

SOCIALISM  
or  
DEATH

FIDEL  
CASTRO



Speech given by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba and President of the Council of State and of the Council of Ministers, at the memorial ceremony held at El Cacahual on December 7, 1989, "Year 31 of the Revolution," for the Cuban internationalists who fell while carrying out honorable military and civilian missions.

Comrade President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos and Other Guests,

Relatives of our Fallen Comrades,  
Members of the Armed Services,  
Fellow Countrymen:

December 7, the date on which Antonio Maceo, the most illustrious of all our soldiers, and his young aide-de-camp were killed, has always been very meaningful for all Cubans. Their remains lie here, in this sacred site of their homeland.

By choosing this day for laying to rest the remains of our heroic internationalist fighters who have died in different parts of the world — mainly in Africa, the land of birth of Maceo's ancestors and many of our forebears — we make it a day for honoring all Cubans who gave their lives while defending their country and all mankind. Thus, patriotism and internationalism — two of man's most treasured values — will be joined forever in Cuba's history.

Perhaps, some day, a monument will be erected not far from this site to honor them.

The remains of all internationalists who died while carrying out their missions are being laid to rest in their hometowns all over Cuba right now.

The imperialists thought we would conceal the number of our men killed in Angola during that complex, 14-year-long mission — as if it were a dishonor or a discredit for the Revolution. For a long time they dreamed that the blood shed had been to no purpose, as if those who died for a just cause had died in vain.

Even if victory were the ordinary yardstick to measure the value of men's sacrifices in their legitimate struggles, they also returned victorious.

The Spartans used to tell their fighters to return with their shields or on them. Our troops are returning with their shields.

Still, it is not my intention, on this solemn occasion, to boast of our achievements or to humiliate anyone — not even those who were our adversaries. Our country sought neither glory nor military prestige. We always applied the principle of achieving our goals with the lowest possible number of casualties. To do this, we had to be strong, unemotional and always willing to do our utmost.

All of our soldiers knew that the whole country supported them and that all of us were concerned about their health and safety.

When political and diplomatic efforts became feasible for attaining the final goals, we did not hesitate to use political and diplomatic channels, and, while we always employed the necessary firmness, at no time during the negotiation process were we arrogant, overbearing or boastful. We were flexible whenever flexibility was advisable and fair.

The final stage of the war in Angola was the most difficult. It demanded all of our country's determination, tenacity and fighting spirit in support of our Angolan brothers.

In fulfilling this duty of solidarity, not only to Angola but also to our own troops fighting under difficult conditions there, the Revolution did not hesitate in risking everything. When the imperialist threats against our own country became very serious, we did not hesitate in sending a large part of our most modern and sophisticated military equipment to the Southern Front of the People's Republic of Angola. Over 50,000 Cuban troops were in that sister nation — a truly impressive figure, in view of the distance and our country's size and resources. It was a veritable feat by our Revolutionary Armed Forces and our people. Such chapters of altruism and international solidarity are very infrequent.

Therefore, we greatly appreciate the fact that Jose Eduardo Dos Santos is attending this ceremony. It was an entirely spontaneous gesture "I want to be with you on this occasion," he said. Also spontaneously, as soon as they learned of this ceremony, only a few days ago, the leaders of Ethiopia, SWAPO and other countries and revolutionary organizations stated that they wanted to send representatives to be here with us today when we laid to rest all of our internationalists who died in Africa and in other lands.

There are historic events that nothing and no one can obliterate. There are revolutionary examples that the best men and women of future generations, both within and outside our country, will always remember. This is one of them, yet we should not be the ones to judge it history will do so.

We will never forget that the soldiers of the Angolan Armed Forces were our comrades in arms. Tens of thousands of the best sons and daughters of that nation lost their lives in the struggle. Our unity and close cooperation made victory possible.

We also had the honor of fighting alongside the courageous sons and daughters of Namibia, the patriots of Guinea Bissau and the unmatched Ethiopian soldiers. Years earlier, in the difficult period immediately following Algeria's independence, our internationalist fighters were at her side — as, later, they helped defend Syria, another sister Arab nation that was a victim of foreign aggression and requested our cooperation.

Every legitimate African cause received our people's support. Che Guevara and a large group of Cuban revolutionaries fought against white mercenaries in the eastern part of what is now Zaire, and doctors and teachers are working in the Saharawi Republic now, helping its people, who are fighting for their freedom.

All of these countries were then or are now independent, and those that have not yet won their independence will do so, sooner or later.

In just a few years, our fighters wrote an outstanding chapter of solidarity of which our people can be proud. Men from other countries also fought at our side in our own struggles for

independence. Maximo Gomez, who was born in the Dominican Republic, was the most outstanding of all and due to his extraordinary merits, became the chief of our Liberation Army. In the years prior to our Revolution, a thousand Cubans organized by the first Communist Party fought in Spain to defend the Republic. They wrote memorable chapters of heroism which Pablo de la Torriente Brau recorded for history until death put an early end to the life of that brilliant revolutionary journalist.

That was how our gallant internationalist spirit was forged. It reached its zenith with the Socialist Revolution.

Wherever Cuban internationalists have gone, they have set examples of respect for the dignity and sovereignty of those countries. The trust that those peoples have placed in them is the result of their irreproachable behavior. Their exemplary selflessness and altruism is remembered everywhere.

A prominent African statesman once said in a meeting of leaders of the region: "Cuban fighters are ready to give their lives for the liberation of our countries. The only things they will take back with them, in exchange for that assistance to our freedom and our peoples' progress are the bodies of those who died fighting for freedom." That continent, which experienced centuries of exploitation and plunder, has recognized the full extent of the unselfish nature of our internationalist contribution.

Now, our battle-seasoned troops are returning victoriously. The joyful, happy, proud faces of mothers, wives, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters — of all our people — welcome them with affection and love. Peace has been achieved with honor, and their sacrifices and efforts have been amply rewarded. Our sleep is no longer disturbed by constant concern over the fate of our troops fighting thousands of kilometers away from their land.

The enemy thought that our troops' return would cause social problems, since it would be impossible to provide jobs for them all. Most of those men — aside from those who have made the military career — had jobs here in Cuba and will go back to their old jobs or be given better ones. None of them has been

forgotten. Many of them already knew where they would be working even before returning home.

Of all the young men in military service who shortly after being graduated from high school, volunteered for the honor of going to Angola on an internationalist mission, none have had to wait before going back to school or joining the ranks of our working people.

Our country is working hard, implementing ambitious socioeconomic development programs. The irrational laws of capitalism do not guide our actions, and every man and woman in our country has a place in education, production or services.

No close relatives of those who died while fulfilling their missions or who suffered serious injuries have been forgotten. They have received, are receiving and will continue to receive all the care and consideration due them for the sacrifices made by their loved ones and for their own devoted, selfless, generous, even heroic behavior.

The hundreds of thousands of Cubans who carried out military or civilian internationalist missions have earned the respect of present and future generations. They have honorably upheld our people's glorious fighting and internationalist traditions.

On their return, they have found their country engaged in a tremendous struggle for development while continuing to confront the criminal imperialist blockade with exemplary dignity. This is in addition to the current crisis in the socialist camp, from which we can only expect negative economic consequences for our country.

People in most of those countries aren't talking about the anti-imperialist struggle or the principles of internationalism. Those words aren't even mentioned in their press. Such concepts have been virtually removed from their political dictionaries. Meanwhile, capitalist values are gaining unheard-of strength in those societies.

Capitalism means unequal terms of trade with the peoples of the Third World, the exacerbation of individual selfishness and national chauvinism, the reign of irrationality and chaos in

investment and production, the ruthless sacrifice of the peoples on behalf of blind economic laws, the survival of the fittest, the exploitation of man by man, a situation of everybody for himself. In the social sphere, capitalism implies many more things: prostitution; drugs; gambling; begging; unemployment; abysmal inequalities among citizens; the depletion of natural resources; the poisoning of the air, seas, rivers and forests; and especially the plundering of the underdeveloped nations by the industrialized capitalist countries. In the past, it meant colonialism; now, it means neo-colonizing billions of human beings, using the most sophisticated — and cheapest, most effective and most ruthless — economic and political methods.

Capitalism, its market economy, its values, its categories and its methods can never pull socialism out of its present difficulties or rectify whatever mistakes have been made. Most of those difficulties are the result not just of errors but also of the tight blockade and isolation imposed on the socialist countries by imperialism and the major capitalist powers, which have monopolized most of the world's wealth and the most advanced technologies by plundering their colonies, exploiting the working class and promoting a large-scale brain drain from countries that had not yet developed.

Devastating wars were unleashed against the first socialist state, taking a toll of millions of lives and destroying most of the means of production. Like a phoenix, the first socialist state had to rise more than once from its ashes. It has performed great services to mankind by defeating fascism and decisively supporting the liberation movements in countries still under colonial rule. Now, all this is being forgotten.

It's disgusting to see how many people, even in the USSR itself, are engaged in denying and destroying the history-making feats and extraordinary merits of that heroic people. That is not the way to rectify and overcome the undeniable errors made by a revolution that emerged from Czarist authoritarianism in an enormous, backward, poor country. We shouldn't blame Lenin now for having chosen Czarist Russia as the place for the biggest revolution in history.



Thus we didn't hesitate to stop the circulation of certain Soviet publications that are full of poison against the USSR itself and socialism. You can see that imperialism, reactionary forces and the counterrevolution are behind them. Some of those publications have already started calling for an end to the fair and equitable trade relations that were established between the USSR and Cuba during the Cuban revolutionary process. In one word: they want the USSR to begin practicing unequal trade with Cuba by selling its products to us at ever higher prices and buying our agricultural produce and raw materials at ever lower prices, just as the United States does with other Third World countries — in short, they want the USSR to join the US blockade against Cuba.

Imperialism's undermining actions and the systematic destruction of the values of socialism, combined with the mistakes that have been made, have accelerated the destabilizing process in the Eastern European socialist countries. The United States designed and implemented a long-term policy of treating each country differently and undermining socialism from within.

Imperialism and capitalist powers cannot hide their glee over the way things are turning out. They are convinced — not without reason = that, at this point, the socialist bloc has virtually ceased to exist. Groups of US citizens, including US presidential advisers, are programming capitalist development in some of those Eastern European countries right now. A recent news dispatch reported that they were fascinated by that “exciting experience.” One of them, a US government official, favored the application in Poland of a program similar to the New Deal, with which Roosevelt tried to alleviate capitalism's severe crisis. This would be to help the 600,000 Polish workers who will lose their jobs in 1990 and half of the country's 17.8 million workers, who will have to be retrained and change jobs as a result of the implementation of a market economy.

Imperialism and the NATO capitalist powers are persuaded not without reason — that, at this point, the Warsaw Pact no

longer exists and is but a fiction, and that societies which are corroded and undermined from within will not be able to resist.

It has been stated that socialism must be improved. No one can deny this principle, which is inherent and permanently applicable to every human endeavor. But, can socialism be improved by forsaking Marxism-Leninism's most basic principles? Why must the so-called reforms be along capitalist lines? If those ideas are truly revolutionary, as some claim, why do they receive the imperialist leaders' unanimous, enthusiastic support?

In an amazing statement, the President of the United States described himself as the number-one advocate of the doctrines currently being applied in many countries in the socialist camp.

History has never recorded an instance of a truly revolutionary idea's receiving the enthusiastic support of the leader of the most powerful, aggressive and greedy empire known to mankind.

During Comrade Gorbachev's visit to Cuba in April this year — a visit during which we had a frank, in-depth exchange of views — I publicly expressed my opinion to the National Assembly that, if any socialist country wants to build capitalism, its right to do so should be respected, just as we demand complete respect for any capitalist country's right to build socialism.

I believe that revolution cannot be imported or exported; a socialist state cannot be founded through artificial insemination or by means of an embryo transplant. A revolution requires certain conditions within society, and the people in each individual nation are the only ones who can create it. These ideas don't run counter to the solidarity that all revolutionaries can and should extend to one another. Moreover, a revolution is a process that may advance or regress, a process that may even be frustrated. But, above all, Communists must be courageous and revolutionary. Communists are duty-bound to struggle under all circumstances, no matter how adverse they may be. The Paris Communards struggled and died in the defense of their ideas. The banners of revolution and of socialism are not surrendered without a fight. Only cowards and the demoralized surrender — never Communists and other revolutionaries.

Now, imperialism is urging the European socialist countries to become recipients of its surplus capital, to develop capitalism, and to join in plundering the Third World countries.

It is a well-known fact that a large part of the developed capitalist world's wealth comes from the unequal terms of trade it maintains with the Third World countries. For centuries, those nations were plundered as colonies. Millions of their sons and daughters were enslaved; their gold, silver and other mineral resources were exhausted; they were pitilessly exploited; and underdevelopment was imposed on them. Underdevelopment was the most direct and clearest consequence of colonialism. Now, those nations are being squeezed dry by means of interest payments on an endless, unpayable debt, while ridiculously low prices are paid for their commodities and they are forced to pay ever higher prices for the industrial goods they import. Financial and human resources are constantly being drawn away from those nations through the flight of capital and the brain drain. Their trade is blocked by dumping, high tariffs, import quotas, synthetic substitutes produced through advanced technological processes, and subsidies for the developed capitalist countries' products when they aren't competitive.

Now, imperialism is inviting the European socialist countries to join it in this colossal plunder — an invitation which seems not to displease the theoreticians of capitalist reforms. Thus, in many of those countries, no one speaks about the tragedy of the Third World, and their discontented multitudes are guided toward capitalism and anti-communism — and, in one country, toward Pan-Germanism. Such developments may even lead to fascist trends. The prize promised by imperialism is a share of the plunder wrested from our peoples, the only way of building capitalist consumer societies.

Right now, the United States and the other capitalist powers are much more interested in investing in Eastern Europe than in any other part of the world. What resources can the Third World — in which billions of people live in sub-human conditions — expect from such developments?

They speak to us of peace, but what kind of peace? Of peace between the major powers, while imperialism reserves the right to intervene in and attack the Third World countries. There are many examples of this.

The imperialist government of the United States demands that no one help the Salvadoran revolutionaries and tries to blackmail the USSR into ending its economic and military assistance to Nicaragua and Cuba because we express solidarity with the Salvadoran revolutionaries, even though we abide strictly by our commitments concerning the weapons supplied by the USSR, in accord with the agreements signed between our sovereign nations. Meanwhile, that same imperialist government which is demanding an end to solidarity with the Salvadoran revolutionaries is helping the genocidal Salvadoran government and sending special combat units to El Salvador; supporting the counterrevolution in Nicaragua; organizing coups d'etat and the assassination of leaders in Panama; sending military aid to UNITA in Angola — in spite of the successful peace agreements in south western Africa — and continuing to supply the rebel forces in Afghanistan with large amounts of weapons, ignoring the Geneva Accords and the fact that the Soviet troops have withdrawn.

Only a few days ago, US Air Force planes insolently intervened in the internal conflict in the Philippines. Regardless of whether or not the rebel forces had good cause for their action — which it is not our place to judge — the US intervention in that country is a very serious matter and is an accurate reflection of the current world situation, showing that the United States has taken upon itself the role of gendarme, not only in Latin America — a region it has always considered as its backyard — but also in any other Third World country.

The consecration of the principle of universal intervention by a major power spells an end to independence and sovereignty in the world. What kind of peace and security can our peoples have other than that which we ourselves achieve through our own heroism?

The elimination of nuclear weapons is an excellent idea. If it were more than simply utopian and could be achieved some day,

it would be of unquestionable benefit and would increase world security — but only for a part of mankind. It would not bring peace, security or hope to the Third World countries.

Imperialism doesn't need nuclear weapons to attack our people. Its powerful fleets, which are stationed all over the world; its military bases everywhere; and its ever more sophisticated and lethal conventional weapons are enough to ensure its role as the world's master and gendarme.

Moreover, 40,000 children who could be saved die every day in our world because of underdevelopment and poverty. As I've said before — and this is worth repeating — it's as if a bomb similar to the ones dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were dropped every three days on the poor children in the world.

If these developments continue on their present course and the United States isn't forced to renounce these concepts, what new way of thinking can we speak of? Following this course, the bipolar world which emerged in the postwar period will inexorably become a unipolar world under US hegemony.

In Cuba, we are engaged in a process of rectification. No revolution or truly socialist rectification is possible without a strong, disciplined, respected Party. Such a process cannot be advanced by slandering socialism, destroying its values, casting slurs on the Party, demoralizing its vanguard, abandoning the Party's guiding role, eliminating social discipline and sowing chaos and anarchy everywhere. This may foster a counterrevolution, but not revolutionary changes.

The US imperialists think that Cuba won't be able to hold out and that the new situation in the socialist community will inexorably help them to bring our Revolution to its knees.

Cuba is not a country in which socialism came in the wake of the victorious divisions of the Red Army. In Cuba, our people created our socialist society in the course of a legitimate, heroic struggle. The 30 years in which we have stood firm against the most powerful empire on earth, that sought to destroy our Revolution, bear witness to our political and moral strength.

Those of us in our country's leadership aren't a bunch of bumbling parvenus, new to our positions of responsibility. We

come from the ranks of the old anti-imperialist fighters who followed Melia and Guiteras; who attacked the Moncada and came on the Grannia; who fought in the Sierra Maestra, in the underground struggle and at the Bay of Pigs; who were unshaken by the October Missile Crisis; who have stood firm against imperialist aggression for 30 years; who have performed great labor feats and have carried out glorious internationalist missions. Men and women from three generations of Cubans are members and hold posts of responsibility in our battle-seasoned Party, our marvelous vanguard young people's organization, our powerful mass organizations, our glorious Revolutionary Armed Forces and our Ministry of the Interior.

In Cuba, the Revolution, socialism and national independence are indissolubly linked.

We owe everything we are today to the Revolution and socialism. If Cuba were ever to return to capitalism, our independence and sovereignty would be lost forever; we would be an extension of Miami, a mere appendage of US imperialism; and the repugnant prediction that a US president made in the 19th century — when that country was considering the annexation of Cuba — that our island would fall into its hands like a ripe fruit, would prove true. Our people are and will always be willing to give their lives to prevent this. Here, at Maceo's tomb, we recall his immortal phrase: "Whoever tries to take power over Cuba will get only the dust of its soil, drenched in blood, if he does not perish in the struggle."

We Cuban Communists and the millions of our people's revolutionary soldiers will carry out the role assigned to us in history, not only as the first socialist state in the western hemisphere but also as staunch front-line defenders of the noble cause of all the destitute, exploited people in the world.

We have never aspired to having custody of the banners and principles which the revolutionary movement has defended throughout its heroic and inspiring history. However, if fate were to decree that, one day, we would be among the last defenders of socialism in a world in which US imperialism had realized

Hitler's dreams of world domination, we would defend this bulwark to the last drop of our blood.

These men and women whom we are honorably laying to rest today in the land of their birth gave their lives for the most treasured values of our history and our Revolution.

They died fighting against colonialism and neocolonialism.

They died fighting against racism and apartheid.

They died fighting against the plunder and exploitation to which the Third World peoples are subjected.

They died fighting for the independence and sovereignty of those peoples.

They died fighting for the right of all peoples in the world to well-being and development.

They died fighting so there would be no hunger or begging; so that all sick people would have doctors, all children would have schools, and all human beings would have jobs, shelter and food.

They died so there would be no oppressors or oppressed, no exploiters or exploited.

They died fighting for the dignity and freedom of all men and women.

They died fighting for true peace and security for all nations.

They died defending the ideals of Cespedes and Maximo Gomez.

They died defending the ideals of Marti and Maceo.

They died defending the ideals of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

They died defending the ideals of the October Revolution and the example it set throughout the world.

They died for socialism.

They died for internationalism-

They died for the proud, revolutionary homeland that is today's Cuba.

We will follow their example!

Eternal glory to them!

Socialism or death!

Homeland or Death!

We Shall Overcome!

© Jose Marti Publishing House, 1989

JOSE MARTI Publishing House  
Foreign Languages  
P.O.Box 4208, Havana 4, Cuba

Distributor :

UFO SERVICES, S.A.  
P.O.Box 6197, Havana 10600, Cuba

Printed in Cuba

***Re-Printed 2021***  
***New Outlook Publishers***