

Remembering Chibás, 100 years after his birth

When I read Hart's article, published by Granma in commemoration of Chibás' birth, and saw it quoted a paragraph of the speech I delivered at the Colón Cemetery on January 16, 1959, eight days after my arrival in Havana following the revolutionary triumph, many memories of fallen, heroic comrades came to me. I thought of Juan Manuel Márquez, a brilliant orator and follower of Martí's ideas and second chief of the Granma expeditionary force. I thought of Abel Santamaría, who was to take command of our forces were I to fall during the attack on the Moncada garrison; of Pedro Marrero, Níco López, José Luis Tasende, Gildo Fleitas, the Gómez brothers, Ciro Redondo, Julio Díaz and practically all the members of the numerous contingent of young people from Artemisa who fell at Moncada or in the Sierra. The list is endless. All of them came from the rank and file of the Orthodox Party.

The first problem we faced was getting Batista out of office. Had Chibás been alive, Batista would not have been able to stage his coup d'état, because the founder of the Cuban (Orthodox) People's Party kept a close eye on him and called him into question publicly and methodically. Following Chibás' death, Batista was sure to lose the elections scheduled for June 1, 1952, two and a half months after the coup. Opinion polls were fairly reliable and Batista's unpopularity was constantly growing, day after day.

I was at the meeting where the new Orthodox candidate was chosen. I was more of a bold intruder than an invitee. I was to enter parliament, to struggle in the name of a radical program. No one could have prevented this. Then, it was rumored that I was a communist, a word which prompted many negative reactions inculcated by the dominant classes. To have spoken of Marxism-Leninism then, or even during the first years of the Revolution, would have been foolish and clumsy. During the speech I delivered before Chibás' grave, I spoke such that the people would understand the objective contradictions which our society faced at the time and which we still must face.

I spoke every day at a local radio station in the capital to deliver messages directly to tens of thousands of voters who had spontaneously joined the Orthodox Party. I also addressed the entire nation through the special supplements of the *Alerta* newspaper on several, nearly consecutive Mondays, publishing the proven accusations of corruption in the Prío government voiced between January 28 and March 4, 1952. Intuitively, I was able to predict and get inside Batista's intentions of staging a coup. I denounced these intentions before the party leadership and asked them permission to use Chibás' Sunday radio time to do so publicly. "We'll look into it", they told me. Two days later, they announced the following: "We have looked into the matter through our channels and there's no indication of that whatsoever". The coup could have been prevented but nothing was done. Months before, Chibás had already, painstakingly managed to prevent "a pact without ideology", as he would call it, between members of the Orthodox party and the former Cuban (Authentic) Revolutionary Party. Most of the provincial party leadership had supported the pact. The economic system prevailing at the time made it easy for the oligarchy and land-owners to take control of the party leadership in nearly all of the country's provinces. Only one party leadership remained loyal, the one in the capital, which was heavily influenced by radical intellectuals. Following the coup and at a time when unity was most dearly needed, what the oligarchy did was abandon the vast majority of the people at the mercy of the imperialist tempest. I continued to adhere to my revolutionary project, only that this time it would be an armed struggle, from the very beginning.

The day in which Chibás --whose body lay in state at the University of Havana-- was to be buried, I proposed that the leadership of the Orthodox Party lead the enormous funeral procession to the Presidential Palace and seize the premises. I had spent the entire night answering questions from radio reporters and inciting the people to undertake radical actions. No one at the university paid any attention to the radio broadcasts that night. We had a disorganized, panic-stricken government, a

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demoralized army that had no intention of repressing that procession. No one would have held it back.

One year after the death of Chibás, I wrote a proclamation titled "A Harsh Blow", which was mimeographed six days following Batista's treacherous coup. What follows is the text of this proclamation.

Not a Revolution, but a harsh blow! Not patriots; but destroyers of civil liberty, usurpers, backward-minded individuals, adventurers thirsty for gold and power.

It was not a military uprising against the apathetic and lazy President Prío; it was a military uprising against the people, on the eve of an election whose results were a foregone conclusion.

There was no order but it was the people whose duty it was to decide democratically, in a civilized manner, on the men who would govern them, by political will and not by force.

A fortune would be spent in favor of the imposed candidate, nobody denies that, but that wouldn't change the result just as the result was not changed by a flood of funds from the Public Treasury in favor of the candidate imposed by Batista in 1944.

It is completely false, absurd, ridiculous and childish that Prío would attempt a coup d'état, a clumsy excuse; his impotence and incapacity to attempt such an enterprise has been irrefutably demonstrated by the cowardice with which power was seized.

We were suffering from bad governance, but we were also suffering from years of waiting for a constitutional opportunity to avert the evil, and you, Batista, who remained in the shadows as a coward for four years and futilely indulged in politicking for another three, now you appear with your tardy, disturbing and poisonous remedy, ripping the Constitution to shreds when we were only two months away from reaching the goal through the official channels.

Everything you allege is a lie, a cynical justification, concealed vanity and not patriotic decorum, ambition and not ideal, greed and not civil nobility.

It was correct to overthrow a government made up of embezzlers and murderers; we tried to do this by civic channels, supported by public opinion and with the help of the masses; in contrast, what right do they who yesterday robbed and killed indiscriminately have to replace it in the name of bayonets?

It is not peace, it is the seed of hatred which is being sown. It is not happiness, it is mourning and sadness which the nation feels as it is faced with the tragic panorama it begins to discern. There is nothing in this world as bitter as the spectacle of a people who go to sleep in liberty and awaken in slavery.

Once again the military boot; once again Columbia dictating laws that remove and appoint ministers; once again tanks rumbling menacingly through our streets; once again brute force reigning over human rationality. We were becoming accustomed to living by the Constitution; we had twelve years without any great difficulties, even though there were some errors and rash actions. Superior states of civic coexistence can only be attained through arduous efforts. In a matter of a few hours, you, Batista, have demolished the Cuban people's noble illusion.

All of the ills Prío was responsible for in three years, you committed in the course of eleven. Your coup is thus unjustifiable; it is not based on any serious moral reason, or on any social or political doctrine of any kind. It finds its only reason for existence in force, and its justification in lies. Your majority lies with the Army, never with the people. Your ballots are guns, never free will; with them you can win a military uprising, but never clean elections. Your usurping against power lacks any principles to

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legitimize it; laugh if you will, but in the long run principles are more powerful than cannons. Principles are what form and nourish the people, what embolden them for battle, what they die for.

Do not call this outrage revolution, this disquieting and untimely coup, this treacherous stab in the back of the Republic which you have just given. Trujillo has been the first one to recognize your government, he knows who his friends are in the covey of tyrants who are battering America; that shows, more than anything else, the reactionary, militaristic and criminal nature of your coup. Nobody even remotely believes in the governmental success of your old and rotten covey; the thirst for power is too great; there is no moderation when there is no Constitution and law other than the will of the tyrant and his gang.

I know beforehand that your guarantee for life will be torture and humiliation. Your followers will kill even though you don't want them to, and you will tranquilly consent because you owe yourself completely to them. Despots are masters of the people they oppress and slaves to the force on which they base their oppression. A torrent of lying and demagogic propaganda will rain down on us now, in your favor, from all sources, using both soft and hard methods, and your opposition will be deluged with vile slander; Prío did that also and it had no effect on the people's consciousness. But the truth which illuminates the fate of Cuba and guides the steps of our people in this their difficult hour, that truth which you will forbid to be told, the whole world will know it; it will race clandestinely from mouth to mouth, down every man and woman, even though no one says it in public or publishes it in the press, and everyone will believe it and the seeds of heroic rebellion shall be sown in every heart; that is what guides every conscience.

I do not know what the furious pleasure of the oppressors will be, when their treacherous whip hits human backs like a new Cain against their brothers, but I do know that there is an infinite happiness in fighting them and raising a strong arm while saying: I don't want to be a slave!

Cubans: again we have a tyrant, but again we will have the likes of Mella, Trejo and Guiteras; there is oppression in our homeland but one day there will be freedom again.

I invite all brave Cubans, all the brave militants of the Glorious Party of Chibás; the time has come to make sacrifices and fight; should our lives be lost, nothing is lost; "to live enchained is to live in dishonor and outrage. To die for the Homeland is to live."

Fidel Castro

When this irreverent article was not published—who would dare publish it?— it was distributed at the Colón Cemetery by friends and sympathizers in the Orthodox Party on March 16, 1952.

On August 16, 1952, the clandestine newspaper El acusador published an article entitled "A Critical Assessment of the Cuban (Orthodox) People's Party", under the pseudonym of "Alejandro". As I have already offered a critical assessment of that party, I thought it apt to include the following analysis:

Above and beyond the commotion of the cowards, the mediocre and the fainthearted, it is necessary to voice a brief but courageous and constructive assessment of the Orthodox Movement, following the fall of its great leader Eduardo Chibás.

The formidable and sharp criticisms of the champion of the Orthodox Party left it such an immense profusion of popular emotion that it brought it right to the doors of Power. Everything was done, and all

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that remained was to know how to hold on to the ground already gained.

The first question each honest Orthodox member must ask himself is the following: Have we enhanced the moral and revolutionary legacy left us by Chibás..., or, on the contrary, have we misappropriated part of that legacy...?

He who thinks that until this moment everything has been done well, that we have nothing to reproach ourselves for, is not sufficiently severe with his conscience.

Those sterile feuds that followed the death of Chibás, those colossal scandals, for reasons that were not exactly ideological but purely selfish and personal, still echo like bitter blows of the hammer on our conscience.

That dreadful process of going to the rostrum to clarify pointless disputes was a grave symptom of lack of discipline and responsibility.

March 10th came unexpectedly. It was to be expected that such a serious event would rip from the roots of the Party the petty quarrels and the sterile personal ambitions. Was that what actually happened...?

To the amazement and indignation of the Party masses, the clumsy disputes cropped up again. The culprits were so foolish that they did not realize that there was narrow room in the press to attack the regime, but ample room to attack the Orthodox Party. Those who have helped Batista in like fashion have not been few.

No one would be shocked that such a necessary recount should be made today, when it is the time for the great masses who, in bitter silence, have suffered these losses, and there is no more fitting moment than today to be accountable to Chibás at his tomb.

That immense mass of the Cuban People's Party is on its feet, more determined than ever. It asks at this hard moment...Where are those who were candidates...those who wanted to be the first in the positions of honor at the assemblies and in the executive, those who would go on tours and chart tendencies, those who would claim their places on the platform at the large rallies and who now no longer go on tours, or mobilize the grass roots, or ask for the positions of honor in the front line of combat...?

Whoever has a traditional concept of politics could be pessimistic when faced with this vision of truths. On the other hand, for those with a blind faith in the masses, for those who believe in the uncompromising force of great ideas, the indecision of the leaders will not be a reason for weakness or despair, because these vacancies will be occupied in short order by upright men who come from the rank and file.

The moment has come for revolution and not politics. Politics is the consecration of the opportunism of those who have the means and the resources. Revolution opens the door to true worthiness, to those who possess courage and sincere ideals, to those who bare their chest and uplift the banner. The Revolutionary Party requires a revolutionary leadership, young and from the ranks of the people, in order to save Cuba.

Alejandro.

Later, we set up a clandestine radio station which did what Radio Rebelde would later do in the Sierra. In relatively little time, the mimeograph, broadcaster and the few things we had fell to the hands of the

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coup officers. I then learned the rigorous rules to which the conspiracy which culminated with the attack on the Moncada garrison had to adhere.

Shortly, a small volume which expounds on two fundamental ideas that were expressed in two of my speeches —the one I delivered at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro over 15 years ago and at the international conference titled “Dialogue among Civilizations”, held two and a half years ago— will be published. I ask readers to study the two documents in depth. I apologize for this act of self-publicity, from which I hope you, not I, will profit.

Fidel Castro Ruz

August 25, 2007

6:32 p.m.

Date:

25/08/2007

Source URL: <http://www.comandanteenjefe.net/en/articulos/remembering-chibas-100-years-after-his-birth?page=0%2C13%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C1>