

"Why we fight"

by FIDEL CASTRO



AS THIS IS WRITTEN, our armed campaign on Cuban soil against Cuba's dictatorial regime is entering its second year.

Though it has been given many meanings and many interpretations, it is essentially a political struggle. In this struggle, we have sustained few reverses and a good many victories, while dictator Batista can point to a single successful achievement: he has effectively muzzled all public communications in our country, silenced TV, radio and the press, and so intimidated our news publishers that not a single Cuban reporter has ever been assigned to *our* side of what is, in effect, a spreading civil war.

One of the unexpected results of this iron censorship, augmented by a military blockade around the combat zone, has been that our program—the aims, plans and aspirations of the 26th of July Movement—has never been published or explained adequately. In obtaining and publishing this exclusive article—the only first-person story written by me since we landed in Cuba on

OldMagazineArticles.com



December 2, 1956—CORONET Magazine has given us the opportunity to state our aims and to correct the many errors and distortions circulating about our revolutionary struggle.

Though dictatorship, ignorance, military rule and police oppression have spawned a great many evils among our people, all these evils have a common root: the lack of liberty. The single word most expressive of our aim and spirit is simply—freedom. First of all and most of all, we are fighting to do away with dictatorship in Cuba and to establish the foundations of genuine representative government.

To attain this, we intend to eject from office Fulgencio Batista and all his cabinet officers; to place them under arrest and impeach them before special revolutionary tribunals. To replace the unconstitutional Batista regime, we will aid in setting up a provisional government to be nominated by a special convention made up of the delegates of our various civic organizations: Lions, Rotarians, professional bodies such as the physicians' or engineers' guilds, religious associations, and so forth. This will be a break with established procedure, but we feel certain that it will prove workable. Once appointed, the provisional government's chief task will be to prepare and conduct truly honest general elections within twelve months.

The question has presented itself whether I aspire to the presidential office of this provisional government or the elected government which will succeed it. The truth is that, quite apart from my personal reluctance to enter the presidential competition so soon, our Constitution, as it now stands, would prohibit it. Under its age requirement clause, I am, at 31, far too young to be eligible for the presidency, and will remain so for another ten years.

We do have, however, a number of program points which might serve as a basis for action by the provisional government. They are the following:

(1) Immediate freedom for all political prisoners, civil as well as military. Although the outside world knows little about it, Batista has imprisoned dozens of officers and hundreds of enlisted men from his own armed forces who have shown revulsion or resistance to his bloody suppression of

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political discontent.

(2) Full and untrammelled freedom of public information for all communication media—broadcasting, TV, the daily and periodical press. Arbitrary censorship and systematic corruption of journalists has long been one of the festering sores of our nation.

(3) We want to re-establish for all citizens the personal and political rights set forth in our much-ignored Constitution.

(4) We want to wipe out corruption in Cuban public life. Those who have grown accustomed over the years to dealing with venal policemen, thieving tax collectors, rapacious army bosses here in Cuba may think this an optimistic resolution. But we intend to attack this problem at its very roots, by creating a career civil service beyond the reach of politics and nepotism and by making sure that our career functionaries get paid enough to be able to live without having to accept bribes.

(5) We want to sponsor an intensive campaign against illiteracy. Though no one knows the exact number of our illiterates, they run into the hundreds of thousands, perhaps even up to a million. Our farm children get little schooling at best; many of them get none at all. Hundreds of thousands of small farmers feed their families on roots and rice, simply because no one has ever taught them how to grow tomatoes, lettuce or corn. No one has ever shown them how to utilize water. No one has ever told them how to choose a wholesome diet or how to protect their health.

(6) We are in favor of land reform bills adjusting the uncertain owner-tenant relations that are a peculiar blight of

rural Cuba. Hundreds of thousands of small farmers occupy parcels which they do not own under the law. Thousands of absentee owners claim title to properties they've hardly ever seen. The titles, in fact, have been seen by no one and it is often impossible to establish who actually owns a particular property. We feel that in settling the question of legal ownership, preferential treatment should be given to those who actually occupy and cultivate the land. We will support no land reform bill, however, which does not provide for the just compensation of expropriated owners.

(7) Finally, we support speedy industrialization of our national economy and the raising of employment levels.

Apart from political misconceptions about my own ambitions and those of our movement—we have been often accused of plotting to replace military dictatorship with revolutionary dictatorship—nothing has been so frequently misunderstood as our economic program. Various influential U.S. publications have identified me as a tool of big business, as a dangerous radical, and as a narrow reactionary manipulated by the clergy. U.S. companies with business interests in Cuba have been repeatedly warned that I have secret plans in my pocket for seizing all foreign holdings.

Let me say for the record that we have no plans for the expropriation or nationalization of foreign investments here. True, the extension of government ownership to certain public utilities—some of them, such as the power companies, U.S.-owned—was a point of our earliest programs; but we have currently suspended all planning on this matter. I personally have come to feel that nationalization is, at best, a

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cumbersome instrument. It does not seem to make the state any stronger, yet it enfeebles private enterprise. Even more importantly, any attempt at wholesale nationalization would obviously hamper the principal point of our economic platform—industrialization at the fastest possible rate. For this purpose, foreign investments will always be welcome and secure here.

Industrialization is at the heart of our economic progress. Something must be done about the staggering mass of over one million unemployed who cannot find jobs during eight months out of twelve. They can hope to work only during the four months of the cane harvest. A million unemployed in a nation of six million bespeaks a terrible economic sickness which must be cured without delay, lest it fester and become a breeding ground for Communism.

Fortunately, improvement is by no means as difficult as Cuba's present rulers would lead us to believe. Our country is rich in natural resources. What we need is an adequate canning industry to utilize our superb fruit crops; expanded industrial facilities for the processing of sugar and its important by-products; expanded consumer industries for the production of light metal, leather, paper and textile goods which would go far towards improving our trade balance; and the beginnings of a long-range cargo fleet.

The state would not need to resort to expropriation to take a guiding part in such economic developments. By reforming its tax collection system which now consists of paying off the revenue collector instead of paying the state, it could increase its budget many times and turn its attention to the

sorely needed extension of our road network.

And with rising living standards and growing confidence in government will come rapid progress toward political stability under a representative, truly democratic government. That, ultimately, is what we are fighting for.

As long as we are forced to fight, however, our constructive projects must wait. Our immediate task is something entirely different: it is the burning of Cuba's entire sugar cane crop. It was a terrible decision, and now that we are about to carry it out, it is a terrible job. Sugar cane is Cuba's principal source of revenue; it contributes about one-third of the total national income and employs two-fifths of the labor force. Half of our farm income is dependent on sugar. Yet it is the very importance of the cane crop that compels us to destroy it.

If the cane goes up in flames, the army will grind to a standstill; the police will have to disband, for none of them will get paid; and the Batista regime will have to capitulate. What's more, we will gain this decisive victory with comparatively little bloodshed by expending this year's crop.

I well know the heavy personal losses involved. My family has sizable cane holdings here in Oriente, and my instructions to our clandestine action groups state clearly that our crop must be the first one to burn, as an example to the rest of the nation. Only one thing can save the cane, and that is Batista's surrender.

But even if the crop will have to burn down to the last single cane, the flames will set fire to the dictatorship which weighs so heavily on us now. Once the tyranny has gone up in smoke, we will see the way to a decent, democratic future.