

Why the Moncada?

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When Fidel assaulted the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953, there were no blackouts in Cuba. There could not have been. The first necessary condition for blackouts to occur is that electricity is available, but at that time, only 56% of homes were illuminated with light bulbs.

We were a dark country; no one has to tell me that. I was born in a forgotten corner of Taguasco, under a kerosene lamp, assisted by a midwife, 40 kilometers from the nearest hospital.

My family was part of that 60% of Cubans who lived in huts of guano and palm fronds, with no latrine or running water; in rural areas where people died of curable diseases, and children were literally devoured by parasites.

In 1953 there were no lines in Cuba either. Not for meat or for bread. For there to be a line, many people with enough money to buy must be present, and this was not the case given the meager resources of families where I was born.

In 1953, a census was conducted, and four years later, in 1957, a group from the Catholic University visited 126 municipalities over five months to gather, for the first time ever in Cuba, detailed statistics on the living conditions of agricultural workers.

Certainly, for some people these figures may appear to be simply cold numbers - and perhaps others will say that they are pure fiction or propaganda - but they are none of this for me and my relatives, who still carry the reality in our memories, not in the form of data, but as first hand experiences.

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Propaganda and fiction were those colorful postcards on which a farmer appeared mounted on a shiny Ferguson tractor, while his wife, in a pleated skirt and lace blouse, fed the chickens with generous handfuls of corn that she was taking from a basket gracefully balanced on her waist.

At that time only 4% of those interviewed mentioned meat as a regular part of their diet; 3.4% mentioned bread, and less than 1% mentioned fish. Eggs were consumed by 2.1% of agricultural workers, and only 11.2 % drank milk.

No wonder that the average farmworker's height was five feet four inches, while 91% were considered malnourished.

The cruelest moment of my childhood still drills my memory. It was the time I spent an entire week with a terrible toothache, since my parents did not have the three pesos it cost to pull the tooth.

The Revolution had already triumphed, but social transformations do not happen overnight, and the old structures were still in place.

In that 1957 study, it was reported that 14% of campesinos had suffered, or were suffering tuberculosis, while 13% had typhoid fever. In that year alone, those of us who lived in my part of Taguasco lost Jorge Ruiz Ramirez, the only doctor who assisted the poor at no charge. He was murdered by Batista's guards, after being savagely tortured. His crime: treating a young wounded revolutionary.

Why then the Moncada? Because it seemed that Marti would die in the year of his centenary, such was the affront, as Fidel said in his defense plea, known as History will absolve me.

But the Apostle was not dead; he lived in those who assaulted the forts armed with the decorum of many men.

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