

### Sincerity and the value of being humble

Any autobiographically tinted writing forces me to clear up any doubts about decisions I made more than half a century ago. I am talking about subtle details, since the essential points are never forgotten. This is the case of what I did in 1948, sixty years ago.

I remember it as if it were yesterday when I decided to incorporate myself to the expedition to liberate the Dominican people from the Trujillo tyranny. Also, each of the most transcendental events of that period remained in my mind; several dozens of episodes, unforgettable for me and which from time to time I have been bringing up. Many of them are around in written form.

When I decide to travel to Colombia with the idea of promoting the creation of the Federation of Latin American Students, I could not say today, with all certainty, that among the aims there was also the concrete idea of impeding the founding of the Organization of American States, OAS, being promoted by the United States; this is a precocious vision which I am not sure I had yet reached.

The exceptional historian and master of detail, Arturo Alape, who interviewed me 33 years after the events, reproduces some of my answers where I affirm that this was part of my intent in my trip to Colombia in 1948.

Germán Sánchez, in his book Transparency of Emanuel, quotes verbatim a paragraph from the Alape interview: "During those days, confronted by the OAS meeting of 1948 which had been instigated by the U.S. to consolidate its system of control here in Latin America, I came up with the idea so that, at the same time as the OAS meeting and in the same location, we would have a meeting of Latin American students backing these anti-imperialist principles and defending the points I had already expressed".

In an edition of that very interview, published in Cuba by the Abril Publishing House recently, the paragraph appears intact. Some one reminded me that in the book One Hundred Hours with Fidel, I myself had cast some doubt upon whether those had been the purposes guiding my behavior. It is obvious that the expression had not been clear when I used the phrase "confronted by the OAS meeting".

As a sole resource to dissipate the doubt, I have attempted to reconstruct the aims moving me at that time and up to which point the political evolution of someone was reaching, someone who, just two and a half years earlier, was finishing his twelfth grade education in schools run by priests. I was a rebellious person whose energies had been channeled into playing sports, exploring, climbing mountains and examining the pertinent school subjects with as much knowledge as time would permit, simply as a matter of honor.

Something I was quite aware of during my school years were the news printed daily about battles, from the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 --I had not yet reached my 10th birthday-- until August 1945 --I was about to turn 19-- when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as I related at one point .

From a very young age I suffered the injustices and prejudices of the society in which I was living.

When I left for Colombia, I was quite radicalized, but at 21 years of age I was not yet a Marxist-Leninist. I was active in the fight against the Trujillo tyranny and others like that, for the independence of Puerto Rico, the return of the Canal to Panama, the restitution of the Falkland Islands to the Argentine Republic, the end of colonialism in the Caribbean and the independence of islands and territories

occupied by England, France and Holland in our hemisphere.

In those years, in Venezuela, the homeland of Bolívar, a revolution led by Democratic Action took place. Rómulo Betancourt, inspired by radical leftist ideas, pretended to be a revolutionary leader. He led the country between October 1945 and February 1948. Rómulo Gallegos, the great writer, followed him, having been elected President in the first elections taking place after the military movement of 1945. I met with him that same year when I visited Caracas.

In Panama, students had just been brutally suppressed for demanding the return of the Canal; one of them had been wounded in the spinal column by a bullet and was unable to move his legs.

In Colombia, the university was seething with the popular pro-Gaitán mobilization.

My contacts with students from these three countries had been fruitful: they agreed with the Congress and with the idea of creating the Federation of Latin American Students. In Argentina, the Peronists were also supporting us.

The Colombian university students put me in contact with Gaitán. Thus I had the honor of meeting and talking with him. He was the undeniable leader of the humble sectors of the Liberal Party and of the progressive forces in Colombia. He promised us that he would inaugurate our Congress. For us, this was great encouragement.

In that sister country, a meeting of representatives from the governments of Latin America was taking place. The Secretary of State, General Marshall, was there on behalf of the President of the United States Harry S. Truman who, behind the backs of the Soviets, their ally in World War II who had lost millions of soldiers, had dropped atomic bombs on two great civilian communities in Japan. The main purpose of the United States in the Bogotá meeting was to create the OAS, which ended up producing such bitter results for our peoples.

I ask myself whether I had advanced in my ideological development to such a point as to propose to myself the bold idea of obstructing the creation of that supra-national institution. In any case, I was against the tyrannies which were represented there, the occupation of Puerto Rico and Panama by the United States, but as yet I did not possess a clear idea about the system of imperial domination.

Something that amazed me was reading, in the Colombian press, the news about the massacres that were taking place in the countryside under the conservative government of Ospina Pérez. There would usually be information about dozens of peasants being murdered during those days. It was a while since something similar had occurred in Cuba.

Things appeared to be so normal that in the theatre where they were holding an official gala and where Marshall and the other representatives from the countries meeting in Bogotá were present, I made the mistake of dropping from the top floor some leaflets outlining our program. This resulted in my being arrested, and two hours later I was released. It seemed that it was a perfect democracy there.

To get to know Gaitán and his speeches, such as his Prayer for Peace, as well as his eloquent, impressive and well founded defense of Lieutenant Cortés –which I heard from the outside because there was no room inside– was something unexpected. As for me, I had just barely finished two years at the Faculty of Law.

Our second meeting with Gaitán and other university representatives was set for April 9 at 2:00 in the afternoon. I waited for the time of the meeting with a Cuban friend who accompanied me, walking up and down the avenue close to the little hotel where we were staying and to Gaitán's office, when some fanatic or crazy man, no doubt instigated, shot the Colombian leader; the assailant was ripped apart by the people.

At that moment, the unimaginable experience I lived through in Colombia began. I was a voluntary combatant with that brave people. I supported Gaitán and his progressive movement, just as Colombian citizens supported our mambises (patriotic fighters) in our struggle for independence.

When Arturo Alape traveled to Cuba years after the triumph of the Revolution, in 1981, Gabriel García Márquez arranged a meeting with me; it began at dawn, at Antonio Núñez Jiménez' home. Alape came with a tape recorder and interrogated me for hours about the events in Bogotá in the month of April in 1948. Núñez Jiménez was recording on another one.

I had a lot of fresh memories of the events I could not forget; for his part, the historian knew everything that had happened on the Colombian side, many details which I naturally didn't know about and this helped me to understand the meaning of each of the episodes I lived through. Without him, maybe I would never have known about them. However, he was still lacking one task: to transcribe everything on tape with his people; the other recording was transcribed in the Palacio de la Revolución. I recall checking one of them. For this work, dialogues are more difficult than speeches, because often the voices overlap. I found mutilated words and changed phrases. I took the time of checking and correcting them. There were more than four hours of interview. Not many can imagine the kind of work involved in this.

I think that the mixture of historical events before and after the triumph of the Revolution resulted in a probable state of confusion in my mind. That's what I am thinking and, in the case of any doubt, the most honorable thing is to explain it.

If in three years my political ideas had radicalized before my visit to Colombia, in the short period between April 9, 1948 and July 26, 1953 when we attacked the Moncada Barracks regiment -now almost exactly 55 years ago- the passage was enormous. I had been ideologically transformed into a true leftist radical, which inspired the perseverance, the tenacity and also the astuteness with which I dedicated myself to revolutionary action.

Subsequently, the struggle in the Sierra Maestra followed, lasting 25 months, and the first victorious combat with only 18 weapons, after our small troop of 82 men was almost wiped out on December 5, 1956.

In the files of the International Red Cross there are records of hundreds of prisoners we returned after the last enemy offensive, in the summer of 1958. In December of that year, there wasn't enough time to call in the International Red Cross in order to hand over prisoners. With the promise of not fighting, the soldiers in the units surrendering handed over their weapons and remained mobilized and unarmed, while the officers kept their rank and small fire-arms, awaiting the end of the war.

Now that all of that is in the distant past, nobody can imagine the value of a work such as that of Arturo Alape; he wrote an excellent book about the phase of revolutionary struggle in Colombia. It is my intention to write about this several reflections, from a theoretical angle and with the greatest respect, in light of current circumstances in our hemisphere and the world.

From all of this, the true revolutionary can draw a permanent lesson: sincerity and the value of being humble.

**Fidel Castro Ruz**

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## **Sincerity and the value of being humble**

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