. cit., 6-7.
25. Frei Betto, op. cit., 101.
26. Ibid., 102.
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28. Fidel Castro, "Una revolución solo puede ser hija de la cultura y las ideas" [A Revolution Can Only Be the Child of Culture and Ideas]. Speech given in the Aula Magna of the Central University of Venezuela, February 3, 1999 (Havana: Editora Política, 1999), 49.

29. Frei Betto, op. cit., 104-105.
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31. Fidel Castro, "Discurso pronunciado con motivo del inicio del curso escolar 1995-1996 en la enseñanza superior y sus 50 años de vida revolucionaria" [Speech Given to Mark the Beginning of the 1995-96 Academic Year in Higher Education and His Fifty Years of Revolutionary Life], *Granma* daily (September 8, 1995): 4.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 3.
34. Tomás Borges, *Un grano de maíz* [A Grain of Corn] (Havana: Oficina de Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, 1992), 265-266.
35. Frei Betto, op. cit., 114.
36. Reynaldo López Rodríguez, "El gigante que boxeó con Fidel" [The Giant Who Boxed with Fidel], *Ahora* newspaper (September 2, 1990).
37. Id.
38. Aldo Isidrón del Valle, "Viaje al mundo de los recuerdos" [Journey to the World of Memories], in *Antes del Moncada* [Before Moncada] (Havana: Editorial Pablo de la Torriente, 1989), 1.
39. Ibid., 2.
40. Ibid., 3.
41. Ibid., 7-8.
42. *Ecos de Belén*, Year VII, June 1945.

After gaining his baccalaureate, Fidel Castro Ruz presented this photo for his undergraduate file in the Faculty of Law at the University of Havana.

POLITICAL INITIATION

FIDEL AT UNIVERSITY

In 1945, Fidel enrolled in the Faculty of Law at the University of Havana. His vocation as a politician and revolutionary quickly revealed itself. There, right from the outset, he felt that a whole new world was opening up for him.

On the 50th anniversary of his entry into higher education, Fidel told a group of students:

Well, I shared the first few months at University with playing sports, because I wanted to keep them up, as well as initiating myself in political activities. But at that point it was a political involvement that didn't extend beyond the University, but remained as internal politics.

So, I put myself forward as a delegate within the anthropology course. It was a special course because one could help students in various ways, giving information about practice days and warnings of laboratory and exam days, because many students didn't attend the University as such; they were registered but didn't attend. I also organized the first-year nominations.

Naturally, there were some second- and third-year students who were trying to capture us so as to gain a majority because, at that time, delegates

from the various courses elected the year delegate, and the year delegates elected the president of the Law Faculty. That's how it was.

I got involved in those activities in the first year; of course I had to share them with sports. It wasn't long before it became apparent that the time I had to devote to sports and political activities was irreconcilable. Without thinking twice I totally opted for political activities, organizing the nominations' slate, supporting it, seeking support among the students; we were working well together. We discovered that it was dominated by a political mafia, but our working methods produced results.

I remember that on election day, around 200 students turned out to vote. I received 181 votes and my adversary 33, and our party won all the course subjects and all the delegates in the first year, totally—in contrast to the last elections—it was a united vote; the majority won and elected me year delegate. It would seem that afterwards they elected me faculty treasurer. Really, when they elected me treasurer of the Faculty of Law, I didn't have and never had a single cent, so it was an honorary post, the treasurer of nothing. That was how the first year began.

I was already beginning to stand out, relatively speaking, people were starting to notice me and, at the same time, governmental disrepute was rapidly increasing and, as students, we came out against that government.

Chibás' rebellion with the Orthodoxy movement virtually coincided with that period, and culminated in a party called the Orthodoxy Cuban People's Party, in a response to the frustrations of the Grau government; and we had already demonstrated against the government. Those University leaders had positions, sinecures, responsibilities and everything in the government, and they had governmental resources.[1]

MY BATTLE GETS COMPLICATED

In that way my battle became more complicated in the second year, when the Faculty of Law became decisive in terms of the FEU [Federation of University Students] elections. So I did the same work in the second

year—the course that came afterward, the first career year—I continued working on the second year and the first; we engaged in the same politics. But it should be said that in the second year, our adversaries couldn't produce a nomination slate, they didn't have the people to organize the slate, and that was a fact. And by employing a similar working method in the first year, we attained another crushing victory. We now had both year courses, and the largest ones in the Faculty of Law, and that's when governmental interest in maintaining the FEU at all costs came into play; first wanting to beat us and then, to intimidate us.

In that second year at the Faculty of Law, my adversaries at faculty level in the second elections—not all of whom were pro-government—had some strength, and thus there was a certain division of forces. The result could have turned out differently; but because there were five courses, one of those individuals in the fourth year, who had a vote, became decisive, and despite his weak character, was elected president of the faculty with a commitment to vote in the FEU against the government candidate. I think I acted somewhat precipitately and with great passion in terms of the faculty's in-fighting, because with a little more experience I'd have worked out some kind of election strategy and found somebody more capable and loyal among the internal adversaries, who were not as yet very defined in one position or another, but were necessarily pro-government students. So we had a split between the lower and higher years, and that split promoted an individual who had a solid commitment to vote against the government candidate in the FEU. That individual didn't fulfill his commitment to vote for the government opposition in the FEU, and so we were forced to remove him from office. We simply obtained a majority of four and got him out, because as four year delegates—first, second, third and fifth—we managed to agree on the issue of the FEU nomination.

So the Faculty of Law become the apple of discord and the decisive vote in the University.

It should be said that at that time and as a consequence of a frustrated revolution—as I have already explained—there was a set of so-called revolutionary factions, made much of by the media and generally accepted by a significant sector of public opinion, all because

of some antecedent, because they'd been involved with this or that. So there was a set of groups that started off being revolutionary, all of them in relation to the government, although with certain rivalries amongst themselves.

So there I was on my own in the University, absolutely on my own when, during the election process, I suddenly found myself confronting all that mob which dominated the University. They were determined not to lose the University: as I said, they controlled the rectorate, the university police, the street police, they controlled everything, and so they decided that the removal of the president was invalid. They used the simplistic argument that as the statutes didn't make any mention of removal, in spite of significant precedents to the contrary accepted by those same authorities, that was it. They decided in the rectorate that the removal of the Faculty of Law president wasn't valid and, of course, his was the vote that would decide whether the University would remain in the hands of the government supporters or if it would be in the hands of anti-government people. That was the story.

For me, that translated into an infinity of dangers, given that the atmosphere I observed in the University from the first year—although it was still sustainable and nobody bothered about us—was one of force, fear, pistols and arms. And the group dominating the University was closely linked to the government, had the full support of the government and all the government resources and weapons.

In what way do I think I might have precipitated myself a bit? Perhaps I should have delayed that fight or confrontation a bit longer, but I couldn't stand the attempts at intimidation and threats and went into open battle against all those forces, into an open fight, on my own. I have to say on my own because I didn't have any organization with which to confront all of that, I didn't have a party to give me support, so it was a rebellion against the attempt by those groups to dominate the University and to impose themselves on it by force.

. . . the physical pressure was very heavy, the threats were very heavy, the FEU elections were approaching and that was the point at which that mob prevented me from attending the University, I couldn't go back to the University.[2]

A BROWNING WITH FIFTEEN BULLETS

I've told friends about this more than once. I didn't only go to the beach to meditate, I even cried, at twenty years of age, not because they were preventing me from attending the University, but because I was going to University in any case. Nobody knew how many there were in that gang but they had all the authorities, everything. I decided to go back, but to go back armed. You could say that was the beginning of my peculiar armed struggle, because armed struggle in those circumstances was virtually impossible. I asked an older friend of mine with a certain anti-Machado and anti-Batista history to get me a weapon, and he found me a Browning with fifteen bullets. I felt super-armed with a Browning and fifteen bullets because I was a good shot overall, because of having lived in the country, where I used the guns that were in my house without anybody's permission, revolvers and every weapon around, and it so happened that I was a good shot.

Now, why did I cry? I cried because I thought I'd have to sacrifice myself in any case, because after the battle I'd been waging in the University with the support of the students, with the support of the faculty, almost total support—in terms of my year and the ones behind, as well as students from other faculties—how was I going to accept being prevented from returning? So I'd made my decision, I got hold of a gun, but it pained me deeply to think that maybe nobody would acknowledge the merit of my death, and that my very enemies would be the ones to write up a version of what happened. But I was determined to return and not only to return, but also to barter my life at a high price. We couldn't guess how many adversaries would have to pay together with me for that encounter, and I decided to return. Really, I never doubted that for a second.

What prevented me from dying that day? Well, as it turned out, this friend of mine had other friends and there were various people, various organizations and enough armed people all over the place—some of them valuable and valiant young men—so he took the initiative. He had very good relations with the students and said to me: "You can't sacrifice yourself like this." And he talked another seven or eight people into coming

with me, people I didn't know and who I met for the first time on that day. They were excellent. I have known men, I've known combatants, but those were good, brave boys. So I didn't return alone.

Today I was asking about the two stairways, and that's where we met, at a cafeteria there—and there should still be one, even outside in another spot, but there's nothing now—the braggarts and the mob had concentrated there, outside and inside the Faculty of Law. I said to the others: "You three go in the front way, three of us will go up the stairs there, and another three this way," and we all arrived there suddenly, and frightening the fifteen to twenty of them. They didn't even stop to think about whether we could challenge such a power, such a force. So on that occasion nothing happened, all they did was to panic. I came to the University and continued coming to the University, but once again on my own. That was one day, another time I came on my own.

I had a gun, yes, sometimes I did; but then another problem arose: they had the university police, the street police, all the repressive bodies I mentioned before; they had the courts, they had the Emergency Court, and there was a law under which you could be arrested for carrying a weapon. So I came face to face with my third dilemma: I had to confront that armed mob and I couldn't use a gun, because if I used a gun they would pull me out of the game and have me imprisoned. Those courts were very rigorous and pulled anybody out of circulation on strict instructions from the government. So I had to continue the fight against that armed gang almost always unarmed, because I could only get a weapon on exceptional occasions. A gun, I didn't have anything else!, but mostly I was unarmed.

You could say I had to wage that whole battle around the University and the University's position in relation to the government without arms. That's why I said it was an armed struggle under very peculiar conditions, in which I only had my own skin on many occasions. And they got tired of making plans of one kind or another; chance, luck… There was one occasion when an entire anthropology class left the University and accompanied me home, because I was unarmed and they, the adversaries, were both organized and armed.[3]

ACADEMIC RECORD

I have a little academic record somewhere here—I don't know if it's worth very much, I'll have to search out the details—of the forty-seven subjects in which I was examined in a year and a bit. I enrolled in twenty as an independent student—studying on my own—and dedicated myself to my studies in the midst of other activities, but mainly studying, and in one year I passed twenty; in the following year I enrolled for thirty. It wasn't a mania for enrolling on courses, I needed to because I wanted to get four degrees: Law, Diplomatic Law, Administrative Law and then a doctorate in Social Science and Public Law. There were only three subjects missing for the doctorate, which I knew very well.

At that time I was thinking of taking a break to study and I wanted to study Political Economy, but for that I needed a scholarship. To get the scholarship I had to pass those fifty subjects, and I would have done it; but at that moment events accelerated in Cuba and I changed my plans, abandoned that idea and dedicated myself totally to the revolutionary struggle.

Don't take me as a model, I accept the honors you have given me as a gesture of generosity, friendship, and affection from all of you. I don't see myself as a model, and far less as a model student. But I have tried to be a good revolutionary, I have tried to be a good combatant, and if it should occur to any of you to imitate a case like mine, I ask you to imitate my few successes and save yourself from the many mistakes I probably made.[4]

I STARTED OFF AS A UTOPIAN COMMUNIST

In a conversation with Frei Betto, Fidel confided that he attained his Marxist-Leninist training at the University, through contact with revolutionary literature. He told the Brazilian religious leader:

There's a curious thing, however: as a result of studying capitalist political economy, I started drawing socialist conclusions and imagining

a society whose economy would operate more rationally even before I discovered Marxist literature. I started off as a utopian communist. I didn't come in contact with revolutionary ideas, revolutionary theories, the *Communist Manifesto,* and the first works by Marx, Engels and Lenin until I was a junior in the university. To be quite frank the simplicity, clarity and direct manner in which our world and society are explained in the *Communist Manifesto* had a particularly great impact on me.

Naturally, before becoming a utopian or a Marxist communist, I was a follower of José Martí; I mustn't omit that. I've been a follower of Martí's ideas since I was in high school. Martí's ideas impressed all of us; we admired him. Also, I always wholeheartedly admired our people's heroic struggles for independence in the past century.

I've spoken to you about the Bible, but I could also tell you about our country's history, which is extremely interesting, filled with examples of courage, dignity and heroism. Just as the Church has its martyrs and heroes, so too the history of any country has its martyrs and heroes; it's almost part of a religion. Something very like veneration filled my heart when I listened to the history of General Antonio Maceo, the "bronze titan," who waged so many battles and performed so many feats; or when I was told about Ignacio Agramonte; or Máximo Gómez, that great Dominican internationalist and brilliant military commander who fought on the Cuban side from the beginning; or the innocent medical students who were shot in 1871 for having allegedly desecrated a Spaniard's grave. We heard about Martí and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the father of his country. So together with the biblical history we were talking about, there was another history that we considered sacred: our country's history, the history of our nation's heroes. I got that not so much from the other members of my family—because they didn't have the required educational level—as at school from books. Gradually, I came in contact with other models of people and behavior.

Before becoming a Marxist, I was a great admirer of our country's history and of Martí.[5]

CAYO CONFITES: I WASN'T GOING TO GET ARRESTED

Fidel was twenty when he joined the internationalist contingent being organized in Cuba to support the Dominican struggle against dictator Leónides Trujillo.

Cayo Confites, to the north of the eastern region, was the location of the revolutionary army camp composed of Cubans and exiled Dominicans, headed by Juan Rodríguez and Juan Bosch. However, the treason of unscrupulous politicians soon made itself felt. In the summer of 1947, press headlines read: "Cuban boats intercept anti-Trujillo fleet in the Bay of Nipe; crew of invading boats arrested. Combined army and naval forces order those besieged to hand over their arms. U.S. squadron on maneuvers off the Dominican Republic."

Recalling those incidents, Fidel told Colombian journalist Arturo Alape:

I don't want to talk about that expedition, of the errors its organizers committed, given that that's another subject, but the fact per se is that I was president of the Faculty of Law, an official student at the University of Havana.

To be a leader there you had to officially enroll.

Self-taught or independent students, as one category that could take subjects in different courses, didn't have the right to vote, but in that year 1947 I was finishing my third year in Law and still had some exams to take.

A lawsuit had been filed because those controlling the majority of the University and associated with the Grau government, were trying to maintain that control. In my faculty, the majority of the delegates had expelled the president who was closely associated with the government, and had elected me. The government-controlled university authorities did not want to recognize that decision. So I was vice president of the faculty and was subsequently elected faculty president. . . .

But I was also the president of the Pro-Dominican Democracy Committee at the University. And when the expedition to the Dominican Republic was organized, more or less at the end of the academic year in July, I considered it my first duty to enroll as a soldier in the expedition and did so, although I wasn't one of the expedition organizers. But I had

a lot of connections with Dominican leaders, above all with Rodríguez, one of the main ones at that time, as well as many others who had been in exile.

The expedition brought together around 1200 men. Everything was very badly organized given that there were good people, both Dominicans and Cubans who felt for the Dominican cause, but because of recruiting in a rush, antisocial and lumpen elements joined, anybody and everybody. I enrolled in that expedition as a soldier.[6]

Nearly fifty years later, Fidel recounted some of the details of his battle in the University of Havana and the Cayo Confites episode to a large group of students:

By the end of the second year the battle was quite intense—that was 1945, 1946 and mid-1947—I had already been appointed president of the Pro-Dominican Democracy Committee, and president of the Pro-Puerto Rican Liberation Committee. There was a large anti-Trujillo movement in the University, as well one supporting Puerto Rican independence. Albizu Campos was there during that time and led some of the uprisings and organized important demonstrations.

Included in all that, I haven't mentioned the huge number of demonstrations organized outside the National Palace in the anti-government struggles. In some of those photos there I'm on the wall outside the Palace, making a speech against Grau outside his office; he wanted to meet with a representation of us, but we didn't want any contact at all. It was a protest at the death of a young man—I don't remember the exact circumstances—there were various cases like that.

But in the midst of those battles there were ups and downs; it was all very difficult as those people wanted more and more power. It was the period of Alemán, the infamous BAGA[7] and uncontrolled robbery. He had political ambitions and all those groups dominating the University joined up with Alemán, and used the noble Dominican cause as a banner of revolutionary politics.

It was around the time people believed the conditions for organizing a final battle against Trujillo had arrived. Apart from the Dominicans, it was really many of those people who organized the Cayo Confites expedition and it was Alemán, Minister of Education, who provided the funds. It was one of the worst organized things I've ever experienced:

They picked up loads of people off the streets of Havana without paying any attention to cultural conditions or knowledge. They went ahead and organized an artificial army of more than 1200 men.

Naturally, I could see what a battle against Trujillo would lead to and as I was president of the Pro-Dominican Democracy Committee, I didn't think too much about it, packed a suitcase and, without saying anything to anybody, went to Cayo Confites and joined up for that expedition.

But perhaps the most important aspect is the fact that I enrolled in something that included the overwhelming majority of my enemies; but the strangest thing was that they respected me. Because there is something that I learned, like a lesson, in all those years when I had to defy death unarmed many times and almost every day: that an enemy respects those who do not fear it. My gesture of going to fulfill my duty as a student inspired their respect. That's how it was.

It was while I was in Cayo Confites during the final stage—with Alemán as the financial czar supplying all the resources for the expedition—that Trujillo bought off Genovevo Pérez, who was chief of the army, and that is when open fighting broke out among various of those groups describing themselves as revolutionary. And many of them believed they were, honestly believed it, because they didn't know what a revolution was. Who really could have been or were revolutionary leaders or had revolutionary ideas? The communists, people who defended the workers, who had an ideology, who had a revolutionary theory and, in addition to that, what could the revolutionary theory be? For many of those groups the revolution consisted of punishing a henchman from the Machado period or the Batista period, who had committed crimes against the people. That was their concept of what it was to be a revolutionary.

So things were degenerating and that's when the Orfila massacre occurred. The group involved had the massive power of the police and repression, the works; when things escalated into a shoot-out in a house during an attempt to take out one of the enemy capos. They even killed the lady of the house, killed other people and the army had to be sent in to put an end to a battle that had gone on for four hours. We were in Cayo Confites.

A journalist made himself famous because he managed to get footage of the entire incident and it was published, giving rise to a huge scandal.

That incident gave Genovevo, as chief of the army, an opportunity to liquidate the Santo Domingo expedition. Logically, he saw in that expedition an adversary in terms of the country's internal politics, people who spelled danger to him in the case of being successful in that Santo Domingo fighting movement. That's what gave them the chance to take advantage of the situation and liquidate, imprison many of those capos. They took away all the commands they had in the mobile units, in the Enemy Activities Bureau, in the secret services, in the juridical sector, in the national police; took away all their commands, they lost them all.

So, when the invasion was frustrated—we were still set on going to the Dominican Republic with others who remained true to the cause—there were many desertions. I already had the idea of guerrilla struggle, I had been given a company of soldiers, even though it was chaotic: lack of organization, lack of efficiency, lack of everything. But I said, we have to go. So I almost initiated my guerrilla warfare period over there because, based on Cuban experiences and many other things that are too lengthy to go into here, and starting from the conviction that it was possible to fight against the army, I was already thinking of the possibility of guerrilla warfare in the mountains of the Dominican Republic. I'm talking of the year 1947.

When I came back I avoided capture, I couldn't resign myself to the idea of being captured—that's a long story as well—so I escaped and managed to salvage some weapons that were later lost because of a leak. Everybody in Havana believed that I'd been devoured by sharks in the Bay of Nipe; the specter of death appeared on the University stairway and everyone went about with long faces, because I was out of contact for days, until I arrived here in Havana.[8]

The Commander in Chief of the Cuban Revolution affirmed:

We spent a few months in Cayo Confites training for the expedition. I had been made lieutenant of a platoon. In the end contradictions between the civil government and the army in Cuba resulted in the expedition being called off. In the way that things happen, some people deserted in the face of danger and they made me chief of one of the expedition's companies. We left anyway, in an attempt to reach the Dominican Republic. The expedition was finally intercepted twenty-four

hours before reaching the region, and everybody was arrested. They didn't arrest me because I jumped overboard; I wasn't going to get arrested, most of all as a question of honor, and the shame of that expedition ending up with its members arrested. So I dived into the Bay of Nipe, swam to the Saetía coast and made my way back.[9]

Many years later, Fidel returned to Cayo Saetía and recalled incidents from that historical episode with Lalo Guzmán, an old sailor and friend from his youth, who was the young expeditionary's guide when he reached land.

Lalo, a coastal pilot, hoarded that secret for twenty years. He never revealed the identity and patriotic mission of the young revolutionary who arrived on the doorstep of his modest home in the early hours of a day in 1947 after exhausting episodes, and said: "I need you."

That weary rookie insurgent in a wet uniform had traveled on foot between mangrove swamps and jagged rocks and woods, and fought his way through tracks and confines never penetrated by humans, with their craters of trapped water, turbid and burning. . . .[10]

ENROLLED AS AN INDEPENDENT STUDENT

On his return to the University of Havana, Fidel had to face new setbacks. He recalled:

But then, I had a problem, which was as follows: the expedition was to leave in June or July and last until beyond September. But I had to take some exams in September in certain subjects, and when I arrived it was no longer examination time. So I had to choose—another dilemma—between enrolling as an official student so as to carry on working in the FEU official institutions in the second year—I had to enroll again—or becoming an independent student. And that was a very important decision, because one thing I couldn't stand was that business of eternal students and eternal leaders, enrolling time and time again. I was very critical of that and couldn't fall into it myself. So I said: however strong the arguments, I'm simply going to enroll as an independent student.

After I enrolled in that capacity there was a noticeable contradiction in terms of the great support from the students, very noticeable! And my

condition as an independent student, which meant I couldn't aspire to official positions in the organization. But I didn't hesitate and I'm happy and satisfied at having done what I did at that moment.[11]

THE DEMAJAGUA BELL

Comrades from Fidel's youth recall that the objective of the protest marches on the Presidential Palace during 1947 was to promote a situation of popular insurrection. The first one coincided with the burial of student Carlos Martínez on October 10, 1947, on the same day that Ramón Grau San Martín completed his third year as President of the Republic.

Martínez was killed when students at Havana's No.1 Institute demonstrated against a BAGA propaganda caravan. Exhortations by a group of students headed by Fidel, then in his third year of Law and twenty-one years of age, succeeded in rerouting the funeral cortege; instead of taking the shortest route to the cemetery, the students directed the funeral procession various blocks to the north and the funeral car passed in front of the Presidential Palace.

Four days later, on October 14, 1947, a student protest was organized outside the Palace, during which—standing on the remains of the old city wall—Fidel addressed the impassioned student body.

There was a similar purpose one month later, in November 1947, when Fidel managed to bring the Demajagua bell[12] to Havana from Manzanillo, something that the veterans of the independence war of the last [19th] century had denied President Grau. Fidel intended to use it to call the people to a huge mass demonstration on the University stairway and attack the first and corrupt Authentic government with the powerful incentive of sounding the symbolic bell.[13]

In early November 1947, Fidel, as vice president of the Faculty of Law Students Association at the University of Havana, together with a group of his faculty and FEU comrades, proposed to rescue that marvelous symbol of national dignity. Unscrupulous politicians were trying to get hold of the bell for their anti-popular and demagogic campaigns during Ramón Grau San Martín's corrupt presidency and, to this end,

they were hypocritically trying to win over veteran groups from the independence wars, despite having created divisions within the groups and reneging on commitments made to their social organizations, all in the interests of their electoral campaign.

The background to Fidel's battle to recover the homeland's most precious heirloom had occurred a month previously, in the city of Manzanillo.

On October 6, 1947, Alejo Cossío del Pino, Minister of the Interior in the regime, arrived in Manzanillo. It was Sunday. The press described the meeting that had to be immediately organized in the city hall as "a scandalous spectacle." The Minister of the Interior was trying to make concrete the government initiative to transfer the Demajagua bell to Havana, to be used in what he called a "patriotic" political meeting to commemorate October 10 and Veterans' Day.

Previous contacts, bombastic declarations and promises to the veterans that the bell would be promptly returned seemed to have guaranteed its handing over with the Manzanillo City Hall's approval.

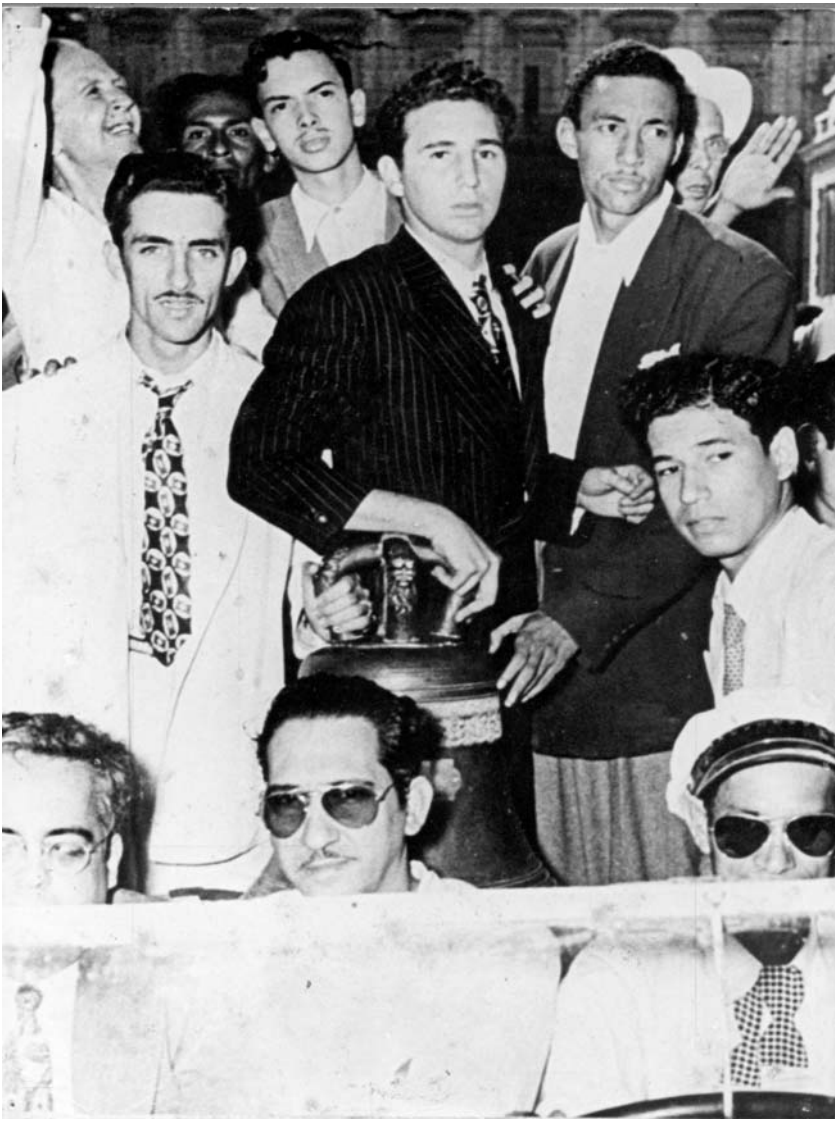
But César Montejo, a councilor in the Authentic Party itself, burst into the Municipal Chamber followed by a crowd of Manzanillo residents and led an energetic protest. They shouted: "Thieves, not the bell, no! They've taken everything else and now they want the bell as well! Where's the money earmarked for public works in Manzanillo? This is a government of pirates, don't let them take the Demajagua bell, we won't let them take it… because they would insult it!"

It was an energetic and just protest.

That incident had led to a flood of sentiment on the part of Manzanillo's population, alerted by progressive sectors in the locality, including local leaders of the People's Socialist Party and the nascent Orthodoxy Party.

Cossío del Pino had to leave immediately; he gave a press statement describing that dignified act "uncivilized" and those promoting it a "gang of loud-mouths," took a train to Bayamo and from there a plane back to Havana, defeated.[14]

Around that time, Fidel made contact with one of his comrade FEU leaders, Alfredo Guevara, then secretary of the Federation of University Students. He approached him in the café on L and 27th Streets, took him aside and detailed the plan to him.



With a group of university students, Fidel guards the Demajagua bell, symbol of the beginning of the Cuban independence wars.

Fidel's idea was that the FEU should take the situation into its hands without losing any time and that the students should bring the historic heirloom to Havana, place it at the top of the stairway and convene a huge mass meeting. This would come at a time of the great political upheaval characterizing those days, in the midst of a climate of condemnation of the government and internal contradictions, even between the president and the chief of the army. The Demajagua bell would be struck as it was to initiate the War of Independence and with the masses participating with patriotic fervor, they would march on the Presidential Palace to demand Grau's removal from office, and after the collapse of the regime, would establish a revolutionary government.

The FEU secretary warmly welcomed the bell initiative and the federation agreed that Fidel himself should travel to Manzanillo to ask the veterans, custodians of the bell, if it could be used in this way. Guevara proposed that Lionel Soto, student and vice president of the Faculty of Philosophy and leader of the People's Socialist Party in the University (who with Guevara—a secret member of the Socialist Youth—and other students, made up a united front) should accompany Fidel.

Fidel and Lionel flew to Manzanillo.

"I remember it was the first time I'd been on a plane," Lionel told us. They returned to Havana, in possession of the bell, on the central railroad.

The veterans and Manzanillo City Hall agreed to the FEU request proposed by Fidel, and the Municipal Chamber named Juvencio Guerrero, vice president of the City Hall, a cigar worker and a member of the Communist Party, to travel back with the students. The president of the Veterans Association and others also accompanied them.

They stopped in Bayamo and Matanzas, and a crowd of people was waiting for them at the station terminal in Havana.

While the FEU delegates were in Manzanillo, the students followed Fidel's directions for the reception and protection of the highly symbolic bell. . . .

Fidel's motto at all times was to rely on the masses for the bell's custody, independent of the armed student guard. But his followers lacked the organizational level or military capacity, and had no experience at all

for such a situation facing forces as powerful and unscrupulous as those that nourished the BAGA.[15]

In this context Alfredo Guevara stated:

It was a fact that we weren't capable of looking after the bell, due to irresponsibility. And I can say now—although it might seem like hindsight and because Fidel is Fidel—that he was the only one with enough lucidity to see that, because the truth is that if we had maintained a mass guard and an armed guard twenty-four hours a day, that bell wouldn't have been taken, or would have been the object of an affray, and that wasn't the case. . . .

And how did they manage to steal the bell? Because up until 4:00 A.M. as Fidel said, the heirloom was heavily guarded by the student body. But at around that time, people started to get sleepy and the bell really did seem to be safe, behind something like bars… but without any doubt, after that time the guard dropped noticeably. Frankly we demonstrated we were no good. Fidel had insisted that we should keep the masses there, not just our armed people. He had a level of intuition even at that moment of how to do things, prefiguring the leader of the 26th of July Movement some years later.[16]

In the morning, when Fidel found out that the bell had disappeared, he angrily reproached his comrades for not following the ideas he had defended so passionately, including that of maintaining a mass guard and not just an armed one. From that minute he gave himself the task of finding the heirloom together with the FEU secretary.

First he went to Ovares' house and had a long talk with him trying to get a lead; leaving the house they passed a car in which Eufemio Fernández was riding with some other individuals. Everyone was armed to the teeth. Fidel talked him into getting out of the car and let him know in no uncertain terms that where he was, "in his world," was also where the stolen bell was. Eufemio roundly denied it, but Fidel was convinced that Eufemio was one of the direct authors of the robbery.

He had no doubt that the Demajagua symbol was hidden in the vicinity, probably in the house of "Tony" Santiago, leader of the Authentic Youth (nothing to do with the revolutionary of the same name and surname).

News of the stolen bell spread like wildfire. All the newspapers and radio stations widely reported it along with suppositions on where the

heirloom could be and who could have stolen it. The students and newspapers affirmed that, just like the Capitolio diamond, the bell would turn up in the Presidential Palace, and so it did. Fidel immediately organized mass protests and led a march on Police headquarters, where the relevant charges were filed.[17]

Later evidence confirmed that Eufemio Fernández the gangster was indeed responsible for the theft of the bell.

Fidel energetically condemned the theft, described it as unheard of, an outrage to a heirloom of the Republic and expressed "our condemnation of and contempt for the authors of the deed." He added: "Those who have been saying that the university spirit is dead, are lying; we have also come to say to those who think that its conscience has been suffocated that they are lying."

He charged the government with the theft of the beautiful symbol, and with defrauding the people for failing to deliver the Authentic Party's promises. "Today all of that has collapsed and nothing but misery can be predicted for the coming years, faith has been lost, but woe betide those who killed the faith of the people, because the people could get angry!"

He continued: "Those of us for whom the deception was more terrible must proclaim that a youthful people can never say that they are beaten."

"In the face of the current crisis," he noted, "the student movement's position has to be an independent opposition, because we cannot allow ourselves to be mistaken for Machado's or Batista's men."

According to the press account of his words, Fidel concluded by proclaiming that the University was on a war footing alongside the people so as to avoid the government evil.[18]

On October 12, 1947, the government was forced to return the Demajagua bell to the city of Manzanillo.

A YOUNG MAN LIKE US

On the 76th anniversary of the shooting of eight medical students, one of Spanish colonialism's most horrific crimes, Fidel made a patriotic speech in Artemisa, a city east of Havana.

It was Juan Miguel Carvajal Moriyón, a young member of the Cuban People's Party (Orthodoxy), who suggested inviting Fidel to speak on that anniversary.

Juan Miguel received unanimous backing from his comrades at the Artemisa Institute to invite Fidel Castro to the event commemorating November 27, 1871[19] in 1947. He telephoned the FEU, found out how to locate Fidel and left for the capital. The pages of the newspapers of that period vibrated with charges and complaints from the population, accounts of outrages, attacks on the trade union movement, the economic crisis, and inter-gang warfare (the Orfila events were still being discussed).

The young student from what was also known as the Red Village located Fidel at a radio station where he was broadcasting his political commentaries. Juan Miguel explained the reason for his journey and Fidel remained pensive for a few seconds before responding:

"Thank you for your invitation; I have certain commitments, but I'll try to be there."

Juan Miguel confided his deep-felt satisfaction at that gesture from the young FEU leader in whom he perceived "maturity and strength of character, and a very clearly defined personality."

"I returned to Artemisa and communicated Fidel Castro's possible presence to my comrades on the association's executive, and commented that he was a distinctive leader, a young man like us, but who spoke another language. Life proved me right.

"I am making this observation to explain that with Fidel's presence at that event we broke with a tradition, as in previous ceremonies the Student Association Executive officially approached the FEU presidency at the University of Havana and requested the participation of a leader to speak at the event. On this occasion, we went directly to invite the speaker for November 27.

"Why? The question is an appropriate one. As I said at the beginning, for the sympathy we all felt toward Fidel. . . .

"Fidel's presence filled us with joy; we went to meet him; he talked with other young people from Artemisa and was the main speaker at our commemoration. . . . Using vivid examples, he denounced Grau's demagogy, vices and excesses, and spoke of the way to eradicate them, raising the vital role of youth in those necessary changes."

That night, so highly charged with premonition, Fidel came to know a valiant group of youthful patriots from Artemisa, radical and determined, who would accompany him in the historic Moncada attack.[20]

STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

In 1948 a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) was planned in which the United States proposed to further consolidate its system of domination in Latin America. Colombia was to host the event.

Given this situation, Fidel conceived the idea of calling a meeting of Latin American students, based on anti-imperialist principles, to run in parallel with and in the same country as the OAS meeting. The leader of the Cuban Revolution recalled years later:

That was when I gave myself the task of trying to organize a Latin American students' congress in Colombia, to coincide with the famous OAS meeting, where goodness who knows how many reactionary agreements were going to be made. We managed to bring people together; I visited Venezuela, I visited Panama, and there was a lot of agitation in those places. Student contacts in Colombia put me in touch with Gaitán, who turned out to be an exceptional leader, with great mass support and who was unfortunately assassinated that April 9, an hour before meeting with us for the second time. We were getting ready to go and meet him when the Bogota explosion occurred.[21]

Without intending to, at a certain point I found myself at the center of that battle against the Grau government. That took place in 1948.

By that period I had also participated in and had become a member of the Puerto Rican pro-independence movement, as I had relations with Albizu Campos and his family and other Puerto Rican leaders. Given that I was president of the Pro-Dominican Democracy Committee, I was involved in the expedition to that country, although it didn't come to fruition. I actively participated in the Puerto Rican independence struggle, apart from political activities in Cuba, which were basically directed at criticism of and protests against the corrupt government that

existed at that time. During that period we were already relating strongly to other Latin American causes, like the issue of the devolution of the Panama Canal to Panama. It was a period of student agitation in Panama, a period of agitation in Venezuela as well, as the defeat of the dictatorship had taken place, and Rómulo Gallegos had just been elected president of Venezuela. At that time there were already strong contradictions between Perón [of Argentina] and the United States. Thus we were in this movement that was confined to the following points: democracy in the Dominican Republic and the battle against Trujillo, Puerto Rican independence, the devolution of the Panama Canal, and the disappearance of the colonies still existing in Latin America. They were the four cardinal points, and this led us to establish certain contacts, let's say tactical ones, with the Peronists, who were also involved in their struggle against the United States and in their struggle over some of these issues, because at that time they too were reclaiming the Islas Malvinas [of Falkland Islands], then a British colony.[22]

During that time, given the OAS meeting in 1948—a meeting promoted by the United States to consolidate its system of domination here in Latin America—I came up with the idea of organizing a meeting of Latin American students in parallel with the OAS meeting and in the same place, to back these anti-imperialist principles and defend the points that I have already laid out: the battle against dictatorships in Latin America, not only in the Dominican Republic, but also in other countries involved in the struggle for democracy in Latin America. The idea of organizing the congress was mine and so I began to contact Panamanian students, who at that time had a very active position in the battle for the devolution of the Canal; also with the Venezuelans, I knew the positions and interests of the various countries. Thus I conceived the trip in this way: first to visit Venezuela, where a revolution had just taken place and there was a very revolutionary student attitude; then to visit Panama; and then on to Colombia. I was going to propose the idea in these universities, to ask for their cooperation. In their turn, the Argentines also committed themselves to mobilizing students in their country and it could be said that there was cooperation in that context

with the Argentines, with the Peronists. Of course, we mobilized the resources for all that ourselves. We had very little money; exclusively for travel costs.[23]

Our idea was that the students should be organized and actively participate in the struggles of the nations I have already mentioned and against imperialism. We believed that an organization should exist, we even had the idea of creating a Latin American students' organization. I took all these steps and effectively, the congress was organized.[24]

A situation came up: I was the congress organizer and the role I was undertaking was accepted everywhere, but when the official FEU leaders in Cuba realized that the congress was a reality, they wanted to participate in an official capacity and send a representation that included Alfredo Guevara, at that time secretary of the organization and the FEU president. When this official FEU representation arrived, the issue of representation was posed in one of the first meetings; whether I could represent the Cuban university students or not. That was discussed in a plenary session; I spoke passionately, explained everything that I had done, how I had done it and why. I should say that the students backed me almost unanimously when I made my exposition a bit passionately, as was to be expected in that period and at that age. I was de facto presiding over that meeting. I said that I had no personal interest, that I was not pursuing honors of any kind, that what interested me was the struggle and the aim of that struggle, that what interested me was the congress and that I was prepared to renounce any position and honor, and that my only interest was the struggle and the congress going ahead. The students applauded loudly when I talked and supported the idea that I should continue in the role of event organizer.[25]

Fidel recalls:

Afterwards we flew to Panama, already with the support of the Venezuelan revolutionary students, virtually the entire university… In Panama we met with the student leaders. There had just been one of the many shoot-outs over protests against the U.S. occupation of the Canal and a Panamanian student had been injured, and was left disabled. He was like a symbol for all the students. I made contact and visited him.

The Panamanian students were very enthusiastic and very much supported the idea of a congress, they supported it and decided to send a delegation to Bogota. Now we had two important countries.[26]

The Colombian journalist Arturo Alape, who undertook a meticulous investigation into Fidel's visit to Panama during the congress preparations, related:

"I asked Álvaro Menéndez Franco, Panamanian poet and ardent journalist, to sift through his memory to recall the 1948 visit to his country of a Cuban student called Fidel Castro, en route to Bogota to participate in a Latin American Student Congress. The poet and journalist squeezed his memory as if it were an orange. He closed his eyes to retrace the steps of history."[27]

With the dialogue under way, Álvaro Menéndez replied:

"I remember him because there was a meeting of all the chapters of the Panama Students Federation in the former location of the National University of Panama, where the National Institute still functions. A great nationalist struggle had occurred from December 12 to 17, 1947, which led to many clashes with the old national guard, leaving a number of students wounded, one of them, Sebastián Tapias, paralyzed for life.

"And, taking advantage of that climate of struggle, that night at the end of March we called for a demonstration to confront a new aviation agreement that benefited the United States."[28]

"We explained the content of our struggle to the Cubans, what it was we were planning, how we were organizing a demonstration for the first few days of April in Lesseps Plaza, where the new legislative palace now functions, very close to the former Canal Zone."[29]

"What other activities did Fidel undertake during his stay in Panama?"

"I can confirm that a day or two later, Fidel went with Luis Carlos Noriega to Santo Tomás hospital, to visit Sebastián Tapias, the student who was wheelchair bound, due to a bullet that was never be extracted from his spine despite twenty operations, and who has remained paralyzed for life. . . . One other detail: Fidel came out of the Central Hotel with a wreath, which he laid at the bust of Panama's first president. A detail that I have never forgotten."

"What did the Fidel of that period look like physically?"

"Well, his height impressed me. He was an exceptionally tall man. He was slim, beardless. We saw him as an American student passing through the Canal."[30]

THE *BOGOTAZO:* MY DUTY WAS TO STAY ON

Thirty-three years after the events of April 9, 1948 in Santa Fe de Bogota, the leader of the Cuban Revolution granted an interview to journalist Arturo Alape on his recollections of the Bogotazo *(the Bogota uprising), a historical event that he experienced intensively together with the Colombian people. At that time, Fidel was barely twenty-one and just a student leader with a clear anti-imperialist position.*

Fidel recalls those days down to the finest details:

The following incident occurred when we were in Bogota, spending all our time in student meetings, organizing the congress and the meeting with Gaitán: There was a gala function in a theater over there. I don't remember the name, it was a very classical and attractive theater; I think the gala had to do with the governmental delegations participating in the OAS conference. Youthful to the end, a bit immature, we had printed a manifesto—I don't know if there are any left over there somewhere—a manifesto in which we stated all the congress slogans: the struggle for democracy in the Dominican Republic, the struggle for Puerto Rican independence, the Panama Canal, the disappearance of the colonies in Latin America, the devolution of the Malvinas to Argentina and the struggle for democracy. We took the pamphlets to the theater, to the gala function, and released them during the function. Technically, we might have been committing an infraction, I don't know, but we didn't do it with any intention of violating the law or much less, but to make propaganda for our congress. Afterwards, we were arrested.[31]

To tell the truth, maybe out of idealism, in the ardor of youth, we told the authorities over there who we were, what we were doing, about the congress, our aims in that congress, about Puerto Rico, the Panama Canal, what was in the pamphlet and the ideas behind the congress. To tell the truth, I think we had a bit of luck in the conversation with

the detective authorities there; the fact is I even got the impression that someone with responsibility liked what we were saying. We had been persuasive with them. Maybe they realized that we weren't dangerous people, far from it, nor were we interfering in the country's internal problems. Perhaps because they liked some of the things we were saying, I don't know why, but the fact is that after that interrogation, they took our particulars and let us go. Perhaps we were running a greater risk than we imagined, but at that time we weren't aware of it. Simply, after the interrogation and all that, we went back to the hotel and tranquilly continued our activities.[32]

We had a meeting with Gaitán at 2:00 or 2:15 P.M. We had arranged it to continue talking about the congress and to firm up aspects related to the final part of the event, in which he was to participate.[33]

It was about 1:15, 1:30 or 1:20 P.M. when we left the hotel to go in that direction and stroll about until the time of the meeting, which, as I told you, was at 2:00 or 2:15 P.M. At approximately 1:00 P.M. we left on foot in the direction of Gaitán's office, and people began to appear running wildly in all directions. One, two, several at once, here and there, shouting: "They killed Gaitán!" "They killed Gaitán!" They were people on the streets, people from the town, rapidly circulating the news. "They killed Gaitán!" "They killed Gaitán!" Enraged people, indignant people, people reflecting a dramatic, tragic situation, affirming what had happened, news that began to scatter like dust. To such an extreme that after walking a couple of blocks further and reaching a park, we noticed at that moment that people were beginning to get violent. Even at that hour, around 1:30 P.M. people were committing acts of violence. Having gotten near Gaitán's office, we continued walking along 7th Avenue and the people had already broken into offices. I remember one detail just after we reached the park: I saw a man trying to smash up a typewriter that he had grabbed from somewhere, but that enraged man was having a terrible time breaking the machine with his hands, and I said to him: "Hey man, give it to me;" I helped him, took hold of the machine, tossed it into the air and let it fall. Seeing that desperate man, I couldn't think of anything else to do.

We went on walking, and acts of violence were also apparent on 7th Avenue. We were going in the direction of the park where the

Parliament building was located and the conference was meeting. We went by 7th Avenue, I think, and I saw people breaking show windows and smashing things. That was starting to worry me, because even at that time I had very clear and very precise ideas on the nature of revolution, what should happen in a revolution and what should not happen in a revolution. To tell the truth, I began to see displays of anarchy on 7th Avenue. People were breaking show windows. A state of great anger was apparent in the masses. In that always-crowded avenue, the multitude was devoting itself to breaking show windows, to breaking objects. I was worried; I began to feel concerned at the situation, because I could see the anarchic situation that was developing. I wondered what the leaders of the Liberal Party were doing, and whether anyone was going to organize things.

I continued walking along 7th Avenue—this would be between 1:30 and 1:45 P.M.—and we reached the corner of the plaza where the Parliament is located. There, somebody was on a balcony to the left, talking from a balcony, a few people gathered there, but more than anything, people dispersed all over the place in an attitude of absolutely spontaneous anger and violence. There were a few dozen indignant people in the park shouting in fury, and they began to break the lamps in the park, throwing stones at them, so you had to be careful not to get hit by flying stones or glass. I moved ahead and more or less reached the middle of the park. There was a line of recently polished up, very well dressed and well organized police in the Parliament doorways. As soon as those dozens or few hundred people who were breaking light bulbs and things approached the entries like a tornado, the police cordon broke; it looked like they were demoralized, and everyone stampeded into the Palace. I was in the middle of the park, stones flying in all directions. They entered the Parliament, which had about three or four floors. We didn't go right inside the Parliament, but stayed just outside the building, watching that eruption, because that was an eruption of the people. We were looking and the people went upstairs and from up there began to throw down chairs, began to throw down desks, began to throw down everything, you couldn't stand there because a deluge was raining down from above. And, as I said, a man was trying to make a speech

from a balcony in one corner close to the park, but nobody was paying any attention to him; it was an incredible spectacle.

We decided to go and make contact with the other two Cubans who weren't staying in the hotel: Enrique Ovares, and the other, one of our comrades of the Revolution, Alfredo Guevara, who was in a guest house not far from where we were. We went there to find them, see what they thought about the situation and to tell them what was going on. We reached the guesthouse, talked with them for a few minutes and at that point a great procession of people could be seen, a river of people approaching via a street more or less parallel with 7th Avenue. Some of them were armed, there were some rifles, others had sticks, iron bars, everybody had something, because people were gripping.sticks, iron bars, anything, in their hands. A great multitude could be seen in that street; as I said it looked like a procession along that long narrow street, probably thousands of people. When I saw that huge crowd, I didn't know where they were going—to a Police Division they said—I went and joined it. I incorporated myself into the front ranks of that crowd and marched in the direction of the Police Division. I saw that a revolution was underway and I decided to join it as one more man, just another man. Of course, I was convinced that the people were oppressed, that the people who were rebelling had a reason, that Gaitán's death was a crime, and I chose my side. To that point I had done nothing, until I saw the multitude passing in front of me, after having visited the two Cubans. When I saw the multitude of people marching, I joined them. One could say that that was the moment when I joined the multitude that had revolted. We reached the Police Division, the policemen were up there taking refuge with their guns trained, nobody knew what was going to happen. The crowd reached the entrance, the police cleared the entrance, and nobody fired a shot.[34]

I saw that the crowd was heading for the Division and I was among the first. They were training their guns, but they didn't fire. We turned the corner and the entrance was thirty meters away. The multitude, like an overflowing river, penetrated the building on all sides, retrieving weapons and things. There were police agents who had joined the crowd; you could see uniformed policemen in the crowd. That Division had a patio in the middle and two floors in the front part. I don't know how many arms there were, the few that were available were grabbed fast. Some police

officers kept their weapons and joined the crowd. I went into the arms store, but I didn't see any guns, I really didn't see any guns. There were some teargas shotguns, with some long and dense bullets. And the only thing I could grab was one of those teargas shotguns. I started to fill my cartridge belt with those bullets; I loaded it with about twenty or thirty. I said to myself: "I don't have a gun, but at least I have something to fire with," a big double-barreled shotgun. And I thought: "I'm not dressed for a war." I found a cap without a visor, bam, and put on the cap without the visor. But, with all that, I had on my ordinary shoes, not appropriate for warfare and, moreover, I wasn't very happy with my shotgun. I went out into the patio, which was full of people, people registering everything; you have to imagine the picture, everybody running upstairs, downstairs, going here, there and everywhere, a mixture of civilians and policemen. Some of them were policemen who had allowed their weapons to be taken, others were armed and had joined the crowd. I climbed the stairs rapidly to the second floor and entered a room that turned out to be for police officers. There I was seeking clothing, apart from trying to see if any more arms came to light; I was putting on some boots, but they didn't fit me. An officer came in—I'll never forget that—and in the midst of that terrible chaos, he said to me: "Not my boots! Not my boots!" The boots didn't fit me and I said to him: "It's all right sir, keep your boots."

I went down to the patio to enlist myself in something, a squad or something, and saw a police officer who was organizing a squad. I didn't have any pretensions to be a chief or direct anything; I was going as a rookie soldier. I arrived with my teargas shotgun and my bullets and got into rank. The officer had a gun and he saw me loaded with those bullets and the shotgun and says: "But what's that, what are you doing with that?" I replied: "It's all I could find," and he asked me for the shotgun. It seemed that the man wasn't so keen on fighting, even though he was organizing a squad. He asked me for it and gave me his gun with twelve or fourteen bullets; he gave it to me. Of course when he gave me the gun loads of people hurled themselves at me, wanting to grab it, and I had a tough time keeping it. But I kept the gun and the fourteen bullets or so that the officer had. From that moment I was armed with a gun, but there was no organization there, only people leaving the Division without

any order. In the same way as they had entered, the crowd was leaving without knowing where it was going; voices could be heard saying to the Palace, to who knows where. I left the Division and joined that crowd not knowing where it was going, without any direction. I was witnessing great disorder, great indiscipline, a complete lack of organization. We advanced about three blocks and ahead I saw about four or five soldiers imposing order at a crossroads. Given that there were so many people in uniform already with the crowd, I thought that those four or five soldiers were part of the crowd too and imposing order, so I went to help them restore order. I had already acquired my uniform, a visor-less cap that had turned into a beret and a police cape, that was my uniform.

So I helped the soldiers to impose order, saying like them: "Not this way, that way." At that point I believed they were soldiers who had revolted. Afterwards I realized that that was not the case, and that they were soldiers from the Presidential Guard, who were there with guns, not in a warlike attitude, but quelling that sea of people and trying to impose order. Initially I was confused and believed that they had revolted. Why were the soldiers imposing order? Because through the street where the crowd was passing, someone fired from some buildings belonging to a religious college. They fired from San Bartolomé School. I didn't know who was doing the shooting, I couldn't be sure. I was incredulous, I couldn't believe that they were firing from a convent; I was incredulous, just standing there on the corner. They were firing from the convent and I was just standing there, incredulous; finally I had to look after myself. It seemed like the soldiers had tried to divert… I don't really know what the soldiers' mission was. I don't really know if they didn't want the crowd to head for the Palace, or if it was the fact that that the shooting had started from within San Bartolomé School where they were diverting the crowd. But I helped them, believing that they were people who had rebelled and were organizing things. Because wherever I saw the possibility of someone who wanted to organize things, I tried to help.

In the midst of that shooting I situated myself on a corner. There, on that corner, I saw some students that I knew from the University, and who were with us. Students with loud hailers passed by in a car, carrying various corpses on top, they were agitating. It wasn't an organized

agitation, but one of those things that happen spontaneously. We were about two or three blocks from 7th Avenue. At that point came the news that the students had taken the radio station and that they were under attack.[35]

Our situation was difficult because we were around ten to twelve unarmed men and just two with arms. We decided to support the students who were in the National Radio Station. The crowd had moved off in one direction or another when we heard the car telling us that the National Radio Station was under attack, and we decided to go there; to tell the truth, without really knowing exactly where it was; we were going to help the students. We kept to 7th Avenue and went north as if going to Monserrate Hermitage. I didn't know what time had elapsed since I joined the crowd, entered the Police Division, came out, helped those soldiers imposing order, the shooting from the convent, deciding to help the students and leaving. On 7th Avenue the crowd was already attacking everything in sight: buildings, businesses, already starting to sack those establishments. We were going via that street. Some people had gotten drunk; they arrived with a bottle of medium-colored rum like you Colombians have and said: "Bloody drink some of this!" Imagine, there I was with my gun and the other armed man and around fifteen unarmed men along the whole of that avenue. The situation was confused and nobody knew what was happening. Many policemen had rebelled; it was even reported that military detachments had rebelled.

At that point, the position of the Colombian army was unknown. Gaitán had sympathizers among the military, that was undisputed, but the confusion was significant. We advanced along 7th Avenue; I don't know how many blocks we had covered, six, seven, eight, ten or twelve; I'd have to retrace my steps along it to find out.

At that moment many buildings and offices were on fire. When we were walking along 7th Avenue, the crowd had already attacked all the establishments. In those circumstances we reached what I later realized was the Ministry of War. We reached it going in a northerly direction, I recall; it had a park on its right and another to the left. On reaching it, we saw a battalion of soldiers ahead, moving south. They were approaching with the German helmets they used at that time—I don't

know what they use now—their guns, an entire battalion with tanks advancing. However, we didn't know who that army was with, if that army had rebelled or what that army was going to do. Seeing the battalion approaching, we took the precaution of falling back by some twenty meters, and barricaded ourselves behind some benches, waiting to discover if that battalion was friend or foe. As I said, there were about twelve students with me, and we had two guns. But the battalion took no notice of us and continued in military formation down the street. I think the tanks were behind the battalion, the soldiers in front and three tanks in the rear. They paid no attention to us and continued along 7th Avenue.

To comprehend what had happened you have to take the circumstances into account. A Police Division had been taken, the policemen had given way, many of them joining the people, there was great confusion, I had no information, we only knew that the radio station was under attack and we were going there with the students. We crossed the street and I remained in ignorance about the battalion, whether it was with the people or against the people, in rebellion or with the government, even though there wasn't really any government at that point. I crossed the street and we went to the other park facing the Ministry of War—without knowing it was the Ministry of War—which was a low-rise building, one or two floors at the most. There was a door and some bars, a fairly large number of soldiers, and then myself, gripped with a revolutionary fever as well and trying to get as many people as possible to join the revolutionary movement. I climbed onto a bench facing the Ministry of War and harangued the soldiers there to join the revolution. Everyone heard but nobody did anything and there was I with my gun haranguing from a park bench. I ended my harangue and followed the students headed there.

A bus was waiting at the edge of the park and I realized that that bus was going to the radio station; the students had commandeered it. So after giving my harangue, I went towards the bus that was leaving and we ran to catch it. The other armed comrade who was with me was left behind and I didn't see him again. I took the bus, thus leaving myself with a gun and a group of students, going to support those in the National Radio Station. I'm not sure how many blocks we traveled in the bus; it

was around eight or ten. With all this I lost my wallet with a few pesos in it, as we didn't have any money to speak of. Somebody grabbed my wallet with the little it contained, took it off me. We went towards the radio station, and got off at the corner of an avenue, a street like a boulevard that led to the radio station. In real terms, we got off in the street, with just one gun, mine, to give support to the students in the National Radio Station. When we reached the avenue there was a tremendous burst of firing, we had barely arrived when I don't know how many guns began firing on us. We were able to barricade ourselves behind some benches and other objects and it was a miracle that we weren't all killed. We reached the corner again and our group of one armed and ten or twelve unarmed men continued. At that point we couldn't do anything to liberate the National Radio Station and decided to go to the University. We took the opposite direction to the hermitage. Goodness knows who was at the National Radio Station, maybe a whole company of soldiers; it was impossible to do anything so we went to the University, to see what was going on there. To see if there was any organization, if the students had organized a command post or established some leadership.

When we reached the University nothing had really been organized. News of actions and events was flying backwards and forwards, there were lots of people, and everyone was unarmed. There was a Police Division not far from the University, so we decided to go and take the Police Division so as to acquire some arms, given there were only me and my gun and a whole load of unarmed people. It was assumed that I was the one who had to take the Division, as I was the only one with a gun. We headed for the Police Division with a crowd of students; that was really suicidal. One had already been taken and we were thinking of taking another to arm all those people. Very luckily for us, when we arrived, the Police Division had already been taken. The men had rebelled. In other words, we went to take a Police Division with my gun and a few dozen students and when we arrived outside the Division it was taken and we were received in a friendly manner. Policemen and people were already mixed in the Division. When I arrived I introduced myself to the chief of the Division who turned out to be the chief of all the policemen that had rebelled. I introduced myself, told him immediately that I was a student,

a Cuban, we were in a congress; in a few words I explained everything and the man made me his aide. At that point, at the second Division we intended to take, I became an aide.

The head of the rebel police was a rather tall man, not terribly but tall enough, I couldn't exactly describe him; he had the rank of commander or colonel, I don't remember. I became the aide to the head of the rebel police. He then decided to go to the Liberal Party office. This is an exact and rigorous account of the incredible things that happened that day. I climbed into the jeep with the chief of the rebel police who was heading for the Liberal Party headquarters. "What a relief!," I thought, as I was concerned at the lack of organization, the chaos, no sign anywhere of any element of leadership or organization, so I was happy to see the chief of the rebel police; I could see he was in contact with the Liberal Party. I knew that was where he was going and thought that things were beginning to get organized. I went with him in the jeep to the Liberal Party office; we arrived and entered. I believed at that point that I was helping to organize what was major chaos. We had traveled I don't know how many blocks. The streets belonged to nobody. There was great confusion and as I said, we had traveled at least twenty blocks. We reached the office and went in. We accompanied the chief to the door. He entered and I stayed outside; he talked to the Liberal leaders who were there, I don't know who they were. Then he returned in his jeep to the Division, which was close to the University. By this time, we had two jeeps.

We spent some time at the rebel Division and then decided to go back to the Liberal Party office, as dusk was beginning to fall. We left in two jeeps. He went in the front one and I was in the one behind. But in any case, both in the earlier trip and in this one there were crowds of people, as the group of unarmed students was still with me. They climbed in here and there and the two jeeps were full. In the second journey to the Liberal Party office I was in the front on the right, in the escort jeep. As I said, every time a car started up everyone around jumped in and everything happened very fast. Rush, rush over here, rush, rush over there, and a whole pile of people got in. Something unusual occurred on the second trip to the Liberal Party office, and I made a Quixotic gesture. It was already getting dark and the jeep in which the rebel police chief was

traveling came to a halt, it had a mechanical problem and stopped; they were trying to restart it and it wouldn't budge. The police chief got out and remained standing and there was the other jeep full of people. I didn't like that, so I got out of the jeep and said: "You're an irresponsible bunch, the lot of you," and gave my seat to the police chief. I was left in the middle of the street with two or three other students, in the middle of the street without contact of any kind. I was on the sidewalk, standing by a large wall. That happened in a street parallel to no less than the Ministry of War, as I understood later. That was the second time I came upon the Ministry of War. A few seconds went by and a little door opened in the wall, and behind the door I could see an officer's cap and three or four guys, and various guns with bayonets. I said to the other students: "These are the enemies. Let's cross the street," and taking advantage of the darkness left by the headlights of a passing car, we crossed to the opposite sidewalk. We looked but really we didn't know who they were; I suspected they were enemies when the little door opened and we saw an officer's cap and four rifles with bayonets about six meters from us.

We crossed the street, suspecting they could be enemies, but with all the insecurity, they didn't fire. We continued along that street after crossing opposite the Ministry. Then we saw a man with a submachine gun and, not knowing whether he was friend or foe, approached him, and asked him who he was. He replied: "I'm from the Fifth Division of the Rebel Police," and we discovered that he was a friend, a friendly soldier. So I was at the Ministry of War twice, once haranguing in front of it and then at the side of it when I gave the jeep to the police chief. The officer and the men that appeared from the wall fired on us; they were evidently confused as well; they were on the lookout. We crossed, reached the opposite sidewalk, where I stopped the policeman from the Fifth Division. I couldn't say exactly where, but I have the impression that we crossed the avenue, took the street at an angle with it, turned right and met up with the rebel police officer on a corner. With that we decided to go to the Fifth Division and join them. I had lost contact with the police chief and decided to join what turned out to be the Fifth Division. Night had already fallen. Everything that I have related to you took place between 1:30 P.M. and 6:30 P.M. The entrance to the Fifth Division faces downhill; it is the one close to the hill and with the entrance on

the other side. I went into to the Fifth Division and, as I did everywhere, immediately identified myself, "I'm a Cuban student, and we are in a congress," and everywhere I was well received, immediately. So, we went in, I didn't even have a cent for coffee, I'd have you know. There was a large group of rebel policemen and civilians there, in total some 400 armed men organizing themselves.

I arrived; there was a large patio in the center, where people were organizing; I immediately joined the ranks and was organized there with the people. Rather than organizing units they were checking the number of men that were there. They assigned us different locations to defend the Division. I had the second floor. There was a dormitory there and I was defending the whole floor with other policeman. Every once in a while, every half-hour, three-quarters or hour they called us for inspection in the patio; afterwards, everyone to their posts. The confusion continued, nobody knew what was happening, and that confusion lasted almost to the next day.[36]

I observed that large force of 400-500 armed men, on the defensive in the garrison, and asked for a meeting with the garrison chief. There were various officers there and I said to him: "Historical experience demonstrates that a garrisoned force is a lost force." In the Cuban experience itself, any troop garrisoned during Cuba's armed struggles was a lost troop. I proposed that he get the force out on the streets and assign it an attacking mission, to take objectives against the government. I reasoned with him, argued with him and proposed that he send the troop out on the attack. I explained that it was a strong force which, on the attack, could carry out decisive actions but while it was inside it was a lost force. That was the proposal, it was discussed and he was good enough to listen to me, but did not take any decision and so I returned to my post. I think I pursued the idea more than once to put the force on the street at that point and deploy it to take the Palace, to take objectives; that a garrisoned revolutionary force was a lost force. I had some military ideas derived from studying the history of revolutionary situations, of the movements that arose in the French Revolution: the Storming of the Bastille, and when the quarters were mobilized and attacked; as well as of Cuba's own experience, and I could clearly see that it was absurd. What was going on? Were they waiting for an attack

by the government forces? It was evident that the army had taken a position, had taken the side of the government and the police were there waiting for an army attack. We spent all night waiting for an army attack, all night.[37]

At that moment I thought of Cuba, of my family, of everyone and I felt a bit alone, because I was on my own in that Division with my rifle and the few bullets I had. I said to myself: "What am I doing here? I've lost contact with everyone, with the students, with the chief of police, I'm here in this rat-hole, this is a total mistake, it's crazy to be here waiting for an attack instead of going out on the attack with this force to engage in some decisive action." I spent some time thinking whether I should stay and why I should stay. Then I decided to stay. It would have been easy to hand over the rifle to one of the unarmed men. But at that time my thinking was internationalist and my reasoning went: "Well the people here are the same as the people of Cuba, the people are the same everywhere, this is an oppressed people, an exploited people." I had to persuade myself, and I argued: "The principal leader has been assassinated, this uprising is totally just, I'm going to die here, but I'll stay." I made the decision knowing that what was happening was a military disaster, that those people were lost, that I was on my own, that it was not the Cuban people, that it was the Colombian people. But I reasoned that people were the same everywhere, that their cause was just and that it was my duty to stay. And I stayed there all night until dawn waiting for the attack.[38]

As I have always had ideas of a military nature—basically the result of studying the history of warfare and so on—when I surveyed the terrain I saw that it was a lost cause there. Because the Division was in a skirt and there was a hill behind it, and beyond that, Monserrate Hill. I talked with the commander again and told him that if there was an attack on the fortress from above we were lost, and that we had to protect the heights behind the Division. I asked him for a patrol, and told him that if he gave me that mission I would protect the heights for him. He gave me a patrol—not a very large one, seven or eight men—the chief of police gave me a squad. I don't know if I'm going to recount all the anecdotes to you. So off I went with my patrol and took possession of the high ground between the Division and Monserrate Hill. My mission was really to take the heights, because I was expecting an attack. I spent

the 10th patrolling the heights between Monserrate Hill and the Police Division.

Various things happened. I went on a little reconnoiter in a southerly direction to see if an enemy troop was coming from that side. I remember that at one point I saw a car turning the corner. I told the driver to stop; he didn't stop but continued without seeing me. So I ran and climbed a hillock on that bend to get a sight of him. After taking the curve, the guy heard a loud noise, rammed the car, jumped out. I told him to halt, shouting "Halt! Halt!" He didn't stop, but I didn't shoot him because I realized he was unarmed, but I thought he was a spy, I thought he was spying in the area.[39]

We were there all day. For what it's worth I fired some shots at the Ministry of War. I could see it from my position and fired around four or five shots at 3:00 or 4:00 P.M. Even at that time there was no sign of the army or troops. No enemy troops appeared anywhere on those heights during the whole time we were there.[40]

At about 4:00 in the afternoon we suddenly saw some men approaching from the Division with a submachine gun and lances. The men arrived, a patrol with a submachine gun, and I asked what was going on. They said that the Fifth Division was under attack. I exhorted them not to go, not to desert, that we should go there, that we couldn't abandon the people there. The men confronted us, pointing the submachine gun at us. I couldn't stop them, because while I was arguing with them, telling them not to go, to return to the Division, they suddenly confronted us and almost fired on us, almost killed us. I was trying to persuade them and they were in a complete panic, determined to go; they confronted us with the submachine gun and off they went.

I went back to the Division with my patrol, as they had said it was under attack. But when I got there it wasn't under attack, that was a lie. On the contrary, a Division patrol had gone out to a building—I think it was a church—where some snipers were holed up. The patrol went out to fight against those people holed up in a tower. I went with them, and we passed through some very poor streets. First of all we came across a series of brick, oven and roofing factories and I recall that a little boy came up to me; his father had been killed by a stray bullet and the distraught child was shrieking at me for help: "They've killed my daddy!

They've killed my daddy!" He was crying, a child of six or seven. The man was lying in the street, a civilian who had died. We went to the tower, the shooting there stopped and so we returned to the Division. I spent my second night in the Division, the night of April 10 to 11.

At dawn on April 11 there was much talk of an agreement, people began to talk of an agreement between the government and opposition forces. I remember that I had my rifle and also a sword, I had a saber. I don't know as well, I don't know where I got it. I had about nine bullets left and a saber, my police cape, my militia-type beret—a cap without a visor—and the sword.

The talking began, things relaxed and the whole troop was informed of an agreement reached with the government that would lead to peace. They were saying that the policemen should remain in the garrison, guns should be handed in, and civilians should return to their homes. Everybody had treated me very well since my arrival, I don't know, maybe with a certain admiration at seeing a Cuban there among them with a disposition to fight, that made a good impression. When we said goodbye in the morning, I wanted to take a heirloom of it all with me, the saber maybe, but they said no, not even that.

That was no agreement, it was a great betrayal, and in my opinion the people were betrayed. The people were told about an accord, but there was no accord. I handed in my rifle on April 11, at about midday. The other Cuban had turned up there, after experiencing a series of vicissitudes; it was a miracle that he hadn't been killed, he had headed for the same Division. Around midday, we were walking calmly back to the hotel, given that peace had been reached, a national agreement. However, on the way back to the hotel, shooting was still going on at many points. We saw many revolutionaries, who had found themselves isolated, being hunted down one by one, snipers who had been left isolated. They were in a tower and you could see the army pursuing the isolated snipers one by one, many combatants were killed. In my opinion the agreement reached had no just bases or guarantees for the people, and what really happened after it was reached, after the weapons were laid down, was that they began to hunt down revolutionaries all over the city.

On reaching the hotel, we realized that they were accusing us, the Cubans, when they said: "What are you doing here? Everybody's out

there looking for you." They said: "Are you the Cubans?" We, the Cubans, had become famous by the time we reached the hotel. There were also Conservative Party members in the hotel and we were being sought as those responsible for everything. Without a cent, without any addresses; imagine our situation without a cent and without knowing a single address in Bogota. It was about 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon.

We left the hotel and could see snipers taking on the army, and headed for the guesthouse where Guevara and Ovares, president of the FEU, were staying. They had stayed at the guesthouse. The owners of the house received us well and promised to put us up there because of a 6:00 P.M. curfew. I arrived there burning with everything that I'd seen, I was a bit over-excited. First Gaitán's assassination, then all the fighting, the people's uprising, the whole tragedy that had occurred, the agreement and the betrayal. But, by chance, the owner of the guesthouse where the other two Cubans were staying and where it was agreed that the four of us would stay and get a meal and a bed, was a conservative. We hadn't said anything and had arrived there as unarmed civilians, but then the guy started to say awful things about Gaitán and the Liberals. My patience snapped and I committed that error just before the curfew, after 5:30 P.M. I told him that he was mistaken, that those people were oppressed, that they were fighters, that their cause was a just one, that they were fighting. I got carried away and contradicted the man, defending those he was attacking, and so he said that we couldn't stay there.

We were really immature to commit the mistake of getting into an argument with the owner of the house at 5:35 P.M. and then have the man tell us we had to go. To leave spelt death. We left the house and reached a hotel close to the center where many delegations were staying, the most important hotel, a white one close to the city center.[41]

It was five minutes to curfew when a vehicle belonging to one of the Argentines we had met while organizing the congress drove out. He was called Iglesias and was leaving in a diplomatic car, one of those that had been at the Pan-American Conference, and there we were, with the Cubans being sought everywhere.

We stopped Iglesias' car, told him about our situation and the curfew, and he said: "Get in!" So we got into the diplomatic car. He greeted us by

saying: "What a mess you've gotten into! What a mess you've gotten into!" Those were his words of greeting: "What a mess! Get in and I'll take you to the Cuban Consulate." That was where he took us that night, to the consulate. There we were, enemies of the Cuban Government and he took us to the Cuban Consulate. Those are the paradoxes of history. It was the 6:00 P.M. curfew, everyone was armed to the teeth and checking all the cars. They said: "Diplomatic? Drive on! Diplomatic? Drive on!"

We reached the Cuban Consulate about 6:10 P.M. We were already famous at the Cuban Consulate, because everybody was looking for the Cubans and they received us very well. . . .

This happened on the 11th at night. Given the turn of events, the Cuban Government had sent a military aircraft, there were some military men there: commanders, captains and pilots. I think there were two planes, one that had gone to Colombia in search of some bulls for a bullfight, and another military aircraft that had flown in because of the turn of events, given that there was a Cuban delegation at the Pan-American Congress. . . . they arranged things and we returned to Cuba in the plane that had gone to look for the bulls, on April 12. The plane made a stopover in Barranquilla.

We returned with all the literature: the Peace Prayer, all the material that Gaitán had given us and we had kept, collecting it from the hotel before leaving. We reached Cuba at dusk after the stopover in Barranquilla.

Thus ended a whole succession of almost miraculous things that happened there. But above all, if we hadn't got into the Granada hotel at five minutes to six, we'd have been dead, because if they'd caught us there we would have been blamed for everything. The government was seeking to justify the lie that it was a communist plot hatched up by foreigners. If they had caught us they would have made mincemeat of us and blamed us for everything. The truth is that we had nothing to do with all that, and what we did was as youthful students, idealistic people, Quixotic people, joining the people's uprising.[42]

I'm going to tell you something; I already had revolutionary ideas—I'm not saying that they were as complete at that time as they are today—

theoretically my ideas were not as firmly founded as they were some years later. But I was already a fighter in that period, for Puerto Rican independence, Dominican democracy, for the fundamental Latin American causes. I was an anti-imperialist fighter, I was a fighter for Latin American unity, the unity of our peoples against U.S. oppression and domination. I had some of the rudiments of Marxism-Leninism, but it couldn't be said that during that period I was a Marxist-Leninist, far less a member of the Communist Party or even of the Communist Youth. . . . on April 9 I was a man with leftist ideas but, above all, democratic ideas, patriotic ideas, anti-imperialist ideas, popular ideas.

What was I in 1948? I'm going to say that I was almost a communist, but not yet a communist. I was what could be termed potentially close to a communist political concept, but in that period still highly influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution, especially the popular struggles, the tactics of the French Revolution, and particularly the military aspects of the issue.[43]

Imagine, at that time I was twenty-one and I believe what I did there was genuinely noble. For my part, I feel proud of what I did, first because my attitude was a responsive one in that I reacted with the same indignation as a Colombian at the news of Gaitán's death. I reacted with the same spirit as a Colombian in the face of a situation of injustice and oppression in that country. I reacted with resolve and selflessness and altruism. I think I reacted with a lot of commonsense as well in doing everything possible to help with the organization. I believe that the advice I offered at the Fifth Police Division couldn't have been bettered today, with the age and experience I have today. I think that the decision to stay on there—although I was on my own and everything that happened that night seemed to me to be a real tactical disaster—was a great proof of selflessness, a great proof of idealism, a great proof of the Quixotic in the finest sense of the word. I was loyal until the end when they told me during the afternoon of April 10 that the Division was being attacked and the policemen were deserting, and I went back to the Division with my patrol. In other words I would say that my conduct was blameless. I was disciplined, although aware that it was suicide to stay there. But, why did I stay there knowing it was suicide and that they were mistaken from the

military point of view? It was out of a sense of honor, of idealism, of principle, morals; I stayed there that night while tanks went by every once in a while and they were expecting an attack every half-hour. I knew that everybody would have died in the event of an attack there, as it was a rat-trap. Despite totally disagreeing with the steps taken, in complete disagreement with what they were doing from the military point of view, I remained there. I was going to die anonymously there and nevertheless, I stayed. Personally, I am proud of that, because I acted responsibly, I acted with principles, I acted with correct ethics, I acted with dignity, I acted with honor, I acted with discipline and I acted with an incredible altruism given the things that went on there. Up until my final Quixotic act, which was to get into an argument with the owner of the guesthouse and which almost cost me my life; but I just couldn't remain silent in the face of that. Now I think: "I was twenty-one, perhaps with a little more experience I would have shut right up in front of that conservative, would have allowed him to come out with everything so as not to provoke a situation that we got out of by a pure miracle. If they had caught us, they would have blamed us for everything and I would not be here recounting the exact and factual truth of everything I saw and experienced on April 9. The people demonstrated an exceptional courage."[44]

FIDEL WAS ONE OF THE FIRST

The events took place in Havana, on March 11, 1949. It was a Friday and barely dusk when the U.S. squadron, moored in the bay, began to spew out waves of U.S. sailors who, within a few hours, had taken over the streets and flooded the bars, brothels and night spots of the capital with their alcoholic fumes.

Most of the members of the U.S. Navy who took part in the events belonged to the crew of the minesweeper *Rodman* which, with the aircraft carrier *Palau*, the minesweepers *Hobson* and *Jeffers* and the tug *Papago*, had arrived from the United States on the previous day, March 10.

As the finale to a scandalous binge played out along the whole of Prado Boulevard, totally drunken crew members approached the statue of the great revolutionary leader of the Cuban people (José Martí), situated in Central Park and, shouting and joking, began to climb all over it.

One of the savages, Richard Choinsgy—of a primate mentality and agility—managed to hoist himself onto the shoulders of the Martí statue, and utilized it as a public urinal. Sergeant Herbert David White and sailor George Jacobo Wargner were also among the most notorious offenders.

People's reaction was energetic and immediate. Dozens of citizens in the vicinity swiftly mobilized against the vandals, trying to settle things there and then. But the police arrived at the scene simultaneously, and instantly took the marines under their protection, laying into the angry public with their nightsticks.

It was obvious from the outset how police and government agents were going to react to the incidents provoked by that outrage against the Cuban hero's statue.

Meanwhile, popular anger was increasing and news of what had happened spread like wildfire through the warm Havana night.

By the time the marines got to the police station, hundreds of citizens were already crowding outside, demanding an exemplary punishment for the lunatic Yankees. Their blue-uniformed protectors had to form a police cordon to get them into the building. Given the tremendous tension in the crowd, fresh incidents broke out.

Bottles and glasses flew against the police station in protest and once again repression was unleashed against the people, with the police threatening them with sticks, rifle butts and shots fired into the air to make them disperse.

Many other clashes between the people on the one side and the imperialist marines and police on the other side occurred during that night of March 11, 1949.

However, the next day, surprise, surprise! Most organs of the so-called "serious press" didn't print a word about what had happened, and others

blatantly underplayed the extent of the incidents by adopting an ambiguous and pacifying tone.[45]

The most politically aware sectors included the students and the University; the FEU was one of the first groups to spark the action that the people felt to be fitting.

Fulfilling instructions, the next morning, March 12, a large group of students gathered in the Plaza de Armas, opposite the former U.S. embassy.

Those who took part in the action recall that law student Fidel Castro, already characterized by his anti-imperialist position and his immediate readiness for action, was among the first to arrive. Fidel was among the first—when the group was still small—to hurl stones at the building, a symbol of U.S. arrogance and might, in protest at what had occurred the previous night.

Hundreds of people spontaneously joined the student group's resolute action.

The demonstrators were demanding that the guilty marines—who had been handed over to the U.S. authorities—should be given back to be tried in the Cuban courts, and that the U.S. flag should be removed until that hand over was effected.

Suddenly a number of police cars under the command of Colonel Caramés, chief of police, and Lieutenants Parra and Salas Cañizares burst into the area and brutally laid into the students and people gathered there with their nightsticks.

Students with contusions to the whole body included Baudilio Castellanos, who physically shielded fellow student and FEU leader Alfredo Guevara—still convalescent after an illness—, Fidel Castro, Lionel Soto and others.

Demonstrators there recall one incident when a well-built young man turned up in the middle of all that repression. Wearing a suit and looking like an office worker or a civil servant in some important place—maybe the U.S. embassy itself—he constantly repeated to journalists and the public in general: "These are not Cuban students. These are Communist agitators taking advantage of the situation to attack the United States."

The students immediately refuted the provocateur, loudly calling out their names and positions in the FEU, while Fidel took it on himself to confront that individual.[46]

Baudilio "Bilito" Castellanos, a law student injured in that confrontation, recalls:

"We took Obispo Street in the direction of the sea, where the embassy was located then, facing the Plaza de Armas, in the Horter building on Obispo and Oficios Streets. Hundreds of people were gathering there spontaneously: students, workers, and the people of the city.

"We began to look for stones. The only attack on the U.S. embassy during the neocolonial Republic that I've heard of was the one our generation mounted. Somebody, on Fidel's shoulders, wanted to tear off the shield on the embassy.

"At that point ambassador Butler came down, surrounded by his bodyguards, and began to apologize. But the people went on insulting him, nobody wanted to listen, and the people brought more stones. And the police started to arrive at the end of the street and the first to come into view was Lieutenant Salas Cañizares, who ordered the police to whip the crowd with the *'bicho de buey.'*[47]

"I tried to protect Alfredo Guevara, still convalescent from his illness, and they lashed my back with the whip. Riposting the attack, Fidel, who was at my side, took me to a First Aid post and demanded a medical certificate noting my injuries. When I lifted up my shirt, a photographer from *Bohemia* took a shot and subsequently published it in the magazine.

"Armed with the medical certificate we went to the Ministry of the Interior and Fidel told the duty officer: 'We have come to charge the minister, as directly responsible for police actions, with criminal abuse.' Terrified, the officer begged him: 'Don't damage my reputation, sir, I have to keep my family on this small wage.' Fidel calmed him down and we went to the police station on Dragones and Zulueta and filed charges there."[48]

FIDEL ALEJANDRO: AN EXCEPTIONAL MAN

Ignacio Barbón Benítez, a modest man of the people, who worked alongside Fidel with Gildo Fleitas, René Rodríguez and other young people, recalls:

"At what point did I get to know the man who is now a universal political leader?"

A written testimonial replaces spoken words. He produces a small notebook of various pages. It is an unpublished article, and its title is: "Fidel Alejandro: An Exceptional Man." Any doubts are expelled in the first paragraph and later in the article.

"I want to contribute to a deeper understanding of the man whom I knew back in 1947-1948; he was a university student reading Law; and I was a black youth earning a few pesos as an aide in the legal office of Dr. Joaquín López Montes, on the second floor of 365 Empedrado Street. I had an elementary political education, but after meeting Fidel Alejandro and sharing his ideas, my political vocation took on a defined direction. I sympathized with the Orthodoxy (Party) and Chibás, its leader. In the Party slogan: 'Honor versus money,' I sensed something more than a theoretical program; it was a response to the clamor for popular justice, something that would change that climate of corruption that ruled in Cuba. A few meetings were enough for Fidel and me to develop an emotional, clean and long-lasting communication.

"When I say that that boy whom I knew around forty years ago is the same today: courageous, decisive, patriotic, altruistic, revolutionary and a friend, I am not exaggerating. I was also with him at political meetings, meetings at 109 Prado and for radio broadcasts.

"I remember that one day none of us: Fidel, Gildo, René Rodríguez and myself, had any money for lunch and, in a beautiful gesture, he (Fidel Alejandro) said to me: 'Barbón, go to the pawnshop (on San Rafael and Hospital, opposite Trillo park) and leave my watch in warranty there. Get some pesos.'

"And off I went. Vitorino, the pawnshop owner, valued the watch and offered me five pesos. I handed the money over to Fidel and a few

minutes later, when we were on our way to the Único Market to have some lunch, we saw Isidro Sosa, a young man from Camagüey, a friend of Fidel's and a comrade at the University. He approached walking quickly, looking anxious. After the friendship ritual appropriate for all moments: greetings, shaking hands, he recounted his economic troubles, similar to ours, and told of his urgent need of a few pesos to solve some kind of domestic conflict, I don't know what. Fidel immediately put his hand in his pants pocket and asked Isidro: 'Is five pesos enough?'

"Gildo, René and me looked at each other. I asked Fidel: 'Hey man, what about our lunch?' He stood there pensively and serious, and said: 'Go and see Tinguao (Juan Martínez) and ask him to lend you some money on my behalf, and he and I can sort it out later.'"[149]

ONE VOTE AGAINST, FIDEL'S

By 1948 Fidel Castro was the Orthodoxy Party delegate for Oriente Province and likewise to the organization's National Assembly. But, in that same year, Millo Ochoa was aspiring to become governor for the eastern province, and in order to ensure his election he informed Chibás of his intention to form an alliance with other discredited political parties, but with a controlled source of votes, which would benefit his candidature. Eduardo Chibás was against coalitions, with good reason given the political conditions at that time in Cuba, and much less with political hacks with little or no influence among the masses.

Millo had assured Chibás that all the Orthodoxy delegates in Oriente Province were in agreement with the coalition, and he promised the Party leader and founder that he would only accept the coalition if the delegates voted unanimously in favor of it. If not, there would be no pact.

To this end the twenty-six Oriente Province delegates met under Chibás' presidency and in the presence of Millo Ochoa in the former's office in the López Serrano building in Havana. The issue was debated and then put to the vote; apparently all the delegates had raised their hands in approval, but Chibás asked if there were any votes against or

abstentions. One delegate rose to his feet and asked to explain his vote against the pact: it was Doctor Fidel Castro Ruz. For close to an hour he spoke in favor of the Orthodoxy Party's independent line.

Two years later, on January 28, 1950, at the Orthodoxy Party National Assembly, a motion was passed that would become part of the so-called Orthodoxy doctrine, in which the line of the organization's total political independence was adopted, rejecting political alliances at any point in the movement's existence because such coalitions did not respond in any way to ideologies, and affirming that the Party was not bound to any other interest than the interest of the people.

That pact planned by Millo was never adopted and later, as president of the Orthodoxy Assembly in Oriente Province, he convened the delegates, leaving out Fidel Castro.

Fidel returned to the starting point with more impetus, hence his work among the masses in Havana's Cayo Hueso barrio and his subsequent election to the Havana provincial assembly, as an immediate step to his nomination as a representative, having continued the political process truncated by the events of March 10, 1952. [50]

POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN CAYO HUESO BARRIO

Adolfo Torres Romero, the barber on 823 Neptuno between Marqués González and Oquendo, had many clients among the Orthodoxy youth, both university students and people in the neighborhood. Fidel was one of those clients. At that time Adolfito was a person of weight in the densely populated barrio in terms of any pre-electoral regulatory adjustments, in his condition as Orthodoxy Party delegate, a modest but occasionally decisive position in the hierarchy for aiding and even guaranteeing electoral aspirations, given that each delegate controlled a considerable number of party members.

As was the case in other political organizations in the game of the so-called representative democracy, the Orthodoxy movement contained

various tendencies among its ranks, and Adolfito had his, to which he had to respond. And his was not exactly the one espoused by Fidel, who came into the barrio from outside the established mechanisms.[51]

At that time Adolfito already had a very well organized force and was preparing for his re-election as a municipal assembly delegate for Chibás' Party.

"With that impulse for struggle, with that fighting spirit and innate sense of organization, Fidel approached me with an interest beyond that of the client-barber relationship. The barber's saloon was a meeting place for local Orthodoxy supporters in general. When he arrived there, Fidel became my client, and brought various friends; he was an assiduous visitor to the saloon and my home, because the barber's salon was installed in the living room of my house," Adolfito related.

According to the barber, that natural relationship between the youthful Orthodoxy member and a municipal delegate of the organization soon turned into a political battle.

"Overnight, I perceived Fidel as my strongest rival, and in fact he was," Adolfo Torres affirmed in his testimonial.

What had happened?

Fidel had cornered Adolfo Torres in Cayo Hueso barrio (consisting of thirty-nine blocks over a 26-hectare surface area), utilizing personal, direct persuasion and correspondence. With his friend and comrade Gildo Fleitas, and [Raúl de] Aguiar, another Moncada assailant who fell in action, Dr. Fidel Castro copied the register of Orthodoxy members in the barrio (with names and addresses) and sent them personal letters by mail, exhorting them to elect him as delegate in the first round of elections. The letters included a succinct program or projection of his future work. But moreover, he quickly visited all the tenements and numerous multi-family buildings and homes in the barrio to discover the needs of the huge neighborhood. Taking advantage of his profession as a lawyer, he also proposed solutions to conflicts that he came across on "ground visits," as we would say today.

That new way of working—very tough and combative—introduced by Fidel, gave him a real electoral strength. It was direct proselytizing with no intermediary, a crushing formula in terms of the traditional methods practiced by the political bailiffs who responded to Adolfito

who, on the other hand, couldn't leave his work in the barber's saloon. His sedentary position prevented him from counteracting the young lawyer's dynamic activities.[52]

Things continued to advance and Fidel decided to aspire to nomination as a representative. Given that that policy had its own mechanisms, he had to make an impact on the assemblies. He wanted to be a delegate, he had to be a delegate, starting with Havana, and within a Havana barrio.

More than twenty years later Adolfito related: "He announced his wish to us: he proposed associations of force between us, in other words, with me; I clarified that we already had the barrio sewn up. We got on well, but that was the reality; we felt affection for him because he shared ideas with us, but we told him that he should go to another barrio and that we would help him if we could. But seemingly he had problems in other barrios and returned to Cayo Hueso, where he contacted Raúl de Aguiar, who did give him an entry in terms of his aspiration. When that came to my attention he had already perforated the barrio with those initiatives of his, visiting people, direct contact with the people in the neighborhood: that was the truth.

"Insofar as the letters he sent to the voters, I remember that there were two: one inviting them to cooperate with him, to vote for him, and the other thanking them for their cooperation.

"His drive in working among the masses was so great that we had to, I had to rapidly address the task of seeing how I could save my situation, otherwise I would be eliminated in the political struggle in Cayo Hueso barrio," the barber admitted.[53]

CAUGHT IN A HAIL OF BULLETS

Adolfito told us that in one of his Sunday radio broadcasts, Chibás made an exposé implicating Senator Rolando Masferrer, head of a terrorist group known as the Masferrer Tigers. The Sunday after that transmission, Masferrer would have the right to a space on the Orthodoxy leader's

own program to refute the charges, which he was intending to use to gag Chibás, whose radio program was heard throughout Cuba, to the point that more than once movie screenings had to be halted so that the audience could listen to him through speakers attached to the projection room radio.

"That Sunday," Adolfito recalled, "there was a lot of excitement because the Orthodoxy masses were protesting against that restrictive measure. With Orthodoxy supporters from Cayo Hueso, Medina (Vedado), Marianao and other districts, we marched on the López Serrano building on L and 13, whose penthouse was occupied by Eddy Chibás and where he had his central office. We were thinking of accompanying him in an orderly march to the CMQ, there on L and 23 in the Radiocentro building. I remember Chibás climbed onto the roof of a car surrounded by the people; the people were angry, furious, because the police had arrived to prevent the march. The entire area was occupied by the police, Masferrer's people and even army elements; all of them well armed, unlike the people.

"I saw Fidel on that demonstration; he was indignant, protesting, walking from one side to the other. At that very moment the police started firing on us, on the people. They hit an Orthodoxy worker of Spanish origin called José Otero Bens, who died from his wounds. It was like seeing everything in a photograph. A stevedore whose surname was Segura was very close to Fidel. The situation was very delicate on account of the level of tension."[54]

Omar Borgess testifies that Fidel was indeed there, in the park facing the building, now the Camilo Cienfuegos clinic [currently the International Pigmentary Retinosis Center], in the epicenter of that hail of bullets. For him, the agent of repression who began the firing on demonstrators was Rafael Salas Cañizares, then head of the patrolmen with the ranking of lieutenant. Fidel Castro was so close to the firing line that the smoke irritated his eyes. A friend of both of them discovered the Masferrer Tigers waiting in a car, having identified Fidel, whom they viewed as an outright enemy, and he called Omar and informed him of the danger. Omar approached Fidel and said: "Get away country boy, Masferrer's people are going to shoot you. Those people want to shoot you." But he followed the rhythm of

the crowd and took part in the protest. There is even a photo in which Fidel appears arguing with General Quirino Uría, chief of police, who was wearing battle dress.

His comrade insisted on getting him away; they had already wounded Otero Bens, and Chibás was calling for some sanity to avert a massacre.

Fidel left the area in open dispute with Omar; they took a bus and alighted on Línea and Paseo, from where they went on foot to the Fren Mar building on 2d and 3d Streets in Vedado, where Fidel was living at that time. His eyes were still irritated by the gunsmoke.[55]

A TREMENDOUSLY STIRRING SPEECH

"Almost forty years have gone by and I still conserve intact the emotion of that day, September 30, 1949. Fidel gave a tremendously stirring patriotic speech with a crystal-clear social emphasis; in which he gave a magnificent portrait of the sacrificial figure of Rafael Trejo, the university student leader who fell on September 30, 1930, during the historic revolutionary demonstration against President Gerardo Machado's dictatorship."

Ignacio Barbón Benítez looked at the old, unpublished photo, taken in the Radio Cadena Habana studio on San José and Belascoaín. He smiled and his face expressed various emotions.[56]

He went on to recount:

I remember that a few days before the radio meeting it was agreed to pay tribute to Trejo in a different way: by publicly denouncing the Prío government's excesses, by telling the people that the youth honored Trejo and his memory without any fear of reprisal by the army, police or hired gangs.

Fidel and I talked with Alejo Cossío del Pino, proprietor of the Radio Cadena Habana network, and he agreed to facilitate a broadcasting slot for the September 30 anniversary. It was, I repeat, something more than a speech. The program lasted half an hour (12:00-12:30 P.M.). With Cossío del Pino's approval, we began to promote the broadcast to friendly people

via press notes, phone calls and other actions. I did the opening part and Fidel read out a brilliant speech. He concluded with inviting people to go the university stairway. And the people responded. It was a tribute worthy of Trejo.[57]

ENDNOTES

1. Fidel Castro, "Discurso pronunciado con motivo del inicio del curso escolar 1995-1996 en la enseñanza superior y sus 50 años de vida revolucionaria," ed. cit., 4-5.
2. Ibid., 5.
3. Ibid., 5.
4. Ibid., 7.
5. Frei Betto, op. cit., 112-113.
6. Arturo Alape, "Fidel y el Bogotazo" [Fidel and the *Bogotazo],* in *Antes del Moncada***,** ed. cit., 46-47.
7. The initials of a manipulative political bloc known as the Alemán, Grau and Alsina Bloc, headed by José Manuel Alemán, Minister of Education in the Grau government.
8. Fidel Castro, "Discurso pronunciado con motivo del inicio del curso escolar 1995-1996 en la enseñanza superior y sus 50 años de vida revolucionaria," ed. cit., 6.
9. Arturo Alape, "El Bogotazo: memoria del olvido" [The *Bogotazo:* Forgotten Memory], *Casa de las Américas* review (Havana, 1983): 639.
10. Aldo Isidrón del Valle, "Lalo, el guardafaro de Cayo Saetía: un hombre de palabra" [Lalo, the Cayo Saetía's Lighthouse Keeper: A Man of His Word], in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 48.
11. Fidel Castro, "Discurso pronunciado con motivo del inicio del curso escolar 1995-1996 en la enseñanza superior y sus 50 años de vida revolucionaria," ed. cit., 6.
12. Demajagua cane plantation bell, rung by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes on October 10, 1868 to announce to his slaves that he was freeing them in order to join the Cuban War of Independence. *Ed.*
13. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada* [Moncada Cry], Vol. 2 (Havana: Editora Política, 1986), 379-380.
14. Marta Rojas, "Combate de Fidel por la reivindicación de la campana de Demajagua" [Fidel's Battle to Reclaim Demajagua Bell], in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 11-14.

15. Ibid., 16-17.
16. Ibid., 18.
17. Ibid., 18-20.
18. Ibid., 21-22.
19. When eight revolutionary medical students were executed in Havana. *Ed.*
20. Aldo Isidrón del Valle, "Noviembre 1947: Artemisa por primera vez" [November 1947: Artemisa for the First Time], in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 56-58.
21. Fidel Castro, "Discurso pronunciado con motivo del inicio del curso escolar 1995-1996 en la enseñanza superior y sus 50 años de vida revolucionaria," ed. cit., 6.
22. Arturo Alape, "El Bogotazo: memorias del olvido," ed. cit., 639-640.
23. Ibid., 640-641.
24. Ibid., 644.
25. Ibid., 644-645.
26. Arturo Alape, "Fidel en Panamá" [Fidel in Panama], in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 61.
27. Ibid., 60.
28. Id.
29. Ibid., 61.
30. Ibid., p.63.
31. Arturo Alape, "El Bogotazo: memorias del olvido," ed. cit., 648.
32. Ibid., 649.
33. Ibid., 651.
34. Ibid., 652-655.
35. Ibid., 655-657.
36. Ibid., 657-662.
37. Ibid., 663-664.
38. Ibid., 664-665.
39. Ibid., 665-666.
40. Ibid., 666.
41. Ibid., 666-669.
42. Ibid., 669-671.
43. Ibid., 671.
44. Ibid., 673-674.
45. Julio García Luis, "Afrenta de 'marines' a José Martí y la protesta que anunció futuras batallas" [U.S. Marines Affront to José Martí and the Protest Presaging Future Battles], in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 170-172.
46. Ibid., 174-175.
47. A kind of whiplash made of a bull's penis. *Ed.*
48. Pedro A. García, "Ultraje a la memoria de Martí" [Outrage to Martí's Memory], *Granma* daily (March 12, 1999): 9.

49. Aldo Isidrón del Valle, “Historia para una foto” [History for a Photo], in *Antes del Moncada*, ed. cit., 190-192.
50. Marta Rojas, “Adolfito, barbero de Fidel” [Adolfito, Fidel’s Barber], in *Antes del Moncada*, ed. cit., 41-43. [On March 10, 1952, with the support of the U.S. Government, Fulgencio Batista perpetrated a coup d’état and created a social and political situation that could only be resolved by the Revolution. *Ed.]*
51. Ibid., 25.
52. Ibid., 26 and 31.
53. Ibid., 34.
54. Ibid., 35-36.
55. Ibid., 37.
56. Aldo Isidrón del Valle, “Historia para una foto,” in *Antes del Moncada*, ed. cit., 187.
57. Ibid., 188 and 190.

A LAWYER CALLED FIDEL

WITH A REVOLUTIONARY OUTLOOK

In an interview with Frei Betto, the leader of the Cuban Revolution stated:

I graduated from the University in 1950, and I'd acquired a fully revolutionary outlook—not just in terms of ideas, but also in terms of purposes and how to implement them, how to apply it all to our country's conditions—in a very short period. I think that was very important.

When I enrolled in the university, I first became involved with an opposition party that was very critical of political corruption, embezzlement and fraud.

BETTO: The Orthodoxy Party?

CASTRO: Yes. Its official name was the Cuban People's Party, and it had broad mass support. Many well-meaning, honest people belonged to that party.[1]

After graduation, I wanted to take some graduate courses. I was aware that I needed more training before devoting myself fully to politics. I especially wanted to study political economy. I'd made a great effort at the university to pass the courses that would enable me to obtain degrees in law, diplomatic law, and social sciences, in order to get a scholarship. I was already living on my own; my family gave me some

help during the first years, but when I was finishing college—I'd even gotten married—I couldn't think of continuing to receive help from my family. Even so I wanted to study, and the only way to do it was by getting a scholarship abroad. To get that scholarship, I had to get those three degrees. The scholarship was already within my reach. I had to take only two more courses out of the fifty I had to pass in two years. No other student in my class had done this, so there was no competition. But then impatience and my contact with reality forced me to act. I didn't have the three years I needed to continue my studies.[2]

Rather well equipped with the main ideas and with a revolutionary outlook, I then decided to put them into practice. Before the coup d'état on March 10, 1952, I already had a revolutionary outlook and even an idea of how to implement it. When I entered the university, I didn't have any revolutionary culture yet. Less than eight years passed between the development of that outlook and the triumph of the revolution in Cuba.[3]

Some people knew what I thought and some were already trying to block me. They called me a communist, because I explained everything to everybody rather candidly. But I wasn't preaching socialism as the immediate objective at that time. I spoke out against injustice, poverty, unemployment, high rent, the eviction of farmers, low wages, political corruption, and ruthless exploitation everywhere. This was a denunciation, a preaching, and a program—for which our people were much better prepared and where I had to start working in order to lead the people in a really revolutionary direction.

I noticed that even though it was strong and had influence among the workers, the Communist Party was isolated. I saw it as a potential ally. Of course, I couldn't have convinced a Communist Party member of the fact that my theories were right. I didn't even try to do that. What I did was to pursue those ideas after I already had a Marxist-Leninist outlook. I had a very good relationship with them. Almost all of the books I read were bought on credit at the Communist Party bookstore on Carlos III Street. I also had a very good relationship with Communist leaders at the university; we were allies in almost every struggle. But I would think, "There is a possibility to work with the large, potentially revolutionary masses." I was putting those ideas into practice even before Batista's coup on March 10, 1952.

BETTO: Did the members of the group that attacked the Moncada garrison belong to the left wing of the Orthodoxy Party?

CASTRO: They came from among the young people in that party whom I knew. I also knew what they thought. When the coup was staged, I started to organize them.

BETTO: Under what name?

CASTRO: I was organizing combat cells.

BETTO: Was that what they were called, "cells"?

CASTRO: I was setting up a military organization. I didn't have an independent revolutionary plan as yet, because that was in the first few months after the 1952 military coup. I'd had a long-term strategic plan since 1951, but it called for a preliminary political period.

Just after the coup I was proposing a revolutionary movement. I even had some political strength. The Orthodoxy Party was going to win the election. I knew that its leadership in almost all the provinces—all except Havana Province—was already in the hands of the landowners and the bourgeoisie, as was always the case. That party was virtually in the hands of the reactionary elements and electoral machines—except for Havana Province where a group of honest, prestigious politicians, intellectuals, and university professors prevailed. There was no machine, though some rich people were coming up and trying to take control of the party in the province, using the traditional methods of machines and money.

The party was quite strong in Havana. It had 80,000 members who'd joined spontaneously. That was a considerable number. It grew—especially after the death of its founder, a militant man with great influence among the masses who killed himself as the result of a controversy with a government minister. He'd charged the minister with having purchased property in Guatemala with embezzled funds, but he couldn't prove it. He fell into a trap, starting a controversy over that issue, for—even though corruption was rampant in the country—he couldn't provide any concrete evidence. He grew desperate and committed suicide. The party was virtually without leadership, but it had enormous strength.

I was already saying that that party was going to win the June 1952 presidential election. I also knew what was going to happen with that

government: it would end up in frustration. However, I was already thinking of a preliminary political stage for preparing the movement and a second stage of seizing power in a revolutionary way. I think that one of the key things that Marxism taught me—and that I also knew intuitively—was that power had to be seized in order to make the revolution and that nothing could be accomplished through the traditional political methods that had been used up until then.

I was thinking of using certain positions as a platform from which to launch a revolutionary program—initially, in the form of legislative bills—that later came to be the Moncada program. It wasn't a socialist program yet, but it could win the support of large masses of the population, and it was the first step toward socialism in Cuba. I'd worked out the ideas of the Moncada program long before Batista's coup. I was already organizing a powerful base with poor shantytown dwellers in Havana and other poor sectors in the city and province. I also worked actively with Orthodoxy Party members.

Since I already was a lawyer, I had close contact with those sectors in an active, dynamic, energetic struggle, supported by the efforts of a small group of comrades. I didn't hold any leadership posts, but I had broad mass support in that party and a revolutionary outlook. When the coup took place everything changed. It became impossible to carry out that initial program, in which I'd even included the soldiers, as I considered them to be victims of exploitation—they were put to work on the private farms of magnates, the president, and the colonels. I could see all that, and I denounced it and even had some subtle influence among their ranks. At least they were interested in the denunciations. I planned to include the soldiers in that movement—soldiers, workers, farmers, students, teachers, professionals and the middle class—all in a broad program.[4]

I HAVE DEVOTED MUCH TIME TO HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL LITERATURE

For me, reading is one of my greatest pleasures and throughout my life I have read everything I could lay my hands on related to history, everything my agitated life has allowed me both when I was young and

later. I read as a university student, in my pre revolutionary life, in my life during the Revolution, in my life in prison, in my life in exile and throughout these years of Revolution, robbing one, two, three and sometimes more hours from sleep or work. Of course I have read up on all kinds of matters, all kinds of writings, but I have always had a special predilection for historical works, and that's why I have been able to develop my own ideas and, on many occasions, question the way in which many events were related.[5]

After historical, comes political literature. I began to familiarize myself with political literature when I was studying at the university, especially when I was studying political economy, which I began in the first year at the Faculty of Law. It was capitalist political economy, but contained all the classics, the main schools of economy; we had references to those. Political economy studies continued in the second year as well, and then came labor legislation, which is when I started go more deeply into Marx, Engels and Lenin, the distinct schools, and I read their works extensively.

Curiously enough, it was studying capitalist political economy back then which converted me into a kind of socialist utopian, I made a critical assessment of all that economy and to me it seemed crazy, absurd, anarchic, chaotic. That's why socialist ideas are so deeply rooted in me, because I came to the conclusion—before reading Marx, Engels and Lenin, all those classics—that capitalism was madness and chaos, according to my own analysis, precisely from studying capitalist political economy. So I became what is now known as—because I didn't know then what I was, only later—a utopian socialist, and I began to elaborate theories as to how the economy should be organized.

The economy books in the Faculty of Law were voluminous and heavy, and the exams were difficult. Let me tell you that I obtained outstanding marks in that subject, in spite of them suspending many students and the exams being oral ones. I had thought a lot about it all, in spite of there not being much time available in the first years to study, as I was already involved in political activities and in sports. I was an athlete, a political activist and moreover, I wanted to study, I tried to study and I did study, but I didn't really have much time for studying in my first years at university.

Of course, as I began to develop my own ideas and make my own independent judgment on the entire existing economic system, then my mind, my spirit was totally inclined toward Marxist-Leninist ideas. That was the way, that was the open door, I would say, that I entered, because I became a fanatic—to put it one way—an impassioned sympathizer of the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and from that point I read a lot on political literature.

I have devoted a lot of time not just to history and geography, but also to political literature and definitely, universal literature. I'm always reading. For example, I have a large collection of books on Bolívar, I feel infinite admiration for Bolívar. I consider Bolívar to be the greatest character among the great figures of history, the man of difficulties, and the man who overcame all the obstacles, a really exceptional person.

I have read a lot about Hannibal the Carthaginian, his expeditions, his campaigns in Italy, his wars, his battles; everything related to Alexander the Great; on Julius Caesar, great historical figures and more modern great military figures like Napoleon, his military campaigns and all his history.

Among the great figures of history, I have my predilection, and that predilection is for Bolívar.

I haven't even mentioned Martí. Martí is a Bolívar of thought, and Bolívar was a political genius, a genius of warfare, a statesman, because he had the opportunities that Martí did not have to become a leading statesman. His idea of uniting that immense continent in the midst of such enormous difficulties is unprecedented; he not only contributed with his actions to the liberation of all those countries, but the mere effort of trying to unite them is such a fundamental idea, vital for all of Our America, for all our continent, for all people of Iberian descent—people of Spanish and Portuguese origin—that mix that started 500 years ago. Bolívar's philosophy and ideas have such transcendence!

But to define Martí, I would express it by saying that he was a Bolívar at the peak of political thought. Maybe I could be accused of sectarianism, but I don't recall anyone of the intellectual caliber of Martí.

Martí was fanatical about Bolívar, about his grandeur and his objectives. And, as I have read many books, I have a certain right to make a selection among persons that I have most affinity to in history.

It remains to say that I have read a great number of books on revolutions. I believe that I have read all the books that have been written on the French Revolution; I have read a great deal on the Bolshevik Revolution; an infinity of material on the Mexican Revolution; and I have likewise read a lot on the Chinese Revolution over all these years. Moreover, I have paid particular attention to literature on economics; I have read about economic problems but perhaps not to such an extent as historical problems.[6]

AN ATYPICAL COMMUNIST

Fidel recalls the tactic he followed at that time:

I was discreet, not as discreet as I should have been, because I would start to expound on the ideas of Marx and the class society to anyone I met, so that within a movement of a popular nature, whose slogan in the fight against corruption was "Honor versus money," and which I had joined shortly after going up to university, I was gaining fame as a communist. But, in the final years of my course, not a utopian communist, but this time a free-acting atypical Communist. I started from a realistic analysis of the situation in our country. It was the McCarthy era, and the virtually total isolation of the People's Socialist Party, as the Marxist Party of Cuba was called. However, in the movement that I had joined, which had already become the Cuban People's Party, there was a large number of people who, in my judgment, had a class instinct, but not a class awareness. It included campesinos, workers, professionals, middle-class people, good, honest and potentially revolutionary people. Its founder and leader, a man of great charisma, had dramatically killed himself a few months before the 1952 coup d'état. Our movement was nourished by the youthful ranks of that party.

I was a member of that political organization, which really was already falling—as happened with all of them—into the hands of wealthy people, and I knew exactly what was going to happen after the already inevitable electoral win. However, I had formulated certain ideas, by myself as well—as you can imagine anything can occur to a utopian—on everything that had to be done in Cuba and how to do it, in spite of the United States.

Those masses had to be led along a revolutionary road. Perhaps that was the merit of the tactic we followed.[7]

I DRAW UP A STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

The fundamental issue for me was my own political formation and acquiring a revolutionary awareness. I had the old idea of the war of independence, Martí's ideas, a great sympathy for Martí and his thinking, the wars of independence—on which I had read almost everything published—before I first came into contact with economic ideas, with the absurdities of capitalism and then I developed a utopian mentality, that of a utopian socialist rather than a scientific socialist. Everything was in chaos, everything was disorganized: excess here, unemployment there; food in excess here and hunger there. I began to become aware of the chaos that was capitalist society; that's where I started, reaching my own conclusion that the economy we were told about and were taught was absurd.

For that reason when I had the opportunity to read for the first time Marx's famous *Communist Manifesto,* it had a great impact on me, as well as some university texts that helped. The *Historia de la legislación obrera* [History of Labor Legislation], written by an individual who did not remain true to his history but wrote a good book; and Rosa's work [*sic*], and histories of political ideas. In other words certain professors' texts helped me to get to the point, until I set about acquiring an entire Marxist-Leninist library in the People's Socialist Party library—and on credit, because I didn't have money to pay anything. It was they who supplied me with the materials that I then devoted myself to feverishly reading.

The Orthodoxy Party was already founded and I was part of it from the beginning and prior to acquiring a socialist awareness. Then I became something like a leftist in the Orthodoxy Party.

Now, what was the key notion in everything that happened afterward? My conviction that the Communist Party was isolated and that, in the country's existing conditions, in the middle of the cold war and the volume of anticommunist prejudice abounding, it was not possible to make

a revolution from the positions of the People's Socialist Party, although the Socialist Party wanted to do so. Imperialism and the reaction had isolated this party to the point that it was totally prevented from undertaking a revolution, and that was when I got to thinking of the ways, the roads and the possibilities of a revolution and how to go about it.

Given the state of ferment in the country and the strength gained among the masses by Chibás' movement, I found myself in a party that had great popular strength, certain attractive concepts in combating vice and political corruption, and ideas in the social context that were not as yet totally revolutionary. But, apart from in the capital of the Republic, the party was already falling into the hands of the landowners, because when a popular party emerged here its provincial directorates didn't take long to fall into the hands of landowners and the rich (a process that was already taking root in the Orthodoxy Party). And it was on the basis of that contradiction and the tragic death of its combative and tenacious leader, that I formulated the concept of how the Revolution had to be made within the conditions of our country.

Chibás' suicide left that party without a leader. It had to get to the elections and it had to win the elections in those conditions. However, with the great support left it by the death of Chibás himself, victory for the Cuban People's Party was inevitable in that election.[8]

Facing the possibility of revolution by that route and the inevitability of rapid frustration, I drew up a strategy for the future: to launch a revolutionary program and organize a popular uprising from within the government and from within Congress itself. And, from that moment, I had the whole concept; all the ideas put forward in *History Will Absolve Me*, what the measures should be, how to propose them, what to do. That was the first revolutionary concept that I was able to elaborate, let's say barely six years after going up to university that September. You could say that I took six years to acquire a revolutionary conscience and to draw up a revolutionary strategy.[9]

FIDEL ON "LA VOZ DEL AIRE"

Ignacio Barbón evokes the time when he worked very closely with Fidel:

I haven't forgotten that a few months after graduating from the university as a lawyer, Fidel began to work as a journalist-commentator on "La Voz del Aire" (Voices on Air) on 25th and G, Vedado. "Only the Orthodoxy Party can raise a combative tribune" was our slogan. Thus, the interminable sessions of political work for the electoral campaign were supplemented by the radio program, which was an impregnable position for denouncing Carlos Prío's corrupt government. But Fidel Alejandro the lawyer didn't slow down his rate of professional work. In 1950 he opened a legal office with Azpiazo and Resende.

According to public survey specialists, Fidel's broadcasts on "La Voz del Aire" had a formidable acceptance, principally in Havana. His charges against Prío and his politicking mafia were reiterated, as were death threats against Fidel. On more than one occasion we got warning calls from people who were friends: the paranoid Masferrer and his gangsters were roaming around in the vicinity of the radio station. Cheap thugs, nothing more.

It was said that that Masferrer lived to kill and killed to live, but he didn't dare to touch Fidel.

I will never forget that toward the end of the year Fidel set about composing a New Year greetings letter to program listeners, members of the PPC(O)[10] and friends who lived in all the municipalities of Havana Province. To confirm the effectiveness of the mail he proposed to send the first missives to our own homes. Gildo, René, Azpiazo and myself were the first to receive the New Year congratulations.

Gildo and René printed thousands of mimeographed letters.[11]

The text of the letters read:

December 1951

Comrade in ideas:

I am sending you these lines with my sincerest wishes for you and your esteemed family in this festive season.

Sad and recent memories have turned our festivities into mourning this Christmas, but new and heartening hopes are being born in the warmth of the first lights of the fortunate dawn that ignited the sacrifice.

For us, there is only one possible way of seeing in the New Year, by recalling Martí's last words that Christmas before the last freedom

effort: For a suffering people there is no "other New Year than that made by the force of its fist in the ranks of its enemies."

With those words I remain yours sincerely,

Fidel Castro[12]

AZPIAZO-CASTRO-RESENDE LEGAL OFFICE

Fidel had just graduated as a Doctor in Law and in September 1950 he suggested to two of his university comrades, Jorge Azpiazo and Rafael Resende, that they should open a legal office together.

The majority of the legal bureaus, and the commercial ones, were located in Old Havana. That was the center of the country's economic activity and the young lawyers set up office in the Rosario building on 57 Tejadillo Street, first in apartment 204, then 303 and later in 206 in the same building, whose facade still bears a plaque to the effect.

The rental for that space was sixty pesos per month and had to be paid one month in advance.

Between the three of them they got together eighty pesos for José Álvarez, the owner of the building, promising to pay him the remainder soon. They acquired the place unfurnished and it opened because of Fidel's will. They loaned a chair and desk from the same proprietor; then they bought a typewriter in installments.[13]

Some years ago, journalist Marta Rojas,[14] accompanied by Dr. Azpiazo, visited apartment 206, 57 Tejadillo Street. On that occasion the reporter took some notes on the objects in the office and wrote this description:

The office contains furniture from the period in which it was set up. Here is Fidel's desk, a book cupboard, a typewriter, a small bookcase, a straw-stuffed sofa, two armchairs, a phosphorescent light, a bust of José Martí, some books and a box full of envelopes for printed letter heads stating: Azpiazo-Castro-Resende Legal Office: Civil, Criminal and Social Matters, Apartment 303, 57-59 Tejadillo, Havana. I took an envelope to copy and keep as a souvenir. I asked Dr. Azpiazo what else the room had contained. He replied: "Paintings, one of Martí; as everybody knows,

Fidel Castro argues with an army officer who is trying to stop a demonstration.

Fidel was always a follower of Martí. And a painting of Maceo and another of Ignacio Agramonte."

I noticed that one of the bookcases was empty. He told me that it had held the collection of Martí's works they acquired, but that many of the books were sent to Fidel in prison, when the penal authorities permitted the entry of certain items.[15]

FIDEL FINDS ANOTHER WAY TO SORT IT OUT

In 1950 Rubén López had a small carpentry workshop on the ground floor of the building on 18th and 23d (more exactly at the road fork ending on 21st Street) in Vedado, and the painter César Fonseca worked with him as an assistant. One of Fidel's sisters, Lidia Castro, lived in the vicinity, on 20th and 23d, and Fidel lived not very far away on 23d between 22d and 24th.[16]

Interviewed by a well-known journalist, Rubén López recalls:

I was introduced to Fidel, who was wearing a suit and tie, very correct. He said that he wanted me to make him some furniture for the office he had just opened in Old Havana. I replied in the affirmative. Azpiazo and Resende withdrew a bit and Fidel close a deal with me. He told me that there was no problem with the timber, that he had it. That day I became aware of Fidel's great powers of persuasion, because I didn't let clients give me the timber. Most people who contracted a job and brought the timber believed that the carpenter wouldn't use it all for the furniture they had ordered; I didn't allow that because of the slight on my personal honesty. However, I said yes to Fidel. He had convinced me. I said: "All right, I'll go and get your timber," thinking all the time that at the end of the day I would discount the value of the boards from what he paid me for the work. Then he said: "OK, go to the Gancedo Timber Yard and select the boards you need for the office furniture."

Rubén continued: The next morning Fidel returned to the workshop. He brought me a magazine specializing in furniture. "Look, this is what I picked, this is the bureau I want, with the armchair and the bookcase," he said. "Ah, that's all right," I replied.

I went with César Fonseca to Gancedo's and selected all the wood that we needed. We called the assistant to measure it, and after he'd done so, he told me how much it cost.

"That's to go on Dr. Fidel Castro's account," I told him.

The assistant didn't know him. "Who's Dr. Fidel Castro? As far as I know he doesn't have an account here in the timber yard, so I can't give you the timber."

"Well, kid, as I'm not taking it with me, I'm going to put it back where it was." "No, leave it here," he answered, and I left Gancedo's.

In the afternoon—Rubén continues relating—Fidel returned to the workshop to ask if I'd brought the timber; I told him that we'd gone to collect it but they wouldn't dispatch it to us. He placed a hand on my shoulder and asked me to go with him to the Gancedo Timber Yard. I got into his car, Fidel was driving, it was a black or very dark car; we got there; he went into the office and I stayed in the store. After a little while he came out and told me that we could go and get a van to transport the boards whenever we wanted. For his part, the administrator had ordered the assistant to cut the timber. Problem solved.[17]

Fidel paid us with interest. The fact is that I cannot repay him for what he did for us. It wasn't affordable in that period. This is what happened. I had that place on 18th Street, rented from a family who lived upstairs, but they sold the whole building to a man who worked as head of the Presidential Palace stenographers; it was during the Carlos Prío Socarrás government, and when the new owners occupied the property they threw us out.

The man who acquired the building warned both César Fonseca and myself that we had to get out in twenty-four or forty-eight hours. One afternoon I closed the workshop, or César stayed there, and I went home. When I returned the next morning, I found that things had been consummated. They had chucked the carpentry bench and everything that we had there into a passageway. César, who had arrived long before me, saw it all and immediately went to find Fidel at home.[18]

In minute detail, César Fonseca corroborated Rubén's account:

The owner had given us a matter of hours to leave the workshop, where I'd previously had a photo lab to develop aficionados' work. We

had little time to solve the problem and went out to find alternative premises, but they were asking at least 500 pesos for the privilege of renting to us. I went to see Dr. Pérez Lamy, the Socialist Party lawyer, who was a criminal attorney, and so he sent us to Dr. Contreras, who attended to civil matters. He had told that time was very short, but to go and see him, and that's when we were thrown out. I'd talked to Fidel as well, and he had advised me not to leave the place. In that period, the time the proprietor had given us, I stayed in the workshop until very late, but I was cold and hungry and decided to go home to sleep. Very early the next morning, I arrived at the carpentry workshop and found that all our things were outside, in a passageway. I ran to Fidel's house; he was still asleep, they woke him up and he received me half dressed. I told him what had happened and he told me that we should wait until Gildo Fleitas arrived with the car. When he arrived we left for the workshop.

When we got to 18th I went upstairs to see the owner and told him that we were there with the lawyer representing us. Fidel gave an exposition of the rights we had. The man replied that we had no rights.

But the form in which the new proprietor had proceeded was totally unjust, and Fidel assured César: "We're going to sort this out."

The carpenters had to reoccupy the workshop and they did; Fidel himself helped to put the furniture and work tools back there. Afterwards he argued with the owner's son, a politician. César recalls that Fidel told him he was going to solve the matter legally, and the next step was to go to the police station and make a claim. Fonseca thought, logically, that those people had called out the patrol squad because cars arrived there within minutes. After Fidel dispatched them, we made the charges:

"I made a claim at the police station on the Malecón. Fidel went with me. Later, he came back to the workshop," César added.

"I spotted one of those patrollers," Rubén López related. The car stopped and Fidel told the police: "This matter is already solved, there's no problem," and the patrol squad followed at a distance.

"What I remember," Rubén continued, "was that Fidel told me that in law the prime issue is possession." "They threw your furniture out onto the street and put a padlock on the door and we took it off," he said. Everything happened in a trice. He was dressed in gray striped suit; it's

as if I can see him now. I remember that he had told me he was in a hurry because he had to go and talk on a radio hour he had on G and 25th; at that time Fidel was exposing the corruption of Prío's government.

César Fonseca explained that on that day Dr. Fidel Castro was involved in a campaign against a group of farm owners, friends of Prío, who were forming a society to set up a dairy consortium. So they were pressuring the campesinos who were unable to take what they milked to sell to the Dairy Company of Cuba (Concha No. 1). La Chata farm, property of then president Carlos Prío Socarrás, was included in this power circle and, for waging this battle on behalf of the campesinos—and others like them—Fidel had been threatened with death by gangster groups, including that of Jesús González Cartas, "The weird one." Fonseca recalls that a group of friends, including some people from La Pelusa, La Timba and La Corea barrios always accompanied him to the broadcasts on that radio slot.

The new proprietors of the building where the carpentry workshop was located were well aware that Fidel was exposing the Prío corruption. . . .

"As to the new proprietors," Rubén López told us, "I can tell you that they called me immediately to ask what I wanted. They were worried at the turn of events. We explained to them that we needed time to look for another place and had to complete some jobs we were doing, and they offered us money to move. They gave me much more than I had expected and we were able to set up another workshop at 417 Santa Felicia between Rosa Henríquez and Melones, Luyanó."

Rubén López asked us:

"In those years, what other lawyer do you think could have solved that case on behalf of a carpenter who didn't even have papers to protect him? Look, both César and I were communists, we were members almost from childhood, first in the Young Communist League and then in the People's Socialist Party; we didn't belong to the Orthodoxy, the party to which Fidel belonged at that time. And we had a communist lawyer, a good friend of mine, who always defended the workers, but he wouldn't have done what Fidel did, he would have gone through the normal legal channels of the court, an appeal, etc. until they were exhausted; but Fidel found another way to sort it out. We didn't have the money to pay him

for what he did, it was worth more than all the furniture in Tejadillo put together; we never talked of payment or anything, neither César nor me."[19]

PROSECUTING LAWYER

"Someone, I don't remember who," Jorge Azpiazo told me, "had sought us out as lawyers in connection with some credits owed to the Gancedo S.A. Timber Yard, and it was in terms of that professional relationship that we acquired the timber for the Tejadillo legal office, likewise on credit. That excluded the sofa and some small armchairs in the reception area; we were given those by a lady living nearby, who was going to throw them out because she had bought a new three-piece suite for her living room.

"Gancedo S.A. had numerous unpaid accounts that, acting as their lawyers, we had to claim from those indebted clients. When we received the money we came out with a credit for the Tejadillo timber and furniture and also charged our fees. . . .

"Fidel himself directed the debt collection strategy. He sent an urgent communication to each debtor (carpenter) to come in person to the legal office. Gancedo's debtors would appear. In the interview with Dr. Fidel Castro they explained that they had not been able to settle their accounts because they were also owed money by the clients for whom they had undertaken carpentry work with timber bought on credit.

"Knowing that they were very poor people, Fidel Castro would tell the carpenters not to worry, that his client, Gancedo Timber Yard S.A., was not under any pressure and that the legal office would commit itself to collect monies from their clients, for which reason he asked the carpenters for the addresses of those persons who owed them money.

"The office immediately began to function as a representative for the carpenters and Fidel urged their debtors to settle the amounts due at the Tejadillo legal office. Each time a debtor paid up, Fidel phoned the carpenter to whom the money was owed to inform him; he would appear at the Tejadillo office and naturally, instruct Fidel Castro to hand over the amounts collected to his client Gancedo S.A. so as to liquidate

the account with the timber yard. But Fidel would advise the carpenters not to do that, because—as he told them—Gancedo didn't need those twenty or thirty pesos. He then handed over the money collected to the carpenters."

Azpiazo told us that on one occasion he accompanied Fidel to the home of one of the indebted carpenters in Porvenir Street, Lawton.

"When we arrived," Azpiazo recounted, "the man wasn't there; his wife received us. There was terrible poverty in that house. The carpenter's wife was pregnant and had a little girl. The woman invited us to wait for her husband and kindly gave us each a cup of coffee in the midst of that massive poverty. She went to the kitchen to brew the coffee and while she was gone Fidel asked me to lend him five pesos. I gave it to him and he put it under a plate on the table. We drank the coffee and Fidel decided not to wait for the carpenter. He told the woman to inform her husband that he didn't have to worry about his debt to the Gancedo Timber Yard, and to come and see him at the Tejadillo legal office when he had time."

Azpiazo recalls that in that period Fidel often walked round with holes in the soles of his shoes and shared out the profits from the legal office in a communist way. They weren't large, but he distributed them equally. He also shared his time between his work as a lawyer and the revolutionary responsibilities he had assumed in his life: combating the corruption of the Prío Socorrás' regime and defending popular causes. He defended the red trade union against the sell-out yellow trade union in the Mercado Único, and also defended people in La Pelusa, La Timba and La Corea barrios in the vicinity of what is now Revolution Square, who were about to be evicted from their humble homes without any guarantee of another. This lawsuit turned into a political movement, and Azpiazo also recalled that a group of girls and young boys from those barrios went out into the street with pots and collection boxes to beg, and with the money collected the neighbors hired a bus to go to a meeting where Fidel Castro was speaking in Santiago de Las Vegas municipality.

Shortly afterwards came the military coup of March 10 which finally evicted the great majority or perhaps everybody from those barrios. What happened to them is not known.

During that period, Fidel also defended campesinos threatened with eviction, and was the prosecuting lawyer in the trial of police agents

under the command of Lieutenant Rafael Salas Cañizares and Commander Rafael Casals, both notorious killers, for the homicide of young Carlos Rodríguez, whom they clubbed to death on the street (Hospital and San Lázaro). The case was filed after the Batista coup, when the dictator appointed Salas Cañizares brigadier and his chief of police.[20]

I WILL ASSUME MY OWN DEFENSE

In the archives of the former Las Villas Provincial Court there is an old file containing a minute that states:

In the City of Santa Clara, December 14, 1950 constituted in a Public Hearing, the First Section of the Las Villas Court of Justice, with President Mr. Armando M. Rodríguez Valdés.

And magistrates Messrs. Mario F. Márquez Martínez and Arturo Rebollar Martínez, in my presence, appeared for this Emergency Trial No. 543 of 1950. For Inf. Section 7, Article 23, Decree Law 292 of 1934.

Appearing as plaintiff:

Capt. Manuel Pérez Borroto Marrero

As accused:

Fidel Castro Ruz or Ramiro Hernández Pérez and Enrique Benavides Santos or Enrique López García, as prescribed in the trial.

Whom, instructed in the rights granted them by Military Order No. 213 of 1900, in its Article 24, paragraph 4 of Military Order No. 109 of 1899, when asked if they confessed to being authors of the crime imputed to them, stated that they were not the authors, and that Dr. Benito A. Besada for Benavides, and Fidel Castro Ruz on his own behalf, wished to make statements. Accompanied by the stamps of Lawyer's Writ.

Judge Alfredo Carrión Fernández.[21]

The events that led up to the prosecution of Fidel and his comrade took place in Cienfuegos, one month previously, on November 12. In bold headlines, the local press ran the news: "Arrested and taken to the Santa Clara bivouac, FEU leaders Fidel Castro, aged twenty-four, of 3d and 2, Vedado, president of the Faculty of Social Sciences Student Association, and Enrique Benavides Santos, aged twenty-six, of

306 Manrique, in Havana, delegate for the Faculty of Law, who had come to participate in the protests organized by the students against the resolutions of Aureliano Sánchez Arango, Minister of Education, which led to a strike in the institutes."

The student action was banned by Lomberto Díaz, Minister of the Interior, who issued orders to the army, police and paid gangs to break up the demonstration.

The demonstrators, initially assembled in the Institute and then outside the City Hall, were brutally attacked by the public force, machetes in hand.

While those events were going on, the chief captain of the army and other soldiers arrested Fidel Castro and his comrade, charging them with inciting the Cienfuegos students and attempting to hold by any means the meeting banned by the governor. . . .[22]

Journalist Aldo Isidrón del Valle, who meticulously researched these historical events, informs us:

Minister Sánchez Arango was attempting to eliminate the gains won by the students in secondary education institutes for the 1950-1951 year. He brought in a resolution that was immediately energetically opposed by the students. And having imposed the measure, he stationed police at the entrance to each institution.

The atmosphere was hotting up as the days passed in the island's twenty-one institutes and the educational year, set for October 3, came closer. That day the Cienfuegos Association of Senior High School Students decided on a general strike and called on the rest of the student institutions in the country to support it.

The strike spread like a chain reaction, accompanied by demonstrations and street protests. The Matanzas Institute was closed, and that of Cárdenas occupied by the police. A supreme disciplinary committee was formed in Cienfuegos and René Morejón González, president of the Students Association, was sentenced to five months absence from the institute. The movement acquired a national dimension: secondary education was not only paralyzed in the universities but in the technical and professional colleges and the home schools.

Infuriated, Lomberto Díaz, Minister of the Interior, illegalized the student associations, persecuted their leaders, suppressed the right to

meet and prohibited the organization of public assemblies. He was determined to crush the student body's unyielding resistance.

In this situation the FEU constituted a fighting committee to support the secondary students, and its leadership included Fidel, who immediately set up a plan of action:

- A lightning meeting in the University of Havana's Cadenas Plaza.
- A demonstration in the streets of the capital to the Martyrs' Monument at La Punta.
- A 72-hour suspension of teaching activities in the Alma Mater and a plan to extend the stoppage for an indefinite period if necessary.
- A representation of the Fighting Committee to attend public demonstrations organized by the secondary education sectors for the repeal of the measures imposed by Aureliano.[23]

The strike continued for forty days in that southern city, and pupils from the institute had thrown furniture and other effects into the streets. A supreme disciplinary council was once again functioning and ten students were expelled.

The student leadership in Cienfuegos agreed to mobilize the people for a demonstration outside the teaching center itself, for the afternoon of November 12, and sent an invitation to the FEU Fighting Committee. By this point they were condemning both Sánchez Arango's reactionary rulings and Lomberto Díaz' abuses, and the cowardice of a teaching faculty that made itself an accomplice of the regime's injustice and lent itself to sanctioning the rebelling students.

The bed of a truck was fitted out as a rostrum, amplifiers installed, and young pickets were agitating in the streets.

Captain Faustino Pérez Leiva, military chief of the plaza, seconded by likewise captain of the police section, Manuel Pérez Borroto, announced that the demonstration was banned. Its organizers were deliberating on what to do when the FEU delegation arrived. Headed by Fidel, it was composed of Enrique Benavides, Mauro Hernández, Francisco Valdés and Agustín Valdés.

They decided to visit Pérez Borroto to explain that the ban on the demonstration was illegal and that the students were exercising an inviolable constitutional right.

Fidel led the conversation at the residence of the chief of police; his arguments were irrefutable; the student group was within its right, it had

the right to protest, to demand the repeal of abusive measures... And the captain repeated time and time again: "I know nothing about laws, I know nothing about educational problems. And I don't discuss orders. I fulfil them, whatever they are."

Fifteen minutes went by. There was no agreement and so they left.

Another organizers' meeting. The majority held the view that confrontations with the police should be avoided and the objective of holding the meeting achieved. The idea came up to occupy the City Hall and, with amplifiers angled toward the street, to talk to the people from there. Fidel felt that that was the most logical and positive course of action. His comments decided the agreement.

At 6:00 P.M. as planned, the Municipal Palace was occupied. The student commissions worked on readying the large council meeting room. Railroad and port workers cooperated by bringing in chairs to accommodate the public. Everything was prepared quickly to commence the meeting at 8:30 P.M. and the tension rose.

They were waiting for the arrival of the main speakers, especially the Havana University students.

The old clock on the San Carlos and Martí cathedral indicated 8:10 P.M.

People were impatient; meanwhile the mobilization crowded in front of the Municipal Chamber in Martí Park to back the students' just demands with their presence and to listen to the valiant voices of Fidel and the other FEU leaders.

Just after 8:15 P.M. the university delegation approached the City Hall. Suddenly their way was closed by a group of police officers under the command of Lieutenant Julián Negret Pineda. Fidel and Benavides were arrested and taken to the police unit next to the City Hall. They were charged with inciting the strike and promoting a public event not authorized by the government, as the charge card read. . . .[24]

Prío's henchmen unleashed all kinds of mistreatment on Fidel and Benavides, ranging from verbal abuse to kicks, and further abuse was only spared because of the mobilization of students and the masses, whose cries of protest shook the old building to its foundations.

From a window in the upper part of the cell, which they reached by climbing up on each other's shoulders in turn, Fidel and his comrade could observe what was happening outside.

In the street, the army and police were attacking youth right and left with machetes and truncheons. However, despite the combined pressure of both repressive forces, the meeting was going ahead in the City Hall. Leaders from the FEU talked to the people, denouncing the government maneuvers and informing them of the arrest of Fidel and Benavides.

The objective that took Fidel and his comrade to Cienfuegos was to a large degree attained.

The protest against the excesses of the Prío regime was even more violent and its repercussions had an impact that wouldn't normally have occurred in a meeting.

The unequal fight between the people and Carlos Prío's henchmen continued for more than four hours. The streets were only finally deserted in the early hours of the morning. That was when two pairs of rural guards arrived at the cell where Fidel and Benavides were being held with orders to take them to an unknown location.

"We put up resistance," Benavides told us years later, "we were taken from the prison under force, handcuffed and kicked. They put us into a car, protected by another one, and we took off for an unknown destination. After about twenty minutes they stopped the cars in a place surrounded by shrub and tried to force us out. We fought against them, kicking, elbowing and punching.

"This struggle was going on when a car appeared in the distance signaling with its lights and stopped beside us a few seconds later. A man got out asking indignantly:

"'What's going on with these two boys? Answer me!' It was the president of the City Hall, who had followed us from Cienfuegos because he feared for our lives, and with that valiant attitude he frustrated the act of aggression."

Fidel and Benavides and their custodians reached Santa Clara at four in the morning, and were locked in a cell. Three hours later an angry crowd of students surrounded the provincial penitentiary. The climate of tension extended to the capital, Villa Clara. Thousands of voices chorused: "Set them free! Set them free! Aureliano, murderer, coward!"

The combative action of the student body, the popular mobilization, and an exposé by Orthodoxy leader Eduardo R. Chibás combined to force the Carlos Prío government into granting bail for the FEU leaders.[25]

On November 14, the day after his release, Fidel sent an open letter to the people of Cienfuegos, which *La Correspondencia* newspaper included in its pages. Here is an extract:

". . . We went to the institutes in Cienfuegos at the invitation of comrades from the Institute, to speak at a demonstration which, as everyone knew, was convened with all the legal requirements and whose only aim was a more than just protest at the education minister's despotic attitude toward the students, as horrifically revealed yesterday against teachers and professors in secondary education.

"For that reason it is shameful to see how many of those same teachers are groveling to serve the dictatorial minister, on the pretext that they have the necessary support to restore order and discipline in educational centers.

"Government hysteria created a crisis in Cienfuegos, with the Minister of the Interior's arbitrary, illegal and unjustified order to repress the student meeting.

"The reactionary order denied the students their ultimate right, their only means of defense against injustice and calumny; now they are also going to have to defend themselves against violence. This is a serious precedent making future public demonstrations—a basic right within any democratic regime—dependent on the capricious will of a Minister of the Interior, who could turn out to be, like this one, a politician without morals or scruples, a bastard son of the prevailing situation.

"And they will calmly say that it is to safeguard public order, because the cynical justification of petty tyrants is always the same. They do not safeguard any public or private order, nor do they respect standards or sentiments, but violate the constitution, make mincemeat of the most elemental of citizens' rights; they are the ones who disturb order, peace and justice.

"And will those who act in this way be in the right? And will that brazen captain—who does not deserve to be one—of the Cuban army who, in an insolent and cowardly manner labeled us outsiders and took us to the Emergency Court in handcuffs, be in the right?

"What scant intelligence and bad faith on the part of that small-minded captain to accuse invited speakers who had barely shaken off the dust of the road and begun to replace lost energy with the food that an amiable

student—like everyone from Cienfuegos—gave us in his home, of being outsiders and instigators. How heroic! How courageous! What a brilliant strategy! The genius of Napoleon himself resuscitated! With that intelligence, his supreme patriotism and the outstanding services rendered to Cuba with our detention he could well be forgiven for ignoring that paragraph in the Constitution, which states that any Cuban may enter and remain in national territory, leave it, move from one place to another and change residence without needing a letter of security or any similar requisite.

"I would like to state in this newspaper that his arbitrary attitude did not frighten us. There is no merit in being the public hangman, only ignominy. The captain should rectify his ways in time and desist from sowing hatred among those who have to suffer his presence. We will meet again at the Emergency Court!"[26]

Enrique Benavides told the journalist that Fidel and he appeared before the Las Villas Court in early December 1950.

"We left by train for Santa Clara at midnight. Fidel hardly slept. He was reading Martí for hours and on that occasion, as in November when the Cienfuegos incident occurred, the only books he took with him were Martí's works. He was preparing his defense.

"We reached Santa Clara at 6:00 A.M. feeling tremendously cold. We were ill fed and worse clothed.

"We went on foot from the railroad terminal to the house of Benito Besada, one of our comrades from university classes and the revolutionary struggle, who was starting up practice as a lawyer. He was to take on my defense; Fidel had other plans.

"On the way we drew up our strategy. Fidel proposed that I should ratify what he said before the court: 'Follow my instructions to the letter,' he repeated.

"To be truthful I had my doubts and I argued that he had little experience as a lawyer and that court problems in that period were resolved by ruses and political bargaining. We argued it out and reached the conclusion that Fidel would defend himself and Benito Besada would represent me.

"It should be clarified that Chibás and the Orthodoxy and Popular Socialist Parties had appointed lawyers for us; we thanked them for their offer, but kept to the agreed strategy."[27]

In relation to the events of December 14, 1950, Aldo Isidrón del Valle also interviewed Benito Besada, one of Fidel's comrades from Villa Clara in the years of higher education and resident in Havana.

". . . Fidel and Benavides arrived at my house on Martí and Luis Estévez in Santa Clara as day was breaking; they looked tired. We had breakfast and exchanged impressions on the situation they were both confronting and I got ready to go to the hearing so as to discover the trial details and define our defensive strategy.

"I did my exploratory work for part of the morning; I found out at the Secretariat that the district attorney would be Dr. Carrión. I went to see him and explained that I was defending two colleagues from the University, that I had little experience in the profession, (I had recently graduated) and needed his opinions on the case and, if possible, which aspects I could work on in the trial to gain my clients' acquittal.

"Carrión reviewed the case. He told me he couldn't anticipate anything: 'Everything depends on the trial's development,' he warned.

"It was already known that the charges being heard in that court were agitation, public disorder; Fidel and Benavides were accused of having promoted a series of street meetings and inciting the people against the civil and military authorities.

"I went back home, Fidel was still resting. I saw a book on his chest, Emil Zola's famous *J'Accuse!*

"I woke him up. I told him that I had gotten a favorable impression from the district attorney, but that wasn't necessarily a reason for optimism. Because in emergency trials there is no indictment, there are elements that are presented during the trial and the defense needs to be alert to this kind of situation."[28]

Benito Besada talked things over with Fidel Castro and Enrique Benavides. A surprise was awaiting the Villa Clara lawyer.

"Well, in that conversation Fidel suggested that I should represent Benavides and that he would defend himself in order to denounce a series of abuses suffered by the people. Fidel's face burned with indignation. He insisted that the result of the trial would depend on the way it went, statements from witnesses and what the two accused would expound. A negative sensation came into my mind.

"I thought that an impassioned statement by Fidel might complicate the situation, and for that reason I had prepared a defense that would give the court a way out for acquittal, but. . . ."

Fidel didn't say any more on the subject. They had lunch and at 12:45 P.M. arrived at the court, an old and robust building constructed at the beginning of the century. The university leader continued reading.

Presumably he was studying his self-defense and plea. Efforts to obtain a gown for him from the Lawyers College were underway.

The court corridors were overflowing with the public, mainly young students and revolutionaries and they greeted Fidel, expressing support in their gestures.

"When the hearing commenced," Besada related, "the first person to give evidence was Manuel Pérez Borroto, the Cienfuegos police captain, who acidly accused Fidel and Benavides. He affirmed that he had proof that they were responsible for the Cienfuegos incident.

"The captain didn't refer to the repeated excesses and abuse committed against the students and the people, and formulated charges filled with hate against my comrades, asking the court to sanction them.

"Witnesses appeared but there was no substantive evidence against Fidel and Benavides."

The list of witnesses having been exhausted, Dr. Rodríguez Valdés, president of the court, informed Fidel and his comrade that it was their turn to speak. Both men remained in the dock, and stated that an emergency trial did not offer sufficient guarantees or legal procedure to analyze the crimes attributed to them.

District Attorney Carrión intervened and the following dialogue immediately ensued between the accused and magistrate Rodríguez Valdés:

"Are you represented?"

"Yes," affirmed Benavides. "Dr. Besada will defend me."

"And you, Mr. Castro?"

"I will assume my own defense."

"Please acquire your lawyer's stamp and take your place on the rostrum."

Besada recalled that Fidel went outside the room. Arturo Valdés, an old court employee, was waiting with a gown for his use. Fidel returned

dressed in the gown and, as a lawyer, took his place next to him. A total and tense silence reigned in the court.

The bailiff called the witnesses. Carrión spoke first and then us. Fidel called Captain Manuel Pérez Borroto for the prosecution.

Fidel went onto the offensive from his first question to the arrogant officer:

"You represent the people very badly when you repress and stifle their legitimate rights," stated Fidel.

Arrogantly, Captain Pérez Borroto pressed on with his accusation, but his arguments steadily weakened under questioning from the university leader, who did not allude to Case 543 in particular, but to the situation in Cuba. He attacked the political system.

"After the cross-examination," Besada continued, "Dr. Rodríguez Valdés asked Carrión to present his summing up and, despite the very tense development of the trial given the way in which Fidel conducted his questioning of the captain, the district attorney called for all charges to be dropped against the accused for lack of evidence against them."

Nevertheless, when the presiding judge conceded the word to the defense, Fidel rose to his feet and slowly and energetically denounced the outrages of the regime.

"The characteristic of that self-defense," Besada observed, "was valiant Fidel's 'J'accuse!' He made a dramatic speech, passionately denouncing the Prío regime's corrupt politics: the lack of constitutional guarantees, the embezzlement of our wealth, assaults by gangs on trade unions and other evils suffered by Cuba.

"Fidel barely referred to the charges against him; he charged the Prío government. It was a valiant and honorable attack.

"Fidel's charges imparted an unexpected tension to the trial. The public present in the courtroom was visibly moved. Nobody had ever talked in those terms in the Villa Clara Court; there was no precedent and nobody thought that someone could speak in that way.

"The court also received the impact of Fidel's 'J'accuse!' It was something completely new, an event greeted by shock and admiration.

"The magistrates withdrew for half an hour to deliberate their verdict, not a usual situation in the Emergency Hearings, which generally announced their ruling immediately. They didn't immediately accept the

district attorney's instruction. I believe that Fidel's 'J'accuse!' was an influential element there.

"The panorama of the trial had changed. When I assumed Benavides' defense I subscribed to Fidel's testimony, but in more moderate terms.

"While the court was out, Fidel and I talked and he asked me what I thought. 'Well kid,' I replied, 'I'm sure they're going to find you guilty,' and I wasn't so far off the mark because Vázquez Martínez, one of the magistrates, cast his particular vote for a sanction. 'Our fate doesn't matter Benny, these truths had to be told,' a serene and confident Fidel whispered to me."[29]

Shortly afterwards the judge ordered the accused to rise and announced his ruling of innocent. Fidel's 'J'accuse!' left no room for doubt; however, it took many years for justice to become a reality on Cuban soil.

FIDEL CHARGES PRÍO AND HIS CLIQUE

Pedro Trigo, a 26th of July Movement combatant, recalls:

We met Dr. Fidel Castro at a public meeting in Santiago de las Vegas, at the end of November 1951. At that meeting, a comrade had referred to the false incineration of bank notes by the Carlos Prío government, to which I responded that we didn't need to go that far, as we had an example of that government's corruption in our own municipality. There was wealthy man here in Santiago de las Vegas, Mendigutía, whose interests were championed by Carlos Prío. This man had raped an eight-year-old girl, so neither his influence nor his money could save him from prison. On assuming the presidency of the Republic, Carlos Prío immediately reprieved this man who, to express his gratitude, gave him a small farm of approximately 3360 hectares in El Globo district between Calabazar and Managua. Prío so much liked that farm that he immediately took to buying up neighboring farms, including Lage, Potrerillo de Menocal, Casas Viejas, Pancho Simón, and Paso Seco, converting the original small farm into an extension of some 73,200 hectares, which he named El Rocío. Juan Rodríguez, the campesino leader in the area, was one of those renting the land and evicted without any legal ruling.

When I'd finished speaking, a young, tall, strong and well-built man approached me and asked if everything I had just said was a definite fact, which I guaranteed. Then he introduced himself as Dr. Fidel Castro and asked me what I thought of getting together to get hard evidence against Prío and his clique and thus vindicate the memory of deceased Orthodoxy Party leader Eddy Chibás. It was Chibás who had been asked for evidence that his party had not been able to provide at that time, and Fidel explained that if we devoted ourselves to this, with the evidence to hand, Prío's government could be exposed in court and before public opinion.

The idea appealed to me and I said yes. We arranged to meet at 8:00 A.M. the next day at my house—at that time I lived opposite the Tejidos Capitalinos factory, on a small farm owned by my father-in-law, Gregorio Crespo Rodríguez.

Early next morning Fidel arrived at my house accompanied by two comrades, José Luis Tasende and Gildo Fleitas, who were later killed during the attack on the Moncada Garrison. After talking I took them to see El Rocío farm. We drew up our plans and commited ourselves with these comrades to look for information and evidence concerning this farm. Fidel had the idea—among other things—of having a kind of outing to it one day, getting onto the land with some women comrades and Martínez Tinguao for a picnic, with the intention of being discovered there. Some twenty minutes after entering the land, we were discovered by Tejera, the sergeant, who was responsible for looking after the farm. Alarmed, he asked us how we had dared to enter the president's farm, to which Fidel responded was he was referring to the president of the Senate or that of the Supreme Court? Tejera replied the farm belonging to Carlos Prío Socarrás, President of the Republic, and how did we dare to go in there. Although we already knew the sergeant, Fidel took advantage of his skills to ask him his name and to make him repeat that the farm belonged to Prío, the President of Cuba. Then he apologized, saying that we didn't know whom the farm belonged to and that we were just out for a good time. The sergeant told us to get off the land immediately.

Comrades José Luis Tasende, Gildo Fleitas and myself devoted ourselves to taking photos of regular soldiers undertaking tasks like stonewalling and tree grafts with the Pestonit company; as well as

constructing barns and stables on the farm patio. On one occasion both Gildo Fleitas and Fidel filmed the farm and the activities being undertaken by soldiers there from a plane.

Fidel managed to find out from Carlos Pérez, who lived nearby, that those farms now combined under the name of El Rocío, were registered in the San Antonio de las Vegas court. As a lawyer, Fidel was easily able to confirm this, by obtaining the file number and the inscriptions. They were registered as being owned by the Acirema Real Estate Company, whose president was Carlos Prío himself.

We also talked with campesinos employed in El Rocío who were paid a daily wage of only $2.50, from which they had to pay $0.50 for lunch and $0.50 for transport, leaving them with a wage of $1.50 per day. Among those workers I remember one named Guillermo Luis, nicknamed Pijirigua, being a native of that town. We also talked with evicted tenant Juanito Rodríguez, thrown off his farm, as I stated previously.

Additionally, we took on the work of seeking information on La Chata and La Altura in Pinar del Río, as well as a farm belonging to José Eleuterio Pedraza in Santa Clara, which was continuously guarded and protected by the army.

Fidel subsequently denounced all these things before the Supreme Court and in the *Alerta* newspaper, challenging Prío and his clique to refute everything he had just charged. Obviously, nobody came forward to refute it, because they knew it was a fact and that all the evidence was there.[30]

On September 11, 1951, Fidel had published in *Alerta* his article "Más vale morir de pie" (Better to Die on Your Feet), on the murder of young Carlos Rodríguez, which was also an exposé of vice and abusive practices by the police force.

On January 28, 1952, likewise in *Alerta*, he wrote another titled: "Prío rebaja la función de nuestras fuerzas armadas" [Prío Reduces the Function of Our Armed Forces], in which he demonstrated how soldiers' labor was being utilized for the personal gain of politicians, even extending to agricultural work on the properties of the president of the Republic himself. "34 fincas compradas en una sola provincia" (Thirty-four Farms Bought up in Just One Province) was the headline of the subsequent investigation in *Alerta*, February 11, 1952, which exposed the sordid story of how Prío's unconstitutional promotion of a latifundium was linked to

immoral extortion and complicity with a millionaire who had raped a young girl, a man he defended as a lawyer and subsequently reprieved as president, so that he could act as his front man in the acquisition of more and more rural properties. Six days before the coup on March 4, *Alerta* published Fidel's evidence that the government was subsidizing gangster groups with state funds: "$18,000 mensuales dan a las pandillas en Palacio" [$18,000 per Month to Gangs in Palacio], with a subtitle reading: "Sostiene Prío la terrible maquinaria del crimen" [Prío Supporting the Terrible Crime Machine].[31]

ENDNOTES

1. Frei Betto, op. cit., 115.
2. Ibid., 115-116.
3. Ibid., 116.
4. Ibid., 119-121.
5.Tomás Borges, op. cit., 21-22.
6. Ibid., 266-269.
7. Fidel Castro, "Una Revolución solo puede ser hija de la cultura y las ideas," ed. cit., 49-50.
8. Fidel Castro, "Discurso pronunciado con motivo del inicio del curso escolar 1995-1996 en la enseñanza superior y sus 50 años de vida revolucionaria," ed. cit., 6.
9. Id.
10. Cuban People's Party (Orthodoxy). *Ed.*
11. Aldo Isidrón del Valle, "Historia para una foto," in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 192-193.
12. *Fidel Castro: "Fidel siempre fue Fidel" [Fidel Was Always Fidel], in Bohemia* magazine, no. 17, April 26, 1959, 149.
13. Marta Rojas, "Fidel defiende a carpinteros deudores, como abogado del acreedor" [Fidel Defends Indebted Carpenters, As a Lawyer of the Creditor], in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 196.
14. Marta Rojas participated as a reporter in the trial against Fidel Castro for the attack on the Moncada Garrison in 1953. *Ed.*
15. Marta Rojas, "Fidel defiende a carpinteros deudores," in *Antes del Moncada*, ed. cit., 197.
16. Ibid., 198.
17. Ibid., 198-200.

18. Ibid., 201-202.
19. Ibid., 202-204 and 207.
20. Ibid., 208-211.
21. Aldo Isidrón del Valle, "Patriótico ¡Yo acuso! de Fidel Castro" [Patriotic Fidel Castro's J'Accuse!], in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 212-213.
22. Ibid., 214-215.
23. Ibid., 215-216.
24. Ibid., 218-219.
25. Ibid., 223-224.
26. Ibid., 224-226.
27. Ibid., 226-227.
28. Ibid., 227.
29. Ibid., 228-231.
30. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, *Moncada: antecedentes y preparativos* [Moncada: Antecedents and Preparation], 3d edition, Vol. 1 (Havana: Editora Política, 1985), 188-190.
31. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 1 (Havana: Editora Política, 1986), 31.

Fidel fought actively against the coup d’état.

BEFORE THE COUP D'ÉTAT

A COUP, NOT A REVOLUTION!

When Fulgencio Batista took the Columbia Military Camp on March 10, 1952 and declared that his coup d'état was a genuine democratic revolution, there were only fifty-two days to go to the general elections in which the corrupt government of Carlos Prío Socarrás would undoubtedly have been defeated. On June 1, 1952, the people's votes were going to give the victory to the Orthodoxy candidates.

Analyzing the details, Fidel Castro intuitively realized that General Batista was preparing a conspiracy against the national interest and attempted to make that exposé public. Journalist Mario Mencía relates:

With his fine perception of the essential aspects of our political life, a few weeks earlier vehemently anti-Prío lawyer Fidel Castro had also announced his intention to expose the Batista coup plan. In addition to information collected in various ways deduced from public rumors, his recent conversations with leaders of the *Paupista* youth,[1] whom he knew from his student days, strengthened his idea of the imminence of a coup d'état. One of them heatedly defended his Party's victory, when in reality it had absolutely no electoral chances, as well as the supposed

philosophy of force and the need for a dictatorial government that would bring order to Cuba. Another one, aware of Fidel's perspicacious and tenacious investigative qualities, tried to sound him out to see if he had any evidence that Batista was planning a coup. Logic dictated that Batista had no alternative but to stage a coup.

Those conversations reaffirmed his suspicions. Rapidly, he spoke with [Roberto] Agramonte and asked if he could be allowed to use the party's national radio space to substantiate and make public the charge. But instead of granting it, he was told that he needed to corroborate those suspicions, obtain some proof from worthy sources. The proof was limited to consulting a group of civilian professors at the Higher College of War, who affirmed that all the rumors were false. According to them, Batista was not conspiring with any soldiers. Thus Fidel was refused airspace on "La hora ortodoxa" (The Orthodoxy Hour).[2]

What was Fidel's initial reaction when the coup occurred? The answer was given by the leader of the Cuban Revolution himself, when he confessed:

"I felt a tremendous anger at what had happened. But one of the things that most hurt me was not having made that exposé affirming the imminence of the coup. Agramonte denied me the Party radio hour. He said that there was no definite evidence that Batista was conspiring with soldiers on active duty. Really, that Orthodoxy leadership was totally incompetent."

It didn't matter that March 9 was a Sunday: on that day, like every day, Fidel had returned late at night to his little apartment on the second floor of No. 1511 27th Street, between 24 and 26, Vedado. He lived there with his wife and son. Two of his brothers-in-law and his brother Raúl, who was studying at the university, slept in a bedroom on the roof, reached by a stairway from the kitchen.

It was usual practice for Fidel to arrive late. In addition to his interminable political activity for the ongoing election campaign, in recent months he had immersed himself simultaneously in investigations and exposés of corruption, fraudulent businesses and Prío's links with gangster groups.[3]

René Rodríguez, one of his closest collaborators at that time, recalls:

Sometimes we didn't sleep, and when we went to bed it was because there was nothing else to do. While there was something to do, Fidel didn't go to bed. I left Fidel at 23d and went to my house in Lawton. I woke up around 8:30 A.M. Usually I would go back to Fidel's house between 9:00 and 10:00 A.M. when we didn't have anything to do early. That was the time that Fidel began to prepare his commentaries for the radio space on "La Voz del Aire" (Voices On Air), which started at 1:30 or 1:45 P.M. depending on when Pardo Llada's program finished.

When I woke up that morning, my household already knew about the coup d'état. I got dressed rapidly and went to see Fidel. He wasn't in the apartment. Mirta, his wife, told me that he'd gone out early to his sister Lidia's house. Lidia lived about four or five blocks from there, in one of the third-floor apartments of a building that makes a fork on 23d Street: No. 1352. I went over there and, logically, we started to talk about the coup, the collapse of all our plans and Fidel immediately began to try to obtain information. Straight away he sent me to the University and other places. I went to the University several times that day.

Although nobody knew where Fidel was and so nobody went to see him, René Fiallo from the Dominican Republic was there and talked with Fidel about the situation. René Fiallo was Prío's advisor, Prío's spokesman, he wrote his speeches; he was a friend of Fidel's sister Lidia. After the students met with Prío, Fidel sent me to find Álvaro Barba to find out the situation at the University, what he thought and what the students were going to do. Fidel was really annoyed when he heard that Masferrer had been at the University and reproached Barba. They talked for a long while until Barba left.

Fidel also sent me to Roberto Agramonte's house, on 4th between 5th and Calzada, nearby. Agramonte was meeting with a cohort of Orthodoxy members from his faction. There was a lot of confusion in his house. They talked a lot but didn't decide on anything concrete. He didn't send any message to Fidel, nothing. Agramonte was already discussing the idea of civil resistance. When I told Fidel about that a tremendous row ensued.

That day I devoted myself exclusively to seeking information. Fidel didn't go anywhere until that night, when he thought he should leave Lidia's house. He went to the Andino hotel, a guesthouse where he'd

lived before, opposite the University, at 1128 San Lázaro on the corner of M. He slept there that night.

Meanwhile I set myself to finding somewhere for the next day. I went to talk with Orthodoxy member Eva Jiménez, posed the situation to her and Eva set everything up so that we could move into her apartment, bought in some food and even told her servant not to come, that she wasn't going to work.

On March 11, I went to collect Fidel at 9:00 A.M. at the Andino hotel. He came downstairs wearing some dark glasses that he never used. We took the 28 bus at the corner. As we didn't have any change, Fidel wanted to pay the fare with a five-peso bill that Lidia had given him, but the conductor didn't have any change and a man riding on the back seat paid the sixteen cents for us. To get to Marianao, the 28 route covered the whole of 23d Street, so we passed both Lidia's house and Fidel's. Before crossing Almendares bridge, when the bus went past the Bureau of Investigations, Fidel commented: "That's going to turn into a nest of vultures." We got off at 46th and 21st, in Almendares, and continued on foot to Eva's house. Eva Jiménez lived in an interior apartment on the second floor of the Raquel building, which is on 42d Street, No. 1507 between 15th and 17th. There Fidel immediately sat down to write "Revolución no, zarpazo!" (Coup, Not Revolution!) at the table in a small room, like a little dining room beside the kitchen. He spent that day and the next writing and writing, one draft and another, by hand, because we didn't have a typewriter. He had sent me to get paper and his typewriter from his house, but when I got there, I found his brother-in-law Rafael Díaz-Balart with some Batista people and the police, and they wouldn't let me take anything from the apartment. You can imagine Fidel's reaction when I returned empty-handed and told him. In the end we had to copy it all out onto clean paper. Raúl was also in Eva's house that night.

When the document was finished, Fidel sent Eva, and I accompanied her, to ask Vasconcelos to publish it. Márquez Sterling and other high-ranking political figures were at the *Alerta* newspaper waiting to talk to Vasconcelos. He was already measuring up that situation. He explained to us that he had economic problems with the newspaper, that it wasn't his, that he still had to be paid, that he was well screwed and that

everyone was in on the action, in opportunism and others in shit, because he had met with the leadership of the Orthodoxy Party, with Millo Ochoa, Agramonte and all those people, and could see that they were in the clouds and weren't proposing anything realistic. In short, Vasconcelos refused to publish "Revolución no, zarpazo!" but ended the conversation saying surprisingly: "Take care of Fidel, take care of that boy, because he's the great reserve that the Cuban people have." That was how he said goodbye to us. We went back and informed Fidel that his piece couldn't be published in *Alerta*. We relayed everything that Vasconcelos had explained, because Vasconcelos had praised Fidel more than once during the conversation; he said that with Fidel you could talk about anything, politics or any other theme, and related conversations he'd had with Fidel on Shakespeare's works. That was engraved on my mind.

The big problem to sort out first was still the circulation of that document printed. We didn't go to any other press agency because censorship was already established and Fidel was in a very tight corner, very tight. Then he sent me to make contact with Raúl de Aguiar, and Raúl de Aguiar found a comrade whom I believe was a publicist, who lived close to San Lázaro, above a pharmacy, on the fourth floor, and out of his friendship with Raúl, he mimeographed it there and then, right in his apartment. Two or three days had already gone by. Before that, we had got a linotypist at *Alerta* to mount it in lead, but we couldn't find any press willing to print it.

Ñico López and Raúl Castro worked on that mimeographed printing of "Revolución no, zarpazo!" When I went to collect the already printed job Ñico and Raúl were there in the mimeograph room. Ñico took away a large volume to distribute and I took another load to where Fidel was.

Well, on March 12, Fidel changed address again. Negotiations were made with Miguel Ángel Quevedo's sister so that he could go to her house. But at the last minute, after he was going, the plans changed. I stayed behind at Eva's apartment because we had a telephone there and we were waiting for a response from the contacts we had made. I stayed there and Eva and another woman from the Orthodoxy Party took Fidel. When Fidel came back in the morning, I found out that he had slept in the family home of the woman who accompanied Eva, who was also a friend of Quevedo's sister.

At that point, near the end of the week, he had already made contact with José Luis Tasende. Tasende was one of the few people who knew where we were. And little by little the atmosphere cleared. In response to a journalist, a statement by Salas Cañizares appeared in a morning paper, affirming that he was not going to take revenge against Fidel. With the publication of that news, there was a certain relief of tension, because there was great antagonism between Fidel and Salas, and with all the power that Salas had, we didn't know what could happen.

Fidel already had the idea of going to the cemetery on Sunday, March 16 to hand out the pamphlets. We remained in hiding in Eva's apartment until that day and left for the cemetery from there. We didn't enter by the main gate but by a side entrance, and approached with great caution. There was no patrol. We began to hand out the leaflets. At the end of the commemoration,[4] the police did arrive. But when the patrols arrived, after Fidel energetically spelt out the central party leaders' thesis of civil resistance, a large group of veteran women Orthodoxy members surrounded Fidel and virtually physically shielded him. The incident went no further. There were no blows or arrests and we were able to leave as we had come.[5]

I BECAME A PROFESSIONAL CADRE

Fidel recalls:

When the coup took place, everything changed. As a first step, I thought we'd have to go back to the previous constitutional stage. The military dictatorship would have to be defeated. I thought we'd have to recover the country's previous status and that everybody would join forces to wipe out Batista's infamous, reactionary coup. I started to organize ordinary militant members of the Orthodoxy youth group on my own, and I also contacted some of the leaders of that party. I did that on my own. Some of the leaders said they favored armed struggle. I was sure that we would have to overthrow Batista by force of arms in order to return to the previous stage, to the constitutional regime, and I was convinced that that was the objective of all the parties. I'd already worked out the first revolutionary strategy with a large mass movement that would initially

be implemented through constitutional channels. I though that everybody would unite to overthrow Batista's regime—all the parties which had formed part of the government and all the opposition parties: everybody.

I began to organize the first combatants, the first fighters—the first cells—within a few weeks. First, I tried to set up a small, mimeographed newspaper and some underground radio stations. Those were the first things. We had some run-ins with the police that served as useful experience later on. When it came time to apply that experience, we were extremely careful in choosing cadres and in protecting the security of the organization. That's when we became true conspirators and started organizing the first nuclei for what we thought would be a united struggle by all the parties and all the other forces. That's how I began in that party, where I met a lot of earnest young people. I looked for them in the poorest sectors in Artemisa and Havana, among the workers, with several comrades who supported me right from the beginning: Abel Santamaría, Jesús Montané, Ñico López, and some others—a very small group.

I became a professional cadre. At the beginning, that movement had one professional cadre—me. Up until just before the attack on the Moncada garrison, we had just one professional cadre—one. Abel joined me a few days before the attack, so there were two of us cadres during the last month.[6]

What had happened, among other things? When the March 10 coup occurred, the only people to have money, millions, resources of every type belonged to the defeated government, and they began to mobilize all those resources to buy arms and, of course, those people had a very strong hatred of me. To understand why, you only had to look in the *Alerta* newspaper to find the exposés I made in the weeks leading up to the March 10 coup, which received the honor of appearing on the front page of the largest-circulation newspaper in the country. That was in January and February. They attempted to blame me for the coup d'état, and this was before the publication of two further articles I was preparing. They were worse still, demoralizing, under the headline: "No hay que ir a Guatemala" (No Need to Go to Guatemala).

I based it on the fact that Chibás committed suicide because he had charged certain politicians with having farms in Guatemala and was unable to prove it, which made him the target of exceptional pressure, and

he despaired and killed himself. I wrote: "No hay que ir a Guatemala," and began to give information on all the farms that those people had here and all their dirty businesses. My new profession as a lawyer allowed me to search through the property registers and elsewhere for all the written material, all the documentation that I presented as irrefutable proof, and which had a great impact.

So those people even attempted to blame me for the demoralization that had given rise to the coup d'état, an unfounded and irrational idea but a powerful one, and I found myself, on the one side, faced with a tremendous hatred, and jealousy in the University, I have to say. But to make it absolutely clear, never, never on the part of José Antonio [Echeverría], who was always a good comrade and a good friend. But the problem was that a revolution was going on and it seemed that there were people who wanted to snatch the Revolution from the University. Those things happened and it was in those conditions that we organized the 26th of July. Only when we perceived massive errors on the part of those who, given their resources, could promote a rebellion; the divisions between parties and organizations; and the incapacity for action; when there was absolutely no alternative, that was when we decided to initiate the struggle with the forces of the 26th of July [Movement].[7]

CAPACITY TO REACT IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

After March 10, Fidel's economic situation became critical:

Leaving 109 Prado one afternoon, his old car wasn't where he had parked it. Had it been stolen? No, the reality was otherwise but no less of a blow: the finance agency had appropriated it because he had failed to keep up with the monthly payments.

Gloomily, Fidel went to the little shop where he used to drink coffee. He just wanted a cup of coffee and a cigar. He hadn't lunched. He said so to the owner but also informed him that he had no money. And as he already owed five pesos, the man refused to extend his credit. Gloomier than ever, Fidel walked up Prado, turned into Colón and reached Zulueta. He observed the armed posts of the Presidential Palace and felt the enormous distance between the power of that regime he was fighting to

bring down and his concrete situation in terms of achieving it. His face grew somber. Why did politicians with sufficient means refuse to facilitate him the resources to struggle? He only wanted guns to initiate the combat. Mechanically, reaching Central Park where the statue of Martí stood, he stopped to read the headlines of newspapers put on the ground to sell. Not even five cents in his pockets for a copy. Suddenly the sharp voice of the boy vendor brought him rudely down to earth by shouting: "Move on!" He moved on among the crowds of people busying themselves in their purchases in the large stores on Neptuno Street; passed by Galiano's luxury commercial center and continued on foot for various kilometers to the small room in the student lodgings where he was living with his family. This accumulation of situations made him feel bitter, but resolved and determined to move ahead. He lay down on the bed and fell asleep. At 5:00 P.M. he awoke. It had been like a nightmare. Once again his decisiveness, energy, capacity to react in the face of adversity returned, and he took to the streets to pursue his conspiratorial labor. Montané negotiated the return of the car. He and Abel assumed payment for the subsequent bills and the rental of a small apartment, as well as electricity and telephone bills.

"I was the Movement's first professional cadre," Fidel joked on recalling those times. "They even gave me something for food."[8]

DICTATORSHIP AGAIN, BUT THERE WILL BE OTHER MELLA'S, TREJO'S AND GUITERAS'[9]

On Sunday, March 16—as on the 16th of every month—a crowd of Orthodoxy members gathered at the graveside of Party founder Eduardo Chibás in Colón Cemetery. They were awaiting directions for the struggle, the order for combat. It was yet another disappointment. Millo Ochoa was in charge of reading the awaited Orthodoxy Party manifesto to the people of Cuba.[10]

Suddenly, in a corner of the crowd, shouts and applause focussed attention on a tall young man who, standing on a tomb, had shouted something. Only those closest to him heard his brief harangue but everyone would know it shortly afterwards. In a crumpled *guayabera*,[11]

the energy of his voice transmitted through his right index finger, he had simply said: "If Batista climbed to power through force, he will have to be defeated by force!" Somebody asked who the young man was and another man beside him answered: "That's Fidel Castro."[12]

In those initial circumstances one question was obvious.

In the institutional political sphere the only ostensible force with some possibility of successfully mobilizing the masses to confront the recently installed dictatorship was the Orthodoxy Party. An organization with a large popular majority, the coup had been specifically directed against it.

The real anti-Orthodoxy intention of the coup was denounced on March 14 in a manifesto where the deed was described as "Revolución no, zarpazo!" A historical coincidence, for that same date and month sixty years previously saw the first edition of *Patria,* founded by José Martí as an organ of the patriotic émigré movement for promoting revolutionary ideas supporting Cuban and Puerto Rican freedom.[13]

Sixty years after Martí's words, on the same date in the same month, "Revolución no, zarpazo!" was a convincing moral condemnation of another opprobrious regime but, above all, was the first genuine declaration of a people's war against the Batista dictatorship. In its own time, it would be yet another demonstration of its author's political courage, of his historical awareness, of the coherence of his development within our history, of his capacity to react in adverse situations, of his confidence in the people, of his optimism in the future, and yet another solid proof of his profound conviction in the strength of principles to win and sustain the nation's freedom.[14]

Fidel stated in that historical document:

A coup, not a revolution! Not patriots, but the assassins of freedom, usurpers, retrogrades, adventurers thirsty for gold and power.

It was not a putsch against Prío, that weak-willed, indolent president; it was a putsch against the people, on the eve of elections whose result was known beforehand.

There was no order, but it was for the people to democratically decide, in a civilized manner and to elect their rulers by will and not by force.

Money would be staked on the imposed candidate, that is undeniable, but that would not alter the result, just as it failed to alter the squandering of the public treasury in favor of the candidate imposed by Batista in 1944.

The idea that Prío would attempt a coup d'état is totally false, absurd, ridiculous and infantile, a clumsy pretext; his impotence and incapacity to undertake such an enterprise was irrefutably demonstrated by the cowardice with which he allowed power to be taken from him.

There was suffering from a lack of government, but that had been endured for years awaiting the constitutional moment to conjure away evil. But you, Batista, who cowardly fled for four years and engaged in useless politicking for another three, have now reappeared with your belated, perturbing and poisonous remedy, disemboweling the Constitution just two months before that goal was achieved in the proper fashion. Everything you allege is a lie, a cynical justification, a dissimulation of vanity rather than patriotic decorum; ambition rather than ideals; appetite rather than civic grandeur.

Well it is a fine thing to bring down a government of embezzlers and murderers, and we were attempting to do that by the civil route with the support of public opinion and the help of the popular masses. What right do you have to replace by the use of bayonets those that yesterday robbed and killed without measure? It is not peace, but the seed of hatred that is sown in this way. It is not joy, it is the mourning and sadness that the nation feels in the face of the tragic panorama that can be glimpsed. There is nothing in the world as bitter as the spectacle of a people who go to bed free and wake up as slaves.

Once again the boots, once again Columbia [Military Camp] dictating laws, sacking and replacing ministers; once again the tanks growling threats in our streets; once again brute force dominating human reason.

We were not accustomed to living within the Constitution, but we lived for twelve years without great mishaps in spite of errors and absurdities. Superior states of civil cohabitation are not attained without great efforts. In a matter of hours, you, Batista, have just dashed that noble illusion of the people of Cuba.

All the wrongdoing Prío committed in three years, you spent eleven years committing. Thus your coup is unjustifiable, it is not based on any serious moral reasoning, or on any kind of social or political doctrine whatsoever. It finds its reason solely in the force of arms, and its justification in lies. Your majority resides in the army, never in the people. Your votes are guns, never the people's will; you can win a putsch with

them, but never clean elections. Your assault on power lacks any principles that could legitimize it; laugh if you want, but in the long run principles are more powerful than cannons. Peoples are nourished and formed on principles, with principles they are nourished in the fight, for principles they die.

Do not term revolution that outrage, that disturbing and inopportune coup, that dirty stab you have just inflicted in the back of the Republic. Trujillo [then president of the Dominican Republic] was the first person to recognize your government, he knows who his friends are in the clique of dictators that is the scourge of the Americas, and that more than anything expresses the reactionary, militarist and criminal nature of your coup. Nobody has the remotest belief in the governmental success of your old and rotten clique; the thirst for power is too great, and brakes are almost nonexistent when there is no other Constitution or law than the will of a dictator and his hirelings.

I know in advance that your guarantee of life will be torture and the palmacristi.[15] Your people will kill even if you don't want that to happen, and you will consent tranquilly because you are totally in their debt. Despots are the masters of the people that they oppress, and the slaves of the force on which their oppression is sustained. Now lying and demagogic propaganda will be raining down in your favor from all mouthpieces, for good or for evil, and vile slander will rain down on your opponents; that is what Prío did as well and it was worth nothing in the mind of the people. But the truth that illuminates Cuba's destinies and guides the steps of our people in this difficult time, that truth you will not allow to be spoken, will be known to the whole world. It will run clandestinely from mouth to mouth among every man and woman, even though nobody will say it in public or write it in the press, and everyone will believe it and the seed of heroic rebellion will take root in everyone's hearts; it is the compass needle in every consciousness.

I do not know what will be the insane pleasure of the oppressors in the whip they will let fall like Cain on human backs, but I do know that there is an infinite joy in combating them, in powerfully raising ones hand and saying: I do not want to be a slave!

Cubans: Another dictatorship is upon us, but there will be other Mella's, Trejo's and Guiteras'. There is oppression in our homeland, but there will

be freedom again one day. I call on Cubans of valor, the courageous members of the glorious Party of Chibás; these times are of sacrifice and struggle. If lives are lost nothing is lost; as to live in chains is to live submerged in affronts and opprobrium. To die for the homeland is to live.[16]

WHAT DIFFERENCE IS THERE BETWEEN A PRÍO AND A BATISTA?

As opposed to the party leaders who appealed to the Social and Constitutional Guarantees Court with the idea of demonstrating the regime's illegality, Fidel individualized responsibility in the highest echelons of those involved in the March 10 coup and made it a common criminal act. The dart was launched at a political objective, not a legal one; having discounted this second aspect, he was seeking some effect in the ambit of the first. On March 24 he arraigned Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar in the Havana Emergency Courts for sedition, treason, rebellion and nocturnal attack. "On all these counts and others too many to enumerate, Mr. Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar has committed crimes whose cumulative sanction is more than 100 years imprisonment," he emphasized in the proceedings against his rival who, in that very year, was just twice his age.[17]

Fidel devoted several days to contacting the principal leaders of his party. He was not in favor of reacting passively or defensively. Civil resistance in the form of refusing to pay taxes, staying away from recreational diversions, withdrawing capital from the banks and others did not strike him as a way of dislodging Batista from power. He proposed the acquisition of weapons and the formation of a combat force capable of initiating revolutionary war as part of a popular uprising. His plan did not meet with approval. From then on he dedicated himself to forming such a force to see if, once it was organized, they would facilitate the arms it needed.

"What difference is there?" Fidel headed the following exposé, published in the only printed edition of Pardo Llada's *La Palabra* newspaper on April 6, 1952, on the same Sunday that the students marched

to the Martí Fragua in what was the beginning of the Constitutional Oath Campaign. That edition of *La Palabra* was simply one tabloid sheet printed on both sides, the popular commentator's way of outwitting the closure of the short program of the same name that went out on air daily at 1:00 P.M. and 6:30 P.M. on the Cadena Oriental de Radio. The regime's reaction was automatic. The printer and two operatives were arrested and taken to La Cabaña fortress; various young people selling the broadsheet in the street were detained, and for the sixth time in one month Pardo Llada was charged with demagogy by the SIM[18] and detained for a number of hours.[19]

La Palabra *newspaper would not have had a place in history but for the appearance in it of Fidel's second public attack on the dictatorship. The young lawyer affirmed:*

The drove that assaulted the Palace, the Public Treasury and the *Gaceta Oficial* to govern this country in the style of Leónidas Trujillo, must have thought that this is the most miserable people in the world.

Defeated in advance at the ballot boxes, they assaulted power with a coup.

No preaching, no theory, no revolutionary program, no mass mobilizations preceded the coup. However, they decided to call the infamous putsch a "revolution," through which the PAU sergeants shared the public administration booty. But it would be unheard of for Batista to say that he had made a revolution to do away with speculation, crime, dirty dealings and to bring peace and tranquility to Cuban families.

What difference is there between a Prío who made off with forty millions and a Batista who made off with fifty? What difference is there between a Cabrera who enriched himself in army headquarters and a Pedraza who accumulated fifteen million?

What difference is there between a Prío who send Salas to beat up the people, caving in Carlos Rodríguez' brain, and a Batista who makes him chief of police?

What difference is there between a Prío who makes Sergeant Martín Pérez, charged with the murder of Madariaga, a lieutenant, and a Batista who makes him a commander?

What difference is there between a Prío who protects Captain Casillas and a Batista who upgrades him to commander?

Were not Carlos Rodríguez, Francisco Madariaga and Jesús Menéndez the sons of Cuban families?

What difference is there between a José Manuel Alemán, creator of the BAGA,[20] and an Anselmo Alliegro, Alemán's partner and a creator of Subparagraph K?[21]

What difference is there between a Ricardo Artigas and a García Pedroso, between an Eduardo Suárez Rivas and an Alfredo Jacomino, between an Orlando Puente and an Andrés Morales del Castillo, between a Nicolás Castellanos and a Justo Luis del Pozo? Is there any difference between those characters and these? And the same fawners, the same hired pens, the same bootlickers that yesterday made panegyrics for Prío are now making them for Fulgencio Batista.

But our present situation is far lower and more insufferable: the former won through the ballot box, but the latter by cunning ambush; the former were going to be swept away in the elections, the latter have indefinitely suppressed them; the former infringed the Constitution, the latter have destroyed it for ever; the former imposed the Mordaza Decree[22] which merited the people's rejection and, at the stroke of a pen, the latter have closed all educational airspace and have placed a soldier with a bayonet at the door of every radio station so that those speaking via the press speak in favor of the government or talk in undertones.

Through a monstrous decree all lawsuits involving soldiers have passed into war jurisdiction.

The sellers out and the timorous affirm that there is freedom of the press and the spoken word: yes, to speak in favor of Batista or to judge him gently, but not to tell the truth and unmask him from head to toe. But the truth will be stated revolutionarily, in defiance of the repression.

The seed of heroic rebellion is growing in everybody's hearts. In the face of danger, heroism appears and germinates with the generous blood that is shed.

Down with those who want to separate the youth from sacrifice with their puerile and accommodating counsel! The frustrations of the past are of no concern to us.

Shame and opprobrium on the collaborators and traitors who, as they did yesterday, are now denying freedom to the homeland and decorum to its people!

Onward all upright Cubans, those of you who, at this difficult hour, wish to place yourselves under the flags of honor.[23]

ABEL SANTAMARÍA MEETS FIDEL CASTRO

On May 1, 1952 Fidel Castro and Abel Santamaría met for the first time. Santamaría headed a combative group that met on 25th and O Streets, in Vedado.

Jesus Montané Oropesa recalls that at midday on May 1, 1952 he had set out with Abel Santamaría for Colón Cemetery to take part in a ceremony in memory of Carlos Rodríguez, a worker who was killed in the protest against the Mordaza Decree emitted during Carlos Prío Socarrás' presidency.

There they met up with Fidel, who was also paying tribute to the fallen comrade. And Montané explained:

"We remembered how Fidel, as a lawyer, organized the private prosecution in that case, and succeeded in arraigning Casals and Salas Cañizares who had murdered the aforementioned comrade with impunity. Later, during the Batista dictatorship, both of them were renowned for their cruelty to imprisoned revolutionaries.

"After the ceremony, Abel, Fidel and myself stayed behind talking. An animated and amicable conversation soon developed on political events in the country. We agreed that something had to be done to combat Batista's dictatorial regime. We lamented the inertia of certain sectors of the so-called opposition, which were demonstrating an evident incapacity to challenge the dictatorship with a genuine fighting front. Such politicking and vacillation made action by the youth imperative. The leader who would organize the people en masse in their battle against the dictatorship could already be perceived in that conversation.

"Fidel talked to us about a doctor friend of his called Mario Muñoz, who practiced in Colón, Matanzas Province, and who was also a radio ham. Fidel was thinking of asking Muñoz to construct us two small plants for his underground operation in Havana.

"As the light brown Chevrolet car that Fidel used was, as always, out of service, Abel gave him his to visit his doctor friend the following Sunday.

We went to Colón and Fidel didn't need much time there to convince the comrade to put together the two underground radio plants as quickly as possible". [24]

Immediately after Fidel's first meeting with Abel at the cemetery, the combative group at 25th and O joined the incipient Movement that Fidel was beginning to organize. The humane and revolutionary quality of this group would become apparent over the course of time. Abel, Boris Luis [Santa Coloma] and Montané came to be part of its National Directorate, Abel as the movement's second in command. Haydée [Santamaría] and Melba [Hernández] were the only two women to participate in the actions of July 26, 1953. It was Raúl Gómez who drafted the manifesto in which the Moncada assailants expounded their reasons for taking that decisive step in our history.

When the 25th and O group linked up with Fidel, he had spent seven weeks in intensive activity. He came and went from 109 Prado, the national Orthodoxy Party headquarters, visited leaders, argued, talked with his party comrades, wrote, spent time with his friends exploring ideas; and in short, created the nucleus of a solid number of young people who identified from the outset with his way of confronting events.[25]

EL ACUSADOR[26]

Jesús Montané Oropesa recalls all the details:

"Abel, Gómez García (the Centennial Generation poet) and ourselves published an underground newspaper that came out every week and which was called *Son los Mismos* [All the Same]. I vividly remember that Fidel proposed that we edit another newspaper with the combative title of *El Acusador.* We admit that it was hard to abandon *Son los Mismos* and, the first week that we started to publish *El Acusador,* the components of editing two newspapers to come out on time had us completely exhausted. Readers can imagine the labor involved in writing the material, cutting the stencils and finally, turning and turning the handle of the old duplicating machine that had cost us the astronomical sum of seventy-five pesos.

That old duplicating machine was our efficient printer that assembled the first sentences condemning the regime and was seized by the police on August 16, 1952. Fidel was surprised at that "exhaustion" and that speaking with half a voice until Abel confessed that we were still publishing *Son los Mismos.*

For us in particular it was difficult to understand that we should concentrate our "literary" efforts on one newspaper.

For the first anniversary of Chibás' death on August 16, 1952, we prepared a special edition of *El Acusador* (our third number), running off 10,000 five-page copies, printed on both sides.

There were also two cartoons on the front page demonstrating how our knowledge of layout and typography was improving. The *El Acusador* journalists were the following comrades: Fidel Castro, who signed his articles with the name Alejandro and who was the political advisor; Raúl Gómez García, who used the pseudonym El Ciudadano (The Citizen) and was the editor; Abel as deputy editor and the body of writers comprising Juan M. Tinguao and me. He signed as Don Tin and I used the name Canino (Canine), for my column entitled "Mordant Comments."

Due to a police leak by a petty traitor to whom Fidel referred once on television, our workshop, located in a Vedado house, was raided and some of the 10,000 copies we had worked so hard on were confiscated. In that initial raid by the Batista Porra[27] on our nascent organization, Abel, Gómez García, Elda Pérez, Tinguao, Melba and the author of these memoirs were arrested.

Those copies of *El Acusador* were handed out in the morning in the vicinity of Havana Cathedral and in the afternoon at Colón Cemetery at the ceremony organized by the Orthodoxy Party in memory of its deceased leader Eduardo Chibás.

One year after the death of their leader, the Orthodoxy masses were in confusion due to the incapacity and weakness of their leaders; for that reason, in that special edition of *El Acusador,* Fidel sent the Orthodoxy members an impassioned message headed: "A Critical Account of the PPC."

In the final paragraph Fidel noted:

"Anyone with a traditional concept of politics could feel pessimistic at that tableau of truths. On the other hand, for those who have a blind

faith in the masses, for those who believe in the irreducible power of great ideas, the indecisiveness of those leaders cannot be motive for slackening or discouragement, because such spaces will be quickly enough occupied by upstanding men emerging from the ranks."

Thus Fidel criticized those Orthodoxy leaders, veritable clay idols, unable to give any direction to the eager Cuban youth and at a far remove from fulfilling the historical role that Chibás' mandate had shown them. So it is not at all surprising that Fidel should place his faith in the invincible strength of the masses.[28]

During the period August 1952 to January 28, 1953, our organization grew in numbers and discipline.

A few dozen comrades from all over the Island, particularly from Artemisa, Guanajay, Havana and rural Havana, joined the group with patriotic enthusiasm.[29]

Melba Hernández Rodríguez del Rey, a Moncada heroine, recalls:

It was May 1, 1952 when I made my first contact with what whould become the beloved Moncada group. I had gone to an event in the cemetery, where I got to know Abel Santamaría. Abel invited me to his house to hear Fidel's ideas. I went that same night, but Fidel couldn't make it. I also met Haydée Santamaría.

Two or three days later, in the home of Haydée and Abel, I did meet Fidel. At that time many of us young people understood what our duty to the homeland was, but had not found a way to channel that duty. When Fidel spoke at that meeting I had the instant impression that he would be able to guide us, and that his plans could be carried out successfully.

From then, I made daily visits to Abel and Haydée's home. And, in addition to a total revolutionary identification, I developed a sentiment of profound sisterly friendship with Yeyé [Haydée].

I had studied Law, which was not a "productive" career for me. The few areas I covered didn't produce much profit, although they were in accordance with my principles. My "clients" were exploited campesinos, a girl who swapped a brothel for jail, dismissed workers. I still remember a case I took on defending workers from Ómnibus Aliados.[30]

Right after Fidel's graduation, and with the aim of collecting funds for the 26th of July Movement, we were going to take up the case of Eugenio

Sosa, the owner of a rice plantation in Matanzas who, as we found out later, had interests in the *Diario de la Marina* daily. The more we got into the facts, the less we liked the work. When we knew all the details we decided to defend the campesinos that Sosa was accusing, rather than him. And thus renounce the chance of obtaining funds. Fidel was like that, from the beginning he remained faithful to the purity of our Movement.[31]

So, the first joint activity that Abel, Fidel and Montané carried out, days after that meeting at Carlos Rodríguez' grave, was part of a plan set in motion to attain those ends. With his old brown Chevrolet out of action, Fidel rang Montané at General Motors and put the problem to him, and the need to go to Matanzas Province as soon as possible. Abel offered him his car and the three of them left Havana in it on Sunday, May 4.

With the passion that characterized him, throughout the journey Fidel outlined the projects that were buzzing in his brain. *Son los Mismos* had enthused him, but what about a more combative title, like *El Acusador?* And the print run would have to be increased, so that it could reach the comrades in Cayo Hueso, Marianao, Santiago de la Vegas, Güines, Calabazar, Madruga, Artemisa and other places... Every opportunity had to be taken to increase the combative spirit... Everyone who was really determined to fight in the manner that circumstances dictated should be brought together... The revolutionary agitator that existed in Fidel, developed as a student leader during his time at the university and afterwards as an Orthodoxy member, understood the mobilizing effect of live speeches, having seen it in Chibás. At that time he ascribed a special practical value to tribunes, to the microphone. Many things needed to be said, many things needed to be denounced, many people had to be caught by those words. *El Acusador* would not be sufficient. They had to use radio. What did it matter if the stations wouldn't lend them airspace? They had to make efforts to find their own means. Characteristically, Fidel always thought on a grand scale, without vacillating between the goal and the starting point, however great the distance might be. Resources depended on effort, dedication, and tenacity in attaining objectives. Overcoming obstacles was purely a source of satisfaction...

Abel stopped the car outside a house with a wide doorway on the corner of Diago and Estrada Palma in Colón, 190 kilometers east of Havana. A physician by the surname of Muñoz lived and had his consulting rooms there.

Mario Muñoz Monroy was fifteen years older than Abel and Fidel. He was two and a half months away from his fortieth birthday. Fifteen months later he would be one of only four assailants of the Moncada Garrison who were older than that when they fell.[32]

CUBA HAS ONLY ONE WAY FORWARD

By the first anniversary of Chibás' death, many things had happened in a very short space of time: Prío no longer headed the government, the June 1 elections had not taken place, and the dictator Batista was drowning the country in bloodshed.

The revolutionary group headed by Fidel had prepared a special edition of *El Acusador,* running to 10,000 copies, to be distributed that day by various comrades assigned to the task.

In spite of the fundamental reasons given in the first edition of *El Acusador,* its index finger did not only point to the ranks of the coup's perpetrators and the shameful renegades who went over to their side. It fulfilled the same role of condemning Batista and his hirelings as *Son los Mismos,* but at the same time, was directed against the weaknesses in the Orthodoxy Party leadership, charging it with being incapable of guiding the people. Thus the two central themes of *El Acusador* had Fidel's particular stamp.

In the third and last number of August 16, 1952, those characteristics were succinctly placed in two editorials both signed with the pseudonym Alejandro. In "Yo acuso" (J'Accuse) he attacked Batista. In "Recuento crítico" [Critical Account] he railed against the inept and Byzantine Orthodoxy leadership.

The tone of "Yo acuso," with as much or more mordacity than *Son los Mismos,* surpassed it in its breadth of knowledge and arguments on the essence and history of the dictator. In it Fidel affirmed:

"Fulgencio Batista, the dogs that daily lick your wounds will never be able to conceal the fetid odors coming from them. Your life, your past, your present, your lies will irretrievably result in your loss.

"It is said that you aspire to glory. Without any doubt, Machado will have a hard fight on his hands to defend the sad glory you aspire to take away from him. Everything that you have uttered is lies, refined cynicism, and perfidious hypocrisy. You talk of peace and you are the civil war, the bloody chaos, the abysmal hatred and the fratricide among Cubans that will take many years to erase. You talk of your humble origins and you live in palaces, surrounded by luxuries, replete with millions and waited on by hundreds of servants.

"You are not the soldiers' friend that you claim to be, you merely want to convert them into the stepping stones of your ambitions, into hangmen and Cains, bringing down on them the hatred of the people and thus forcing them to take your side in an ignoble cause: your thirst for power and for gold, in which they assume the risks and labors and you take charge of the millions. You talk of dirty business and your whole fortune has been made in a dirty way. You talk of respect for human life and your born-again henchmen have mown down a hundred valiant lives. You talk of nepotism and crown your family with sinecures and privileges. You talk of gangsterism when you have set up the most infamous gunmen.

"You talk of elections and who could believe you...? You, who blocked the labors of Miguel Mariano[33] and destroyed him...? You, who won the 1940 elections through rigged rules and the force of bayonets."

The following passage of "Yo acuso" is highly significant and prompts meditation. Simply because of the anonymity of the pseudonym? Could there be a more complex reason? It is a fact that Fidel's Marxist background dated back to his university days, but he eluded any such identity with an ironclad self-control extending to his use of language. From that period onward, he was shaping a revolutionary project that pointed toward socialism but, with rigorous Martí-style tactics, he avoided communist affiliations or any revelation of his strategic intentions. He was aware that in that environment and at that time, "they have to be hidden in order to be achieved," given that "proclaiming them for what they are would give rise to too

many difficulties in reaching the desired end based on them."[34] But on this occasion, he did not use his careful language in a public document and pointed the finger at the basic, long-term enemy. It would be the first and last time that this occurred prior to the triumph of the Revolution. It is when he states:

"You talk of work and there are more unemployed people than ever. You talk of progress and align yourself with the powerful Cuban and foreign interests. You talk, finally, of the homeland, but you are a loyal running dog of imperialism, and the fawning servant of all the ambassadors."

On the other hand, in critically locating Batista "on the side of the powerful Cuban and foreign interests," he was not only attacking imperialism but also defining his own opposition to Cuban capitalists, in an evident class distinction.

And Fidel ends:

"Facing you, Cuba has only one way forward: sacrifice and immolation for the sake of its beloved liberties.

"For the misfortune she is suffering, for the misery that is hurting her, for the blood that flows... JE T'ACCUSE... YOU RUINOUS DICTATOR!!

"And when history is written it will doubtless refer to you. But it will speak of you as one speaks of plagues and epidemics, as one speaks of Attila's horse... for the devastating tracks you will have left behind on your passing through this earth."[35]

THE TIME IS REVOLUTIONARY, NOT POLITICAL

In "Recuento crítico" the credentials move in another direction. Other values come to the fore that have become a proverbial part of Fidel's character with the passing of time. In the first place, his strict critical and self-critical awareness of errors, which leads him to list some of the acute weaknesses undermining Chibás' followers and incapacitating them. He moves on to attack the indiscipline and irresponsibility of the Orthodoxy Party leadership in plain language, and charges its leaders with distancing themselves from the masses.

The masses, the masses, he reiterates time and time again; his constant obsession, the essential motive for his actions. He talks of the "shock and indignation of the masses." He argues that it is "the turn of the great masses." He notes that "the vast mass of the PPC is on its feet," and reiterates what was then and has always been another of his ethical-practical standards: "Faith in the masses," unfailingly linked to another constant expression of Fidel's action and political thought: a firm belief in "the irresistible force of great ideas."

In his own language, which never gives way to any hint of indiscretion, he employs Leninist tools in terms of analysis and prediction to indicate the change of historical time which would affect and transcend the Party and expose its leadership, incapable of rising to the moment, as an anachronism. At the same time he anticipates the emergence of a new vanguard that will lead the people and that has to be built—again the Leninist line—on the base of genuine merit. The last paragraph of his account is classic in all senses. By making politics equivalent to electoral politicking as it was understood in that environment, he convincingly proclaims:

"The time is revolutionary, not political."[36]

And Fidel argues his assessment in this article:

Over and above the uproar of the cowards, mediocre individuals and the poor in spirit, it is necessary to make a brief but bold and constructive judgment of the Orthodoxy movement in the wake of the death of its great leader Eduardo Chibás.

The formidable final attack delivered by the champion of the Orthodoxy Party bequeathed the Party a huge wealth of popular emotion that placed it at the very gates of power. Everything was done; it only needed to know how to retain the ground gained.

The first question every upstanding Orthodoxy member has to ask himself or herself is this: Have we aggrandized the moral and revolutionary legacy left us by Chibás... or, on the contrary, have we misappropriated part of that wealth...?

Anyone who believes that everything that has been done to date has been done well, that we have nothing to reproach ourselves with, is very easy on his or her own conscience.

Those sterile fights that followed Chibás death, those monumental scandals for motives that were not at all ideological, but purely selfish

and personal in flavor, still resound like bitter hammer blows on our consciousness.

That totally disastrous procedure of taking Byzantine quarrels before a public platform was a grave symptom of indiscipline and irresponsibility. Unexpectedly March 10 arrived. One would have hoped that such an extremely grave event would have eradicated such petty feuds and sterile personality battles in the Party from the roots. But was that totally the case...?

To the shock and indignation of the Party masses, stupid quarrels were once again rife. The folly of those responsible was not to notice that the press doorway was too narrow to attack the regime, but on the other hand amply wide enough to attack the Orthodoxy Party itself. Batista has been loaned too many services by that kind of conduct.

Nobody will be scandalized that such a necessary account has been made today, the turn of the great masses who have suffered that misconduct in bitter silence, and at such an opportune moment as the day to answer to Chibás at his grave.

That vast mass of the PPC is on its feet, more determined than ever. At these moments of sacrifice one asks: Where are those who had aspirations... those that wanted to be the first to fill the posts of honor in assemblies and on executives, those who toured municipalities and set trends, those who demanded a place on the podium at large demonstrations, and who, these days, are not touring municipalities, nor mobilizing in the street, nor demanding honorary positions in the front of combat...?

People with a traditional conception of politics could well feel pessimistic given this depiction of the truth. But, for those who have a blind faith in the masses, those who believe in the unfailing force of great ideas, the leaderships' indecision is no motive for weakening or discouragement, because that kind of vacuum is soon filled by upstanding men from the ranks.

The time is revolutionary, not political. Politics is the consecration of opportunism for those who have the means and resources. Revolution opens the way to genuine merit, to those who have valor and sincere ideals, to those baring their chests and taking the standard in their hands. A revolutionary Party needs a youthful revolutionary leadership of popular origin to save Cuba.[37]

FIDEL GOES BACK TO UNIVERSITY

Pedro Miret was in the fourth year of a Surveying degree in the spare-time study plan and was working in the Aqueduct and Sewers Department of the Ministry of Public Works to pay for his studies and subsidize a scant family income. Closely linked to Léster Rodríguez, Abelardo Crespo Arias and Raúl Castro, Pedro Miret lived in a modest boarding house for students on Neptuno and Hospital, near the University. After March 10 he devoted himself completely to voluntary military training at the University, and thus was unable to complete his studies.

He knew Fidel when the latter was reading Law and was occasionally part of a group composed of Alfredo Guevara, Baudilio Castellanos, Mario García Incháustegui, Léster Rodríguez and other like-minded comrades during the student period prior to March 10, many of whom later played outstanding roles within the revolutionary movement.

Immediately afterwards, Miret began to devote his time to training anybody linked to and expressing an intention to fight against the dictatorship. He taught how to load, unload and accurately aim with the few weapons that he was constantly repairing in one of the basements in the FEU office or other parts of the University.

Miret realized that the group led by Fidel was the most serious of all those identified as insurrectionary. Fidel talked to him and they drew up a plan for training his men and the possible training of others at the University whom they perceived as having the necessary qualities. Afterwards, Fidel sent Ñico López to complement in practice what was agreed with Miret.

It is interesting to note that Fidel sent Ñico López—and José Luis Tasende and Ernesto Tizol later—to coordinate and control the military exercises, in spite of his long-term relationship with Miret. The reason lies in the extreme secrecy and discretion with which the developing movement was managed.

Nonetheless, Fidel's political dynamism, greatly augmented by the need to make a rapid and solid revolutionary response to the dictatorship, led him to evaluate the usefulness of his own presence at the University, the scenario of the major uprisings against the dictatorship at that time.

To that end, however, he acted with all the perspicacity of his conspiratorial talent. Out of the blue, on November 4, 1952, he presented himself at the University to enroll as a student in the recently initiated 1952-1953 academic year. In that way he could outwit any police search, as his position as a student justified his free access to the University precinct.

Thus, two years after having completed three university courses in one go, Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz once again became an official student at the University of Havana, in the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature. This time he evidently wasn't going to totally dedicate himself to study as he had done in the 1949-1950 course when he took his final examinations and passed thirty-two subjects in just twelve months.[38] He had another distinct and superior objective to meet.[39]

Armando Hart's testimony is illustrative when he speaks of the first time that he had personal dealings with Fidel and was impressed by his personality:

In the Orthodoxy Party office at 109 Prado, a group of young people was discussing what kind of person should assume the leadership or command of the Revolution. On that occasion, Fidel defended the idea that completely new leaders would emerge, distinct in every way from those who were involved in political life at that point.

In the burning argument, unleashed in the old Prado lodge, I was one of the few in that group of young people—I cannot exactly say that they were all really young, because some of them had very old ideas—who fully agreed with Fidel.

I left 109 Prado with Fidel. We walked through various streets of Havana, him with his arm on my shoulder, as he used to do a lot—and he was still pressing the subject with me. I was surprised when he showed interest in the fact that I was visiting the FEU offices with a group of comrades to learn weapons' handling. I wondered how he knew that.

After the attack on the Moncada Garrison I learnt that Pedro Miret, the FEU representative responsible for organizing that activity, was one of the participants in that heroic action. From that time I noticed that, through Miret, Fidel knew many of those who went to the FEU offices with insurrectional intentions.[40]

IN FOUR DAYS I WILL COLLECT THAT MONEY

At the end of December 1952, just seven months before the Moncada attack, some thirty workers employed on the Ácana farm in Matanzas Province had gone six months without receiving any wages whatsoever.

A dispute between the owners and a tenant farmer at the farm—a logical manifestation of the regime of land holding and exploitation—meant that the Ácana workers were not paid their due wages over that lengthy period, in spite of having nothing to do with the dispute.

Everything they did came to nothing. Many claims were made to the authorities and there were many arguments with their respective employers.

On December 27 the agricultural workers at the farm received a surprise visit from Dr. Fidel Castro, who identified himself as "a Havana lawyer who has come to help you to solve your problem and try and make them pay you what you are owed."

The total debt was more than 5000 pesos and, as the campesinos said, "we were afraid that it (Fidel's visit) was a maneuver by the owners and a tenant farmer." The young lawyer convinced them of his just motives and the campesinos placed their confidence in him. However, some of them weren't convinced that it wasn't a ruse until Fidel's approaches proved successful.[41]

Paulino Perdomo Ramos, who at that time headed one of the groups of agricultural workers at the Ácana farm, told a group of journalists:

And that day, as I was telling you, Fidel arrived. Well, he arrived like you, by surprise, without anyone expecting him and asked: "Which one of you is Paulino Perdomo?"

Some comrades told him who I was and where I was, which was up there, and he came up to me and said: "Look, Paulino, I've come here from Havana. I am Fidel Castro, a lawyer, and I've come to collect the money that you are owed here on the farm. If you give me authority... If not..."

I cut him off at that point and said: "Look kid, I'm surprised that a young lawyer from Havana should come here like this without us sending for you, selflessly as you say." I used the familiar you because I was an older person and at that time he was still just a boy. "That sounds odd to

me. To me it smacks of a maneuver by the owners, so that we give you the authority, and then we'll never get paid!"

Then he replied, serenely: "Look, it isn't like that. What I want is for you to find me somewhere to bring the workers together... I was there in the trade union office and they refused me a place, I was in the municipality and they didn't want me there either."

The truth is that he had already been making efforts about the place but none of those people wanted to help him, you know? The trade union was in the hands of the *Mujalistas*,[42] you know? That was in the year 1952.

I looked at him, thought for a while and then said to him: "Well, my house is a bit small (I'd only laid the floor the day before, because it was earthen) but we could have it there."

We went there and with those things that he has, the agility, being an active person, he himself got ready the few bits and pieces we had, and I told the old lady to make "a drop of coffee."

Well, all that was very active on his part, in a simple and natural way, very impressive in his way of acting.[43]

He told us: "I give you my word of honor that if you give me the authority, within four days, I will collect that money off them." So then I said to him: "Listen lawyer, this business of word of honor might have great value for you, but for us, well, it doesn't have that value, because in many cases we don't know what word of honor means. The problem is that we've already had that beaten into us, we don't even believe in word of honor..."

And he came back and ratified what he was saying. So I said to him: "Look, anyway, speaking personally, I'll give you the authority. Now the comrades have the word and can say, you know?" But the comrades said: "No, Paulino, what you're doing is good; we'll accept it if you think it's a good idea..."

When the comrades said that, he took out a piece of paper, sat down at a little table and wrote out that minute, the authority, and we signed it. That was on December 27 of that year, 1952, at around 5:00 P.M. After he said: "Not tomorrow, but the day after tomorrow, more or less at this time, you're going to receive a telegram here in which I'll tell you how the case is going." And then he left for Havana.[44]

He drove around in an old jalopy... it even had a door missing... Well, lo and behold, on the third day, the mail messenger appeared with the telegram... It said: "Case going well, Fidel."[45]

Look, I'm going to carry on with the story... I took the telegram and left for the comrades' houses and told them: "Listen, I think we're going to win the battle. Look at this: the man's keeping to his word. He says things are going well." Well, I'm telling you now, at around 10:00 P.M. on the 31st, all of us were getting paid, receiving the checks each one of us was owed.[46]

He came to pay us himself. Well, the person that handed over the checks was comrade Gildo Fleitas, who as you know was here running part of the farm, right? But anyway, the payment was made with Fidel present. There's one thing: given that the workers were divided—like I told you some were working for the owners and others for the tenant farmer—Fidel himself went and found the Sabanilla group and the Cidra one; he found the tenant farmer and one of the owners and so, after everything was sorted out, or at least when everyone came to an agreement, the money was paid.

I remember that on that occasion he came with a kind of fair young man, a bit short, you know?, but we didn't know who he was: we didn't go into that, because then, who would have thought that seven months later Fidel would attack the Moncada Garrison there in Santiago de Cuba? That was the last thing that anyone would have thought of... I'm telling you that even then I talked with him about my doubts. I told him about my doubts then and there and that I thought that his presence here could have been a maneuver by those farm people.[47]

I also remember that when they paid us, after the last check was handed over, Fidel said a few words there... But first let me tell you that, when we saw what he'd done, all of us wanted to show our thanks, like you do, right? We wanted to give him at least two pesos from each of us for the gasoline, but he wouldn't even accept that. He had told us he wasn't going to charge anything for his efforts, but anyway, we agreed to do that; to put up two pesos each for gasoline, but he didn't want to accept anything!

And well, it was at the end when he said a few words... Ah, but hang on, I'd forgotten this: I remember that when he was doing that

minute—and of course I didn't know his political position or anything like that—I went up to him and said: "Your attitude seems like ours, like that of the communists: an unselfish attitude."

And he told me, looking at me trustingly: "If my program triumphs some day it will be the same as the communists'; nationalization..."[48]

I should tell you that there was one thing I really liked, that I was in agreement with and that made me trust him, and that was when he was about to write the authority, that minute, and I said to Fidel: "Look, we're going to do things like you say... but under these conditions: in the minutes you have to put that, after the four-day period, if you haven't collected the money, then we can de-authorize you with that same minute and take away the authority we're giving you." I had to say that then because it seemed to me to be a maneuver.

That's why I said it. And he said in a very trusting way: "Yes, I agree. I'm going to do as you say." And Fidel wrote it as I said. That made me trust him although, truthfully, I wasn't at all convinced that we were going to get paid that day. And well, you know that we did, that we got paid.[49]

When they asked Santiago Anisio Ruiz, a former agricultural worker at the Ácana farm, about what remained most strongly in his mind about that episode, he replied:

The first thing was the unselfish attitude of Fidel, who we'd never seen hair or hide of before. What he did, as I already said, was something that made an impression... There's another thing that I'd forgotten; it is his memory! You know, when he saw us all in Paulino's house, he asked us our names and surnames and afterwards, on the day we got our pay, he was saying our names as we went past him. Hey, that's incredible! Someone would be there waiting, and he was saying to us: "You're So-and-so," and to another "And you're what's his name!" I don't think there are many people with a memory like that! There were more than thirty of us, and he more or less said everybody's names and surnames.

We noticed that and said: "How did he manage that, when he didn't even have us written down on a piece of paper or anything?"

Afterwards he said that what we needed was a contingent, from Oriente Province, of 500-600 men... Ah, now I remember as well: he said that if he got to be somebody one day, he was going to make an

Agrarian Reform... But well, imagine, at that time, when I was illiterate as well—I learned to read and write in '61 through the Literacy Campaign—who would have thought that that would come to be, that he was talking seriously?[50]

THE JOSÉ MARTÍ CENTENNIAL YOUTH

The year 1953 opened with a definitive crisis within the Orthodoxy Party leadership. Its national leadership council split on Tuesday, January 13 in an attempt to agree the line of a non-pact with the other political parties. From that point, the Party was divided into three irreconcilable factions, after a tumultuous meeting that ended in blows. That incident further discontented the young Orthodoxy revolutionaries. Polarizing that sentiment, the voice of Fidel was heard: "Let's go. These politicians can't be counted on to make a revolution.[51]

Armando Torres Santryll, recalling those days, relates:

By January 1953 and the centennial anniversary of Martí's birth, one could see a stronger cohesion among the youth—both within and outside the University—who attended those meetings. Around then the FEU convened a meeting attended by Fidel on behalf of the Orthodoxy Youth; Flavio Bravo, who spoke on behalf of the Socialist Youth; Léster Rodríguez on behalf of the pro-Martí Youth; Quino Peláez, who was FEU president; and us, representing the Authentic Youth. Once again, Fidel advocated unity among all the juvenile forces and posed the need to pay a tribute to Martí, one that should be made by the youth. And once more he affirmed that it was going to be and had to be the revolutionary youth who would fight on the basis of Martí's thought, and that the José Martí centennial youth would emerge from them.

So the march of the torches was organized to pay tribute to José Martí. During that parade—and this is a personal appreciation—we noted that Fidel was structuring an effective movement of real strength.[52]

Those men headed by Fidel included many that would be involved in the attack on the Santiago de Cuba and Bayamo garrisons on July 26, 1953. History would grant them an honorable name: the Centennial Generation.

THE MARCH OF THE TORCHES

During the night of January 27, while the official event sponsored by the regime was taking place outside the Capitolio, lines of students and the people were constantly arriving at the University precinct, forming a huge and boisterous throng. The Cadenas Plaza and the monumental stairway were packed. A distant view revealed the fantastic perspective of thousands of fiery-tongued snakes beginning to glide towards Infanta and San Lázaro Streets at 11:30 P.M. Each demonstrator carried a torch on high.

Various cars with movie and television news crews advanced to get footage of the parade, which was headed by a giant flag held by female university students and those from secondary education. Behind them was the full FEU executive.

The river of flames moved down San Lázaro to Espada Street. The contingent that had just come from the closing event of the pro-Martí Youth Congress joined the march. The pro-Martí Women's Organization contributed another solid block.[53]

Aida Pelayo, president of the pro-Martí Women's Civil Front affirms in a written testimony:

But the sensation of the night was a column of 500 youths, in immaculate ranks, marching behind Fidel. One could see that they were well trained from the display of discipline and cohesion that they presented. The voices of these youth rang out clearly among the shouted choruses of "Revolution! Revolution!" It was a thundering torrent that made a great demonstration even more spectacular.[54]

I WAS NOT UNDERGROUND

In an interview with Tomás Borgess, Fidel Castro confided to the eminent intellectual Nicaraguan:

Batista underestimated us, he was concerned about other leaders, other political organizations that had millions of pesos, that had arms, and discounted us, which greatly helped in carrying out all the work in absolute legality before the attack on the Moncada Garrison; everything in the

most absolute legality, I was not underground! I was extremely pleased about that, because I have always found it very hard to be underground, as I am discovered on account of my stature. I could dye my hair and do anything else, but my experiences in working underground were always a failure, because I was immediately discovered. So I could only operate within a framework of legality.[55]

On January 15 [1953], in a protest demonstration at the profanation of the bust of Julio Antonio Mella facing the University stairway, students twice took to the streets in energetic marches, and were attacked by police gunfire. Student Rubén Batista was gravely injured on one of those demonstrations. After one month of agony he died on February 13. Fidel was on the mass demonstration into which his burial was transformed on February 14.

The enraged crowd shouted out their hatred of the dictatorship after the burial, on the return march from the cemetery to the University. En route, the residence of Batista supporter Margarita de la Cotera was stoned and damaged, as well as a car circulating with a September 4 banner, a symbol of the regime.

That same day saw the filing of a public disorder case in Room 5 of the Havana Hearings against Fidel and Orthodoxy fighter Aida Pelayo, president of the pro-Martí Women's Civic Front, who were charged with responsibility for those incidents. The trial, listed for June 10, never took place. On June 5 it became without effect through the Amnesty Decree-law 885 of 1953.[56]

THE GOVERNMENT HAS THE WORD

Eight days before the incidents in the wake of Rubén Batista's interment, *Bohemia* magazine published a defiant article written against the government for the destruction of various death masks—including that of Eduardo Chibás—statuettes of Martí and other works of art in the studio of sculptor Manuel Fidalgo.

The misdeed, committed by police agents, arose the simple fact that at the foot of the statuettes, manufactured in large quantities in that Centennial Year, the sculptor had engraved Martí's words: "For Cuba that is suffering."[57]

The *Bohemia* exposé had the graphic support of four photographs confirming the acts. It was signed by Fidel Castro, with photos by Fernando Chenard. Five months later Chenard would be one of the men who gave his life in the events of July 26 in Santiago de Cuba.

The author of the article being known, the charge against the dictatorship and the energetic tone in which it was written comes as no surprise today. However, one other aspect is outstanding: the leader of the movement's capacity for maneuver and the tactical utilization of any means of political struggle, depending on the particular situation at the time.

Around that time, in its own way and within a rigid circle of power, the government had celebrated—in a veritable tournament of court hypocrisy, luxurious toasts and ceremonies in the absence of the people—the anniversary of the birth of the Apostle [José Martí]. With dozens of foreign personalities visiting the country, the dictatorship was obliged to present a liberal front, including the press, at least during the festivities.

Given that the incident at Fidalgo's workshop took place precisely at that time, the special juncture was utilized by Fidel to hit out at the regime via the largest weekly press publication in the country. It was the first time that he had used the legal press since Batista's coup. His last piece published in the legal media prior to this one was an exposé of Prío, published by *Alerta* four days before the coup.[58]

In his memorable exposé Fidel stated:

Five days have gone by and at the time of writing this brief information the government has still not given any explanation of the El Calvario incident, nor has Fidalgo materialized.

On Friday, two days after the centennial anniversary of Martí's birth, a group of police showed up at 10:00 A.M. outside the eminent sculptor's workshop in El Calvario; there they commenced the destruction that continued afterwards in his studios two blocks up the road. As usual, they had absolutely no legal warrant; they have never used them.

It was not the agents that initiated the misdeed: it was Captain Oscar González from the 14th police station that gave the bad example. Taking a death mask of Eduardo Chibás, he threw it furiously to the ground; then, grabbing one of the Martí statues, he said that he was going to make Fidalgo eat it and then make him produce Batista statues.

That was an order: dozens of statues of Martí were seized and kicked to smithereens, the rest were loaded onto a garbage truck and thrown into a corner of the police station; the death masks of Chibás were pulverized with ignoble fury; every bust of patriots in the workshop was dashed to the ground or carted off to the police station as well; the head was torn off a statue of the Virgin of Charity, and others disappeared. Not one mold was left intact in order to prevent reproduction.

Thanks to Chenard, our valiant and daring collaborator in *Bohemia*, we have obtained irrefutable evidence, despite the military occupation of the workshop and the press being totally refused access to it.

Moreover, Fidalgo had a beautiful collection of famous hands, a natural copy of the hands of each figure. They included those of [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, Chibás, [Miguel] Coyula, Miguel A. Quevedo, Guido García Inclán, Judge Justiniani and other political and scientific figures from all over the world. A product of the sculptor's lifelong work, it was thought to be unique. At this point it is not known how many of the hands were left intact after the boxes containing them were thrown to the ground.

That same day, María Mantilla presented Batista with the shackles that had tortured Martí's ankles and a brilliant reception was prepared in the Auditorium for eminent academics who were visiting Martí's homeland that is not free.

Fidalgo's crime: to have put at the foot of his statues those words of the Maestro pronounced at a time similar to this: "For Cuba that is suffering..."

In this context, they will have to suppress the complete works of Martí, seize them from bookshops and libraries, because all his works, a plethora of love for his homeland and human decorum, stand as a perennial accusation of those men who are currently governing the people of Cuba against its sovereign will.

And let us hope that it is only what they have done against Fidalgo, destroying his work as an honored artist whose hands have only sculpted figures of illustrious figures; let us hope they have not destroyed his existence as well.

Fidalgo is not a sensationalist or a man of notoriety. At this time, Wednesday afternoon, his unexpected and unjustifiable absence is

alarming Cuban citizens. We have been prudent up until now on this point, it is too serious to speculate on, but it is also too serious to lose time. We do not wish to prejudge, but the evidences are already pointed... The government has the word.[59]

ENDNOTES

1. *Paupista:* member of the squalid political grouping that supported Batista. Its name is derived from the initials of the Unitary Action Party (PAU).
2. Mario Mencía, op. cit., Vol. 1, 51-52.
3. Ibid., 141-146.
4. You can find information about this commemoration on page 137. *Ed.*
5. Mario Mencía, op. cit., Vol.1, 145-151.
6. Frei Betto, op. cit., 121.
7. Fidel Castro, "Discurso pronunciado con motivo del inicio del curso escolar 1995-1996 y sus 50 años de vida revolucionaria," ed. cit., 6-7.
8. Mario Mencía, op. cit., Vol. 2, 411-412.
9. Refers to Julio Antonio Mella (1903-29), Rafael Trejo (1910-30), and Antonio Guiteras (1906-35), revolutionary leaders whose example came to form part of the Cuban people's finest combative traditions. *Ed.*
10. Mario Mencía, op. cit., Vol. 1, 121-122.
11. Cuban pleated shirt. *Ed.*
12. Mario Mencía, op. cit., Vol. 1, 123.
13. Ibid., 127.
14. Ibid., 129.
15. Method of torture employed by the dictatorship against detained or imprisoned political opponents, which consisted of making them drink a large volume of castor oil, also known as palmacristi, which provoked acute diarrhea. *Ed.*
16. Mario Mencía, op. cit., Vol. 1, 129-133.
17. Ibid., 151.
18. Military Intelligence Service. *Ed.*
19. Mario Mencía, op. cit., Vol. 1, 153-154.
20. See note 49. *Ed.*
21. Subparagraph in Law No. 7 of April 1943, which allowed for the creation of funds for teaching, used from the outset for the personal enrichment of government leaders. *Ed.*
22. The people's name for Decree-Law 2273, 1950, imposed by the Prío regime, because it silenced freedom of expression on the radio. *Ed.*
23. Mario Mencía, op. cit., Vol. 1, 153-156.

24. Aldo Isidrón del Valle, "La Generación del Centenario y sus primeras acciones" [The Centennial Generation and Its Initial Actions], in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 233-234.
25. Mario Mencía, *Tiempos precursores* [Presaging Times] (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1986), 15.
26. The Accuser. *Ed.*
27. Paramilitary groups who thrived with Batista in power. *Ed.*
28. Aldo Isidrón del Valle, "La Generación del Centenario y sus primeras acciones," in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 236-238.
29. Ibid., 239.
30. An inter-urban transportation company. *Ed.*
31. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, *Moncada; antecedentes y preparativos,* ed. cit., 204
32. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 1, ed. cit., 239-240.
33. Miguel Mariano Gómez, Cuba's president for only seven months in 1936. *Ed.*
34. José Martí's letter to his Mexican friend Manuel Mercado, May 18, 1895, considered as his literary testament. In Martí's *Obras completas* [Complete Works], Vol. 20 (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), 161. *Ed.*
35. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 1, ed. cit., 244-247.
36. Ibid., 247-248.
37. Ibid., 248-250.
38. Fidel's qualifications in those examinations were one pass (60-69), eight good passes (70-79), five noteworthy (80-89) and eighteen outstanding (90-100 marks). Having studied those thirty-two subjects in one year he completed his doctorate in Law, a degree in Administrative Law and a degree in Diplomatic Law, and advanced in the completion of a doctorate in Social Sciences and a doctorate in Philosophy and Literature, which he abandoned to devote himself with fervor to social and political struggles.
39. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 1, ed. cit., 277-278.
40. Mario Mencía, *Tiempos precursores,* ed. cit., 99-100.
41. Santiago Cardosa Arias, "Presencia de Fidel en la finca Ácana, Matanzas" [Presence of Fidel in the Ácana Farm, Matanzas], in *Antes del Moncada,* ed. cit., 240.
42. *Mujalistas:* Followers of Eusebio Mujal, imposed by coercive means as leader of the Cuban Workers' Federation in order to implant a trade union policy against the workers' interests. *Ed.*
43. Santiago Candosa Arias, op. cit., 243-244.
44. Ibid., 244-245.
45. Ibid., 245.
46. Id.
47. Ibid., 246.

48. Ibid., 246-247.
49. Ibid., 249-250.
50. Ibid., 255.
51. Mario Mencía, *Tiempos precursores,* ed. cit., 129-130.
52. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, *Moncada: antecedentes y preparativos*, ed. cit., 164.
53. Mario Mencía, *Tiempos precursores,* ed. cit., 131-132.
54. Ibid., 132.
55. Tomás Borges, op. cit., 293.
56. Mario Mencía, *Tiempos precursores,* ed. cit., 41.
57. Ibid., 42.
58. Ibid., 42-43.
59. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 1, ed. cit., 316-319.

TOWARD MONCADA

A MAN LIKE THAT IS BORN EVERY 500 YEARS

When Rubén Batista Rubio was dying dozens of people met every night at the Calixto García hospital for the latest news on his condition. All of them expected the fatal outcome at any moment. There, Renato Guitart met Fidel.

There is no testimony of what Renato and Fidel talked about that night, but the profound impression he left on the young man from eastern Cuba is recorded:

His father recalls that, on his return to Santiago de Cuba, Renato told him enthusiastically: "I went to the hospital to see Rubén and there I met a guy who is a phenomenon, what a mentality! How active! That man is indeed a revolutionary, dad! He has a forceful personality, and lives very much in the future. A man like that is only born every 500 years!" I asked who he was and he replied: "He's called Fidel Castro."[1]

THE EXACT POINT OF A TACTICAL CHANGE

On Friday, February 13, 1953 Rubén Batista died. People felt anger at the young man's murder. The next day, the funeral cortege that left the

University of Havana and accompanied him to Colón Cemetery consisted of more than 30,000 people.

However, the expression of the masses on that February 14 was to signal another really significant fact in immediate national events. It marked the exact point of a tactical change in the emerging revolutionary Movement headed by Fidel: that of avoiding situations mediating against the principal plan of confronting the dictatorship, which in those early months of 1953 was rapidly maturing.

Up until that moment, the Movement had taken advantage of any opportunity that presented itself to hit out at the regime in one way or another. Participation in mass activities had been one of its peculiarities from the outset. Even before joining the organization, its members had done so intuitively since March 10 itself, when many of them gathered at the University, out of a need to demonstrate their condemnation of the dictatorship.

March 16 and August 16, the dates of the Orthodoxy Party pilgrimages to Chibás' grave, and the silent May Day convergence at Carlos Rodríguez' tomb were mass activities in which many of the future *Moncadistas*[2] participated.

With the student body in ferment, the University had been an appropriate scenario throughout the whole of 1952. The campaign of swearing an oath of fidelity to the Constitution, followed by the symbolic acts of its wake and burial took place there. The May 8 march to Guiteras' grave started there. The popular commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Republic on May 20 was held there. The remembrance event for the medical students shot down in 1871 was also staged there.

All the above demonstrations were attended by the men, who were prepared to give up their lives for their ideals. Having emerged from the very heart of the people it was natural that that revolutionary group should express its rebellion against despotism in mass protests by the people to whom they belonged.

Utilizing the press and clandestine radios were part of the same principle of forging links with the masses and preparing them for the combat.

Other considerations made this tactic a justifiable one. The mass protests expanded into political attacks on the regime, forcing it to reveal

its repressive nature to the whole world. At the same time, mass action served to arouse and develop a state favorable to rebellion.

In terms of the Movement's external relations, these served to make contact with persons from the masses with the necessary conditions for entry into the organization. And internally, they were a determining method for forging awareness, readiness and discipline among the members, decisive factors at the time of selective evaluations.

The revolutionary agitator in Fidel grasped up until what time it was correct to employ this tactic, in accordance with the advances and adjustments at each phase of his revolutionary project.

An analysis of the agenda followed for participation in mass actions confirms that. Everything would seem to indicate that given the advance of the training program and, in general, the Movement's organizational level and training in military aspects, a conscious absence of this type of participation was notable towards the end of 1952. There was no action on October 10. The November 27 anniversary was commemorated, but on December 7—in the midst of combative military selection—the Movement did not make an appearance at any mass demonstration.

January 28, with its tremendous ideological and revolutionary significance, especially in the year 1953, was an essential date for those who, through their actions, were to earn the title of the Centennial Generation at the cost of their lives. Given this, the march of the torches and the parade to Central Park on the following day determined the end of the cycle of public participation by the Movement's cadres. Only an event that directly touched the conscience of the people and unanimously fired the masses on February 14 claimed the guiding presence of that dignified generation.

But, from that point on, the Movement as such stayed away from mass action. It was necessary to eliminate risks that could endanger the essential objective. It was being prepared in secret, but at a constant and rapid rate, to initiate the heroic achievement that would unleash in Cuba a revolutionary process that would transform our history.

The next time that Fidel and his followers would participate in a public demonstration, five months later, the cry of justice—moving call to the people's conscience and action—would be accompanied by the thunder of rifles outside the walls of the Moncada Garrison.[3]

WE STILL HADN'T MADE OUR OWN PLAN

In those months the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), headed by Rafael García Bárcena, had thought up a plan to take the country's largest fortress with the help of a group of army officers.

It is a fact that the MNR plan to take the Columbia fort was widely known in the so-called insurrectional sectors, many of which were infiltrated by enemy agents. Its postponement from March 8 to April 5 further increased chinks for infiltration by the repressive agencies, including the time signaled for its execution.

Like Fidel, who was in contact with García Bárcena in relation to his possible participation, there were more than a dozen similar cases. At one point García Bárcena met with Fidel, Abel and Montané in the apartment on 25th and O and explained all the details of the plan to them.

"He said that he was in contact with various military men, that the plan wasn't going to fail, that they were going to open the Columbia's doors," Montané related. "So we told him that we had heard about it from outside sources, that we were alerting him to that, because the plan was widely known. But Bárcena replied that that was good because it would throw the enemy off. It cannot be denied that there were many people of good faith in the MNR, but very ingenuous. Bárcena himself was a good man but totally ingenuous, his feet just weren't on the ground."

Many years later, Fidel clarified the nature of his relations with García Bárcena at that time:

"When García Bárcena came to talk to me, I told him: 'Don't look for anybody else.' I knew there was a whole pile of organizations that had twenty, twenty-five people, and that as soon as he began to talk everyone would get to hear of it, because there were so many of them in distinct organizations. I told him: 'If you have a plan let's discuss it and go out to get the weapons; we have enough people to carry it out, if there really is a chance of success.'

"At that time, in March 1953, we still hadn't made our own plan. In our efforts to cooperate with those who wanted to fight, we were still prepared to join anyone who took the first step forward, and he said that he had solid contacts. For that reason I said to him: 'Don't say anything more to anyone.' And, really, if he hadn't talked to anyone else, we

would have attacked Columbia and nobody would have known about it beforehand.

"But, a few days later, García Bárcena had talked to 200 different people in all the organizations, with everybody. That was the problem. It was the most publicized action in Cuban history. So we decided not to participate. Had he agreed with us, we would have made a plan and would have executed it although I didn't like the idea of taking Columbia. But I said to myself: 'Well, it could work out if he has military cadres prepared to rebel.'

"We still didn't have a plan of our own. At that moment we were still working in terms of coordination with the other groups. We didn't have any weapons, but we knew that they would turn up, that would be arms here. For that reason we infiltrated 360 men into the Triple A,[4] to collect arms which they said would be handed out for combat. But they never gave out anything. In that situation, what finally decided us to make our own plan was García Bárcena's failure."

Participation in the MNR project was discussed by the Movement's leadership. Despite everyone's anxiety to enter into action against the dictatorship, the reason why many wanted to participate in that attempt, Fidel expressed its deficiencies. Abel was the first to understand Fidel's reasons and in the end it was decided not to participate.

Convinced that the plan was going to fail, Fidel directed his closest collaborators not to be at home those days, so as to elude any repressive operation that could become widespread. Montané left for the Isle of Pines, and Abel, Haydée and Melba for Las Villas. Others made similar tracks. Fidel took advantage of the situation to travel to Palma Soriano and Santiago de Cuba, where he began to draw up practical measures for future operations that he was already planning.[5]

ORGANIZATION AND DISCIPLINE IN THE MOVEMENT

Many years later, addressing a group of students, Fidel Castro recalled:

We maintained our links with the University in all the preparations for the 26th of July, taking part in those demonstrations, because we had a force, one could say, we had proof of that. There were all sorts of

organizations and many and the same people in this, that and the other. We succeeded in having an organization of 1200 trained people. We made use of many points of law.

I forgot to say that everything concerning the 26th of July was organized under absolute legality. We used the Orthodoxy Party offices at 109 Prado, I met with each one of the cells there, we sent them there to train at the University and then in other places. It was a huge undertaking, and our support came basically from the youth of the Orthodoxy Party as it had a strong influence over the masses and much sympathy among young people. Of the comrades selected, 90% of them came out of the ranks of the Orthodoxy Party youth, rather than the youth leadership. Of course, that recruitment was achieved by working from below; thus some regions yielded many very good people, like Artemisa and, generally speaking, all of them.

We could only use around 160 of them in the Moncada action, but for every man we deployed in the Moncada and Bayamo attacks, eight were unable to participate. We could make a really good selection from the groups that had advanced to that point, but all completely legal.

There are many stories and interesting anecdotes of that period, all those months from March 10, 1952 to July 26, 1953. I will just give you one detail: I had traveled 50,000 kilometers in a little car that I had, a Chevrolet 50-315; I had bought it on credit and every now and then they took it off me; anyway, it burnt out two days before Moncada. But by that time we were hiring cars, we were already operating in another way, adapted to the conditions of course, as you can imagine.[6]

José Suárez Blanco, one of the assailants on Post 3 of the Moncada Garrison, relates:

Fidel's idea was to organize an insurrectional instrument that would channel the struggle into an armed one. Fidel put me in charge of that movement in Pinar del Río, an area that I know well as I'm from Artemisa.

Fidel's idea was to create a movement markedly social in nature, because our basis of action in power was sustained on eradicating the latifundia of that time, workers' participation in the capitalists' profits, educational reforms and the elimination of the professional army in the service of imperialism and reactionary forces.

Many members of the Movement were trained in the fields of Artemisa and Guanajay.

Fidel had asked me to find a location to give a group of comrades lightning training on commando operations. When I selected the place, he told me:

"Get hold of a pair of piglets to serve as a pretext in the case of being surprised."

The location selected was the Martín Mesa springs in Guanajay. When we were training, a lookout that we had placed warned us that General Rojas was coming with his entire staff. We quickly collected up all the weapons and brought out the pigs. When Rojas arrived with his henchmen, they waited until we had finished and then we left.[7]

Juan Almeida Bosque tells us:

The first weapons I ever saw in my life were those that Fidel gave us for firing practice in the University Martyrs' Hall: the famous M-1 which all the students of that period know, and the Springfield; the M-1 without a breech, which had a stick-on breech, and which passed through everybody's hands.

Those were the rudimentary arms with which we took our first steps, the first time of having contact with arms. At that time it wasn't like now, when here in this country everyone knows how to handle a gun and walks around with a gun.

Pedrito Miret was responsible for firing practice. . . .

I met Fidel there, he began to talk of revolution, what revolution was, the process, the setback implied by the coup d'état, that importance of youth—the living forces—uniting, and that he could count on persons without past complications.

That was my first contact with Fidel. He went about with a book by Lenin under his arm, a blue book, with the effigy of Lenin on the cover. That was the one that turned up at Moncada. Fidel had a gray suit, with a shirt collar that looked as if it had been much mended, his shirt a bit threadbare . . . and with that strength of character.[8]

In addition to the hundreds of men Fidel infiltrated into other organizations to see whether weapons could be acquired in that way, Abel Santamaría—acting on his instructions—, approached the Authentic action

groups in order to make contact, penetrate them and sound out the possibility of obtaining arms.

As a result of these relations it was decided to mount a show of the Movement's strength and organization. With that aim, a former naval officer belonging to the Triple A was assigned the task of confirming those aspects. Ten houses were set up in different parts of Havana and hundred of perfectly disciplined comrades were brought together in them on the same day at the same time.

Gabriel Gil, head of the Lawton cell, recalled that he was given instructions to divide his group into two squads and order them to present themselves at intervals in two houses without arousing the neighbors' suspicions: one in Belascoaín Street and the other in San Rafael. There they met up with other persons. There was to be no talking or noise that might indicate the existence of those billets. "I didn't know what it was for," he told us on one occasion. "I was never told the objective of that order. After a couple of hours, during which nothing happened, we were informed that we could go until we were advised again." Gabriel Gil would learn of the reason for that strange mobilization during a collective interview in which he took part... fifteen years after the triumph of the Revolution.[9]

So what were the motives of that mobilization whose objectives were unknown to most of its participants? As Mario Mencía found out:

Apartment D on the third floor of 107 Jovellar Street, very close to the University, was second in importance as the center of activities for the Movement's leadership. Melba lived there with her parents, Manuel Hernández and Elena Rodríguez del Rey. "One night there was a review of the troops," is Melba's recollection of that demonstration. "That was one of the most audacious operations of those days. My house was very large. My parents and I were evacuated. When I returned later, I had a big surprise when I opened the door. It was full of young people from the front room to the back. And what was most surprising was the exceptional silence they maintained. Fidel had ordered an 'alarm' and the troops responded rapidly."

Abel picked up the Triple-A representative at the University of Havana in his car, and set about driving him to the various billets in his car. On entering the houses they found the men standing to attention. The ex-

officer asked about the training they had received and, one by one, they replied with details of their physical training, and the types of weapons they knew.

"I was in the third house to be checked," explained Ernesto Tizol. "The man was pale and nervous. He said that we were crazy. 'How could you think of doing this within the City of Havana?' 'And where else are we going to do it?' we replied, 'didn't you want to see our Movement's organization and discipline? There were still seven more houses.' 'No, I'm not visiting any more. You're all crazy. They're going to take you all prisoner.' And he left.

"The talks continued afterwards. But they wanted the names and addresses of the Movement members and that, when the moment came, that we would join its ranks. Fidel said no, the men organized in our Movement would be led by us. That what they should do was to give us arms for our men and locate us in the most dangerous position for combat; that at the hour of battle we were prepared to occupy the riskiest position; that we knew what we should do at that point. At that point the talks with those people broke down."[10]

OUR OWN PLAN OF STRUGGLE

With the MNR's failure to take the Columbia camp, Fidel decided to carry out his own plan of struggle against the dictatorship with his Movement's scant forces and resources.

The limited resources (the Movement was overwhelmingly composed of young workers in very humble situations) determined the form that the insurrectional plan would take.

As there was no money to acquire good combat weapons, the plan involved snatching them from the enemy. "We were a handful of men," Fidel has said. "We didn't think that we would defeat the Batista dictatorship with a handful of men, or defeat its army, no. But we did think that that handful of men was enough, not to defeat that regime, but to unleash that force, that vast force, that immense energy of the people that was indeed capable of defeating that regime."[11]

In summary:

. . . During the first months that followed the March 10 coup Fidel's activities had three principal directions: agitation and propaganda aimed at denouncing the spurious and ambitious nature of the regime; the recruiting of people close to his belief of opposing a solution through revolutionary violence; and advocating the unity of everyone who was really ready to fight at any price against the dictatorship.

In advocating that unity of forces, Fidel was not aspiring to honor or a high position, he was simply offering himself as a foot soldier along with the growing contingent of men that followed him. These were his proposals to the Orthodoxy Party leadership. But that leadership had grown incapable of leading the people in that special situation of political institutional crisis. Fidel even established contact with other self-titled insurrectional organizations. However none of them would give him any weapons, and neither did any of them launch themselves into combat.

Given that situation and after twelve months without those with the resources to initiate the armed struggle against the dictatorship, doing so, in March 1953 Fidel decided to carry out his own plans of popular armed insurrection. And by that date the Movement was duly organized.[12]

Oscar Alcalde, one of the Moncada assailants, affirmed that Fidel's authority was never questioned, his leadership was accepted as a normal and spontaneous fact. "His relations with us were fraternal, and based on reasoning. He never imposed an order; he always sought our opinions, leading us to reality on the few occasions when we might not have agreed."

"Abel, who we admired and loved very deeply," added Melba, "also had an influence on our respect for Fidel. It was a respect and admiration that had nothing to do with standards imposed on us; it arose naturally from the acceptance and confidence that Fidel awoke in us through his conduct, optimism, capacity and revolutionary fervor, right from those early days."[13]

With great sacrifice money was collected to cover training costs and buy arms. They managed to collect over 20,000 pesos. How were those funds managed?

Pedro Trigo relates that one night, after a whole day spent collecting money, he went with Fidel to where he lived at that time. Fidel's little three-year-old son was ill. The apartment was dark... the electricity had

been cut off. Fidel wrote a note to have the child seen by a doctor friend. He asked Pedro if he had any money on him. He left the five pesos that Trigo gave him in the house for medicine and food, and they continued their efforts until the early hours of the morning. When that incident happened, Fidel had more than 100 pesos in his pocket that had been collected that day.[14]

SECURITY MEASURES

. . . The Movement carefully maintained its rule of not admitting any soldiers. Teodulio Mitchell had been in the army in Palma Soriano, but no longer was; he drove a truck distributing soft drinks. Right at the beginning of the Movement an army corporal was enthusiastically introduced to Fidel by the Jaimanitas cell led by Tulio Martín and to which Generoso Llanes, Mario Grande, Ezequiel Barrios and Carlos Bustillo belonged. The man promised arms and explosives. Just one conversation sufficed. "He's no good," said Fidel. "Why do you say that, when the man is to be trusted?" asked Generoso in surprise. "He talks too much. He's no good," was Fidel's response.[15]

Fidel zealously attended to the finest details of the operation.

A new security measure; although Renato [Guitart] was from Santiago, it was decided that he would not take care of renting and preparing what would have to be the general headquarters for stashing the arms and assembling the men who would leave for Moncada. Renato would be responsible for renting and preparing various houses that would serve as transit points for a few hours, from their arrival from Havana to the final gathering at the headquarters. If those were insufficient, when the time came he would make hotel reservations until all the combatants had accomodation. He also had to acquire as many weapons and ammunition as he could, matching those the Movement was storing in Havana, rent an appropriate place in Bayamo to assemble the men in charge of the action in that city, and finally, draw a plan of the layout of the Moncada Garrison so as to better define the combat plan.

The group then devoted itself to localizing a place that would serve as a general headquarters on the outskirts of Santiago de Cuba. Tizol recalls

that they first dove along the highway to Escandell Hill, "and, when we were descending we saw a campesino on a mule on a very sharp bend that the car had to negotiate very slowly. Seeing him, Fidel turned round and asked him:

"Hey, my friend, you going downtown?"

"Yes, I'm carrying a bit of coffee to sell."

"A lot?"

"No, about 100 kilograms of coffee?"

"You have much land?"

"No, a caró." [16]

"Is it yours?"

"No, rented."

"Don't worry, in a little while it's going to be yours."

Tizol commented: "I never forgot that. Fidel told him that as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Of course I related it to the attack, but at that time I didn't fully realize it would be through a great agrarian reform, and not just that campesino, but all of them who would be able to take possession of the land they worked.[17]

Tizol returned to Havana and Fidel and Raúl Martínez traveled on to Palma [Soriano]. The cell headed by Aguilera was located there. They arrived on Friday, April 3, two days before the capture of García Bárcena and the consequent failure of the Columbia assault.

Fidel met with Aguilera, Rafael Oliva and Nito Ortega at the latter's house. They went to lunch at the Topeca bar and Parmenio joined them there. The conversation covered various revolutionary themes. As instructed, the groups headed by Aguilera had suspended their acts of sabotage to avoid risking their security unnecessarily. The agrarian issue took up a good deal of time, with Fidel motivated by the presence of Parmenio, who knew a lot about land and the inhuman exploitation to which the coffee squatters were subjected. As always, in line with the standards of discretion established by the Movement, Fidel kept quiet about the instructions that he had given to Renato to rent a place in Bayamo. The central theme focussed on the Charco Redondo miners and it was very late when Fidel went to Nito's house to sleep.

"The next day, Saturday April 4, we went to the Charco Redondo mine," Aguilera recalls. "Fidel was very affected by the state of the miners.

It almost turned into a meeting, because the workers began to gather together and Fidel to ask them questions and inquire into their livelihood, what caused the work-related sickness affecting them and other problems. We practically had to dissolve a crowd of miners who gathered around him. Fidel saw the mines, saw the conditions in which they worked. At that moment I don't know why he had such an interest in that place. I never imagined that it was part of a study of the practical possibilities of the plan that was drawing nearer. Apart from really being interested in the workers' problems, he was also analyzing the revolutionary potential of that group of workers so close to Bayamo."[18]

FREEDOM MARCH

Shortly before the attack on the Moncada garrison, Fidel had learned that a member of one cell of the movement in Marianao sang and wrote songs, and he asked him to compose something of an epic nature.

Twenty-seven years later, Agustín Díaz Cartaya told us, "I began to work on that musical composition during target practice at the Los Palos farm, and I finished it two weeks later. It was originally called the "Freedom March." One day, when Fidel was visiting Mercedes Valdés, Hugo Camejo's mother, in Marianao, he asked me if I had managed to come up with anything, so I sang it to him. He liked and approved it."

The original words to the "Freedom March" consisted of four stanzas, the third one different from the one we know today.

Marching onward toward an ideal,
we're certain to carry the day;
in furtherance of peace and prosperity
we'll struggle so freedom will win.

Forward, all Cubans,
may Cuba ever prize our heroism,
we're soldiers united, fighting so our country may be free,
our weapons destroying the evil that has plagued our troubled land

of errant, unwanted rulers and of cruel insatiable tyrants
who have dragged us down in the mire.

For us, death means victory and glory, too —
an epic that the future will know well.

Our flaming torch, through a clouded sky,
lights up a horizon of full liberty.

The people of Cuba,
bowed down by endless suffering and pain,
have decided to struggle until they find a real solution
to serve as an example for all who have no compassion,
and we are determined to risk even our lives for this cause.

Long live the Revolution!

While imprisoned in Boniato, the Moncada combatants received a message from Fidel suggesting that the words of the march reflect what had just taken place in Bayamo and Santiago de Cuba, and that the memory of the brothers who had died serve as a sacred force for unity in the ongoing struggle. Thus, a new stanza was written in the Boniato prison to complete the anthem:

Our comrades in Oriente[19] *have died,*
their sacrifice must not be in vain.
United we all must remain
to honor their memory and fight on to win.[20]

FIDEL WANTED TO MAKE ME A REVOLUTIONARY IN A COUPLE OF HOURS

Ramón Castro Ruz recalls:

Some months prior to the attack on the Moncada Garrison, I was in Marcané and Fidel rang me to tell me that he wanted to meet me the

next day and told me where: by a conduit located before reaching the entrance to the town Cueto, and that I should be there in the afternoon.

I was waiting a while until he appeared accompanied by Abel Santamaría; Fidel wearing his unmistakable blue suit without a tie and Abel a *guayabera*. They were in an old car.

During our conversation, Fidel informed me that he was organizing a coup that would occasion Batista's army more than 4000 losses; he didn't tell me where, or with what weapons; he just wanted me to give him some money, which I really didn't have at the time. Fidel wanted to make me a revolutionary in a couple of hours and as he didn't tell me anything concrete about the action, I was skeptical.

We went to the Pintao's service station at the entrance of Cueto to fill up the car, and there Fidel saw Ernesto and Calixto Silva from Marcané; Roger Ricardo, the son of a truck driver; and Felito Couser, son of the chief security guard at the sugar mill; Fidel didn't want anyone to see him.

After we filled up with gasoline, we went over to Holguín. On the way we agreed that I would prepare a small group in the old Marcané sugar mill and in the Birán area and that we would buy all the arms we could. I did that, organizing a group of eleven comrades: Víctor Rodríguez Cabrera, Reynaldo Rodríguez, Manuel Méndez Mejías, Bermúdez, Juan Mustelier, Prende, Rogelio Quevedo, Ángel Rodríguez, Arsenio González, Anastasio Castillo and Carlos Cortiña.

Later, Ángel Rodríguez died in the war, fighting against Sosa Blanco near the electricity plant in Cueto; as did Rogelio Quevedo, who died in Barajagua on a reconnaissance.

That night in Holguín, Abel, Fidel, myself and Miguel Ángel, a rental car driver from Marcané, went to a cafeteria near the Dalama café (Dalama bar); we talked while waiting to be served with four milky coffees and sandwiches. A trio singing to the bar's clientele dedicated songs and boleros to us time and time again.

After a pause, the first voice extended his hat for a tip and chose Fidel for that gesture on account of his elegant bearing; Fidel put his hand in his pants pocket and placed three brown centavos or U.S. cents in the ballad singer's hat.

Shocked and indignant, the artist insulted us loudly. That was all we needed, him coming to clean us out at that time of night. The musician threw the cents out onto the street. An offended Fidel answered the angered musician: 'Listen guy, I gave you everything I had, but at the end of the day that's what your music's worth,' and at that point Troy began to burn.[21]

JULY 24 AND 25, 1953

Fidel didn't rest on the days leading up to the Moncada Garrison attack. He took care of all the details.

Friday, July 24, passed for Fidel in the same tone, moving between 25th and O Streets and 107 Jovellar, between the apartments of Abel and Melba and, in addition, made some special errands, always with Mitchell as his driver—first in the black Dodge and then in the blue Buick. He went to Calabazar with Alcalde. He picked up Pedro Trigo and Ernesto González and they went off to Boyeros. Filiberto Zamora, head of the local cell, wasn't there. They continued on to Santiago de las Vegas and it was the same with Celso Stakeman. Places and activities went by at whirlwind speed. At 25th and O, instructions, arms, ammunition, dispatching men. Dispatching arms, ammunition, uniforms, men and orders at 107 Jovellar. At 23d and 18th Streets, a meeting with Pepe Suárez and the Artemisa and Guanajay men. At dusk he went to Mario Dalmau's house in Cerro, there he had a sandwich and glass of milk, probably the only food in the whole of that turbulent day. Night came, and once again Rancho Boyeros highway. "On the highway there was an incident with a cop who fined us for disobeying a Stop sign," said Teodulio Mitchell. "Fidel told them we were in a rush to collect relatives arriving at the airport. When we left there he commented: 'Who could have told them that flights arrive at this time?'" They picked up Manuel Lorenzo, a civil aeronautics telegraphist, with whom Fidel talked of a job that he needed doing in Oriente Province. From Boyeros to Marianao. In Marianao to Raúl's café on 51st Street, a meeting with Aguilerita. A stop off at 303 Nicanor del Campo (now 4804, 39th Avenue, between 48 and 59), Fidel's apartment, good byes to his family. Luggage: a *guayabera*

and a book by Lenin. From Marianao to Vedado, 910 11th Street between 6 and 8, Naty Revuelta's house, where he picked up a stencil and manuscript copy of the manifesto that he had handed over two days previously to be typed up, and to give her new instructions. From there to Güines Avenue, the central highway, to Jamaica, to Aguilerita's again; Nito Ortega got into Fidel's car. In Matanzas he bumped into Pedro Marrero. From Matanzas to Colón, to Mario Muñoz' house, instructions: wait at the fork for El Cobre; breakfast. Highway to Santa Clara. At López Opticians, 18 Cuba on the corner of Máximo Gómez, new glasses to replace those left behind at 107 Jovellar. Highway to Placetas, Cabaiguán, Sancti Spíritus, Ciego de Ávila, Florida. Camagüey for lunch. The highway to Sibanicú, Cascorro, Guáimaro, Tunas, Holguín, Cacocum, Cauto Cristo. . . .

As they neared Bayamo, Teodulio Mitchell was gaining on a green car. Up closer, he saw it was an Oldsmobile. He reduced speed. Yes, it was Ernesto Tizol. Overtaking him, Fidel made signs that he should follow. They entered Bayamo in convoy at around 6:00 P.M. on the Saturday afternoon. Both of them stopped in front of La Cubana bus office and talked for a while on the sidewalk. Fidel was thinking of leaving Tizol in Bayamo, but then he remembered that he had previously organized the mission to start out from Santiago to Bayamo, at the head of a column to reinforce this advance front to the Cauto when taking the Moncada, and decided to continue the journey. He sent word to Abel that he was already in Bayamo and would travel on to Santiago later. Tizol left in his car to cover the final stretch to Santiago de Cuba and Fidel headed for the meeting place of the men who would fight in Bayamo.[22]

When Fidel arrived at the Gran Casino hostel he met with squadron leaders Raúl Martínez Ararás—who would be chief of operations—and the squad heads Ñico López, Aguilera, Pérez Puelles and Orlando Castro, and detailed to each one of them the distinct steps for executing the attack on the garrison and the subsequent measures to be taken. He went through the plan time and time again and established the means and time of communicating the first part of the plan and distributing the uniforms and arms to the rest of the men.

Around 10:00 P.M. Fidel left Bayamo. "But just before reaching Palma Soriano," Teodulio Mitchell recalled, "we had to stop at an army control

barrier. They were stopping all the cars and checking them. I stopped my car as well. A soldier approached me, but I recognized him. Like me, he was from Palma Soriano. 'Hello, Mora,' I said and saluted him. 'Is that you, Mitchell? Come on, you can go.' I started up the car and Fidel said to me out of the corner of his mouth: 'They don't have much time left.'"

It was gone midnight when, from the highway that snaked down the mountain the flickering of lights twinkling in the darkness came into view: Santiago de Cuba! It was night still, but it was already Sunday, July 26. Within five hours, breaking from the east with the sunrise, a new dawn.[23]

JULY 26, 1953: ZERO HOUR

Fidel entered the city and stopped for coffee in the central plaza bearing the name of the god of war [Marte Plaza].

The people of Santiago were in fiesta. The leader of the Centennial Generation had chosen the date for attacking the country's second-largest military fortress very well, having it coincide with the most famous and joyous of Cuban carnivals.

At Marte Plaza, Abel stopped the car. Getting out of the car with Pedro Trigo, Fidel directed him to find Dr. Muñoz in Melgarejo and return to that same spot. While Trigo waited in the midst of the din of carnival, Fidel disappeared from sight up a street, alone.[24]

By an extraordinary coincidence, in the midst of that wash of people, Gildo Fleitas came rolling along in a conga in the middle of the street. Fidel was overjoyed and called him over. He asked what had happened to him as the trio Benítez, Tápanes and González Seijas from the San Leopoldo cell joined them, as well as Gerardo Sosa and the taciturn Víctor Escalona. Weary and sweating but happy, Gildo explained the mechanic's delay in fixing the car. When they got to Santiago, they went in any case to the lodgings they were allocated, in the guesthouse in Victoriano Garzón Street. They didn't know anyone there and they decided to go out to see if they could reestablish contact. At

that point Abel, Mario Muñoz and young bank employee Julio Reyes Cairo arrived. Effusively, Muñoz embraced Fidel:

"Fidel, has the zero hour arrived?" His question confirmed that this brave man, member of the command leadership of the Movement, whom Fidel had asked to come the previous dawn when they were passing through Colón, had traveled 600 kilometers in a disciplined fashion without knowing exactly what it was all about. And even so, he turned up. And waited for hours at a road fork until he was contacted.

"Yes, doctor," said Fidel, "it's zero hour."

"Congratulations!" exclaimed Muñoz, all the more enthusiastic, "What a day you've picked! I'm forty-one years old today, and I'm placing those years in your hands, a 26-year-old!"

And he embraced him again... It would be the last time.

The men organized themselves in three cars: Fidel in Mario Muñoz'. The presence of the doctor from Colón guaranteed another aspect of the plan's execution. In addition to his medical services, his knowledge as a radio ham would be of great technical usefulness in programming the call to the people. [25]

As Fidel had foreseen, things were not easy. By common consent with Montané and Guitart, Abel Santamaría had thought of offering himself as a volunteer in the vanguard group that had to neutralize the guards at Post 3, and enter the garrison first. But Fidel was not prepared to let him run so many risks. His designation at the head of the group that was to occupy the civilian hospital had the sole objective of guaranteeing him a greater chance of survival. Abel Santamaría was second in command of the Movement, he was animated by an exceptional enthusiasm, he had dedicated himself body and soul to his task, and of all the members, Fidel considered him the most capable of renewing and directing the struggle in the event of his own death. But Santamaría did not understand it in that way. He had too much admiration for Fidel to think that he could replace him. He was obsessed with a fear that they would kill Fidel and all hope of liberating Cuba would disappear along with him. And he ardently wished to fight at his side in the secret hope of protecting him, even at the cost of his own life. In that way, each one of them estimated the other's existence as so necessary to the Revolution that neither wanted

to see the other exposed in an initial combat. This battle between two generous natures was played out between unbendable wills. Neither of the two was prepared to give in. The profound friendship that united them was based on discussion, but it is possible that things got confused with loftier reasons of an affectionate nature. Abel kept saying: "You're not going to do what Martí did, expose yourself unnecessarily." And Fidel replied: "My place is at the head of the combatants. It can't be anywhere else. But you, Abel, you have to live. If I die, you will replace me." The argument went back and forth on the same lines and turned into a vicious circle. The minutes went by. They were wasting time, and Fidel put an end to the argument by saying firmly: "No, no Abel. It's decided, you will go to the civilian hospital." Although he didn't raise his voice, there was no doubt whatsoever: it was an order. Abel recalled that a few hours before he had given a desperate order to Julio Trigo. "I'll go," he said. Fidel put an arm around him: "Come on, there are still some details to go over."[26]

Then Haydée and Melba approached him and communicated their intention of taking part in the attack. "No, no," said Fidel, "the two of you are to stay at the farm. You've done more than enough already." "Exactly," said one of them, "there's no reason to exclude us from the final phase because we're women." And they insisted with such vehemence that Fidel felt confused: He was a firm believer in gender equality and appeared to be adopting an attitude contrary to his principles. But, on the other hand, he felt so much affection for the two girls that he wanted to spare them the horrors of combat, if that should occur. "You're Abel's sister," he said finally, speaking to Haydée. "I leave Abel with the responsibility for that decision." "And me?" said Melba. "He'll decide for both of you." They immediately went off to confront Abel. He listened to them, more absorbed by their eloquence than convinced by their reasons. When they had finished, he began by with a categorical negative. But at that point Dr. Muñoz approached. He felt that the girls would be a great help to him as nurses in the civilian hospital. He said so to Abel and got his consent.[27]

Fidel addressed to the combatants:

Comrades:

In a few hours you can conquer or be conquered, but in any case, listen carefully, comrades!; in any case this Movement will triumph. If you win tomorrow, what Martí aspired to will be made sooner. If the opposite should occur, the gesture will serve as an example to the people of Cuba to take up the flag and continue onwards. The people in Oriente and throughout the island will be backing us. Youth from the Martí centennial, as in 1868 and 1895, here in Oriente we are giving the first shout of FREEDOM OR DEATH!

You already know the objective of the plan. Without any doubt it is dangerous and all of you who leave with me tonight must do so completely of your own free will. There is still time to decide. In any case, some of you will have to stay behind due to a shortage of weapons. Those of you who are determined to go please take a step forward. The orders are not to kill, only if it is unavoidable.[28]

Minutes before leaving for the Moncada Garrison, the leader of the Cuban Revolution stated the details:

"Comrades, listen," Fidel said. The low-voiced conversations stopped and everyone turned towards him, moving closer to him. When things were quiet, he told them:

"We're going to attack the Moncada Garrison. It will be a surprise attack. It shouldn't last more than ten minutes."

He went on to explain the plan.

Speed and surprise were the essential elements of the project. The combatants would travel in cars. The squad in the first car, taking advantage of the confusion that would be caused by their uniforms, would take the Post 3 soldiers prisoner and remove the chain between the two small pillboxes at the entrance. The cars would enter the camp, Fidel's in front. When it stopped, those following would stop as well. The combatants would get out, penetrate the buildings to their left, reach the dormitories, take captive those who gave themselves up and drive the rest back to the patio at the bottom of the camp.

A second group, comprising about twenty combatants, would take over the civilian hospital, whose back windows gave onto the Moncada area. Positioned at these windows, the hospital men would cut off from the rear any soldiers fleeing for the bottom.

The third group, composed of six men, would take the Palace of Justice. Its flat roof dominated the roofs of the camp buildings. If necessary, they would neutralize the machine guns sited there with their fire.

Fidel paused and stated: "You have joined the Movement on a voluntary basis. And today, you have to take part in the attack voluntarily. If anyone disagrees, now is the time to pull out." There was a silence, followed by murmurs.

A few seconds went by and Fidel saw Víctor Escalona advancing. He already knew about his attitude during the journey from Tizol, and before he opened his mouth Fidel knew what he was going to say to him. Escalona approached him looking very pale. Refusing to meet his eye, he said in a low and unsteady voice:

"We don't want to take part."

"We?" inquired Fidel.

"My group and I."

"All of your group?"

"No, Sosita will go with you."

"All right," said Fidel. "You and your group follow me."

"Where are you taking us?" said Escalona.

"To the kitchen."

Fidel wanted to isolate the group as quickly as possible to avoid contamination.

"Why?" said Fidel as soon as the door to the kitchen was shut. Escalona licked his lips and responded without looking at him.

"Because there aren't enough arms."

"Listen. They wouldn't be enough if it was an open field, but for fighting inside a building at short range, on the contrary they are very good. Especially the hunting rifles. The dispersal range of the lead is huge."

"The arms are inadequate," repeated Escalona without raising his eyes. Fidel looked at him more in pity than in anger and his regard halted on Escalona's three comrades.

"Do you agree with him?"

They nodded their heads affirmatively.

"All right, you're forbidden to leave the kitchen."

"What are you going to do with us?" exclaimed Escalona. Fidel looked at him:

"Calm down, nothing's going to happen to you."

He left the kitchen and closed the door behind him.

Abel was waiting for him.

"Another group's backing out," Abel informed him.

"Which one?"

"The student group. They said that they wouldn't fight with those arms. Of course, I isolated them in a bedroom. Montané has designated a sentry to look after them.

"I want to talk to you," said someone to Fidel's right.

"And what do you want?" asked Fidel turning on his heels.

"Do you recognize me? I'm Manuel Lorenzo, the radio telegraphist. I'd like to know what I should be doing in all this."

"Well, all right," said Fidel, "I'm counting on you to get the Moncada transmitter going when we've taken the garrison."

Manuel Lorenzo's eyes widened.

"But I'm not going!" he exclaimed in terror. "I don't want to do anything illegal."

Fidel looked at Abel. "Put him with the students," he said, with a movement of his hand as if he was swatting a fly.

"Is there anyone else who wants to pull out?," Fidel asked in a loud voice. The seconds ticked by. Nobody spoke.[29]

Jesús Montané and Generoso Llanes, both Moncada assailants, will never forget what Fidel said to them at Siboney farm a few minutes before leaving for combat:

"Before leaving Siboney farm," Montané recalled, "Fidel gave us the final instructions which were the same as he gave to the other groups participating in the action and in which he reminded us that we should be humane with the enemy and only shoot in the final instance, in the case of absolute necessity. "Someone asked Fidel what should be done with any prisoners that were taken, Llanes said, and Fidel replied: "Treat them humanely. Don't insult them. And remember that the life of an unarmed man has to be sacred."[30]

Already within the city of Santiago and in close proximity to the garrison:

For the second time Fidel stopped the black Buick he was driving along Garzón Avenue to allow the first car to enter the street leading to

the Moncada Post 3 with a bit of distance. In any case, he had to give the vanguard group led by Renato time to neutralize the guards and to leave the entry clear so that Fidel's car, in second place, could enter the garrison, followed by the whole convoy.[31]

. . . The second car, driven by Fidel, followed the vanguard car at approximately thirty meters' distance and very slowly, to give them time to carry out their mission. At Fidel's side in the front seat were Reinaldo Benítez and Pedro Miret. In the back seat, from left to right, were Gustavo Arcos, Abelardo Crespo, Carlos González and Israel Tápanes.

On the left of the street, between the military hospital and the one-story house used by the deputy officers, there was a small avenue. When Fidel's drove past the military hospital, the attention of the combatants in the back seat was caught by an army sergeant who was walking quickly down that small avenue carrying a carton of food. While walking, he was looking suspiciously and fearfully at the second car—Fidel's—and at the third car, moving his hand to his revolver in a mechanical gesture.

Fidel wasn't looking at that sergeant. His sight was fixed further ahead, on the soldiers armed with submachine guns from the flying patrol standing with their backs to him at that point. Renato's shout ("Open the way, here comes the general!") had paralyzed them and they were gazing in surprise at the "sergeants" of the first car disarming the sentries.[32]

On July 26, 1963, ten years later, Fidel recalled:

At that moment I had two things in mind. Given that each sentry had a submachine gun, I was afraid that the flying patrol might open fire on our comrades who were busy disarming the sentries. Second, I wanted to avoid their shots alerting the rest of the garrison. Then I had the idea of surprising them and taking them prisoner.

That didn't seem to be too difficult, as they had their backs to me. . . .[33]

"We're going to arrest them," said Fidel. And with that he reduced speed. None of the occupants of the back seat paid any attention to that plural and nobody thought it referred to the flying patrol. They had their sights fixed on the sergeant with the carton who, still nervous and mistrustful, had come level with them. Gustavo Arcos grabbed at the car door and pulled out his revolver, ready to jump on the man and detain him as soon as the car stopped.

Everything happened then in a matter of two or three seconds. Fidel followed slowly alongside the sidewalk on the left, no more than three or four meters from the patrol, gently opened the door and drew out his Luger, more practical in this situation than the rifle he also carried. Having done this, he pulled up. Gustavo Arcos, behind him, opened the door and placed one foot on the sidewalk.

At that moment, the patrol soldiers turned round, as if moved by the same instinct, faced Fidel's car and pointed their submachine guns at it. Fidel accelerated and spinning the wheel to the left launched the car in their direction.[34]

The car door suddenly shot open. González fell onto the asphalt and Israel tumbled on top of him. When he got up, his weapon was in his hand. Without knowing how, he found himself between Fidel and Pedro Miret behind the car. He saw a soldier appear at the window of the military hospital. He shot at him, the barrel of his gun a few centimeters from Fidel's head. Fidel made a gesture, and placed the palm of his hand over his ear, as if the detonation had deafened him. At that precise moment, the alarm bell resounded in the garrison with strident force.[35]

The immobilization of Fidel's car had an even more disastrous consequence for the action. It should be recalled that the cars following him had received the order to stop when he did, at which moment the combatants were supposed to get out and assault the barracks to their left. If they had been able to follow Fidel's car inside the camp, he would have taken the general command and the others would have immobilized the troops in their dormitories by taking them out to the back patio. But seeing Fidel get out of his car and being unfamiliar with the location, the combatants jumped energetically out of their cars and invaded the buildings to their left, principally the military hospital, whose door was forced by Ciro Redondo and Guillermo Elizalde. They were still outside the camp!

Fidel desperately tried to regroup the combatants, to make them realize their error. But some of them failed to understand what he was shouting to them. Others didn't see him; they were already taking up positions in the houses on Trinidad Street, on both sides of Moncada Avenue that led to Post 3. "Move forwards, move forwards!" shouted Fidel, pointing to Post 3. He then ran toward the hospital and pulled out the men who had

occupied it and ordered them back into the cars to move ahead into the garrison. He got into the Buick to lead them, but at that moment a car reversing from Post 3 crashed violently into the front of the Buick. Fidel got out of the car. The shooting was already intensifying. He saw a man arriving at 50-millimeter machine gun that could dominate their position with its power, and fired at him with his shotgun. The soldier threw himself to the ground; when he got up, Fidel shot at him again and once more the guard had to protect himself without being able to get the machine gun in action. That scene was repeated several times. The street was already being raked with gunfire. The comrades who were close yelled to him: "Get out! Get out!" But Fidel continued standing there, right in the middle of the street, firing and firing.[36]

The combat had already lasted for fifteen minutes. From the moment the alarm sounded there were no illusions as to the outcome of the fight. But their hatred of the dictatorship and their revolutionary impulse were so strong that nobody thought of abandoning the combat. A combat had been lost. There would be others. It was essential to preserve the Movement. The important thing was not to die gloriously and unnecessarily, but to win. And Fidel gave the order to retreat.[37]

When Fidel thought that all his men had left he got into the last car that was retreating under a hail of bullets. Shortly after, however, he got out again and gave his seat to a wounded combatant, remaining alone in the middle of the street. He began to retreat, walking backwards and shooting at the garrison, along Moncada Avenue to Garzón Street. He had already passed the military hospital when, unexpectedly, another car came towards him in reverse, almost from Trinidad Street, opposite Post 3; it was driven by Ricardo Santana from Artemisa. Fidel got in and before the car left that area three more comrades had gotten in.

Fidel ordered Santana to head for El Caney highway. At that point his basic concern was for the Bayamo comrades. If they had taken the city it was necessary to join up with them to continue the struggle; if they hadn't, the struggle would continue in the mountains. Hence his decision to head for El Caney, take the small garrison there, and seize its arms and munitions.

Instead of taking El Caney highway, Santana, who didn't know Santiago de Cuba beyond the tour he had made shortly before from the farm, took the road to Siboney. When they crossed the wooden bridge,

Fidel realized the error, but they had already gone too far in that direction and ahead was the car that Boris had abandoned to get in another and continue after he got a puncture. Fidel ordered Santana to stop. The men that had stayed there without being able to enter the combat emerged from the tall grass bordering the ditch and joined them.

A private car approached with two people traveling in it. Standing in the middle of the highway, Fidel forced them to stop. "One group with me and the rest of you follow me," he said, getting into the car that had just stopped, while ordering its driver to drive on to Siboney farm, where he got out with his comrades.[38]

At midday on that same Sunday, July 26, 1953, after a battered column of just twenty men had regrouped at the Siboney farm, Fidel began to scale the foothills of the Gran Piedra.[39]

TODAY IT WAS OUR LOT TO LOSE BUT WE WILL BE BACK

The Gran Piedra is climbed by a series of little steep hills leading to its peak. The sun was burning, the march exhausting. In certain parts the comrades disappeared up to their thighs in Guinea grass. The air was on fire, they experienced a burning thirst and had not eaten since the evening before. After some hours climbing, they reached a summit from which they could see the capital of Oriente Province, extending from the shore of its wide bay. They halted. With his hand resting on a tree, Fidel contemplated Santiago, and then his eyes returned to the small column around him. He regarded his comrades, the poor-quality hunting rifles with which they were armed, their faces hollowed and upset, and then said with a calm conviction: "Comrades, today it was our lot to lose, but we will be back.[40]

YOU HAVE CAPTURED US, BUT WE ARE NOT SURRENDERING

Surprised at 6:30 A.M. on the morning of August 1, while they were sleeping in a rustic palm-leaf hut, Fidel and two of his comrades were taken captive by Lieutenant Pedro Sarría Tartabull.

Years later, Lieutenant Sarría related how the capture of the leader of the Moncada Garrison assailants came about:

The first to emerge was Fidel, who halted in front of me, and behind came Oscar Alcalde and further back Pepe Suárez. But I counted the arms they had and there were eight Remingtons stacked almost together and then said: "Ah, five men are missing, where are they?" Fidel answered: "No, there's only three of us." I said: "And the five Remingtons left?" He said: "Well, there were another five but they went off." I said: "Where?" And Fidel: "Over there." I said: "No, because I've just come from the highway, it's not possible, at what time did they go off?" He said: "At about 4:30 or 5:00 A.M." I said: "At 5:00 A.M. I was already on my way here. It's not possible, they have to be around here." Then I said: "Boys, we're going to get ready for the return, facing the same way, in the same order, with about twenty meters between each man." And I said to them: "Well, boys, you've surrendered, now there's no problem..." "Surrendered no," Fidel said to me. "You captured us while we were sleeping and tired, but we have not surrendered." Then I asked sergeant Suárez if he had pen and paper. And I started to take down their details. I started with Fidel: "Well, you're all caught as you yourself said. Now, what's your name?" "Francisco González Calderín." "Age?" "26." "Native of?" "Marianao." "Occupation?" "Student." "Right, next. Come here. What's your name?" "Me, Oscar Alcalde." "Age?" "25 as well, or 21." "Occupation?" "Employee." "Native of?" "Havana." "Right, next. And what's your name?" "José Suárez." "Age?" "29 or 30." "Native of?" "Pinar del Río." Then it occurred to me that maybe he was the man already assumed dead, it could be the man that died on El Caney ridge seeking for the Alto de Villalón hill, en route for Ramón de las Yaguas. Fidel had been taken for dead since July 27; it had even come out in Salas Amaro's *Ataja* newspaper. Even the government was convinced that Fidel was already dead, but they had not as yet identified his body. That was the idea that came to me. Then I looked at him and said to myself: "Ah, this man's very dark, he looks mestizo," and to make sure, I turned my back on him without revealing my suspicions to my men, not to the others. I left him standing there in front of me, like you are, turned my back on him, took three steps back and then made a rapid half-turn and said to him: "What did you say your name was?" He replied

"Francisco González Calderín," and held my gaze. But I thought, let me check what I'm thinking. And I put my hand on his hair and it was very curly and hard, seemingly as a result of the sun and not wearing a hat for four or five days. Then I was half- convinced and said to myself: "No, there one who's been taken for dead, and another one; this notion of mine is unfounded because he's mestizo." You see, I knew Fidel here at the University when I was a student as well. He didn't know why I half turned and felt his hair, and neither did the others, and I said: "Right, to the highway, as I said before, facing the same way, twenty meters apart." As we approached the highway, about 500 meters away, I went behind with the arrested men—I already had them tied up—and I felt a pam... ping... pam... and said: "Hey, I want you alive." They said: "Yes, there's quite a few here." I said: "All right, but just the same." The shots continued and I said: "We're going to hit the ground in case some of them fly this way." Then Fidel said to me: "I want to die, I don't want you to take me anywhere." I said: "I'm the one in charge here, you're the prisoner. Get down." Lying down at my side, Fidel said to me: "I am the man you thought I was..." I'd already forgotten about that and said: "What?" He said: "I'm the chief as you thought there in the hut." And I said: "What man was I thinking about?" Then he said to me: "I'm Fidel Castro." And I replied: "Oh damn, yes I did think so but I discounted the idea, how you've changed boy, look how you are now, how much you've changed in such a short time." "So, now you can kill me, by killing me, it's all over and done with." Then I got angry and said to him: "But who's talking about killing here, don't you know what kind of a man I am, boy?"[41]

YOU CANNOT KILL IDEAS

Talking with students at a higher institute of education in Venezuela, almost forty-five years after Lieutenant Sarría took him prisoner, Fidel Castro recalled that incident.

Well we can reiterate what was said to me by a lieutenant who took me prisoner in a wood, at dawn, not far from Santiago de Cuba, a few days after that attack on the Moncada fortress. Exhausted from having

to rest on stones and roots, we had committed the error—there's always an error—of sleeping in a little *varaentierra*[42] covered with palm leaves we'd come across. Without knowing whom we were, a lieutenant—a black lieutenant fortuitously—and some soldiers with swollen arteries thirsty for blood awoke us with guns pointing at our chests. We hadn't been identified. At first they didn't identify us, asked us our names and I said any old name: prudence, huh!, astuteness, no? Intuition perhaps, instinct. I can assure you that I wasn't afraid, because there are moments in life when it's like that, when you think you've had it and then you react more out of honor, pride or dignity.

If I'd given them my name, that would have been it: Bam, bam, bam! They would have finished off our little group immediately. A few minutes later they found various weapons left there by comrades who were not in any physical condition to carry on the struggle. Some of them were wounded and with everyone's agreement they were returning to the city to hand themselves over to the legal authorities. We were the only three armed comrades left, captured in the way I explained to you.

But that lieutenant was amazing! I have never told this story in detail before in public, he was calming the soldiers, and close to failing in that. When they were searching the surroundings and found the other comrades' arms, they were really mad. They had us bound and were pointing loaded guns at us; but no, that lieutenant moved from one side to another, calming them down and repeating in a low voice: "You cannot kill ideas, you cannot kill ideas." What made that man say something like that?

He was a mature man, he had studied at the University, some courses; but he had that idea in his head, and it occurred to him to express it in a low voice, as if talking to himself: "You cannot kill ideas." Well, observing that man and noting his attitude at such a critical moment when he could hardly prevent those furious soldiers shooting us, I got up and said: "Lieutenant"—just to him of course—"I am So and so, and the leader of the action." Seeing his gentlemanly conduct I couldn't deceive him, I wanted him to know who his prisoner was. And the man said to me: "Don't tell anyone! Don't tell anyone!" I applaud that man because he saved my life three times in a matter of hours.

Still under Lieutenant Sarría's custody, Fidel is interrogated by Colonel Del Río Chaviano in the Santiago de Cuba bivouac.

Some minutes later they took us away. The soldiers were still very wound up. Some shots rang out not so far away and put them in full combat gear. They told us: "Throw yourselves to the ground, throw yourselves to the ground!" I remained standing and said: "I won't hit the ground!" I thought it was a strategy to eliminate us, and refused. I said it to the lieutenant too, when he insisted that he was protecting us: "I won't hit the ground, if they want to shoot, let them." Then he told me—listen to what he said to me—"You are very brave boys." What an amazing reaction!

I don't mean to say that he saved my life at that point, but that he made that gesture at that moment. When we reached a highway, they put us into a truck. There was a commander nearby, a really bloodthirsty type, he had murdered many comrades and wanted the prisoners to be handed over to him. The lieutenant refused, saying that we were his prisoners and that he wouldn't hand us over. He put me in front in the cab. The commander wanted him to take us to the Moncada; but he

didn't hand us over to the commander—here he saved our lives for the second time—nor did he take us to the Moncada; he took us to the prison in the middle of the city and saved my life for the third time. There you have it, and he was an officer in that army against which we were fighting. After the triumph of the Revolution, we raised his rank to captain, aide to the first president of the country after the triumph.[43]

WE HAVE COME TO REGENERATE CUBA

A journalist and commentator from the provincial CMKR radio station recalls:

On August 1, 1953, I arrived early at the radio station and heard that Fidel had been arrested and was in the Santiago bivouac. With that journalistic vocation that one carries inside, I grabbed a huge old tape recorder that was there and headed for the bivouac (the recorder weighed about thirty pounds).

There were many people on the sidewalk on the other side of the street facing the bivouac. Most of them were curious individuals who followed all these things. The people were expectant.

I joined that group and waited for an opportunity to get inside the bivouac. The morning went by. They were saying that Fidel was on the second floor and being interrogated. There was hardly any movement of people leaving the building.

I remember they wouldn't allow us on the street, only on the opposite sidewalk. Soldiers with shotguns were guarding the bivouac.

I remained attentive to any call for journalists or an opportunity to enter the building. Shortly after midday I heard a voice shout from inside: "Let the journalists in." They were going to bring Fidel before the press.

I said to myself: "This is my chance," and walked to the bivouac door. The guards stopped me, but I showed them my press card and they let me in. I took the stairs to the office. Various detainees were seated on a bench in an anteroom to the office. Later I learned that they were assailants as well.

Fidel was in the office. When I went to go in Commander Pérez Chaumont stepped in front of me and told me that I couldn't go in,

there was no space for anybody else. I insisted and explained that I'd been waiting for hours and he couldn't leave me outside. In the end he let me in.

The office was relatively small. I think it was the bivouac chief's office. Colonel Del Río Chaviano was there with some other military men and journalists. So was Lieutenant Sarría, who arrested Fidel and brought him to the bivouac, having made the valiant decision to refuse to hand the prisoners over to that bloodthirsty commander, Pérez Chaumont.

That was my impression of the moment, but everything happened very fast. In the midst of the agitation and the rush I managed to find the tape recorder and prepare the equipment. I don't think that Fidel had begun to speak. I put the machine on the ground and started recording.

I raised my hand to ask a question. Maybe I formulated it in a somewhat timid tone given the circumstances surrounding the event and above all the arrested man. I inquired about the objectives that the assailants were pursuing with the July 26 action.

Fidel was standing erect in the middle of the room. If I remember correctly, he was wearing a light colored short-sleeved shirt and pants discolored at the knees, denim I think. You could see that his face, with a nascent beard, was sunburned.

In response to my question, and although I cannot remember his words exactly, Fidel—in a succinct and very concrete way—spoke of the revolutionaries' program in the event of their triumph.

He affirmed that the idea was to give back sovereignty to the people, to guarantee campesinos their permanence on the land, to liberate rural people from the threat of eviction and the dead time, to give workers participation in the fruits of their labor, to guarantee rights to small landholders, medical attention to the sick, education for children who lacked schools and teachers, to clean up public administration and make life in the country decent.

Fidel concluded his answer with a sentence that I have never forgotten. He said: "In short, we have come to regenerate Cuba."

Just one thing. While Fidel was saying all that, Chaviano—who was moving about restlessly and nervously—exclaimed half out loud: "This man is making politics." Nevertheless, he didn't dare interrupt.

That all took place in about fifteen or twenty minutes. The interview was very brief and I think there were only three or four questions. In response to another journalist, Fidel affirmed that he had heard Batista's Columbia speech on the events of July 26, and that "Batista had not told the truth."

My impression of Fidel at that moment is that he was serene. His words flowed firmly and unfalteringly. I don't think he gesticulated once.

In another part of his statement Fidel emphasized that elements of the old politics—in other words, the traditional politicians—had nothing to do with the organization of, preparations for and the action itself. He stressed that everything was done with the sacrifice, selflessness and patriotism of young men and women, and that the scant resources utilized in the assault were assembled in that way.

There was one moment when Fidel referred to the dictatorship soldiers who fell in the fighting and clarified that he respected the memory of those who had died fulfilling what "they considered to be their duty."

Meanwhile, Chaviano was becoming more exasperated by the minute. Fidel was very concrete, direct and concise in what he said. It was as if he knew that he didn't have much time and had to take advantage of every second.

At that moment, Fidel did not know in detail about the massacre being committed against the surviving revolutionaries. He was isolated in the mountains and his first contact with the city was that August 1.

Wanting to cut things short, Chaviano took advantage of the first opportunity to terminate the interview and vacate the room. I stayed behind for a few seconds to pick up the tape recorder and the auxiliary parts of the equipment. Chaviano told me that I had to go to the Military Intelligence Service (SIM) with the recorder and tape. His people insisted that I go with them. At the same time, Fidel asked me if it had recorded well, if it had come out well. I said "yes, yes..." It was a very awkward situation, virtually seconds. I felt a bit nervous.

But to be fair, I think that everybody there was nervous. I can tell you something, frankly, that the only serene person among all of us in that room—including Chaviano himself and the military men—was Fidel. Afterwards, at home and in a calmer state of mind, I reflected on the interview and came to the conclusion that that man was not any prisoner, that he was a distinct kind of prisoner.[44]

I BELIEVE IN THE PEOPLE

At his trial, Fidel serenely responded to the state attorney's questions:

"Did you participate in the attacks on the garrisons of Moncada in Santiago de Cuba, and Bayamo in Oriente Province, last July 26, in a physical or in an intellectual form?"

"Yes, I did participate."

"And those young men?"

"Those young men, like me, love the freedom of their homeland. They have not committed any crime unless it is considered a crime to want the best for our homeland; was that not taught us in school? Was...?"

"Confine yourself to answering the Public Ministry's questions."

"In what way did the accused expound the plan that was to be carried out to his followers? Did you explain to them the political baggage of it and the criminal action that they were to commit? Please answer that question, but restricting yourself to the question, I am asking you not to include a political harangue in your answer."

"I am not interested in making politics; my only aspiration is to let the truth be told."

"But tell the court how you convinced them."

"I definitely did not have to persuade them, they appeared before me at a stage when—all other possible routes being exhausted—they were convinced there was a danger of this generation being paralyzed and lost and that we had to take the road of armed struggle. Knowing how they felt I expounded my plan to them and they accepted it. I knew almost all of them as members of the Orthodoxy Party, I am not aware of the thinking and the plans of the leaders of that party, but I am sure that 99% of the youth, like these young people, understand that the only solution possible is warfare. Harmony could not be reached, although that was everyone's desire. I believe, Mr. Attorney, that I have answered your question."

"Yes, I see; but tell me, why did you not use the civil route to achieve your plan? After all, you are a lawyer."

"Very simple, because there was no freedom; after March 10, I could not talk any more."

"Do you mean to say that after March 10 it was not possible to make politics?"

"There were attempts, but the government showed itself hostile to any freedoms and we opportunely understood that any dialogue with the usurpers was useless. I personally lodged an appeal before the Emergency Court, declaring the regime that had seized power illegal. According to the law, Batista should have been sentenced to around 100 years' imprisonment, going by the crimes he had committed against Cuba. But the courts did not act as we hoped that they would."

"Can you tell the court where you obtained the money to buy weapons and organize the uprising? Was former president Prío your financier?"

"Just as José Martí did not accept the ill-gotten gains of Manuel García, known as King of the Cuban Countryside, we did not accept Carlos Prío's money. Neither Prío nor any other politician gave us money; our costs were covered by the effort and sacrifice of all the comrades, via generous donations from people that followed me to face death. I have a list of the names of every one of them and the amount that they contributed; almost all of them are dead, but I have confirmatory data that it was they who gave that money, amounting to a total of 16,480.00 pesos, spent to the last cent. On many occasions, that total was collected by doing without the most pressing necessities, like food and electricity and even work tools, which many people sold or pawned."

"Can you give more details of how you were able to collect that sum when your words imply that your friends had very scant resources?"

"Among those of us who are alive and those of us who were murdered, the following persons gave money: Jesús Montané—who is here—contributed the sum of 4000 pesos which was paid him as a bonus by his employers, General Motors when they wound up their operations in Cuba; Oscar Alcalde—likewise present—mortgaged his laboratory for the sum of 3600 pesos and liquidated an accounting office that he owned, making a further contribution in that way; Renato Guitart—who was murdered—gave 1000 pesos; and Ernesto Tizol placed a chicken farm that he owned at the disposition of the Movement; and Pedro Marrero sold the dining room dinner service, refrigerator and living room suite in his house, and the only reason he didn't sell the bedroom furniture was because I prevented him from doing so. Moreover, he asked a moneylender for 200 pesos to increase his contribution. Fernando Chenard—who appears among the dead 'in combat'—pawned personal effects and his photographic

camera—his working equipment—the same one he used for the studio portrait of the sculptor Fidalgo, that was destroyed by the dictatorship police because he had sculpted a statue of Martí entitled 'For Cuba that is suffering.' Chenard's photos were published in Bohemia magazine on that occasion; Chenard gave 1000 pesos. Elpidio Sosa sold his position in the agency where he worked as treasurer for an important company; José Luis Tasende made a similar sacrifice, he was one of the comrades who made the greatest sacrifice. Abel Santamaría pawned his car, but that wasn't his only contribution: he gave much more, as if it was little, he gave his life, which will have no price when the Revolution triumphs. I could go on expanding the list, but it would seem to be a better idea to hand it over to the court, if you wish, in an orderly way, in writing, so that you can append it to the summary and investigate the veracity of everything."[45]

That was the reason for the Fidel's cutting response to the public prosecutor during the trial, when he asked if he had the help of a certain member of the government to successfully carry out his plan:

"We relied solely on our own efforts and with the help of all the people of Cuba, which we would have obtained if we had been able to communicate with them via radio. The possibility of some civilian or military person from the regime helping us is totally improbable."

"So, you just relied on the people?"

"Yes, on the people. I believe in the people."[46]

Immediately after the revolutionary triumph, in Santiago de Cuba's Céspedes Park, five years, five months and five days after the attack on the Moncada Garrison, Fidel reiterated this concept of his struggle to all Cubans:

"When I arrived on Cuba's beaches with eighty-two men and the people said that we were crazy and asked us why we believed that we were going to win the war, I said: 'because we have the people.' And when we were defeated the first time and were left with a handful of men and persisted in the struggle, we knew that it would be a reality, because we believed in the people. When we were dispersed five times in the space of forty-five days and met up again and renewed the struggle, it was because we had faith in the people, and today is the most palpable demonstration of that faith being justified. I have the total satisfaction of having profoundly believed in the Cuban people and of having inculcated that faith in my

comrades. More than a faith, this faith is a complete security, and this faith that we have in you is the faith that we want you to have in us for ever."

This faith, this confidence in the people's revolutionary essence is a constant defining trait in Fidel; on December 12, 1953, he wrote from prison:

"What has weight at the hour of going into combat for freedom is not the number of enemy weapons, but the number of virtues in the people. Although one hundred valiant young men fell in Santiago de Cuba, that only means that in our country there are 100,000 other young people ready to fall as well. Look for them and you will find them, guide them and they will march forward, no matter how hard the way; the masses are ready, they only need to be shown the true route."[47]

TAKING THE SKIES BY SURPRISE

On the eighth anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Garrison, Raúl Castro affirmed:

The events of July 26, 1953 highlighted comrade Fidel Castro as the leader and organizer of the armed struggle and the radical political action of the people of Cuba...[48]

Fidel does not carry Cuba's national leadership just because he displayed valor and daring, firmness and decisiveness in the attack on the Moncada Garrison, but because, alongside that, he expounded the program of the homeland, the program of the people. And he not only expounded that program, but also demonstrated the will to realize it and pointed out the way of doing so.

When Karl Marx stated that the Paris communards "tried to take the skies by assault," it could be said of the Moncada attack that a few dozen young people armed with shotguns for shooting birds "tried to take the skies by surprise."[49]

HISTORY WILL ABSOLVE ME

Fidel's self-defense in the Moncada trial, resumed in the historical document known as History Will Absolve Me, *clearly expounded the*

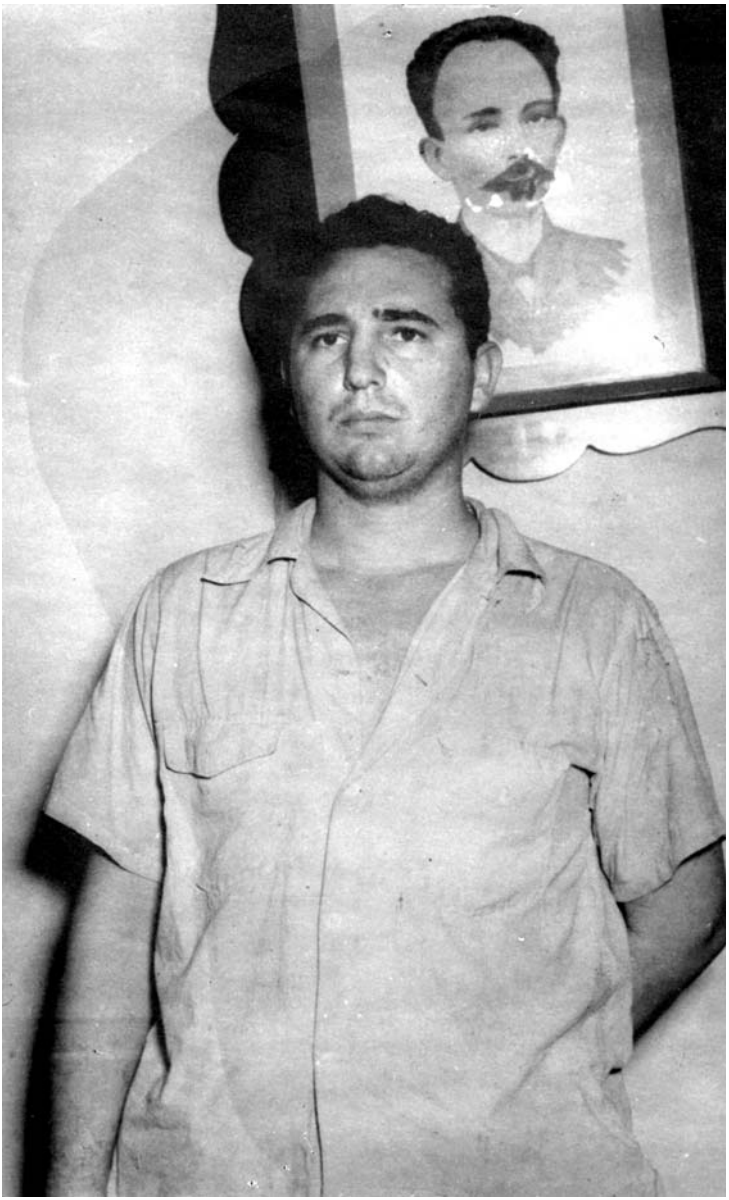
program for which the youthful assailants of that military fortress were fighting.

Fidel told a group of students about the difficulties he had to face during that trial:

At the trial, what I did was to assume my own defense. It's not that I regarded myself as a good lawyer, but I believed that I was the best person to defend myself at that time; I donned a gown and took my place alongside the lawyers. It was a political rather than a criminal trial. I wasn't attempting to get off, but to communicate ideas. I began to interrogate all those criminals who had murdered dozens and dozens of comrades and who were acting as witnesses; it was they who were on trial. Because of that, the next day they pulled me out of there, separated me, declared me sick. That was the last thing they did, because they wanted to do away with me for once and for all; but well, I knew very well why they acted with restraint. I knew and know those people's psychology, their mental state, the popular situation, the popular rejection of and great indignation over their murders, and I had a bit of luck as well: but the fact is that in the initial hours, while they were interrogating me, the book by Lenin appeared—someone pulled it out: "You had a book by Lenin!"

We explained what we were: followers of Martí, that was the truth, that we had nothing to do with that corrupt government that they had dislodged from power, that we proposed such and such objectives. Of Marxism-Leninism, we didn't utter a word. Nor did we have to say anything to them. We said what we had to say to them, but as the book came out into the open in the trial, I felt really annoyed at that point and said: "Yes, that book by Lenin is ours; we have read the works of Lenin and other socialists, and anyone who doesn't read them is an ignoramus;" that's what I affirmed to the judges and the rest of them.[50]

Then there was our program laid out when I defended myself at the trial. Those who didn't know we thought, didn't know because they didn't want to know. Perhaps they wanted to ignore that speech known as *History Will Absolve Me,* with which I defended myself there on my own, because, as I explained, they threw me out, they pronounced me sick, they tried all the others and sent me to a hospital to be tried in a small room. They didn't admit me into hospital exactly, but held me in



Symbolic photo of the Moncada trial. Behind Fidel is a portrait of José Martí, the intellectual author of that assault.

an isolation cell in the prison. The small room in the hospital was converted into a hearing with the court and a few people crammed into it, almost all military men, where they tried me and I had the pleasure of saying everything I thought, all of it, very defiantly.[51]

Fidel Castro Ruz concluded his historical testimony in the little room in Santiago de Cuba's Saturnino Lora hospital on October 16, 1953, by stating:

It seemed the Apostle [José Martí] would die on the year of his Centennial. It seemed that his memory would be extinguished forever. So great was the affront! But he lives; he has not died, his people are a rebellious people; his people are a worthy people; his people are faithful to his memory. There are Cubans who have fallen defending his doctrines; young men who, making unprecedented amends, came to die by his grave, to give him their blood and their lives so that he could continue to live in the fatherland's heart. Cuba, what would have become of you had you let your Apostle die!

I am about to close my plea, but I will not do it like all lawyers do, requesting that the defendant be released. I cannot ask freedom for myself while my comrades already suffer ignominious imprisonment at the Isle of Pines. Send me there to join them and to share their fate. It is understandable that honest men are either dead or in prison in a Republic whose President is a criminal and a thief.

My sincere gratitude to the Honorable Judges for having allowed me to express myself freely, without petty restrictions. I hold no grudges against you. I admit that you have been humane in certain aspects, and I know that this Court's Chief Judge, an impeccable man, cannot conceal his disgust at the prevailing state of affairs that obliges him to pronounce an unjust sentence. The Court of Appeals has yet to face a more serious problem: the indictments for the murder of 70 men, that is to say, the greatest massacre we have ever known. The culprits are still free and are armed. They are a permanent threat to the lives of all citizens. If the force of law does not fall upon them with all its weight due to cowardice or because it is prevented to do so, and all the judges do not resign, I take pity on your honor, and regret the unprecedented shame that will fall upon the Judicial Power.

I know that jail will be harder for me than it has ever been for anyone, filled with cowardly threats and hideous cruelty, but I do not fear it, nor do I fear the wrath of the miserable tyrant who took the lives of 70 of my brothers. Condemn me. It does not matter. History will absolve me.[52]

Minutes after Fidel concluded his testimony in the exercise of his right to self-defense, the court withdrew to deliberate and, on their reappearance, read out the sentence against the accused "as maximum author of a crime effected against state powers," dictating a fifteen-year prison term to be spent in La Cabaña Fortress in Havana.

However, in a resolution emitted that same October 16, Minister of the Interior Ramón O. Hermida ordered his transfer to the Men's National Penitentiary on the Isle of Pines.

ENDNOTES

1. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 1, ed. cit., 320.
2. Name by which the young men and women who assaulted the Moncada Garrison would be known. *Ed.*
3. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 1, ed. cit., 325-327.
4. Organization created by the Authentic Party after the March 10 coup d'état, to confront the Batista dictatorship with arms. Headed by Aureliano Sánchez Arango, the Triple A was weakened by politicking and phantom insurrections. *Ed.*
5. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 1, ed. cit., 339-342.
6. Fidel Castro, "Discurso pronunciado con motivo del inicio del curso escolar 1995-1996 en la enseñanza superior y sus 50 años de vida revolucionaria," ed. cit., 7.
7. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, *Moncada; antecedentes y preparativos,* ed. cit., 224.
8. Ibid., 178-179.
9. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 2, ed. cit., 369.
10. Ibid., 370-371.
11. Mario Mencía, *Tiempos precursores,* ed. cit., 136.
12. Ibid., 121-122.
13. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 2, ed. cit., 406.
14. Mario Mencía, *Tiempos precursores,* ed. cit., 137.

15. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 2, ed. cit., 425-426.
16. Word used in the former province of Oriente for an agricultural measure equivalent to one tenth of a *caballería* (1.343 hectares). *Ed.*
17. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 2, ed. cit., 433-434.
18. Ibid., 436-437.
19. In the current version of "Freedom March" the word "Oriente," a province then, has been replaced with "Cuba." *Ed.*
20. Mario Mencía, *The Fertile Prison: Fidel Castro in Batista's Jails* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1993), 64-66.
21. Roberto Silva Pérez, "Cómplice y encubridor del ataque al Moncada" [Accomplice and Accessory to the Moncada Attack], *Ahora* newspaper, July 24, 1990.
22. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 2, ed. cit., 507-509.
23. Ibid., 510-511.
24. Ibid., 526.
25. Ibid., 526-527.
26. Ibid., 532-533.
27. Ibid., 534.
28. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, *Moncada; antecedentes y preparativos,* ed. cit., 259.
29. Ibid., 536.
30. Mario Mencía, *El grito del Moncada,* Vol. 2, ed. cit., 537-539.
31. Ibid., 544-545.
32. Ibid., 547-548.
33. Ibid., 548.
34. Ibid., 548-549.
35. Ibid., 550.
36. Ibid., 553-554.
37. Ibid., 575.
38. Ibid., 576.
39. Ibid., 585.
40. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, *Moncada: la acción,* ed. cit., 151-152.
41. Ibid., 198-199.
42. Type of small hut without a support or walls, with a leaky roof. *Ed.*
43. Fidel Castro, "Una Revolución solo puede ser hija de la cultura y las ideas," ed. cit., 57-58.
44. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, *Moncada: la acción,* ed. cit., 360-362.

45. Centro de Estudios de Historia Militar de las FAR, *Moncada: antecedents y preparativos*, ed. cit., 289-291.
46. Mario Mencía, *Tiempos precursores*, ed. cit., 105.
47. Ibid., 105-106.
48. Raúl Castro Ruz, "Discurso pronunciado en el VIII Aniversario del Moncada" (Speech on the 8th Anniversary of the Attack on the Moncada Garrison), in *Moncada: la acción,* ed. cit., 405.
49. Id.
50. Fidel Castro, "Una Revolución solo puede ser hija de la cultura y las ideas," ed. cit., 51.
51. Id.
52. Fidel Castro, *History Will Absolve Me,* Annotated Edition (Havana: Editorial José Martí, 1998), 122-123.