

RADIO REBELDE: AN "IDEOLOGICAL WEAPON"



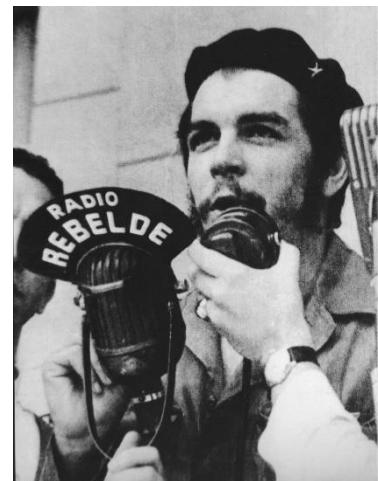
A Radio Rebelde station in 1958

As well as being a charismatic leader and military strategist, Fidel Castro was also a master of propaganda. The rebels built a press hut in the mountains where they produced a newspaper called **El Cubano Libre, the Free Cuban**. There was also a radio station, **Radio Rebelde**, broadcasting from inside the camp. One of the highlights was live performances by a local peasant band called the **Quinteto Rebelde** or **Rebel Quintet**. The Quintet were all brothers, sons of a local farmer who had let Fidel build his headquarters on his land.

The radio broadcasts were initiated in February 1958 by the rebel army's media wing, under Guevara's supervision. Guevara had reportedly been impressed by the power of radio after experiencing first hand the role of a CIA clandestine radio station, *La Voz de la Liberación*, in ousting the government of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. An electric generator and the first radio equipment had arrived in Pata de la Mesa, Guevara's command post, where the rebels were to set up the clandestine station and get it on the air.

Early broadcast efforts were conducted by Luis Orlando Rodríguez, who later became Minister for the Interior. The first broadcast began with the announcement: "*Aquí Radio Rebelde, the voice of the Sierra Maestra, transmitting for all Cuba on the 20-meter band at 5 and 9 pm daily... I'm station director Capt. Luis Orlando Rodríguez.*"

The broadcasts became a vital source of communication due to increased government restrictions on the Cuban press. A new boosted transmitter in La Plata carried lengthy interviews and speeches by Fidel Castro and provided radiotelephone communication between the rebel columns throughout the region. Expansions in rebel numbers and more ambitious military ventures away from the group's base in the **Sierra Maestra** meant that each fighting column needed its own radio equipment. Eventually 32 Rebelde stations were operating throughout Cuba. The stations broadcast nightly, with each broadcast beginning with the loud declaration "¡Aquí Radio Rebelde!" ("Here Radio Rebelde!") that has remained the station's trademark salutation to the present day.



Che Guevara at the mic.

On April 9, 1958, the station broadcast calls for the nation's workers to join in a general strike. Rebelde also broadcast the first reports that Guevara's column had taken Santa Clara on New Year's Eve 1958, and on the first morning of the new year Castro broadcast a call for another general strike. During the transmission he rejected any attempts by the Cuban military to replace Batista by a coup d'état and urged his revolutionary force to press on to the cities of Havana and Santiago. His final words were "*¡Revolución Sí, Golpe Militar No!*" (*Revolution Yes, Military coup No!*). Within hours the army had surrendered in full.