

Excerpt from
Latin America Diaries

The sequel to "The Motorcycle Diaries"

By Ernesto Che Guevara

Foreword by
Alberto Granado

It is a difficult task to write the foreword to a book whose author's work and life made him a paradigm of a human being. One faces the temptation to transform that person into some kind of myth that is unrelated to the reality of his life. This challenge is even greater when one had the great fortune of participating in those "extravagant dream trips" into concrete reality.¹

Those of us who enjoyed his friendship and were close enough to perceive the moral and intellectual qualities that set him above the ordinary run of humankind should, however, always remember that he was a man and only a man, not a mythical being.

Bearing this in mind, I accept the responsibility as an old friend – from as long ago as October 1942 – of presenting this diary of his second Latin America journey, which with some premonition he gave the title "Otra Vez" [Once Again].

In this vivid account, the reader constantly encounters the flesh-and-blood Ernesto Guevara with all the temerity of his 25 years. Various aspects of the emerging personality are revealed, as he sets out to confront all the challenges of the journey along with his friend Carlos Ferrer (Calica): "two distinct wills extending out into the Americas, not knowing exactly what it is they seek, nor in which direction it lies."

Nevertheless, once the decision has been made to leave the beaten track offered by Venezuela in order to discover and participate in the revolution then underway in Guatemala, the change occurring in him becomes more palpable; now a certain confidence emerges that he has found the path he had been seeking.

¹ Alberto Granado was Ernesto "Che" Guevara's companion in his trip around Latin America on the famous "La Poderosa" motorcycle, a journey immortalized in the movie "The Motorcycle Diaries" directed by Walter Salles and starring Gael García Bernal.

While his first trip through South America served to deepen his ideas about social distinctions and sharpened his consciousness of the need to struggle against them, this second journey consolidates his political understanding and fires a growing need for further study in order to grasp more clearly why and how such a struggle should be waged so that it culminates in a genuine revolution.

In my mind's eye, I remember the good-bye from his family and friends who did not understand the reasons for his departure, yet they went through the motions appropriate to members of their class of farewelling someone leaving in search of new horizons—although in this case he was breaking all the group norms and contradicting all established schemas.

I see him dressed in Argentine army fatigues: tight pants, rough shirt and boots with the laces certainly untied, not as a sign of carelessness but in accordance with his scale of values in which external show is not the most important.

Hanging out of the second-class compartment with a broad smile, holding high his almost shaven head (always the "*pelao* Guevara"), he departs Buenos Aires station and enters history.

From this moment, he notes down everything he considers important, the pages of his diary becoming something of a fascinating kaleidoscope of a constant symbiosis of the literary stylist and the insightful observer.

He gives a graphic description of the countryside around the Bolsa Negra mine [in Bolivia] and then comments: "But the mine's heart was not beating. It lacked the energy of the arms of those who every day tear from the earth their load of ore, arms that on this day, August 2, the Day of the Indian and of Agrarian Reform, were in La Paz defending the revolution."

In this passage, we can see succinctly what was already becoming axiomatic for Ernesto: the importance of the human being in all aspects of life. But at the same time, such comments reflect the great beauty of a talented writer.

Another striking aspect of this early diary is the great variety of activities Ernesto undertook on this short trip. He goes from lecturing about teacher training at the University of Buenos Aires to speaking about research with the eminent Spanish physiologist P. Suñer, a victim of persecution by the Franco regime.

He had a series of discussions (often disagreements) with prominent individuals. He drew up a critical balance sheet after each discussion that shows a remarkable insight, even half a century later.

Arriving in Costa Rica, he met several exiles, including two who would later play a significant political role as presidents of their respective countries. Certainly, his discussions with Juan Bosch from the Dominican

Republic and Rómulo Betancourt of Venezuela instantly raise the question of how this unknown young man with an unassuming manner, yet incisive and critical in dialogue, could break through the circle of officials surrounding these figures.

The answer to this question is not easy; but the fact is that these discussions did take place and Ernesto's conclusions from them could not have been more accurate.

In a few words, he describes Bosch as he was during his time in government. And he anticipates with pitiless realism how Betancourt would later conduct himself, both as president of Venezuela and leader of the Acción Democrática electoral machine, in handing over his country's great wealth to the US transnationals.

The diary is not lacking in joy or vitality, and along with the man of ideas, we find the lively young man full of energy, sensitive to the presence of women, capable of giving the "*negrita* Socorro" some affection and comfort without betraying himself, while at the same time being able to judge their encounter in its true colors.

The account of his time in Mexico is extraordinarily important because of the wide range of his interests it reveals. He visits museums, admires the murals of Orozco, Rivera, Tamayo and Siqueiros, tours the fascinating Aztec pyramids, without forgetting his real objectives. Along with his fascination with Mexican culture arises his decisive and irreversible commitment, as he puts it, "to lead the life of a proletarian."

Thus, he does not allow himself to be tempted by offers of help from Ulises Petit de Murat, Hilda [his wife], Petrona or his own aunt Beatriz, who would set him on a bourgeois path. He maintains his proletarian status with "the ordinary chain of hopes and disappointments" that characterizes the life of that class during the struggle for real power.

This new attitude to the political problems around him is clearly shown in a discussion with a group of Argentine exiles in Mexico. They want to send a message of support to the new government in Argentina that has emerged after the overthrow of Perón. In this meeting, Ernesto argues that before giving their support to the government, they should wait until it has delivered "something definite with regard to trade union democracy and the running of the economy."

Along with this proletarian consciousness arises an ever-greater sense of human solidarity. Just as during his first trip when he shared his overcoat with a couple of workers on a freezing night on the Chilean Altiplano, now in Mexico, despite his own hardships, he seeks and obtains money (150 pesos) to help his friend "El Patojo" ["Shorty"] return to Guatemala where his mother needs his financial and emotional support.

The final pages of the diary make perfectly clear the three main lines of conduct that have marked the first decades of his life: his interest and

ability in science; his wanderings among curious travelers and his study of nature and civilizations in the company of friends; and his need to participate in a genuine revolution.

With regard to science, he comments on the presentation in Guanajato of his work on allergies and considers the option to do research work and human medicine. At this time, when he is writing about his future, he also refers to the idea of meeting the Granados in Caracas, and although he considers this a possibility, it is more of a passing thought than a concession to the pleas of his friends. What is especially clear to me is that his behavior and attitude is already very different from that of "Fuser" with whom he shared some unrepeatable moments in 1952. His desire for travel and research is still there, but you can sense his iron conviction not to become a semi-scientist, semi-bohemian, semi-revolutionary. Now he is ready to make a great decisive leap.

Through one of those accidents of life, it was during that difficult month of July [1955] that he first met Fidel Castro, finding in him the strength and support he needed.

And if it is said that this diary gives little space to a meeting that would be so important for the future, would I be wrong in thinking that in writing those lines, he said to himself, paraphrasing the words of "the Master" [José Martí]: "There are some things that must remain in silence."

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