





INTRODUCTION

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The publication in this book of such well-known and at the same time such unique works by Ernesto Che Guevara has not been done solely for literary interest but in order to bring together his ideas, reflecting certain common themes and objectives. We also wanted to demonstrate the continuity between these works and earlier writings – many of which were conceived in different contexts but which nevertheless follow a similar line – and to indicate how Che was able to merge philosophy, politics and economics in his all encompassing, coherent revolutionary vision.

A detailed reading of these works reveals the scope of Che's decisive theoretical contribution in the historical period leading up to what could be described as his international phase. These works are, above all, the culmination of a method of work in which theory was used to solve concrete problems, a process that is not apologetic or dogmatic but rather marked by a revolutionary ethic that is both humanist and Marxist. Che Guevara was clearly "ahead of his time"



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as his ideas and his struggle strike a chord in the current search for global justice.

Che was a Marxist thinker who emphasized practical action. He set out to generalize his revolutionary experience, using the example of the Cuban Revolution and his experiences as a leader of that revolution to inspire other revolutionaries, especially those in the Third World. Che's legacy of speeches, conference papers, essays, articles, televised talks, interviews and letters truly express the relationship between his daily actions and his final objectives, and show how he transformed theory into a viable instrument for the revolutionary movement that would ultimately help bring about the full emancipation of humankind.

The study of the development of Che's thought cannot be divorced from the historical context in which many of his ideas first emerged — a unique and significant period. The 1960s have been labeled as "the transcendental rebellion between two existing powers of domination" and by the force and prevalence with which rebellious struggles emerged. Possibly the most significant of these struggles took place in the Third World, best symbolized by the Cuban Revolution and the influence it had on the revolutionary movement of that time.

The impact of Che's death in October 1967, and its repercussions for an entire generation of people fighting for social change, is highlighted by the Nobel Prize winner José Saramago, who recalls:

The clandestine portrait of Ernesto Che Guevara came to the unhappy Portugal of Salazar and Caetano. His image was the most celebrated of all, a portrait in striking tones of red and black. It became the universal image for the revolutionary dreams of the world.

In spite of the historic setback of the collapse of the socialist bloc, Che's thinking and example have been revived as a way of reestablishing continuity with genuine revolutionary socialism, which strives for full national liberation as part of a project of social change.

By focusing on a particular historical epoch, it is possible to gloss over important facts. Without losing perspective, the negative and positive aspects of that period need to be assessed.

In understanding the past, we can see the objective need for such

a sharp speech as that given in Algeria on February 24, 1965, at the Afro-Asia Economic Seminar, a speech which Che's detractors have said showed his break from the Cuban Revolution. In reality, this speech included nothing that Che had not previously said about the nature of capitalism and the revolutionary struggle that would open the way for a new, socialist society.

In "Socialism and Man in Cuba," the letter sent to the Uruguayan journalist Aníbal Quijano, director of the weekly publication *Marcha*, Che felt the need, among other things, to summarize his analysis of the Cuban Revolution, its experiences and its important lessons for other countries embarking on similar struggles in the future. This historic letter — written just days after the speech in Algeria and on the eve of his incorporation into the revolutionary struggle in the Congo — discussed the question of profound social change and why certain faults and inconsistencies occurring within the socialist countries would affect the process of constructing socialism.

"Message to the Tricontinental" is one of Che's more well-known works, published for the first time on April 16, 1967, in very different circumstances from the other pieces included in this book. By this time Che was already fighting in Bolivia. It is included here to illustrate the continuity of Che's principles. Written in the context of struggle, he presented an analysis that responded to the issues being debated in a world full of contradictions and inconsistencies. In great detail, he outlined the tactics and strategies that should be followed in revolutionary struggle in the Third World.

Detailed study of each of the texts included in this book shows that they form the basis of Che's philosophical, economic and political strategy for a tricontinental revolution. There is an historical vision that goes beyond the immediate and under which lie the foundations of a larger project. For Che, this process began with his individual experience as a young activist that later led him to become part of a collective fight when he decided to join the revolutionary struggle in Cuba; this would later extend to his participation in the struggles of other lands.

It is essential, as part of this analysis, to emphasize that Che's intellectual development was concretized through a political practice that flowed from his ideals. Central to Che's thought and actions was a deep-seated humanism, which guided his Latin Americanism and which led him to a deeper sense of Marxism, along with a sharp

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anti-imperialism. This was what brought him into the Cuban Revolution and later shaped his ideas about revolutionary struggle in the Third World, guided by a revolutionary ethic as a weapon of combat and the spiritual striving for the liberation of humankind.

It is this underlying ethic reflected in Che's theory and practice that is the basis for the widespread acceptance and support of his ideals in the modern world. It makes his vision for global justice far reaching and proves that — in terms of theory — Che was ahead of his time.

If we follow the thread of Che's argument through these works, we can identify consistent themes in regard to what he considered to be determining factors in the struggle to overthrow the current order and create a new social model. Che's ideas are distinguished by the framework of the struggle for socialism, initially from the point of view of attaining power and later as a participant in the struggle. This was intensified, as has been noted, by the impending situation in so-called "real socialism" and, in particular, with the Soviet socialist bloc and the processes that slowly divorced it from its original revolutionary values.

Che thoroughly analyzed what was occurring in the socialist world, studying the different stages of its development. He initiated for the first time in a socialist country an international debate about economics, a polemic in which he was a central protagonist. Che's ideas were further developed in his comments at different meetings and at daily work sessions, recorded in the "famous" minutes of the bimonthly meetings of the Ministry for Industry, which are full of thoughtful reflections. Che often discussed issues that were later presented in his Algeria speech, where with a clear intention he elaborated many of these ideas. In addition, he made the premonition that without an awareness of the significance of enormous problems that were accumulating, the underdeveloped world would not be able to pull itself out of stagnation.

Much has been written about the conclusions that Che reached in the 1960s. Taken out of the context of "existing socialism," they were considered to be simply heresy or a definitive rupture. Most of these evaluations failed to take into account the originality and transcendent nature of his ideas and the theoretical advances that Che made in this period, as a result of his true revolutionary practice.

Che's Marxist development allowed him to quickly develop and

reformulate certain ideas. These have yet to be properly explored and as time goes on it has become even more necessary to discuss and study them, in order to give full weight to the theoretical dimension of Che's thought in its own right as well as to highlight its relevance for the present.

Our commitment to the publication of these works is based on the belief that they are important in contributing to a better understanding of Che's theoretical development. We do not aim to provide an extensive analysis of its content but rather to show succinctly the evolution and importance of Che's contribution to a genuine socialist alternative.

Another important aspect of this compilation is the connection Che established between politics and economics – and his insistence that one should not be separated from the other. It is a constant theme reinforced in all his speeches and theoretical works, without which a genuine social transformation would be impeded. Without this understanding of political economy, Che's writings would be reduced to rhetoric or a mere academic exercise.

From his essay "Political Sovereignty and Economic Independence" (1960) and his speeches at Punta del Este (1961), Geneva (1964), the United Nations (1964) and up to his speech in Algeria (February 1965), Che presents a common argument – that the only way to achieve true national sovereignty is first through political independence and then gradually working toward economic independence. From this perspective of underdevelopment, Che was aware of the inevitability of social change. It is within this context that we can clearly see the most radical ideas that would later be incorporated into his uncompromising stand against imperialism and his call for revolution in the Third World.

There is continuity in Che's main ideas, certain invariable premises, which appear first as hypothesis and later as demonstrative elements of his theoretical scaffolding. He firmly established that it is not a case of action for action's sake that determines the course of revolutionary processes, but the accurate assessment of the relative importance of each element. In this sense, he signaled a far broader perspective in so far as he concluded that the taking of power by revolutionary forces is a worldwide objective and that the struggle for the future is the strategic element in the revolution.

Along these lines, he argued for the full participation of revol-

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utionary forces on an international level and that the socialist world should show the way to the future. This led to the conclusion that without demonstrating solidarity and support for the underdeveloped world, the socialist countries would not only be appeasing the forces of reaction but would actually become accomplices to those forces.

This led Che to determine the circumstances that would result in the destruction of the status quo and the creation of a new social order. He described the principal antagonist in this struggle and the correlation between the forces of reaction and revolution. His methodology emphasized that following the conquest of political power every subsequent action must be centered on the attainment of national sovereignty, which must be based on economic independence.

Che's ideas about political sovereignty and economic independence were put forth as early as his article of March 20, 1960, cited above, where he argued that full sovereignty required a structural transformation, hence the idea that these changes would only be possible through the attainment of popular power and with the full participation of the masses in the direction that the process would take.

He spoke of tactical objectives, such as Agrarian Reform, which would in turn provide a basis for the industrialization of a country and the diversification of foreign trade. This was an issue that would permeate all of his writings and speeches on this topic. Within this framework he identified economic struggles as the primary battleground and considered it part of a war that demanded collective heroism and sacrifice of all.

He reiterated that any economic victories achieved would become key elements in pursuing the main strategic objective of national sovereignty. This line held true not only for Cuba but for the entire underdeveloped world. The power of the monopolies had to be challenged, as in general they belong to no particular country, although they all have very close ties with the United States. That is why any path to liberation must be based on a victory against the monopolies.

Che drew all these ideas together at the core of his final reflections, including his speech given at the Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva, March 25, 1964, in which he acutely outlined the

essence of the problem. He warned that we live in a world divided by groups of nations representing economic, social and political tendencies that are very dissimilar and with great contradictions, such as the unequal exchange that defines economic dependence.

Even 40 years after they were formulated, the issues Che was dealing with are not widely known. It is therefore perhaps surprising that his ideas have so much relevance for us today. For example, he made constant references to the role of international financial and credit organizations, which at that time were a new form of imperialist domination. As part of this analysis he wrote:

[T]he IMF acts as a custodian of the dollar for the capitalist world. The International Reconstruction and Agriculture Bank is an instrument that is used to penetrate into underdeveloped countries, and the Inter-American Development Bank fulfills this sad role in the American continent. The laws and principles that these organizations are governed by appear to be, on the surface, acting in the interests of the people they are supposedly there to help. They are promoted as safeguarding equity and reciprocity within the area of international economic relations. However, in reality they are merely subtle instruments used to perpetuate exploitation and backwardness.¹

In retrospect, Che's central argument about unequal exchange was expressed most succinctly in his speech in Algeria, where he outlined the relationship that should exist between the development of those countries that embark on the road to independence and the cost that this represented for the socialist countries. Once more, and in a very concrete way, he outlined the principled position that needed to be adopted by the socialist world.

Che clearly defined the sacrifice that was required of the more developed socialist countries in order to assist the development of dependent countries and explained how this would involve a truly revolutionary change in international relations between the socialist countries and the underdeveloped countries on the verge of creating a new social order.

Che combined ethics, economics and politics with the express objective of explaining the new ties of solidarity and the new values that should govern the conduct of future projects for change —

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countering egoism and individualism with sacrifice and solidarity – as the only way to achieve not just national liberation but also liberation on a global scale.

Aware of the complexity of his arguments and the position of many socialist countries, Che consistently warned that in this struggle for freedom one could not remain indifferent toward economic issues or armed confrontations, such as that taking place in Vietnam at the time. His idea was that any victory, like any defeat, belonged to all.

Che's position was clearly defined:

There are no borders in this struggle to the death. We cannot be indifferent to what happens anywhere in the world, because a victory by any country over imperialism is our victory, just as any country's defeat is a defeat for all of us. The practice of proletarian internationalism is not only a duty for the peoples struggling for a better future, it is also an inescapable necessity. If the imperialist enemy, the United States or any other, carries out its attack against the underdeveloped peoples and the socialist countries, elementary logic determines the need for an alliance between the underdeveloped peoples and the socialist countries. If there were no other uniting factor, the common enemy should be enough.²

Revolutionary humanism was integral to Che's thought. This was not merely a moral imperative but a practical and objective need of the revolutionary struggle against a common enemy – imperialism. This is why, after the overt and massive U.S. military intervention in Vietnam after 1965, Che summarized his global revolutionary strategy in the "Message to the Tricontinental," explaining that only through a common struggle could victory be attained.

Never before has Che's call to action been more relevant, despite today's different circumstances and methods. In the face of the devastating effects of global capitalism, the only solution is still one of a prolonged international confrontation, in which the peoples of the Third World continue to play a crucial role. For good reason Che insisted that unity would be determined by the presence and support of the socialist countries. Those countries, he argued, should set aside their differences, so they would not appear weak, especially when confronting the bigger problems that faced the world.

In Che's view, the search for a solution should be guided by funda-

mental principles and an ethic that flowed from those principles. In this regard, he commented:

The solidarity of the progressive world with the Vietnamese people has something of the bitter irony of the plebeians cheering on the gladiators in the Roman Circus. To wish the victim success is not enough; one must share his or her fate. One must join that victim in death or in victory.³

It was this position that was the basis for developing a true alliance between underdeveloped peoples and socialists. It also provided a necessary bridge in the global anti-imperialist strategy and the struggle for liberation.

The world has undergone deep changes brought about in large part by the disappearance of the socialist bloc. Che's warnings about the enormous problems created by the divisions within the socialist camp were not heeded. The significant change in the international balance of power has meant that the United States has emerged as the dominant force.

Despite the significance of the global changes that have occurred and the different conjunctural situation, there is a continuity between Che's liberation theory and the progressive social movements of today that seek solutions to the most acute problems that confront the world. Within these struggles, the thoughts and examples of Che, based on a deep understanding and awareness of reality, are relevant to the current global struggle. There are those who pretend that we live in the best possible world, and that it is possible to ignore the ways in which economic models have been imposed on us — reorganizing our economies according to the recipes of large international institutions — and which have brought only misery and powerlessness. They forget that in the face of these problems other more viable and more inclusive paths will be sought.

Che's legacy of a concept of struggle for socialism from the basis of power was brought together in "Socialism and Man in Cuba." It is here that we see the beginnings of these principles, starting from his experiences in guerrilla warfare in Cuba to the creation and development of a consciousness that allowed for the emergence of other ideas with bigger goals in mind, such as, building socialist societies in the Third World.

He touched on key problems, such as the relationships between the individual and the masses, the masses, the state and the leadership, and the role of developing consciousness amongst the masses in order to achieve their full participation within the new society. He also emphasized the importance of the mechanisms required to ensure that consciousness develops alongside other social changes: moral stimulus and the new concept of work as a social task. Che's new man and woman would emerge from this new consciousness, based on new values that in turn create a new sense of ethics, which would be the foundation of a new society where new relations of solidarity predominate and an individual's daily life would correspond to broader social objectives.

The individual would become the center of the objectives and concerns in this new society that must, in essence, become "a gigantic school," establishing a perfect harmony between education and self education, the pillars of technological development that are needed in the building of a socialist society.

"Socialism and Man in Cuba" is an expression of Che's Marxist humanism, where individuals act according to concrete conditions within the process of constructing socialism. This is done in accordance with a revolutionary ethic of sacrifice and solidarity, where a balance is achieved between thought and action.

The conscious and creative action of the masses in the transition to socialism was a primary tenet of Che's Marxism, recognizing the process through which the Cuban people had achieved power, a process in which Che was himself a leader.

His main argument was that an anticapitalist revolution and achieving liberation would simultaneously represent a synthesis of humanism and a revolution in consciousness. This new political culture would be a basic requirement to creating new moral values, which would, in turn, create real changes in people's behavior.

This cannot be seen merely as a theoretical exercise. Rather, Che pointed to what he considered was the course of "existing socialism" away from revolutionary values, evident in the general stagnation that occurred as a result of the mistaken policies of domination and an increasing tendency to separate the masses from state power. The state marginalized popular participation in politics and economics within society. The results are known only too well – a nonfunctional economy and, more important still, an abandonment of the intrinsic

principles of socialism and Marxism, which are truly humanist and internationalist.

Che, conscious of the implications for humanity, concluded:

Of course there are dangers in the present situation, and not only that of dogmatism, and not only that of freezing the ties with the masses midway in the great task. There is also the danger of the weaknesses we can fall into. The way is open to infection by the germs of future corruption if a person thinks that by dedicating his or her entire life to the revolution means that, in return, one should not be distracted by such worries as that one's child lacks certain things, that one's children's shoes are worn out, that one's family lacks some necessity... The revolution is made through human beings, but individuals must forge their revolutionary spirit day by day.⁴

Aware of the enormous difficulties that this road entailed, Che concluded his letter to Quijano by commenting, "the road is long and in part unknown; we know our limitations. We will create the human being of the 21st century – we, ourselves."⁵

What I have highlighted is that in this volume we can see Che's intellectual audacity, ahead of its time and continuing to be relevant, even in a very different world.

The internationalization of capitalism has been characterized by an absolute power in economic relations, in terms of production as well as the dominance of the key poles of capitalism. The concrete ideological expression of this process has been the consolidation of neoliberalism.

In spite of the apparent universal character of capitalism, economic power is not an expression of the whole but the privilege of a select group of countries that control the transnationals. The rest of the countries that make up the world economy are left in a state of poverty, the role designated to them by the worldwide capitalist system.

Within this power structure, those dependent and less developed countries are subjected to international economic mechanisms dominated by the hegemonic powers. In spite of being presented as the only viable and indisputable path to the progress of humanity, globalization has many intrinsic weaknesses due to the interdependence it

promotes, where the transnationals use regions and countries as instruments of their global activity. The predominant feature of globalization is the global interdependence of financial markets, which is facilitated by new information and communication technology.

The paradox of the internationalization of the world economy is that it does nothing to overcome inequality — creating as it does a form of neocolonialism. Far from being eliminated, this inequality has, in fact, been exacerbated since the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp.

The real problem constantly confronted in the “globalized” world are the deformations brought about by an increasing differentiation between the rich and poor. Despite arguments about economic growth and increased benefits for all, globalization has created widespread unemployment and social exclusion.

Another distinguishing feature of globalization has been selective economic programs, such as the Treaty on Free Trade in the Americas. This treaty is nothing more than a way for the United States to dominate Latin America — selectively and gradually incorporating the countries with the greatest potential — as part of its geopolitical and geo-economic policy.

The economic policies designed for Latin American countries are in direct response to the domestic political needs of the United States and do not take into account the economic needs of Latin America, which has long been characterized by its incongruity and lack of sustainable regional development. Another typical example of this is the African continent, which is currently facing a real threat of extinction of its population, due to its exclusion from the prioritized zones of influence.

Our current “globalized” world generates a permanent sense of insecurity and deep sense of demoralization, which is directly linked to the lack of solidarity and the destruction of the social bases that represent the cultural gains made by humanity. Never before has this cultural production been so threatened by the commercial monopoly of literature, in a process that sees profit as the only measure.

This is another reflection of the way in which Che was consistently ahead of his time. It is now nearly 40 years since his speech at the Punta del Este Conference in August 1961 where he denounced U.S. plans to impose a cultural model for Latin American countries

through the Alliance for Progress. He pointed out:

...they are attempting, distinguished delegates, to establish a cultural common market, organized, managed, paid for and domesticated. All the culture of [Latin] America will be at the service of imperialism's propaganda plans, to demonstrate that the hunger of our peoples isn't hunger at all, but laziness. Magnificent!... Confronted with this, we reply [with]... total and absolute condemnation... [This is] an attempt by imperialism to domesticate the one thing that our peoples had saved from disaster: our national culture.⁶

This early stand by Che has resurfaced today, especially within the anti-globalization movement, which, in its search for solutions, has exposed the social costs of the brutal economic system that has been imposed on us. This movement also strives for a sense of unity and social action with the aim of preserving the common work of humanity.

It is the responsibility of us all to find the most appropriate answer, but we must not think that these solutions will be easy. In his "Message to the Tricontinental," with real vision Che pointed out:

Everything seems to indicate that peace, that precarious peace that bears that name only because no global conflagration has occurred, is again in danger of being broken by some irreversible and unacceptable step taken by the United States... The world panorama is one of great complexity. The task of winning liberation still lies ahead even for some countries of old Europe, sufficiently developed to experience all the contradictions of capitalism, but so weak that they can no longer follow the course of imperialism or embark on that road. In those countries the contradictions will become explosive in the coming years. But their problems, and hence their solutions, are different from those facing our dependent and economically backward peoples.⁷

In the search for an alternative path, a humanist ethic is required, especially in confronting the destructive policies that neoliberal forces continue to impose on a global level. This should be the main concern for social movements that try to counter the neoliberal tendencies

toward fragmentation and individualism.

By defending the road that will lead to social and political liberation on a national and global level – without forgetting the need to break the dominant cycle of consumerism and reach a deeper cultural consciousness and awareness of our material practices and social relations – today’s social movements will attain a better understanding of the vast social disaster that neoliberalism is imposing on the whole world.

Che’s project for sustainable social change, beginning with the emergence of national liberation revolutions and their transition to socialism, today represents a real alternative, a guide for all those social movements that seek to create a different future.

The ongoing study of both Che’s ideas and the development of his revolutionary practice – while recognizing the new challenges presented by the key problems in the world today – can contribute to the necessary adoption of new forms of struggle and their ultimate success.

In the current political climate, the final project must be an end to all domination and an unleashing of the abilities of the free human being – unburdened by egoism and individualism – who will act according to new ethical values in a fully sovereign and peaceful world. These are the weapons that we have inherited from Che, along with his internationalist call for the transformation of society – it is a call that rises above local limitations while bringing forward, even in the present, the goal of full universal liberation.