

Marti's loyal follower

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A daring generation of Cuban youth, led by Fidel Castro Ruz, managed to defeat one of the bloodiest and best-armed dictatorships in Latin America. On January 1, 1959, from Céspedes Park in Santiago de Cuba, the Comandante en Jefe expressed his commitment to the Cuban people:

“Our Revolution will go forward...and this time cannot be crushed. It will not be like 1895 when the United States came and took over, intervening at the last moment, and afterwards did not even allow Calixto Garcia to assume leadership, although he had fought in Santiago de Cuba for 30 years. It will not be like 1933, when the people began to believe that the revolution was going to triumph, and then Mr. Batista came along to betray the revolution, seize power, and establish an 11-year-long dictatorship.

“Nor will it be like 1944, when the people took courage, believing that they had finally reached a position where they could take power, while those who assume power proved to be thieves. We will have no thievery, no treason, no intervention. This time it is truly the revolution, even though some might not want it.”

The Batista dictatorship had cost the lives of some 20,000, Cubans who had heroically struggled against a dictatorship which had stolen over two billion pesos from the country's coffers; left a public debt of some one billion; and a difficult social context: one million illiterate citizens, 600,000 children unable to attend school, 10,000 unemployed teachers, 95 hospitals nationwide, with only one located in the countryside.

Only a “Revolution of the humble, by the humble and for the humble,” would be able to resolve the critical situation facing the island, which was intensified by its dependency on, and subordination to, the United States government. The triumph of the Revolution broke the neocolonial model that had been imposed for over half a century in the country and represented a harsh blow to U.S. geopolitical strategy, which saw its hegemonic influence in Latin American and the Caribbean threatened for the first time. It had lost the coveted “ripe fruit.”

It was Fidel who realized the ideas of Martí, the author of the Moncada attack, who sought “to prevent, in time, with

the independence of Cuba, the United States from extending itself into the Antilles and falling, with this added strength, upon the lands of our America.”

He knew that this would be his “true destiny.”

In a letter sent from the Sierra Maestra to his faithful comrade Celia Sánchez, dated June 5, 1958, he left a record of the future that awaited him as a revolutionary:

“Seeing the missiles they launched on Mario’s house, I swore that the Americans would pay through the nose for what they are doing. When this war ends, a much longer and greater war will begin for me: the war I am going to wage against them. I realize that this is going to be my true destiny.”

Ninety miles from Cuba’s coast, the Comandante en Jefe astutely dealt with 10 United States governments presided by Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, George Bush Sr, Clinton, and G. W. Bush, all of whom attempted to destroy the Revolution using the most varied methods.

No other nation in history has resisted over 60 years of aggression by a power such as the United States, in its obsessive attempts to re-conquer it; using a great variety of methods, from the most subtle to the most aggressive: including sabotage, assassination attempts against the Revolution’s principal leaders; the application of an economic, commercial and financial blockade; isolating the country politically at the international and regional level; severing diplomatic ties; interference in Cuba’s internal affairs; the implementation of subversive programs; and the illegal occupation, by its Naval Base, of a piece of territory in Guantánamo .

Despite such hostility, and surviving 638 assassination attempts, Fidel always supported dialogue and improving relations with the United States. As such, he would often meet with political and cultural personalities from that nation - Senators, Congresspeople, governors, artists, and journalists, impressing them with his charm and broad knowledge. He held discussions on a wide range of topics, firmly defended his ideas, and treated the U.S. people with respect.

There are copious examples which show that the Comandante en Jefe never harbored any kind of hate toward U.S. citizens. On extending his condolences and offering support to the country following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, he reaffirmed the Cuba’s historic stance toward the U.S. people:

“Today is a day of tragedy for the United States. You know very well that hatred against the American people has never been sown here. Perhaps, precisely because of its culture, its lack of prejudice, its sense of full freedom - with a homeland and without a master - Cuba is the country where Americans are treated with the greatest respect. We have never preached any kind of national hatred, or anything similar to fanaticism, and that is the reason for our strength, because our conduct is based on principles and ideas. We treat all Americans who visit us with great respect, and they have noticed this and said so themselves.”

A universal figure, Fidel transcends borders, and ideologies. He used all his energy to combat imperialism in Our America, and struggled tirelessly for unity and integration between all nations south of the Río Bravo. He modestly contributed to building consciousness among the people of the region, who went on to elect revolutionary and progressive men and women in their countries.

Fidel helped to shape a new era in Latin America and the Caribbean at the end of the 20th century. Thanks to his efforts the United States’ principal tool of economic domination over the region, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), was defeated. Alongside another giant of modern history, Comandante Hugo Chávez Frías, Fidel was also crucial to the establishment of the first integration mechanism based on cooperation and solidarity and designed to respond to the needs and desires of Latin American and Caribbean countries: The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA-TCP). With this initiative, which focused on social programs, millions of people have been lifted from extreme poverty, learned to read and write, and had their dignity as human beings restored.

Fidel was always on the front line of combat, from his position as Comandante en Jefe, a soldier of ideas.

That is how he is remembered in Cuba and around the world, wearing his olive green uniform, defending the dispossessed, playing sports, conversing, debating, listening intently, and maybe even without even realizing, consolidating the creation of the Cuban nation and Greater Homeland, just as the region’s liberators had dreamed.

With almost 80% of the island's current population born and raised after the triumph of the Revolution, with Fidel always at the helm, we Cubans continue to feel the pain of his loss one year since his passing.

Millions of messages of condolences and expressions of love, solidarity, and admiration for Fidel have been received from every corner of the planet.

Millions of Cubans paid tribute to their greatest leader, while over seven million signed the solemn oath pledging to fulfill his concept of Revolution, expressing their commitment to continuing his ideas and to socialism.

Fidel remains undefeated and left an indelible mark on the Cuban people, conscious of the fact that "Revolution is fighting with courage, intelligence and realism." His prophetic words spoken after the triumph of the Revolution on January 8, 1959 upon arriving in Havana, ring as true now as they did then:

"I know that we will never again witness such a crowd in our lifetime except at another time when, I am sure that the crowds will gather once again. The day we die, because when they must take us to our graves, that day, as many people as today will come together once again, because we will never betray our people!"

And he never did. The images of Fidel all over Cuba a year after his death, prove so. He accompanied us in the most difficult moments, the most perilous, at times when we suffered aggression and threats, moments of dreams and hopes, in our work to build a more just society, "by all, and for the good of all;" to create an independent and sovereign nation; to spread revolutionary and anti-imperialist consciousness; in his confidence in youth; and in building a nation of men and women of thought and action, committed to the belief that "being educated is the only way to be free."

During his speech commemorating the 45th anniversary of the Granma landing, his brother in life, struggle, and victory, Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, masterfully described the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution:

"Fidel is like the Martí of today, the Maceo of today, the Mella of today. I am not referring to the individuals themselves, who are unique and singular, making comparisons senseless; I'm talking about the role that he has had to play over the last 50 years. He has learned our history and acted with similar political ingenuity and organizational skill as that of the architect of the Cuban Revolutionary Party and Necessary War; he revived, for these difficult, dangerous and complicated times, the intransigent spirit of Baraguá and military genius of the Titan of Bronze; bringing forth to present times, the forward thinking ideas and dynamism of the founder of the Federation of University Students (FEU) and the first Marxist-Leninist party."

Today, the ideas of the Comandante en Jefe are crucial to confronting the challenges being faced by revolutionary and progressive peoples around the world. The seeds planted by our elders have germinated and produced their best fruits in the form of the heroic Cuban people. The present and future generations, guided by Fidel's loyal comrade, Raúl, will be responsible for continuing to build the homeland, protect the achievements made to date, and implement necessary changes in order to continue moving forward.

Let us convert the sadness that all we Cubans feel in our souls into reflection, unity, revolutionary reaffirmation. Let us ensure that nothing, or no one, steals our dream of continuing to build a sovereign, independent, socialist, democratic, prosperous, and sustainable nation. This is the best way that the grateful can honor Marti's loyal follower.

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