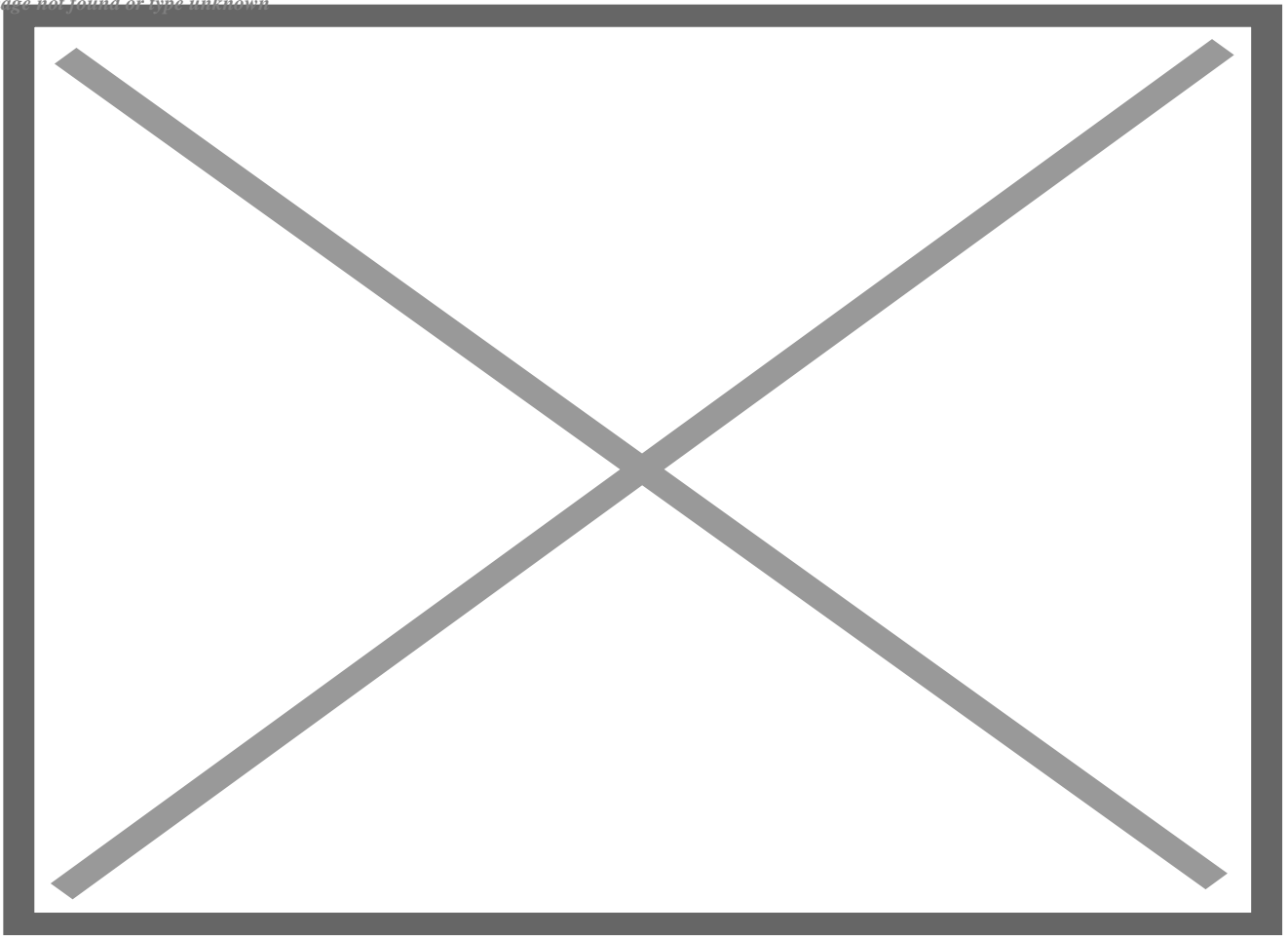


Cuba today remembers Fidel Castro's courage in the face of 1994 riots

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Havana, August 5 (RHC)-- Cuba today recalls the political audacity and courage of its historic leader Fidel Castro who, together with the people of the capital, neutralized in a few hours, on this day in 1994, the street protests and acts of vandalism that took place here.

Instigated and financed by the U.S. government and its former Interests Office based in this capital, a group of people -mostly lumpens and antisocials- went out to the vicinity of Havana's Malecon to violently make demands to the revolutionary government.

After the recent extinction of the socialist camp and the abrupt fall of trade with that bloc, Cuba felt the lack of food and basic services such as electricity and transportation, which generated continuous attempts of illegal exits from the country.

Fidel Castro had called on the people, gathered in what he himself called "workers' parliaments", to approve measures that would revalue the Cuban peso -quoted in the informal market at 150 to the dollar-, and supposedly begin the recovery of the national economy.

However, the climate of hostility against the island was being instigated from U.S. soil. The kidnapping of boats to illegally and unsafely leave the territory was a frequent occurrence, encouraged by radio broadcasts from the United States.

All of the above generated a tense situation in the municipalities near the port of Havana that resulted in broken shop windows, looting of products in nearby stores, riots on the Malecon, and a media hullabaloo in the United States in view of the imminent fall of the "Castro regime".

The popular revolt was unprecedented for a country accustomed to dealing with difficulties, but with the unity of the people around their leaders; despite the adverse situation and the surprise at the events, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro went to the site with serenity and aplomb.

The chronicles of those events relate that in the midst of the tumult that surrounded the Deauville Hotel in Havana, Fidel's presence silenced the undisciplined and the marginalized to the point that, according to popular versions, more than one dropped the stones and went to see him, out of curiosity or magnetism.

In the following hours, the Cuban leader would turn the events into a spearhead for a political and media offensive to denounce the US government for its arbitrary and criminal blockade policy and its encouragement of illegal emigration.

On national television Fidel Castro warned then that: "either effective and rapid measures are taken to prevent illegal departures or we will remove obstacles to any vessel that wants to go to the United States... We cannot continue to be the guardians of the United States borders".

Another new televised appearance of the Cuban leader, on the 11th of that month, established the position of his government with respect to the systematic encouragement, from abroad, to the disorderly emigration to the northern nation.

From now on, the departure from the national territory of any person attempting to emigrate abroad with their own adequate and safe means would not be prohibited, but they should not bring children or adolescents of secondary school age.

According to articles in the island's press, there was then a spectacular exodus of massive departures through our coasts, without any procedure or control whatsoever. This forced the government of William Clinton, the president in office in Washington, to initiate official talks with Cuba on August 27 in New York.

In this context, the Caribbean nation scored a victory by pushing back U.S. immigration policy in the face of the flow of migrants promoted by its own campaigns. The events of August 5, 1994 were, in this sense, a boomerang for the White House and another expression of unity of the Cubans with their leader. (PL)



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