

First of January: The Revolution without impossibles



By Daily Sánchez Lemus

The calendar marked Thursday, January 1, 1959. Around five in the morning, through Radio Rebelde, which was at that moment in Palma Soriano, Fidel dictated precise orders to the column leaders not to cease fire in the face of Eulogio Cantillo's betrayal: the tyrant Fulgencio Batista had fled, and a deal was being concocted in the capital to thwart the revolutionary triumph with a civilian-military junta.

The Commander-in-Chief called for a revolutionary general strike to prevent a military coup against the people's struggle and met in El Escandel with Colonel José María Rego Rubido to negotiate the surrender of the forces at the Moncada barracks to the young commander Raúl Castro Ruz. The indomitable city would indeed see its new mambises enter that time, the Revolution had triumphed. The strategy and

actions of Fidel on that day of many important decisions to thwart the interests of the U.S. embassy in Cuba and the defenders of the dictatorship demonstrated the stature of the political and military leader of the Rebel Army.

It was a day of many emotions and agitations, and while Fidel took the precise steps to consolidate the triumph, the people who awoke to the news of the dictator's flight celebrated the beginning of the year of freedom.

Raúl, the young man who on July 26, 1953, had participated in the actions at Moncada, with the takeover of the Palace of Justice, would be the one to return to the sad fortress to crown the triumph of the living and the dead in the struggle. Shortly after, Fidel would enter Santiago –and forever.

At approximately eleven o'clock at night, the Commander-in-Chief arrived at Céspedes Park, and from there he addressed the people in a speech that has gone down in history, assuring them that the Revolution was beginning now and that it would be an undertaking full of dangers. But the beauty of everyone's victory, of the work that would come afterward, was greater than any other obstacle. Fidel and his bearded men, the brave ones from the plains, and all the collaborators had demonstrated that there were no impossibles when fighting for an ideal. That would be the faith in victory that would forever accompany the Revolution.

The homeland, which was in the texts, in the glimpses of the poets, in the passion of the founders, suddenly embodied with a terrible, overwhelming beauty on January 1, 1959. We had it before our eyes, alive in immediate and incredible men who had accomplished in the mountains and plains what was prophesied, what was the dream of so many heroes, the obsession of so many loners.

The Cuban people knew how to rise up, defend, and build the future. The Cuban Revolution was -and is- the inspiration for other lands on the continent and the banner of just causes in the world, demonstrating at that time that the people could triumph in armed struggle without the support of the national Army, even against that Army backed by imperialism. The longings of the mambises, the revolutionaries of the 30s, and all those who had dreamed of a sovereign homeland time and again without being able to live it were being realized.

José Martí then consolidated himself as the paradigm of struggle, not only as the loving poet and defender of freedom but also as the guide for Latin American unity, to eliminate racism and any form of slavery, the guide for justice, and above all: for the true independence that in Cuba is indissolubly linked to the anti-imperialist character of our Revolution. Our heroes were vindicated, our valiant women, our suffering mothers, the sons fallen in so much struggle, our History. It seemed that everything arrived all at once on the first of January, although in reality, the struggle of so many years had prepared our people... that's why they knew how to defend the tremendous victory.

Then other battles began; but since then, the course of events has had roots, coherence, and identity. The blood has been accepted, the sun of the living and the dead shines demanding at the center of everything. "And everything that seemed impossible became possible."

It was possible

Since the speech on January 1st in Céspedes Park, Fidel reaffirmed what had been the essence of the Moncada Program, of History Will Absolve Me: help for the people, a Revolution of the humble, a homeland for the people made up of the always forgotten. That's why on that unforgettable night of victory in Santiago, he expressed that the best place he wanted to live was in the Sierra Maestra and that out of a very deep feeling of gratitude, they would not forget the farmers there, and that as soon as he had a free moment, he would go see where to build the first school city for them, with room for 20,000 children. And so it was.

On January 1, 1960, 65 years ago, Fidel boarded a train heading to the then province of Oriente to climb Pico Turquino with 390 young people from the José Antonio Echeverría university militias. It was an unforgettable journey through the war's landscapes, during which Fidel told the press he was going to recharge his energy. The then Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government took the young people to El Caney de Las Mercedes, where the Camilo Cienfuegos School City was being built, an immense and beautiful center for the children of the Sierra.

Since 1959, the Agrarian Reform, the other first laws of the Revolution in favor of the humble, the nationalizations, marked the path of the Revolution which, a year later, on the verge of facing an armed aggression, officially declared itself socialist and the people supported it with rifles held high. A few days later, they would defeat the mercenaries at Playa Girón on April 19, 1961, a defeat that Yankee imperialism still does not forgive, nor does it forget the bravery of the people in facing the October Crisis in 1962.

A people that became literate in a year, victorious against aggression and sabotage, that won the fight against bandits; and has had in the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior, in the militias, in the Committees of each block, in all mass organizations, its greatest and most fortified defense. This is how Raúl expressed it on January 2, 1979, in his speech at the XX Anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution Military Review, in José Martí Plaza de la Revolución:

On the twentieth anniversary of the triumph of our Revolution, we can tell our Commander-in-Chief that the socialist homeland has in the FAR the armed wing of the working class in power, and a shield on which this thought of José Martí, defining the will of our entire people, can be inscribed: "Before we give up on the effort to make our homeland free and prosperous, the Southern Sea will first unite with the Northern Sea, and a serpent will be born from an eagle's egg." Long live the 20th Anniversary of the triumph of the Revolution! Long live Marxism-Leninism! Long live Fidel! Homeland or Death!

Each province of Cuba for more than sixty years has been the stage for historic moments and speeches, like that of January 1, 1989, in Santiago de Cuba:

Those who dream that the Revolution can ever be defeated are mistaken; those who dream such delusions ignore that this Revolution, which is the continuation of the history of our homeland, its highest stage –we could say– will reach 40, will reach 50, will reach 60, and will reach 100 years, and many more years, of that we have no doubt.

Exactly one year ago, the Army General expressed in the same indomitable city, when we celebrated 65 years of victory:

Faithful to his teachings and his example, here we are! And from the heroic Santiago de Cuba, we reaffirm that we remain with our foot in the stirrup and ready for the machete charge, alongside the people and as one more fighter, against the enemy and our own mistakes, confident that the mambí cry will always resound in this land: Long live free Cuba!

Therefore, by safeguarding unity, the essence of the work of the humble, that of beautiful young combatants like Celia, Haydee, Vilma, Melba, and so many others; by taking care of their elders and children, this homeland must move forward aware of what its example and actions represent for the revolutionary ideas of the world in the context we live in today.

[SOURCE: Cuba Debate]

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