

Introduction

This expanded edition of a book first published in 1997 on the 30th anniversary of Che Guevara's death has a simple purpose: to make available to an English-reading audience a selection of articles, speeches and letters by Ernesto Che Guevara. It is not a biography nor a book of reminiscences by others — it is Che Guevara in his own words.

In the almost four decades since his death, the world's image of Che Guevara has become increasingly distorted and somewhat one-dimensional. The romanticized portrait known to many is that of the individual guerrilla fighter — heroic to some, to others an adventurer. His organic connection to the Cuban revolution fades in this picture. His work side by side with Fidel Castro for nearly a decade; his contributions to Marxist theory; his efforts as a government minister in the first years of the new Cuba after the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship; his tireless labor grappling with the problems of guiding the economic development of a backward country besieged and attacked by U.S. imperialism; his championing the interests of the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America — all this is missing from most popular portrayals of Che Guevara outside of Cuba.

This is reflected in the fact that for two decades or more after his death his writings were largely unavailable in English. Several collections of speeches by Che were published in the 1960s, but most were long out of print. The 30th anniversary of his death saw several new biographies and many commentaries on his life and death, but still few efforts to publish the ideas of Che himself, in his own words.

This book presents the political lessons drawn by Che Guevara from his experiences and the many tasks that he took on: as Rebel Army commander and strategist of guerrilla warfare; as a leader of the July 26 Movement, which played a central role in the overthrow of the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship; as head of the National Bank and Ministry of Industry

in the new government; as a forger of Cuba's close ties with liberation movements throughout the African continent; and as a representative of the Cuban government on platforms throughout the world.

In a speech given before one million people in Havana on October 18, 1967, at a memorial service for Che Guevara, Cuba's Fidel Castro placed significant emphasis on the breadth of Guevara's political contribution:

Those who attach significance to the lucky blow that struck Che down try in vain to deny his experience and his capacity as a leader. Che was an extraordinarily able military leader. But when we remember Che, when we think of Che, we do not think fundamentally of his military virtues. No! Warfare is a means and not an end. Warfare is a tool of revolutionaries. The important thing is the revolution. The important thing is the revolutionary cause, revolutionary ideas, revolutionary objectives, revolutionary sentiments, revolutionary virtues!

And it is in that field, in the field of ideas, in the field of sentiments, in the field of revolutionary virtues, in the field of intelligence, that — apart from his military virtues — we feel the tremendous loss that his death means to the revolutionary movement.

Che's extraordinary character was made up of virtues that are rarely found together. He stood out as an unsurpassed person of action, but Che was not only that — he was also a person of visionary intelligence and broad culture, a profound thinker. That is, the man of ideas and the man of action were combined within him.

But it is not only that Che possessed the double characteristic of the man of ideas — of profound ideas — and the man of action, but that Che as a revolutionary united in himself the virtues that can be defined as the fullest expression of the virtues of a revolutionary: a person of total integrity, a person of supreme sense of honor, of absolute sincerity, a person of stoic and Spartan living habits, a person in whose conduct not one stain can be found. He constituted, through his virtues, what can be called a truly model revolutionary.

Because of this, he has left to the future generations not only his experience, his knowledge as an outstanding soldier, but also, at the same time, the fruits of his intelligence. He wrote with the virtuosity of a master of our language. His narratives of the war are incomparable. The depth of his thinking is impressive. He never wrote about anything with less than extraordinary seriousness, with less than extraordinary profundity — and we have no doubt that some of his writings will pass on to posterity as classic documents of revolutionary thought.

Thus, as fruits of that vigorous and profound intelligence, he left us countless memories, countless narratives that, without his work, without his efforts, might have been lost forever.

An indefatigable worker, during the years that he served our country he did not know a single day of rest. Many were the responsibilities assigned to him: as President of the National Bank, as director of the Central Planning Board, as Minister of Industry, as commander of military regions, as the head of political or economic or fraternal delegations.

His versatile intelligence was able to undertake with maximum assurance any task of any kind. Thus he brilliantly represented our country in numerous international conferences, just as he brilliantly led soldiers in combat, just as he was a model worker in charge of any of the institutions he was assigned to. And for him there were no days of rest; for him there were no hours of rest!

If we looked through the windows of his offices, he had the lights on all hours of the night, studying, or rather, working or studying. For he was a student of all problems; he was a tireless reader. His thirst for learning was practically insatiable, and the hours he stole from sleep he devoted to study.

He devoted his scheduled days off to voluntary work. He was the inspiration and provided the greatest incentive for the work that is today carried out by hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country. He stimulated that activity in which our people are making greater and greater efforts.

As a revolutionary, as a communist revolutionary, a true communist, he had a boundless faith in moral values. He had a boundless faith in the consciousness of human beings. And we should say that he saw, with absolute clarity, the moral impulse as the fundamental lever in the construction of communism in human society.

He thought, developed, and wrote many things. And on a day like today it should be stated that Che's writings, Che's political and revolutionary thought, will be of permanent value to the Cuban revolutionary process and to the Latin American revolutionary process. And we do not doubt that his ideas — as a man of action, as a man of thought, as a person of untarnished moral virtues, as a person of unexcelled human sensitivity, as a person of spotless conduct — have and will continue to have universal value.

The imperialists boast of their triumph at having killed this guerrilla fighter in action. The imperialists boast of a triumphant stroke of luck that led to the elimination of such a formidable man of action. But perhaps the imperialists do not know or pretend not to

know that the man of action was only one of the many facets of the personality of that combatant. And if we speak of sorrow, we are saddened not only at having lost a person of action. We are saddened at having lost a person of virtue. We are saddened at having lost a person of unsurpassed human sensitivity. We are saddened at having lost such a mind. We are saddened to think that he was only 39 years old at the time of his death. We are saddened at missing the additional fruits that we would have received from that intelligence and that ever richer experience.

Che Guevara first left Cuba in April 1965. From that time rumors began to circulate as to his whereabouts. He was “spotted” in almost every country of Latin America while speculation grew that Fidel Castro had eliminated his “rival.” A campaign began — which has managed to survive these past four decades — to separate Guevara from both the Cuban revolution and Fidel Castro. The most powerful and convincing rebuttal to this calumny is provided by Guevara himself in the words of the speeches and writings contained in this selection.

A companion volume to *Che Guevara Reader* which takes up this theme is *Che: A memoir by Fidel Castro*. In the closest thing to a biography of Guevara to yet emerge from Cuba, Fidel Castro writes with candor and affection of his relationship with Guevara. In particular, Castro describes his last days with Che in Cuba, giving a remarkably frank assessment of the Bolivian mission of 1966-67, which resulted in Guevara’s death in October 1967 at the hands of the Bolivian Army acting under the instructions of the Central Intelligence Agency.



This wide-ranging selection of Guevara’s speeches and writings includes four parts: the Cuban guerrilla war (1956-58); the years in government in Cuba (1959-65); Guevara’s views on the major international issues of the time, including documents written from Africa and Latin America after his departure from Cuba in 1965; and a selection of letters written by Guevara, including his farewell letters to Fidel Castro and his children and family.

The first work on this book was the result of an editorial collaboration in 1987 between the editor and the José Martí Publishing House in Havana, Cuba. Subsequently, the participation of the Havana-based Centro de Estudios Che Guevara [Che Guevara Studies Center] has led to a major expansion of the first edition of this anthology.

An invaluable aid in the preparation of the first edition of this volume

were two comprehensive Spanish-language selections of Che Guevara's works: the nine-volume *Ernesto Che Guevara: Escritos y discursos* [Writings and Speeches] (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1977) and the two-volume *Ernesto Che Guevara: Obras Escogidas 1956-67* [Selected Works] (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1970).

As an aid to the reader, the book contains:

- A chronology of significant events in the life of Ernesto Che Guevara and of the Cuban revolution during his lifetime.
- A bibliography of Guevara's published writings and speeches, which provides an overview of his broad political responsibilities, interests and activities in the years 1958-67.
- A glossary of the names of many individuals, organizations and publications referred to in the text.

These annotations will help readers to place Guevara's writings in the appropriate political and historical context.

The new, expanded edition includes several new chapters that among other goals seeks to highlight Che Guevara's vision toward Latin America. Readers of this volume will want to explore this further in the anthology of Che's writings on Latin America contained in *Latin America: Awakening of a Continent* (an editorial project of Ocean Press and the Che Guevara Studies Center).

In coming years, the principal writings of Che Guevara will be published in a series of books prepared by the Che Guevara Studies Center of Havana and Ocean Press. Although perhaps best known as a guerrilla fighter, this multi-volume series will show Che Guevara as a profound thinker with a radical world view that still strikes a chord with young rebels in every country today. Eager readers will be introduced to Che the political economist and philosopher, Che the revolutionary humanist.

Some of these works have never before been published, such as Che's *Critical Notes on Political Economy*. Other works have only recently been uncovered, while many have been overlooked or available intermittently. A number of the books will be thematic anthologies.

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