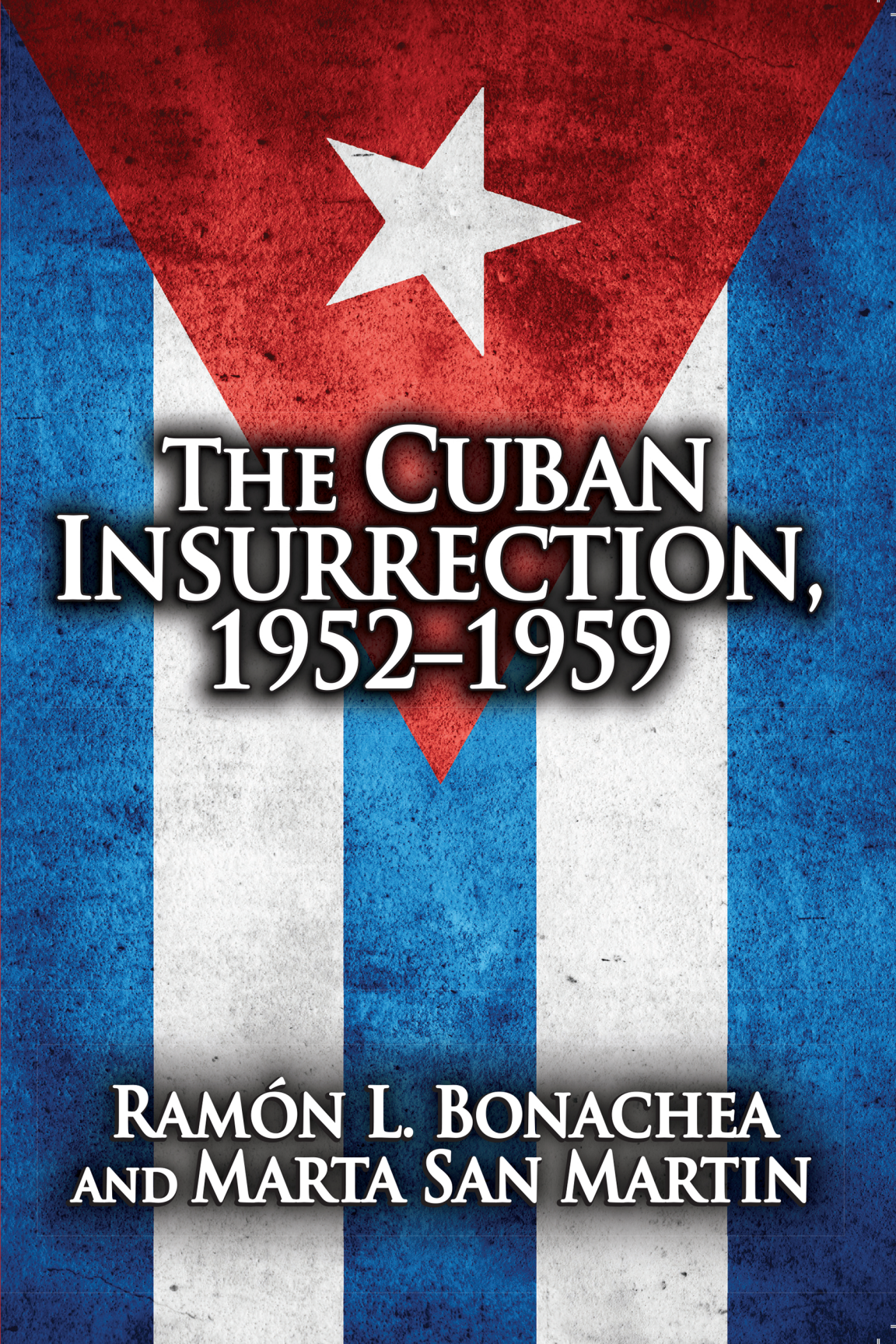
THE CUBAN INSURRECTION, 1952–1959
RAMÓN L. BONACHEA AND MARTA SAN MARTIN

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1974 by Transaction Publishers

Published 2017 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 72-94546

ISBN 13: 978-0-87855-576-5 (pbk)
ISBN 13: 978-0-87855-074-6 (hbk)

To the memory of
JOSE ANTONIO ECHEVERRÍA
and
FRANK ISAAC PAIS

Contents

Preface

For several years now, the authors have felt that no meaningful understanding of the Cuban Revolution can be obtained without exhaustive research into the political-military factors that led to the victory of the insurrection. Our interest in the 1952-59 period sprang from intellectual rebelliousness; we wanted to challenge what we felt had become a maze of ill-founded premises about the social, military and political genesis of the Cuban revolutionary process. We believed that a legitimate beginning to any study of this period would require us to unearth the names of men and women whose ideas and actions, oddly fallen into an aura of anonymity, had been central to the nature and direction of the struggle. Thus, this book has been written from the point of view of the Cuban insurrectionists.

Research for this work is based as much as possible on primary sources. Important gaps would have remained had it not been for the enthusiastic cooperation of hundreds of people, many of whom were actors in the struggle. Through the facilities of a community action agency located in the heart of a Cuban exile community, the authors were able to establish fruitful relationships with Cubans from all walks of life. We found that these persons were eager not only to share their part in the events but to supply the authors with letters, documents and names of persons for corroboration of their information. The fact that a good number of the people we interviewed were militants or participants but not leaders of the various struggling sectors adds a satisfactory measure of history from the point of view of the individual insurrectionist, former regular army soldier, rural guard, supporter of Batista, 26 of July member or member of the Directorio Revolucionario (DR).

These data were added to the personal experiences of one of the authors (Ramón L. Bonachea), who was a direct participant in several of the events described, as well as a member of a DR cell. In this capacity, he had the privilege of interviewing most of the leaders of the insurrection while in Cuba, and of visiting the sites of the main events—Sierra Maestra, Sierra Cristal, Escambray, Cienfuegos, Sagua la Grande and others. At the suggestion of Major Ernesto "Che" Guevara, one of us prepared a series of reports analyzing guerrilla warfare in Cuba in February 1959, which also proved useful in preparing this book.

Additionally, the authors have relied on abundant use of secondary sources, including material that the Cuban revolutionary government has published during the last 15 years. This material complemented the data obtained by the authors through personal interviews and letters from former militants. No small amount of rigorous assessment was needed to separate the obvious from the trivial and hagiography from historical facts.

We owe special thanks to the family of José Antonio Echeverría who placed at our disposal the private documents of the DR leader and participated in what amounted to their first public interview. Dora Rosales Westbrook shared many hours reminiscing about the political philosophy of her son. Joe Westbrook, and discussing the participation of many of his *compañeros* in the formation of the DR. Ricardo ("Popi") Corpión was kind enough to review point by point the historical Pact of Mexico between the DR and the 26th of July movement, to which he and Fidel Castro are the only living witnesses. Ricardo Bianchi and Sra. Bianchi shed light on the Auténtico cooperation with the DR, the events surrounding the Humboldt 7 episode, as well as on the preparations for the Palace attack and various other actions. Félix A. Murias, Armando Fleites, Adalberto Mora, Julio Fernández, Roger González and other DR members were extremely kind in revealing important sequences to the authors.

Raúl Chibás, Mario Llerena and Manuel Urrutia Lleó greatly enhanced the sections of the book pertaining to the ideology and formation of the provisional revolutionary government. We were privileged to make special use of Dr. Llerena's candid manuscript without which we would have been unable to reconstruct the internal structure of the Dirección Nacional.

Former members of the 26th of July movement were equally helpful. Of special importance for the authors was their acquaintance with the men and women who fought side by side with Frank País. They were not only helpful but extremely patient and kind in answering our queries about Frank, his movement and role during the insurrection. Above all, the authors feel a special gratitude toward Agustín País, whose courage, candidness and simplicity gave the authors a measure of what Frank, his brother, must have been like.

Thanks are also due to Carlos Prío Socarrás, Carlos Márquez Sterling, Eusebio Mujal Barniol, Manuel Antonio de Varona and Antonio ("Tony") Santiago for clarifying events in which they participated. Enrique Pizzi de Porras, from the staff of *El Tiempo* newspaper, availed the authors of the opportunity to examine Fulgencio Batista's answers to some specific questions concerning the last days of December 1958.

For assistance in formulating our analysis of events in the military sector we must express our appreciation to many guerrilla fighters and soldiers of the regular army. Many front-line guerrilla fighters provided a most objective account of the guerrilla campaign and their names are duly recorded in the text. Among the officers of the regular army, we are indebted to General Eulogio Cantillo who broke his long silence to discuss with us his personal role in the

insurrection, and allowed us access to his private documents and correspondence. Colonel Nelson Carrasco Artíles, active in the Sierra Maestra campaign, wounded in battle and prisoner of the Rebel Army until 1959, was very helpful in sharing articles and letters about the regular army. Colonel Fernando Neugart described to us his experiences as the government's negotiator in special talks with Fidel Castro during the summer offensive of 1958. This was also the first interview granted by the colonel since 1959. Captain Abon Ly spent many hours with the authors describing the battle of Yaguajay as well as giving his own impression of guerrilla leader Major Camilo Cienfuegos. Colonel Merob Sosa was interviewed on his role during the early stages of the Sierra Maestra campaign. He corroborated the legitimacy of military communiques published by the Cuban revolutionary government, and gave his version of the government's "preventive" measures against the Oriente peasants.

Rev. Cecilio Arrastía and Rev. Sergio Manejías described the participation of the Protestant churches and members during the struggle. Manuel Ray helped reconstruct the sequences leading to the frustrated April 9, 1958 general revolutionary strike. Luis Chaviano Reyes was instrumental in reviewing for the authors the details surrounding the Santo Domingo expedition. Rural teacher, René M. Romero provided the authors with a map of the Escambray guerrilla fronts that enabled us to locate battle sites, geo-political divisions of the territory and numerical strength of the 26th of July and DR forces.

Finally, we must thank Hugo García Barnet for sharing his artistic talents in drafting the maps accompanying this book. Thanks are also due to the López family for their enthusiastic support in urging the authors not to dismay while researching this work, and for caring for Ramón Jr. while his parents were busy typing, interviewing and travelling back and forth. Mary E. Curtis and Frances Shuman have our heartfelt gratitude for their forbearance and analytical insight. The authors deeply appreciate Professor Irving Louis Horowitz's encouraging and relentless moral support for this book. Any errors of judgment, interpretations or intellectual gaps are solely the responsibility of the authors.

Major Historical Events 1868-1952

1868-78	Ten Year War against Spain.
1895	War of Independence begins.
1898	The United States declares war on Spain; the Treaty of Paris is signed and Cuba remains under U.S. protection.
1901	Platt Amendment is attached to the Cuban Constitution granting the United States the right to intervene.
1906-09	Internal uprising and second U.S. intervention.
1912	Partido Independiente de Color leads an uprising; massacre of Negros by the Rural Guard and the army.
1917	Internal uprising; U.S. troops land to protect the government from rebels protesting against electoral frauds.
1922	University reform movement begins after visit of José Arce, rector of the University of Buenos Aires. The Directorio de la Federación de Estudiantes (FEU) is organized with Felio Marinello, president; Julio Antonio Mella, secretary.
1923	Group of young intellectuals signs the *protesta de los 13,* calling for rejection of fraudulent governments.
1925	Gerardo Machado is elected president. Julio A. Mella forms the Anti-Imperialist League; the Cuban Communist Party (CCP) is organized, and Mella is expelled from Havana University.
1927	Machado attempts reform of the Constitution extending his period: student protest leads to the organization of the Directorio Estudiantil Universitario (DEU).
1929	Mella assassinated while in exile in Mexico.
1930	Bloody student demonstrations; organization of the DEU of 1930.
1931	Expedition led by Sergio Carbó and others land at Gibara, Oriente province: Antonio "Tony" Guiteras supports a frustrated uprising. Organization of the ABC terrorist movement led by Joaquín Martínez Sáenz.
1933	U.S. Ambassador Benjamin Sumner Welles attempts to mediate between dictatorship and revolutionaries; localized strike begins on August 6, spreads into a spontaneous general strike; by August 11, the army demands Machado's resignation, and the dictator abandons power on August 12. On September 4, 1933 Sergeant Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar leads revolt and is backed by civilian revolutionaries. Revolutionary Government of Dr. Ramón Grau San Martín is not recognized by the United States.
1934	Batista's coup d'etat against the revolutionary government; the deposed revolutionaries form the Partido Revolucionario Cubano-Auténtico.

1934-40	Batista rules the country; attempts at insurrection fail throughout period, and the opposition compromises with the Constitution of 1940 as a result.
1940-44	Batista elected president; Juan Marinello and Carlos Rafael Rodríguez appointed members of Batista's cabinet.
1943	Manolo Castro elected president of the FEU.
1944-48	Ramón Grau San Martín elected president as candidate of the Auténticos.
1948	Jesús Menéndez, labor leader, and Manolo Castro are assassinated. Carlos Prío Socarrás is elected president as candidate of the Auténticos.
1949	In a student meeting, Carlos Rodríguez, a worker, is beaten to death by police lieutenant Rafael Salas Cañizares; Fidel Castro acts as lawyer for Rodríguez's family.
1952	Fulgencio Batista y Zaldivar leads a coup d'etat against President Carlos Prío Socarrás, 81 days before general elections are scheduled. Rafael Salas Cañizares is promoted to the rank of Brigadier General, and appointed chief of police; General Francisco Tabernilla, Sr. is appointed chief of the army. Batista cancels the elections and appoints himself chief of state, prime minister and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Political Institutions and Insurrectionary Organizations

AAA (Triple A)	Founded in 1952 by Aureliano Sánchez Arango. A clandestine organization against Batista financed by Carlos Prío Socarrás.
ABC	Founded in 1931 by Joaquín Martínez Saénz and Carlos Saladrigas. At first, an anti-Machado terrorist organization that later became a party.
AM	Agrupación Montecristi, Founded in 1952 and led by Justo Carrillo as an underground organization against Batista.
AIE	Ala Izquierda Estudiantil. A Marxist organization led by Aureliano Sánchez Arango in 1930; a splinter group from the DEU.
AL	Accion Libertadora. Founded in 1952 after Batista's coup; as an underground organization most active in Oriente where it was led by Raúl del Mazo.
ANR	Acción Nacional Revolucionaria. ARO became ANR when from 1954–55 it recruited members from other provinces. Also founded by Frank País and Pepito Tey.
ARO	Acción Revolucionaria Oriental. Founded in 1953 by Frank País and Pepito Tey as an underground organization against Batista.
CTC	Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba. Founded in 1939. In the 1950s it was led by Eusebio Mujal Barnióll.

DEU	Directorio Estudiantil Universitario. Founded in 1930; an anti-Machado organization led by Carlos Prío Socarrás, Ramiro Valdés Daussá and Rubén de León.
DR	Directorio Revolucionario. Founded in 1955 by José Antonio Echeverría as the students' insurrectionary instrument to depose Fulgencio Batista.
DR	3-13 Directorio Revolucionario 13 de Marzo. Name adopted by Faure Chomón and Rolando Cubelas to designate the DR guerrillas in the Escambray.
FEAP	Federación de Escuelas y Academias Privadas. Founded in 1955 by Joe Westbrook and Ramón Rodríguez to organize secondary education students under the aegis of the FEU.
FEU	Federación Estudiantil Universitaria. Founded in 1923 by Julio Antonio Mella as the instrument of Havana University's students to channel changes in the educational system. In 1955, it was led by José Antonio Echeverría.
FON	Frente Obrero Nacional. Founded by Frank País in 1957 to mobilize the working class for the general revolutionary strike.
JC	Joven Cuba, Founded in 1934 by Antonio ("Tony") Guiteras; an anti-Batista underground organization that believed in armed insurrection.
JS	Juventud Socialista. The youth section of the PSP led by General-Secretary Raúl Valdés Vivó, Antonio Carcedo, Alfredo Font and Amparo Chaple among others.
M-26-7	Movimiento 26 de Julio. Founded in 1955 by Fidel Castro and members of the ANR, Young Ortodoxos, and MNR groups.
MLR	Movimiento de Liberación Radical. Founded in the mid-1950s by Andrés Valdespino as a political party seeking a peaceful solution to Cuba's problems.
MNR	Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario. Founded in 1952 and led by Professor Rafael García Bárcena.
MRS	Movimiento de Resistencia Cívica. Founded in 1957 by Frank País as an instrument of the M-26-7 to mobilize professional sectors. It was led by Angel Santos Buch, Faustino Pérez and Manuel Ray.
MSR	Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario. An anti-Communist terrorist organization led by Rolando Masferrer, veteran of the Spanish Civil War and former member of the Cuban Communist Party.
OA	Organización Auténtica. A clandestine organization founded by Carlos Prío Socarrás in 1934 to wage urban warfare against the puppet governments of Fulgencio Batista. In the 1950s its action and sabotage section was led by Menelao Mora Morales until 1955 and financed by Prío.

PAU	Partido Acción Unitaria. Fulgencio Batista's political party in 1951.
PPC-O	Partido del Pueblo Cubano (Ortodoxo). A splinter party from the PRC-A; founded in 1947 by Eduardo R. Chibás.
PSP	Partido Socialista Popular or Communist Party. Founded by Julio Antonio Mella in 1925. In the 1950s it was led by Blas Roca, Juan Marinello, Aníbal Escalante, Severo Aguirre and others.
PRC-A	Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Auténtico). Founded in 1934 by members of JC, DEU, AIE and individuals such as Rubén de León, Carlos Prío Socarrás and Manuel Antonio de Varona. Ramón Grau San Martín was its president.
SAR	Sociedad de Amigos de la República. Founded in 1954 by Cosme de la Torriente, a veteran from the Independence Wars, to seek a peaceful solution to the Cuban political situation.
UIR	Unión Insurreccional Revolucionaria. A terrorist organization created in the mid-1940s involved in gang warfare and led by Emilio Tró.

The Cuban Insurrection, 1952–1959

Introduction

The coup d'etat was successful. Within mere hours, on March 10, 1952, General Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar overthrew the constitutional government of President Carlos Prío Socarrás, which had been in power since 1948. Confronted with the military coup, elected officials decided to flee rather than fight, while the national oligarchy rejoiced at the return to power of a tyrant who promised an era of "law and order." Labor leaders hurried to make common cause with the military caudillo; politicians offered him their services hoping to partake in the spoils of power; the Cuban people, unable to resist the emerging dictatorship, stood as mute witnesses to the events; and the nation's political institutions did not challenge what the army decisively supported. Predictably, the United States and the Latin American governments extended recognition to the de facto regime. An era of national complacency had ended. In Cuba, only the students strongly protested the violation of the Constitution of 1940 and the return to a praetorian military government.

The effect of Batista's coup was threefold: First, it demonstrated that as long as the traditional regular army existed, no constitutional order was safe from eventual destruction. The regular army was Batista's army. He had restructured it in 1933, appointed his loyal collaborators to key positions and instilled in the troops a sense of patrimony over the destiny of the nation. The regular troops saw Batista as the *man* who had led them out of anonymity and poverty to the highest political echelons. Second, the political parties, and especially the Partido Revolucionario Cubano-Auténtico (PRC-A), had failed to transform the army into an institution at the service of the constitutionally established order. Complacently, the Auténticos emphasized that there had been continuous electoral processes since 1940, shrugging off the possibility of a military coup. Finally, the Auténtico party structure was inefficient; it failed to aggregate a new generation of Cubans eager to engage in politics. Unlike the Auténticos, the Partido del Pueblo Cubano-Ortodoxo (PPC-O) boasted a dynamic youth section. It was, however, completely powerless; the Ortodoxos were controlled by old politicians primarily concerned with inner-party disputes against the Auténticos, of which they were an offshoot. These political institutions were robbed of whatever political vitality they had by the March 10 coup d'etat.

The challenge posed by Batista was answered by the young people in seven years of unprecedented organized violence. The authors have no quarrel with Major Ernesto "Che" Guevara's apt conceptualization that an insurrection is the period of "armed struggle," and revolution the period of "social, economic and political transformations." Hence, the concept of insurrection is applied throughout the text as the process of violent resistance against what was perceived by the insurrectionists as an illegitimate order. Resistance becomes organized acts of violence through urban and rural warfare, climaxing in a widespread civil war. Thus, the thrust of this study is to survey the political and military aspects of the insurrection that led to the defeat of the regular army, and the extraordinary victory of the insurrectionists on January 1, 1959.

The Cuban insurrection was led by a new generation of Cubans whose ideological tenets seemed to have departed little from the ideals of the frustrated revolution of 1933. The political generation of 1950 was more determined than the previous generation to wage violence until they achieved their ultimate objective: to overthrow Fulgencio Batista by force. Thus, the victory over Batista was a military one in the urban and rural battlefields, and not—as it may seem—a voluntary withdrawal from power by the tyrant. Because of the duration of the struggle, the methods of violence applied by both sides and the political unsophistication of the insurrectionary leaders, no philosophical program emerged that deserves to be called an ideology. Yet the text includes discussions over the relevant manifestos written throughout the struggle. These were not so much blueprints for the future revolutionary government, as they were guidelines fostered by the complexities of the war that was waged.

Inconsistencies aside, by and large the *leit motif* of the insurrection evolved around—and was prompted by—the rupture of the constitutional order. Central to all the manifestos was the issue of restoring the Constitution of 1940, holding general elections after Batista's overthrow, overhauling the country's economy by revising its dependent status, reorganizing the civil service system, carrying out a functional agrarian reform and achieving full political sovereignty at home and abroad. These aspirations were already embodied in the law of the land but had not constituted concrete policies of Cuban governments. They had been ignored or brushed aside, but those who became personally involved in the insurrection unquestionably cherished these goals. Those who remained aloof from the struggle but wanted a return to constitutional order simply expected to have the governing civilian-military elite replaced by another group professing exclusively civilian-oriented goals. This expectation was soon to collide with the objectives of the fighting youth who, as the struggle became radicalized, came to despise the very social, political and economic institutions in which they had grown up.

Cuban insurrectionists borrowed no model from abroad to carry out their fight against the dictatorship. In fact, Cuban history afforded rich experience both in the organization of insurrectionary groups and in the application of

violence. The Wars of Independence had been fought in a guerrilla fashion that prompted contempt from British and Spanish officers. The 1933 revolution had provided examples of general strikes, sabotage and terrorism. The ensuing violence of the action groups (1944-1948) had given ample proof of how lives were wasted in the pursuit of internecine disputes. Above all, the action groups had shown how alienated a generation of former revolutionaries had become in a closed-system society such as Cuba's. The lessons drawn from the action groups were many-faceted for those who came in contact with them and later participated in the struggle against Batista. When pertinent, the authors have traced certain political behavior of the insurrection's leaders and/or militants to their previous training with the action groups. To conclude, as unsophisticated *batistiano* sources have, that the struggle against Fulgencio Batista was purely a struggle for power, just as the action groups struggled to control Havana University, is a grotesque oversimplification and quite an unscientific model for the Cuban insurrection. The insurrection was an all-embracing process more powerful than the individual motivations of its leaders—although there were personal motivations, as in every other political struggle.

Equally simplified is the assertion that the experiences of the Sierra Maestra guerrillas as well as those of the Escambray were grounded in their familiarity with the works of Mao Tse-tung or Vo Gnuyen Giap. It raises the question whether such observers, in pursuing their objective account of the events, have fallen prey to the prejudice that a small nation is unable to devise its own means of national liberation. The same historical error is observed concerning the role of the United States in the struggle. The insurrectionists were not disturbed by previous United States-Cuban relations, nor by the proximity of the United States. The absence of a vigorous U.S. presence in determining the direction of the struggle led "Che" Guevara to analyze this feature of the Cuban insurrection "as an exceptional condition . . . difficult to exploit again by other peoples. . . ." Thus, the insurrectionists concentrated their firepower on Batista, knowing that the matter of the United States would come later. Strictly speaking, then, the insurrection was won against, over and despite the United States since at no time did the latter become the prime justification for the struggle.

In terms of stages, the insurrection embraced two overall phases: the organization, growth and equipment of an urban underground; and the formation, development and upkeep of a guerrilla army. Within each stage, there were subsequent stages of development all of which led to increasing political consciousness on the part of militants and leaders.

The first act of overt violence was the attack on the Moncada barracks on July 26, 1953 in Oriente province. The Moncada attack was a departure from traditional opposition tactics in the context of the 1950s. Because it came on the heels of the coup, it was also an act of defiance against the symbol ruling over Cuba, the army. Moncada had a decisive influence over the

insurrectionary process. It opened an abyss between the youth who advocated the violent overthrow of the regime, and older Cubans who supported a political solution, that is, an understanding with the dictator, elections and a transition to the *status quo ante.* The radicalization of the youth began with the attack on the Moncada, spread to street demonstrations and localized acts of terrorism against the regime. These actions helped to polarize the political scene, with the insurrectionists on one side, Batista on another. In between were the electoralists, who depended on Batista's willingness to step down and turn the government over to a civilian elite, thus preventing the insurrectionists from reaching power.

In 1955, Cuban youth entered into a new stage in their struggle against Batista. That year the two most important insurrectionary movements were formed: the 26th of July Movement (M-26-7), and the Directorio Revolucionario (DR). The former pursued a strategy of armed uprising leading to a revolutionary general strike, while the latter concentrated on the one-blow method: Batista's assassination. Both of these tactics proved unsuccessful. The M-26-7 was the first to realize that overthrowing the regime would mean a long, protracted struggle against the regular army. The DR insisted on striking at the top, assuming that if Batista were eliminated, the whole regime would crumble. Methodologically, therefore, the M-26-7—and Fidel Castro above all—entered the second stage sooner than any other insurrectionary organization, building an effective apparatus in the form of a guerrilla army in the Sierra Maestra. The opening of this guerrilla front signaled another change in insurrectionary tactics, and paved the way for the second overall stage of the insurrection that ended with the defeat of the regular army, and Batista's downfall by means of combined urban and rural guerrilla warfare.

The urban underground struggle may be viewed in three stages: formative, offensive and support-defensive. The formative stage dated from the creation of Professor Rafael García Bárcena's Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) and the Moncada attack in 1953, to the founding of the DR and the M-26-7 in 1955. As these movements entered into the offensive stage, they took the initiative of the struggle away from the Triple A and the Organización Auténtica of Aureliano Sánchez Arango and Carlos Prío Socarrás respectively. The politico-military vanguard of the struggle fell into the hands of the new generation, and challenged the Triple A and the OA to perform a supportive role. But, paradoxically, throughout most of the insurrection, the DR and the M-26-7 depended on Prío's purse to carry out their main acts of violence against Batista. The interrelationship of these four movements oscillated between a series of alignments, co-opting of militants, confrontations and commitment to the main objective, the overthrow of the dictatorship.

The offensive stage culminated with the failure of the Palace attack and the frustrated revolutionary general strike of April 9, 1958. The urban undergrounds of both movements were practically depleted by these defeats. These

setbacks forced the urban insurrectionists to an all-out support of the guerrillas' role in the Sierra Maestra, Sierra Cristal and Escambray mountains. Action in the cities continued, but priority was given to survival. No major operational risks were undertaken that could have destroyed what remained of both the DR and the M-26-7. The urban underground lost its initiative and independence, and from then on, all strategic plans were issued from the Sierra Maestra.

Guerrilla warfare developed in two main stages. The first was characterized by the action of small groups of guerrilla fighters against a vastly superior regular army. The objectives were simple: exploit to the utmost the advantages of the terrain, maintain initiative over the regular troops—and survive. From the Granma landing on December 2, 1956 and the Uvero attack on May 28, 1957 to the opening of a second guerrilla front in northern Oriente province on March 10, 1958, the guerrillas' strategy centered on quick attacks and quick retreats. Each retreat was followed up by ambushes of pursuing regular troops until the latter adopted a defensive strategy and abandoned "search and destroy" tactics inside the guerrillas' theater of operations. Gradually, small army posts in the mountains were vacated, and the regular troops were concentrated in marginal areas adjacent to the Sierra Maestra. As Guevara candidly admitted, the guerrillas were unable to move down to the plains, and the army could not penetrate the mountains without sustaining a great number of casualties. This stalemate ended with the failure of the 1958 general strike, which opened the way for the regular army's summer offensive of 1958.

The transitional phase from the first to the second stage of the guerrilla campaign began at this point. The guerrilla army conducted strategic withdrawals into the heights of Sierra Maestra, while the regular army overextended its lines to the point where a guerrilla counterattack became feasible. Overestimation of his own guerrilla army's ability to wage a conventional battle against the regular army almost led Fidel Castro to a military defeat toward the end of July 1958. But by the end of the summer offensive, the guerrillas were increasing their encounters with the defeated regular army until the former invaded central Cuba. A considerable amount of large scale warfare took place in late 1958, But, at all times, guerrilla columns maintained a high degree of mobility and were able to exercise tactics of dispersion and concentration of forces. The guerrilla army engaged in offensive warfare toward November-December 1958, and their push into the plains in Oriente and Las Villas provinces was characterized by more conventional war operations.

The development of guerrilla warfare in Cuba was made possible by the support of the urban underground in Oriente province. The first stage, the formation of guerrilla units and establishment of operational guerrilla bases, channels of supplies and communications, rested on the capability of Frank País' organization in Santiago de Cuba. The fact that guerrilla warfare developed from the first directly into the third state—in terms of Mao Tse-tung's

discussion of guerrilla warfare phases—is further proof of the uniqueness of the Cuban case. The guerrillas responded to changing needs of the military campaign; moving backwards as the regular army showed the will to fight, forward as the army deteriorated.

Within the insurrectionary movement leadership evolved around three talented leaders: Fidel Castro, Frank País and José A. Echeverría. Each of them was young, deeply committed and possessed his own charismatic style. Each exhibited distinct personality traits that reflected his social and political upbringing. The authors' argument is that of the three, Fidel Castro felt most at ease with the conservative views of the Old World. A generous share of egocentrism and male authoritarianism permeated Fidel's actions. These were largely grounded in his father's experiences as a Spanish immigrant; Angel Castro Argiz was a hard-working landowner who treated his peasants sternly, had fought on the side of Spain against the Cuban creoles, and was quite gracious to American overseers of the United Fruit Company. Fidel's relations with his father were, of course, less than friendly. But this background, and the disciplinarian Jesuit education Fidel received at Belén shaped a powerful political personality.

Several years Fidel's junior, José Antonio Echevarría belonged to a middle-class Catholic family and was nurtured in the Auténtico mainstream. Jovial and candid, José Antonio had none of Fidel's political experience with the action groups—despite what *batistiano* sources have suggested. His secondary education was in the public school system of his native city of Cárdenas, where he assumed leadership roles climaxing with his rise as head of the Cuban student movement. Echeverría was strongly antidictatorship, nationalistic and believed in overthrowing military caudillos throughout Latin America. He was one of the first insurrectionists to embrace the fight against colonialism in Asia and South America. It was no accident that Guevara would recruit many DR members who shared Echeverría's vision of a liberated continent.

Frank País had the most humble origins of the three leaders. Little is known of his writings, although he wrote as many letters and documents as Fidel. He was reared under the influence of the Baptist church, one of the most socially concerned Protestant institutions in Oriente province. País knew first-hand the humiliating conditions of Cuba's sugar workers, some of whom he taught to read and write. Like Echeverría, he strongly repudiated dictatorial regimes in Latin America. Quiet, self-assured and setting himself as an example, Frank País blended his deeply-felt Christian beliefs with revolutionary action. He appears to have been the most visionary of the three, and to have experienced human situations in a dimension unknown either to Fidel Castro or José Antonio Echeverría.

Each man surrounded himself with a group of followers whose loyalty was beyond question, and also far beyond their fealty to the movements of which they were members. Their ability to win militants over to their cause rested

on the essentially distinct features of their charismatic styles. Each developed his charisma in different settings and time periods. Echeverría, as president of the University Student Federation, fearlessly headed militant student demonstrations, finally clashing with heavy-set, armed policemen in Havana, Frank País, unassuming and dedicated, moved from city to town throughout Cuba organizing and strengthening the M-26-7. Fidel Castro tirelessly spoke of the people's capacity to make the revolution, and used the mass media to carry forth his message. Neither Echeverría or Frank País enjoyed the luxury of frequent speeches. Urban warfare does not permit such indulgences. Only Fidel Castro had the means, the time and the vision to use Radio Rebelde to reach the most remote villages of the nation. Relationships among the three leaders were not always friendly, but they gave sufficient proof of their courage, audacity and perseverance. A receptive youth was willing to emulate these leaders' behavior.

It was this type of a person who questioned Fulgencio Batista's coup d'etat, and sought redress by means of an insurrectionary struggle. Not only was Batista the symbol of an oppressing praetorian institution, but he himself had been a political institution since 1933 and the movement known as the "sergeants' revolt." In 1952, Cuba's adult population remembered Batista's rise to power as well as the bloody episodes unleashed by his determination to crush any opponents standing in his way. Certain aspects of Batista were profoundly appealing to various sectors of Cuban society. First, his humble origins: Batista had been born in 1901, in the sugar town of Banes, 40 miles from the village of Birán where Fidel was born in 1927. Batista's parents were peasants and descendants of the Bany Indians of northern Oriente province. His father, Belisario, had been a sergeant in the Cuban Army of Liberation serving under General José Maceo. Belisario Batista worked in the early 1900s for the United Fruit Company where Angel Castro Argiz, Fidel's father, was also employed. While Angel Castro managed to acquire some land and build a productive sugar colony, Belisario Batista never left the canefields. Fulgencio Batista learned from his father the rigors of the sun-up, sun-down swing of the *machete.* He was taught how to read and write at night in a public school and ambitiously pronounced English words at Los Amigos, a school run by American Quaker missionaries. Until 1921, Batista worked as a cane-cutter, carpenter, timekeeper, wood-cutter, store attendant, planter and railroad brakeman. From a Marxist perspective, Batista in 1933 was the exemplary revolutionary leader according to his class origins.

Second, his military experience played a large part in his appeal. At age 20, Batista had enrolled in the army in order to move westward to the dynamic city of Havana, to learn and see things he had heard of but did not know from personal experience. He was assigned to the Fourth Infantry Division based at Camp Columbia in Havana. He hoped to become a lawyer but did not know he needed a high school diploma first; so he enrolled in the evening division of the San Mario academy to become a speedtypist and stenographer. In 1923,

Batista faced an examination and won the rank of corporal; in 1926, in a second examination—his last one—he was promoted to sergeant and assigned as reporter to the councils of war. At the War Department, he learned the arts of arm-twisting, backroom politics and class privileges. Knowing as no other man of his time the human conditions of low-ranking officers, peasants and workers, he led soldiers, corporals and sergeants to the revolt of 1933. The Batista of 1933 was a young man turned overnight into a colonel and chief of the Cuban Armed Forces who postulated that a revolution was "an instrument of social change." He held that Cuba had abandoned its colonial status to become a slave of foreign capitalism. The country's fabric needed thoroughgoing reforms so that the revolution could fulfill its destiny. Batista had strongly advocated racial equality and nondiscrimination (of which he had been perpetually a victim himself). He was an idol to the peasantry because he had emerged from the humble; an idol to immigrant groups—mostly Spaniards—who mirrored themselves in Batista, a sort of militaristic version of a Cuban Horatio Alger; and an idol to his troops, whom he had redeemed from squalor by means of swift promotions, improvement of military quarters, salary increases and no small amount of class privilege.

In 1952, Batista knew that his strong-man image would suffice to frighten the weak Auténtico administration and elicit the unconditional allegiance of the regular army. He also guessed correctly that wealthy entrepreneurs, peasants and workers would not feel economically threatened by his coup. The prevailing political parties he dismissed, for neither the Auténticos nor the Ortodoxos were led by able political leaders who were a fair match to his own political seniority. Fulgencio Batista made one mistake though: he underestimated the frame of mind of a generation of young Cubans who were tired of political cynicism and ready for a fresh start on the road to revolution.

1

The Moncada Attack

Fidel Castro Ruz was born on August 13, 1927,[1] on "Manacas," the farm owned by his father, Angel Castro Argiz, in Birán, municipality of Mayarí, Oriente. At age seven he began his primary education in Santiago de Cuba. He completed these early studies at the Jesuit school of Dolores. In 1941 Fidel was accepted at the Colegio Belén in Havana, which was the most exclusive Jesuit educational institution in the country. In 1945 he entered the University of Havana's law school.

Fidel's political career began in that year, with his unsuccessful campaign for the presidency of the law school. In 1947 he ran for secretary to the student assembly but again failed to muster enough support from his fellow students.[2]

Fidel was not unique in attempting to start a political career while still a young man. Cuban youth in general was highly politicized, for Cuba had long been a country of shifting power and alliances. In their university years or even earlier, many Cubans became involved in theorizing, planning and acting to grab whatever share of power was available. Thus many groups formed, worked together, broke up and realigned with slightly different objectives. Fidel Castro was but one of the radical young Cubans who had an early vision of power and took every opportunity to reach his goal.

Fidel's political activism led him to become involved with the "action groups" predominant under the Ramón Grau San Martín (1944-48) administration. Andrés Suárez has described the young revolutionary who joined these groups as "loyal only to his tiny independent group, full of contempt for those he referred to as the ideologists," and "thoroughly convinced that violence alone could decide everything."[3] There were several action groups, but two of the most important were the Revolutionary Socialist Movement (MSR), led by Rolando Masferrer, and the Revolutionary Insurrectional Union (UIR), headed first by Emilio Tró, and later by Jesús Diéguez. These organizations fought each other savagely under the cloak of their particular "revolutionary" program. Leaders like Policarpo Soler, Masferrer, Mario Salabarría and Tró surrounded themselves with young men who became terrorists ready to murder for political leverage, money or personal rivalry. The activities of these groups affected every aspect of Cuba's public life. Havana University was the main headquarters, even though many of the group leaders and members

were not registered students. Masferrer and Salabarría provide excellent examples of the widely divergent types of young Cubans who were involved in "revolutionary" activities.

Rolando Masferrer combined student life with political activism. His academic record was outstanding, and he had won almost every major honorary distinction in open competition in the law school. He had at one time belonged to the Communist party, had been a renowned fighter against the Gerardo Machado dictatorship (1925-33) in his youth, and later had enrolled in the International Brigades which fought in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). After he left the Communist party, he became a notorious gang leader. Mario Salabarría, on the other hand, was a brutal killer with little or no academic background. The Grau administration commissioned Salabarría and Tró as majors, giving one charge of the national police academy and the other control of the national police's investigation department.

At the university the action groups exerted total control over university affairs. Under the influence of "Ojos Bellos" (Pretty Eyes), "E1 Colorado" (The Reddish) and "El Manco" (The Lamed), they were even able to help determine who would be granted professional degrees, particularly in the school of law. As in most such organizations, recruits had to prove their intentions by participating in "direct action" like shooting an enemy of a rival group or engaging in terrorist activities against their critics.[4]

Public reaction to these activities is suggested by a 1949 editorial demanding government action against the high incidence of daylight shooting in the capital: "Gangsterism—once again—erupted in broad daylight in the downtown area, resulting in two deaths, those of Justo Fuentes, vice-president of the Federation of University Students (FEU) and Miguel Siaez, a bus driver. Both were victims of that somber cloak—Mafia-like—that has taken over a large part of our youth."[5] At the scene of the shooting the police arrested Fidel Castro Ruz, a member of the UIR. He was held briefly at police headquarters and then released. In an interview with the press, young Castro said Fuentes had died because "he had refused protection from the UIR."[6] Two weeks later the UIR's Felipe Salazar ("Wichy") was shot to death by men of the MSR. The only witness to the shooting was Fidel Castro, who testified that the MSR was responsible for the assassination.[7]

Earlier in the summer of 1947 Fidel, despite his association with the UIR, had joined an MSR-sponsored group of Dominican exiles, soldiers of fortune, revolutionary idealists and gangsters who planned to invade the Dominican Republic and depose dictator Rafael L. Trujillo (1930-61). The MSR was to supervise the Cubans who enrolled in the expedition, and to that end it appointed a committee which included among others, Manolo Castro (no relation to Fidel) and Carlos Gutiérrez Menoyo.[8] On July 30 the would-be invaders reached Cayo Confites, off the port of Nuevitas, Camagüey province, where they awaited orders to proceed to the Dominican Republic. In

September the Grau administration decided not to support the invasion, and the Cuban navy arrested the expeditionaries. Fidel returned to Havana after a daring escape from a navy frigate.[9]

The rivalry between the MSR and the UIR continued to escalate. In September 1947, shortly after the Confites episode, the two groups fought a bloody battle in what became known as the "massacre of Orfila." Emilio Tró was killed; Policarpo Soler was arrested but escaped and joined Trujillo as one of the dictator's henchmen; and Jesús Diéguez was promoted to the leadership of the UIR.

Still the terrorism continued. On February 22, 1948, Manolo Castro—president of the FEU—was assassinated. He had been elected to the FEU presidency in 1944, running successfully against Fidel's friend, Luis Conte Agüero. Manolo had been active in organizing the Confederation of Cuban Peasants and in promoting various campaigns against dictators such as Trujillo and Spain's Francisco Franco. Rolando Masferrer charged Fidel with the murder, and two days after the killing. Fidel was arrested, though he was later released for lack of evidence. Fidel responded by accusing Masferrer of attempting to take over the MSR's leadership and of slandering him for not supporting Masferrer's aspirations to control the university.[10] Masferrer pledged to kill Fidel at the first opportunity.[11] At this point Fidel decided that it would be a good idea to leave the country for a while until things cooled off.

He found his opportunity in dictator Juan Perón's attempt to organize "anti-imperialist fronts" throughout Latin America. The Latin American Student Association was the *peronista* instrument for mobilizing public opinion against the United States throughout Latin American universities. Perón's delegate. César Tronconi, gained the support of several students in Havana. Together they organized a congress to denounce imperialist activities throughout the continent. It was agreed that the congress would take place in Bogotá, Colombia, to coincide with the Ninth Inter-American Conference. Among the chief Cuban organizers of this congress was Fidel Castro, Enrique Ovares, Alfredo Guevara, Pedro Mirasón, Armando Gali-Menéndez and Rafael del Pino.[12] Fidel arrived in Bogotá on March 31, 1948, accompanied by del Pino, Ovares and Guevara. On April 9, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, leader of the Colombian Liberal Party, was assassinated and the *Bogotazo* erupted. The Cubans sought refuge in the Cuban embassy, and returned to their country on April 13, 1948.[13] Fidel was back in Havana by June 6, 1948, when he was charged, at Havana's Fourth District Criminal Court, with the assassination of Oscar Fernández Caral, a campus police sergeant and member of the MSR. Caral had been instrumental in supplying ammunition to the MSR for the massacre of Orfila, and had been sentenced to death by the UIR. The charges were dropped, however, since there was no evidence that Fidel was the assailant.[14]

Four months after this incident Fidel married Mirta Díaz Balart. Mirta, a philosophy student, bore an only son who was Fidel's name-sake. Gang warfare

began to subside, finally, toward the end of 1948, and the Partido del Pueblo Cubano-Ortodoxo (also known as PPC-O), led by Eduardo R. Chibás, gained strength in Cuban politics. Fidel withdrew from the action groups, and began to dedicate himself to party politics.

Fidel's experiences throughout his years of involvement in acts of violence convinced him that direct action was the shortest way to political solutions. This conviction would keep him one step ahead of the other young leaders who emerged during the insurrection, for he grasped only too well the role of violence in Cuban politics. He also knew that most politicians had had their share of involvement in graft, corruption and murder through the action groups. In the course of the insurrection, former members of action groups were to play important roles in acts of violence against Batista. Fidel's first-hand knowledge of violence and back-room politics helped him establish his important position in the decisive period of the insurrection.

The Road to Action

Several years later Fidel's insurrectionary career swung into high gear. The FEU of Havana and Oriente issued declarations condemning Fulgencio Batista's 1952 coup d'etat. On March 24, 1952, Fidel Castro filed a suit against Batista. Quoting from the Social Defense Code he asked that Batista be punished for violating the constitution and the laws, thereby challenging the judicial system to act. According to Article 147 of the code, anyone who attempted to change the constitution or the form of government through violent means would be imprisoned for six to ten years. Furthermore, Article 148 stated that "anyone who promotes an armed uprising against the constitutional power of the state will be imprisoned for three to ten years."[15] If the insurrection was carried out, the penalty could be 20 years of imprisonment. Other violations of the code would sentence Batista to a total of 100 years of imprisonment. Fidel Castro argued:

> If, in the face of these flagrant crimes and confessions of treachery and sedition, he is not tried and punished, how will this court later try any citizen for sedition or rebelliousness against this unlawful crime, the result of unpunished treason? That would be absurd, inadmissible, monstrous in the light of the most elementary principles of justice.[16]

Similar suits were introduced by Eduardo Suárez Rivas, of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano-Auténtico (also known as PRC-A), and Pelayo Cuervo Navarro, of the PPC-O; in all of them the courts ruled that "revolution is a lawful source." Batista's coup d'etat was interpreted as a de facto, revolutionary overturn of the constitution. Fidel Castro took careful note of this judicial decision.

Many young people were troubled by the coup. Even many who had not been previously involved in politics started to consider opposing Batista. Among the first to agree on the need to fight the regime were Abel Santamaría

Cuadrado and Jesús Montané Oropesa. Santamaría was an accountant for the Pontiac branch in Havana, and Montané was personnel manager for the General Motors Inter-American Corporation of Havana. On May 20, 1952, Santamaría and Montané put out the first edition of a mimeographed paper entitled *Son los mismos* (They are the same). In this task they were helped by Abel's sister, Haydée, Melba Hernández, a lawyer, Raúl Gómez García, a philosophy student, and Elda Pérez among others.[17]

Since all of them belonged to the youth section of the Ortodoxo party it was inevitable that they would come into contact with other Ortodoxos' ideas, like those of Fidel. At the suggestion of the latter, the title *Son los mismos* was changed to *El Acusador.*[18] The second issue of *El Acusador* included two articles: one signed by the poet Raúl Gómez García entitled "The Origin of a Dwarf"—a sarcastic attack on Alberto Salas Amaro, editor of the *Ataja* newspaper and staunch supporter of Fulgencio Batista; the other signed by Alejandro (Fidel) and entitled "Critical Assessment of the PPC."[19] The latter article argued that only two political alternatives remained open: electoral politics or insurrection. Fidel called for a return to constitutional normalcy while offering his pledge to oppose the regime until it gave up power.[20] This article by Fidel was reprinted in the third issue of *El Acusador,* dated August 16, 1952. The issue also included Fidel's "I Accuse" article, and Gómez García mourned the first anniversary of the death of Eduardo R. Chibás in an article, "A Voice."[21] This third issue of *El Acusador* was distributed at Havana's national cemetery around the tomb of Chibás.

The group editing *El Acusador* included Raúl Gómez García, chief editor, Abel Santamaría Cuadrado, assistant editor, and Juan Martínez Tinguao and Jesús Montané as editorial assistants. The chief source of political orientation was Fidel Castro.[22]

Whether out of a sense of duty or feverish enthusiasm this tiny group began to approach other young people who shared similar ideas about the Cuban situation. In this fashion they looked for students associated with the Ortodoxo party at Havana University. Thus, Pedro Miret, majoring in engineering, Lester Rodríguez, a medical student, and Abelardo Crespo, also in the school of engineering, were recruited into the incipient "movement." Despite their efforts, in mid-1952 the common expectation was that the ousted Auténtico party of Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948-52) would take the lead in returning the country to constitutional normalcy. Aureliano Sánchez Arango, for example, gave the impression that he and his secret Triple A organization would soon lead an insurrection against Batista.

Rumors about the Auténticos' activities led Castro to extend his contacts to the nearby province of Pinar del Río, especially to Artemisa, where a number of young Ortodoxos were persuaded to join the movement. Some of the recruits who came over to Fidel Castro shared high hopes about the "Auténtico's famous revolution."[23] It did appear that of all the groups only the Auténticos had the

material resources to equip a force capable of leading a frontal attack against the dictator. Aware of the situation, Fidel began to prepare small commando groups who were expert in handling small weapons as well as accustomed to military discipline.

From August to December 1952, Pedro Miret, Lester Rodríguez, José "Pepe" Suárez and Abelardo Crespo trained young Ortodoxos. Especially important were the Artemiseños, who included, among others, Ramiro Valdés, Ciro Redondo, Julio Díaz and José Suárez Blanco. Target shooting was carried out in the basement of Havana University, the Club de Cazadores del Cerro, and at various farms such as Los Palos, Pijirigua, Capellanía and Porvenir in Havana and Pinar del Río provinces.[24] Target practice at the Club de Cazadores was very expensive, but Castro managed to persuade Oscar Alcalde, owner of Thion Laboratory, to join the movement and help finance some of its costs. Since Alcalde was a public utilities inspector working for Batista's Ministry of Treasury, he was able to secure loans from the Agrícola Industrial Bank and the Nuñez Bank. These funds were used to pay the $30 admission fee to the club as well as to buy shotguns and bullets.[25]

As 1952 came to an end, Castro had over 100 men, most of whom had little knowledge of their exact mission. Castro had overseen the training of these young men every Sunday, and felt optimistic about the future. The would-be insurgents centered their hopes on the aid Fidel was to receive from the Auténticos.[26]

One evening in December 1952, Castro issued orders to his men to meet at several houses in Havana. It was a state of alert, a sort of military mobilization carried out with utmost discipline. At Melba Hernández's home all the men met with a group of Auténticos who reviewed a list of arms which they supposedly would give to Castro's outfit. This meeting raised the expectations of the militants, but as the weeks went by the promise was never fulfilled.[27] It became necessary to change strategy. Castro and Abel Santamaría concluded that the group itself would have to obtain the weapons necessary for an action against Batista. Despite this obvious setback, the group had trained themselves for action, and they were willing to stay on. During the second stage of planning that began after December 1952, the idea of attacking the Moncada military barracks in Oriente province was first discussed.

At about the same time—early 1953—that Castro had prepared his group, another group of enthusiastic young men had gathered around a university professor, Rafael García Bárcena. Bárcena had formed the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) in May 1952 with the idea of taking decisive action to overthrow Batista. The MNR recruited university and high school students in Havana and in Santiago de Cuba as well. Active with the MNR at that time were Armando Hart Dávalos, Joe Westbrook Rosales, Eva Jiménez—the only woman in the group—Faustino Pérez, Fernando Sánchez Amaya, Edgardo Buttari, Jr., Silvino Rodríguez and Julián Fernández, among others.[28]

The MNR planned to assault the military camp of Columbia, to arrest Batista at his quarters, and to call friendly army officers to join the movement to oust the unconstitutional government. The organization rented a house close to Columbia where a "school" was set up. Several evenings before the assigned day of the assault, the students became familiar with the Columbia's gates and the shortest routes to Batista's headquarters. On April 5, 1953, all MNR members were ordered to be at certain locations throughout the capital; the attack would take place that day.

Before the group could even begin operations, Chief of Police Salas Cañizares moved in and arrested Professor Bárcena and a group of 70 youths. All were taken to the army's dreaded bureau of intelligence where, after severe mistreatment, the youngest ones were released in their parents' custody. García Bárcena was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, and the government mocked the assault, calling it "the razor blade coup."[29]

Meanwhile, the Auténticos met at Montreal, Canada, in June 1953 with other opponents of the regime to formulate a strategy for the overthrow of Batista. Led by former president Carlos Prío, the Auténticos favored unity among all groups, with the exception of the Communists, who were not admitted to the discussion. The Montreal Pact, signed on this occasion, declared that Batista must be overthrown but had no concrete suggestions about implementing the objective. The group's statements were criticized in Cuba, particularly by university students who referred to the Auténticos as the "heroes from afar."[30]

The Moncada Barracks

The MNR's frustrated attempt and the evident incapacity of the Auténticos to engage in direct action against the regime seemed to ensure Batista some calm half way through 1953. Yet the emerging rebelliousness of the youth had not been totally appeased. Fidel Castro and his group of men continued their contacts, reaching some youths from Santiago de Cuba. Of these, Renato Guitart would play an important role in the coming assault. Guitart had met Fidel in February 1953 at the time of the death of Rubén Batista, the first student martyr of the insurrection. Guitart had been active in an insurrectionary group named Acción Libertadora (AL) along with Otto Parellada, Frank País and Pepito Tey, among others.[31] He, too, had hoped that the Auténticos would provide weapons and men for some sort of action against Batista.

Since the Auténticos had no arms to give to these young revolutionaries, Fidel and Abel Santamaría decided that their first priority was to get weapons. They purchased, one by one, several dozen shot-guns and .22 caliber semi-automatic rifles at various armories. The armament included one Browning submachine gun, one M-l carbine and several Winchester rifles.[32] On the entire operation they spent $16,480 of which $5,000 went for the purchase of arms and $80 for ammunition. The target was selected by Fidel and Abel

Santamaría; Renato Guitart provided a map of the Moncada barracks. The objective was discussed by Fidel's general staff, which included, besides Fidel and Abel, José Luis Tasende, Guitart, Antonio López Fernández ("Ñico") and Pedro Miret. Castro's entire force consisted of approximately 165 men grouped in squads of seven.[33]

The operation was to unfold with a surprise attack against the barracks at Moncada, Santiago de Cuba.[34] Simultaneously, another group would attack the army post at Bayamo in a diversionary move to relieve pressure on Fidel and his men. Overall, it meant a daring, almost suicidal blitz unless the men could take the camp by surprise. However, Fidel's idea was that a small group of men, ill-armed as they were, could take control of the military camp if they could retain the element of surprise. Once they had established control at Moncada and at Bayamo Fidel hoped the regular troops would join the anti-Batista movement.[35] The arms at Moncada were to be distributed to the people, especially to the students who had been active even before Fidel's group was organized and who would probably join the movement. In this fashion, Batista would be confronted with a fait accompli. Fidel must also have thought that his initiative would place the Auténticos and other groups well behind his, and that a successful attack would greatly enhance his national leadership. Previously, Professor García Bárcena had chosen much the same path to leadership except that Fidel's target was Moncada, not Havana.

The fact that the Moncada garrison was on the opposite end of the island from Batista's quarters spoke well of Castro's strategy for two reasons: first, such a victory would give him control over the entire movement. By being far from Havana, the main center of all kinds of conspiracies and the area of operation for old politicians, Castro need fear no immediate challenge, and those who eventually joined him would have to go to Oriente. Second, Oriente traditionally was the cradle of revolutionary movements in the country, and the attack on Moncada plus Castro's surprise victory would spread throughout Oriente province. Castro's capture of the Moncada might also accelerate a rift within the army, perhaps even producing a coup. Should an immediate coup not take place in the capital, Castro could organize an armed resistance, and then march on the city.

In preparation for the attack, Fidel dispatched Ernesto Tizol to Santiago de Cuba. Tizol's mission was to coordinate efforts with Renato Guitart and rent a farm on the outskirts of the city to serve as their headquarters. The farm chosen was called "Siboney." Arms began to be transported, and Abel Santamaría left Havana in mid-June. On July Melba Hernández arrived at the farm carrying a shipment of army uniforms that had been obtained through an army sergeant, Florentino Fernández.[36]

In Bayamo, Guitart had established contact with a former schoolmate from La Progresiva school, Fernando Fernández, who, ignoring the impending assault, helped Guitart rent a farm on July 14. Guitart made at least six trips

to Bayamo before the attack took place. On Saturday, July 25, he accompanied Fidel on an inspection tour of the city of Bayamo. Twenty-seven members of the movement were ready for the attack on Bayamo, which was to be led by Mario Martínez Arará, "Nico" López and Hugo Camejo among others. They planned to approach the army post, which was guarded by a small detachment of soldiers, from three different sides. The operation was to coincide with Fidel's attack on Moncada.

Also on Saturday, Fidel and Raúl Gómez García gave the final touches to a manifesto they would present to the nation in the event of victory. The first draft had been written two days earlier and differed little from traditional Cuban revolutionary rhetoric. José Martí's centennial was 1953, and the ideas of the apostle of Cuban independence ran throughout the declaration. Fidel not only claimed an ideological continuity with the ideas of Martí but also with those of Céspedes, Agramonte, Maceo, Julio A. Mella, Antonio Guiteras and Eduardo R. Chibás.[37] The step that Castro's forces had taken, said the manifesto, was actually the continuation of the revolutions of 1895 and 1933. After a lengthy summary of the country's political situation, the declaration set forth nine points. The revolution stemmed from the youth and was free of foreign influence, political mediation or personal ambitions. The revolutionaries were not against the men in uniform, only those who had betrayed the constitution and the laws. Cuba's economy would be developed and the exploitation of economic resources carried out by previous governments without benefit to the nation would stop. The declaration further stated the groups' respect for students and workers, Last, in a sweeping statement, it accepted the political platforms not only of Martí's Partido Revolucionario Cubano, but also the programs issued in the thirties by Jóven Cuba (JC). the ABC-Radical and the PPC-O.[38] The 1940 constitution was to be fully reinstated.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, July 26, Fidel briefed his men a final time. The attack would be carried out by three groups, while two other groups would take over the Saturnino Lora Military Hospital and the Palace of Justice. With ten men, Raúl Castro[39] was to take the palace, while Abel Santamaría and 20 men would establish control over the hospital. Accompanying Abel would be Melba Hernández and Haydée Santamaría as assistants to Dr. Mario Muñoz, the group's physician. All were dressed in army uniforms.[40]

Fidel was in charge of a group of 95 men who were to carry out the actual attack on Moncada. Before leaving Siboney he asked for volunteers for the first car which would have the task of taking over camp gate No. 3. Jesús Montané, Carmelo Noa, José Luis Tasende, Renato Guitart, Ramiro Valdés. José Suárez Blanco and Pedro Marrero volunteered for the advance group. Guitart was appointed chief of the operation, and at five o'clock they headed toward the Moncada. As they approached the gate 15 minutes later, the four guards exchanged salutes with what they thought was a patrol of comrades-in-arms. Guitart's squad disarmed the post, and quickly proceeded into the barracks

when the sounds of the alarm were heard. Nearby soldiers opened fire. The other cars arrived just as the shooting started, and Castro's car was fired on by a patrol car. Meanwhile, Montané, Ramiro Valdés and Suárez Blanco entered one of the barracks and exchanged fire with about 50 soldiers. Other attackers became confused and assaulted a group of private officers, homes instead of continuing their initial push toward the arsenal. From the main barracks the troops poured over the camp's assembly grounds. Fidel's support group, some 40 heavily equipped men, lost their way in the unfamiliar Santiago streets, and were unable to join the vanguard in time.[41]

The army, with superior fire power, numerical strength and thorough domination of the terrain, appeared unassailable. Fidel was unable to enter the camp but he managed to send orders from the outside. Realizing that the surprise element had been lost and that the success of the entire operation had depended on it, Fidel called for retreat. At first, the retreat was orderly, with groups of eight and ten men protected by six sharpshooters[42]; but soon everyone began to run for cover. Approximately 87 men, including those at the hospital and the Palace of Justice, had participated.[43]

Montané, Ciro Redondo and Suárez Blanco escaped in a car toward Siboney, where the group had agreed to meet in case of failure. Juan Almeida. Oscar Alcalde, Francisco González. Eduardo Montano. Jaime Costa, Armando Mestre, Israel Tápanes and Reynaldo Benítez (who had been wounded in the leg) also escaped toward the farm.

At the Saturnino Lora Military Hospital, Abel Santamaría was captured by the army and, with Mario Muñoz, was shot to death after savage torture. Raúl Castro was taken prisoner.

In Bayamo the attackers moved in three groups. One stayed at the aqueduct close to the army post, while a second group, led by a dentist, Pedro Aguilera, approached the post from a nearby house.[44] A third group, led by Mario Martínez Arará, moved toward the camp's entrance. Only five soldiers were on duty that morning, but as Aguilera's group moved closer one of the guards spotted them and demanded that they stop and identify themselves. To this the group answered with rounds of fire against the guard; in a matter of seconds machine-gun fire showered the area, causing Aguilera's group to retreat in total disarray.[45]

Army Lieutenant Juan A. Roselló was the chief of the 13th squadron of the rural guards in Bayamo. He led the counterattack. Some of the attackers escaped, but most of them were captured and killed. José Testa Zaragoza was arrested while trying to leave the city in a bus, taken back to the post and immediately assassinated. Others, like Hugo García Camejo, Pedro Vélez and Andrés García, succeeded in reaching the city of Manzanillo. But there they were arrested, and taken to the city's outskirts. With ropes tied around their necks they were dragged along a rugged roadside. Only Andrés García survived when he and the others were left behind by the army as dead. At a

place called Ceja de Limones, four other youths were caught and executed on the spot.

Over half of the group of 27 were shot to death after being taken prisoner. The army sustained one dead and two wounded. The attack on the Bayamo military post had met disaster, as had the attempt at Moncada.

In Santiago de Cuba, the army prepared itself for one of the worst massacres since Batista's coup. Colonel Alberto del Río Chaviano, commander of the city, issued a military communique to calm the citizenry, which was beginning to protest arbitrary arrests. The communique read, in part: "We want the people to understand that this decision of our Armed Forces is the only one that guarantees normalcy to the city. Everyone may continue his everyday activities as the government is the first to offer guarantees for commerce, industry, and work."[46] The colonel praised the people for a "serene and responsible behavior."[47]

At the capital, Batista stated that the attempt was incredible and mad, adding that though his government would respect all rights it would also be "inflexible in applying whatever measures are necessary to guarantee the democratic process of the March 10 revolution, and the security of the nation." Batista claimed that the people, the armed forces and the government were fairly united in "the patriotic purpose of maintaining peace and harmony in the Cuban firmly."[48] General Francisco Tabernilla, chief of the Joint Chiefs General Staff, stated that the army was ready to support any measures which would bring amity among Cubans, leaving the door open for a private initiative to convince the fugitives of the Moncada assault to surrender. Monsignor Enrique Pérez Serantes, archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, offered to help bring the fugitives to the authorities. The government accepted. It was the first time that a high prelate of the Catholic church had mediated in the country's political violence since the coup.

"The revolutionaries must not fear," Monsignor Serantes said. "Let me know where you are, and I shall come there to take you to the authorities. Your life is guaranteed."[49] Radio commentators, television and press reporters echoed the monsignor's words throughout the nation.

The Capture of Fidel Castro

Fidel returned to Siboney, where about 38 survivors discussed what to do next. Fidel addressed the group. As one of the survivors, Severino Rosell, recalled the scene, "The leader told us anyone who wanted to could follow him because he was taking to the mountains. There was a discussion over our possibilities—nil at the time—and then the majority decided to disperse."[50] According to Fidel, "Our plans were to follow up the struggle in the mountains in case the attack met failure. I managed to gather a third of our forces but many were already disheartened. Around 20 decided to come along."[51] Only 18 actually accompanied Fidel to the mountain of La Gran Piedra.

The group marched across the "Arroyo Casabe" farm to Granjita hill, where Fidel proposed to stop and wait for the army so that they could fight. The others persuaded him to continue marching, and soon they came to the house of a very old Negro woman, Leocadia García Garzón ("Chicha"). The old woman identified herself to Fidel by showing him an old document signed by the independence hero, General Antonio Maceo, which certified that she had been a guide for the Cuban Army of Liberation in the War of 1895. She told the group the route to La Gran Piedra mountain, and Fidel's men continued their march. They were joined by the old woman's grandson, who led them across the Carpintero river (where they stopped to rest). The peasants of the area received the group well, and the survivors were given food when they reached the hut of a Negro peasant, Pedro Despaigne. At the house of another peasant, Agustín Heredia, Fidel listened to Batista's July 27 speech in which the latter announced that 32 of the attackers had died. For some of the peasants, the group's arrival brought their first knowledge of the attack. Fidel Castro was interested in finding out the strength of the Ortodoxo party in that area.[52]

The last peasant who helped the fugitives was Juan Leizán who gave food to the whole group, and allowed Fidel, Oscar Alcalde and Suárez Blanco to use the small hut at the "Cilindro" farm. On the morning of August 1 the army surrounded the shack. A 17-man army patrol led by Lieutenant Pedro Manuel Sarría captured Fidel, Alcalde and Suárez Blanco as they were lying on the floor of Leizán's hut. As the soldiers were ready to start firing on the three men, Lieutenant Sarría order a halt, saying "one does not kill ideas." The officer had issued this reprieve because he had recognized Fidel from Havana University where, as a young officer, he had studied law at night.[53] Scattered shooting took place not too far away where other fugitives wandered about. Two hours later, the escapees surrendered to the army and joined Fidel, Suárez Blanco, Alcalde, Juan Almeida, Jesús Montané, Francisco González, Armando Mestre and others. Lieutenant Sarría led the group to Manuel Leizán's farm. Leizán drove the prisoners to Santiago in his own truck. On the way Monsignor Serantes caught up with and began to follow the group.[54] However, before reaching Santiago a troop detachment commanded by Major Andrés R. Chaumont Altazurra stopped the caravan. Major Chaumont and Lieutenant Sarría engaged in a heated argument, with Sarría refusing to hand the prisoners over. Monsignor Serantes' presence probably kept Major Chaumont from taking any drastic action. As it was Sarría admitted that Fidel was among the prisoners, and said that they would all be delivered to the appropriate authorities. Taking various detours, Lieutenant Sarría took the prisoners to the Santiago de Cuba prison rather than army headquarters in Moncada where they would have been assassinated at once. When the lieutenant brought his captives and the monsignor to the prison, he was confronted by Colonel Río Chaviano, who could hardly hide his irritation that Sarría had not done away

with Castro.[55] Once they had been informed of the charges against them the prisoners were placed at the disposal of the courts.

Public Opinion and the Trial

The government's version of the events was presented in a report issued by Colonel Alberto del Río Chaviano:

> Elements led by Carlos Prío Socarrás, Aureliano Sánchez Arango, Eufemio Fernández, and someone named Fidel Castro—who travels frequently to Havana and Santiago—Juan Marinello, Blas Roca, Emilio Ochoa and other leaders of the Communist, Auténtico and Ortodoxo parties, me; in this city to take the Moncada barracks by assault.

The attack, the colonel claimed, had been carried out without any scruples or regard for customs or laws of war and "lacking pity or respect for the sick at the hospital." The official report was intended to link Fidel Castro's group with the Auténtico meeting at Montreal, Canada. "As has been fully demonstrated," the report argued, "by the war materiel captured (which is at the disposal of the court), almost all the arms came from Montreal, Canada, as the seals of the boxes containing ammunition used in the attack indicate."[56]

The government's charges that former president Prío had been involved in the planning of the attack, and that the attack resulted from the Montreal meeting were completely false. As for the involvement of the Communist party, as alleged by the government, nothing was farther from the truth.[57] But Batista was at that time conducting a campaign against Prío's activities in Miami, Florida, and the attack lent itself to the perfect official charge against the Auténticos.

The Cuban people found it quite difficult to believe that a group of young people could plan and carry out such an attack without having the support of the politicians—whether the Auténticos or the Ortodoxos. Of more interest in the ensuing national debate over the significance of Moncada was the personality of the man whom the government report vaguely referred to as "someone named Fidel Castro."

Public interest steadily increased throughout the month of August, and as the day for the trial neared, students demonstrated to demand justice for the attackers, proclaiming that they were defending the constitution and the laws. Most politicos criticized the episode as an irresponsible act led by dreamers who in the end would be used by political opportunists. Those in favor of a solution through elections—the "electoralists"—maintained that the country's crisis could not be solved through violence, but through a compromise with those government officials who leaned toward a peaceful return to democratic government. A "civic revolution" was foreseen by some electoralists, while Dr. Grau San Martín enigmatically declared that very serious events were developing rapidly for the nation's future.

In the streets, cafes and parks the people argued about Castro's strategy, either questioning or admiring his manliness and courage. What seemed to have impressed the people most was Fidel's decision to take direct action. Suggestions that he was involved with the Auténticos were soon discounted, for most people fell that the old politicians would never risk their well-being on such an action.

The Communists promptly called Castro's attack a "bourgeois putsch" and publicly stated their adherence to a conciliatory course instead of the one followed by the youth of the Centennial.[58] In an attempt to analyze the meaning of the attack, the Communists suggested that those who fought Batista came from "different factions and of these the former Partido del Pueblo Cubano-Ortodoxo founded by Chibás is split," and their leaders were led by the hope of "achieving Batista's defeat through a combination of every type of minority action, counter coups d'etat, putsch, terrorism, etc., with the hope of obtaining the support of Washington." The common denominator of those groups, the Communists claimed, was "sabotage, unity and popular action." It was under those conditions that the attack on Moncada took place. A "little group of young men, well intentioned but influenced by the putschist line, made a frustrated assault against the military barracks in Santiago de Cuba, hoping to take possession of this important position and therefrom launch an attack against Camp Columbia in Havana."[59] For the Communists, such insurrectionary action was "petit bourgeois adventurism." The Communists thought it neither expedient, desirable nor necessary that they be associated with a group which seemingly had embraced a philosophy of violence. Only anti-Communist fanatics took at face value Batista's implication that the Communists were involved in the attack. Cuban Communists were widely considered staunch *batistianos*, and very few persons could imagine Juan Marinello, Blas Roca, Fabio Grobart or other aging theoreticians taking part in a real insurrection. Like their comrades in Latin America, Cuban Communists were as comfortably bourgeois as the members of the oligarchy with whom they were always on the best of terms.

Despite the variety of opinions concerning the attack, there was common agreement that it had inaugurated a new stage in the country's politics, a period of violence in which the country's youth would become deeply involved.

The trial had begun on September 21 and received full press coverage. Presiding were Justices Adolfo Nieto Piñeiro, Juan Francisco Mejías and Ricardo Díaz Oliveira. During the first hearing, Castro and his followers were informed of the charges against them. At this point, Fidel engaged in a heated argument with Attorney General Francisco Mendieta. When the argument threatened to get out of hand, the court ordered a postponement.

Confronted with daily street demonstrations conducted by the students, Batista declared a few days after the trial began that the government was ready to quell any disorders with a strong hand in order to maintain law and order.[60]

On September 24 the trial resumed, but when Fidel was called to the stand, Colonel Río Chaviano stepped forward to tell the court that he did not have enough soldiers to maintain the necessary order in the courtroom, and the court again postponed the proceedings for 24 hours. This second postponement gave way to the rumor that the government was trying to prevent Fidel from making a public statement. A more serious rumor was that Castro was going to be murdered, either in prison or while the authorities were taking him to the courtroom. Thus, when Fidel was called to the stand the following day, and the prison authorities said he was sick and could not attend the trial, the audience reacted with cries and shouts. With the aid of one of the prison guards, Fidel had managed to slip a brief letter to Melba Hernández, and amidst the confusion prevailing in the court, she approached the bench asking the judges to allow her to read the letter to the tribunal and the public as well.

The letter stated that there were very important matters that required immediate attention by the court. These were: that Fidel had been prevented from appearing before the court because of the government's fear of what he might say concerning the death of many of his comrades, that he had been kept incommunicado for 57 days, and that there were plans to eliminate him by poisoning or "other means." Fidel requested the court to order his "immediate physical examination by a competent and prestigious physician, such as the Dean of the School of Medicine of the University of Oriente." He also requested the court to appoint a member of the tribunal to accompany the prisoners when they were taken to and from the court.

Aware of the publicity such letter would receive, Fidel challenged the court to discharge its duties according to law. The significance of the trial, Castro argued, imposed an exceptional obligation on the court. If the trial continued to be conducted under the conditions Castro had unveiled, it would be nothing but a "ridiculous farce, an immorality which will be completely repudiated by the nation." "All of Cuba has its eyes set on this trial," he said. "I do hope this court will uphold with dignity its privileged hierarchy and honor which is at this moment the honor of the judiciary power before the history of Cuba."

Announcing that he would act as his own defense lawyer, Fidel ended his letter with a dramatic quotation from José Martí that elicited shouts from the audience, and the applause of the Moncada veterans: "As to myself, if I have to give up my rights or my honor to remain alive, I prefer to die a thousand times. A just principle from the depths of a cave is stronger than an army."[61]

The trial thereafter was carried out in three stages. The first part of the proceedings was held at the regular court, the second in the Spanish Clinic, and the last part behind closed doors at the Civic Hospital. Fidel Castro was called to the stand only during the last stage of the trial.

Fidel Castro's Defense

On October 16, 1953, Castro appeared before the tribunal at the Civic Hospital, in a small room which was surrounded by troops. There he presented his plea as the trial came to an end. Today Castro's defense is known as "History Will Absolve Me," but the published version is not the exact plea made on that day. Fidel revised the original speech while he was in prison, and eventually covered a number of subjects, ranging from a description of the attack to reflections on himself, criticisms of Batista and a detailed discussion of his revolutionary program. The revised version probably was completed during the early part of 1954. In a letter addressed to Melba Hernández, dated April 17, 1954, Castro mentioned the revised edition, which he suggested be published in the form of a pamphlet.[62] Castro's wife, Mirta Díaz Balart, took the manuscript to Havana, where after some editing, it was published by the underground press.[63] The pamphlet had a limited distribution at the time, and its contents were largely unknown until 1959.

Castro's arguments before the court included his interpretation of the attack, charges of horrible crimes committed by the army against defenseless prisoners, and harsh attacks against the unconstitutionality of Batista's de facto regime. Five revolutionary laws constituted the crux of Castro's political and economic plans. The first law, "would return power to the people and proclaim the 1940 Constitution as the supreme law of the land until such time as the people should decide to modify or change it." To implement the constitution, "the revolutionary movement . . . the only source of legitimate power, would assume all the authority inherent to it except that of modifying the constitution itself: in other words, it would assume the legislative, executive and judicial powers." The second law "would grant property, not mortgageable and non-transferable to all planters, sub-planters, renters, sharecroppers, and squatters holding plots of five or less *caballerías* of land [one *caballería* is about 33.16 acres]: the state would indemnify former owners on the basis of the average income they would have received for these plots over a period of ten years."

The third law would grant workers and employees the right to share 30 percent of the profits of large industries including the sugar mills. The fourth would allow all planters "the right to share 50 percent of the sugar production and be allotted a minimum grinding quota of 500 tons of cane to all small planters who have been growing sugar cane for three or more years." The fifth law "would order the confiscation of all holdings and ill-acquired profits of those who committed frauds during previous administrations, as well as the holdings and ill-acquired profits of all their heirs."

Fidel described his view of Cuba's foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere as one that would align with the democratic governments of the continent, while extending generous asylum to all persecuted people. Cuba "should become the bulwark of freedom, and not a shameful link in the chain of despotism."[64] Six problems demanding the immediate attention of