

Che Guevara- Viva! Hasta la Victoria Siempre! “Che! - Among the Greatest Revolutionaries of the 20th Century”.

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Che! - You are one of the greatest revolutionaries of the 20th Century. You inspired tens of millions of people throughout the world to fight for justice, for their freedom and civil rights. You have left a vision of hope, of never giving up - a legacy of solidarity and of Venceremos! - we shall overcome. You have been murdered by the most criminal organization of the most evil empire, the CIA of the United States of America - but your spirit lives on in Latin America, Africa, Asia and even in vassal Europe, inspiring generation after generation for class struggle, that there is universal justice that must be fought for and will be won. Che - you are a true Hero - an icon for the poor and powerless!

Ernesto “Che” Guevara was born in Rosario, Argentina, on 14 June 1928 and was assassinated in Higuera, Bolivia, by CIA-led Bolivian forces on 9 October 1967. It was a summary execution - no trial, no questions asked - 50 years ago. What has changed in 5 decades? - At the surface, one might say - not much. The world is still divided between the capitalist, neocolonialist west and the much more visionary and peaceful east.

However, moral consciousness is rising everywhere. There is slow progression; the vessel is slowly veering towards a more peaceful multi-polar world. Not just the ascent of Russia and China are bringing a new wind of consciousness to millions of people, but the sensation of change is noticeable everywhere - from South to North and from East to West. It is still brittle and weak - but it is growing and gaining strength. And Che - his unquestioned determination to fight for a better world - was instrumental in this awakening.



Che left Argentina in the early 1950s as a medical student, accompanied by his pal, Alberto Granado, a young doctor, on a single-cylinder sputtering 1939 Norton motor cycle – they called it “La Poderosa” (“the Mighty”), exploring the Latin American Subcontinent which they knew only from books. Granado was probably the first one to give Ernesto the famous nickname “Che” – an Argentinian equivalent to ‘buddy’ or ‘pal’. They travelled through South America and discovered misery, poverty and disease. Combining Che’s *“The Motor Cycle Diaries”* and Granado’s *“With Che Through Latin America”*, Robert Redford turned the diaries in 2004 into an epic movie that has since become as symbolic for young revolutionary rebellion as has Alberto Korda’s famous photography of Che’s.

The film portrays the two friends exposed to utmost destitution throughout South America, turning Che gradually into the revolutionary, who eventually was instrumental in freeing Cuba, at the side of Fidel and Raul Castro, from the deadly oppression of US-supported dictator, Fulgencio Batista.

During their trip, the two friends served as doctors in San Pablo, an isolated leprosy colony near Iquitos, in Peru’s Amazon region. They went their separate ways at the end of their trip in 1953 in Venezuela. Granado stayed on in Venezuela, where he felt his *raison d’être* was to be a medical doctor, working as a leprosy specialist in a Venezuelan hospital. It took 8 years until they met again in Havana, when Che, who by then was second-in-command to Fidel, invited Alberto Granado to Cuba, where he was to teach biology at Havana University and in 1962 created the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Santiago in Cuba.

As a medical doctor, Che saw often hopelessness and misery. When he treated once a woman dying from tuberculosis, he was horrified by the public health system:

“How long this present order, based on the absurd idea of caste, will last is not within my means to answer, but it’s time that those who govern spent less time publicizing their own virtues and more money, much more money, funding socially useful works.”

And he continued,

“It is at times like this, when a doctor is conscious of his complete powerlessness, that he longs for change: a change to prevent the injustice of a system in which only a month ago this poor woman was still earning her living as a waitress, wheezing and panting but facing life with dignity. In circumstances like this, individuals in poor families who can’t pay their way become surrounded by an atmosphere of barely disguised acrimony; they stop being father, mother, sister or brother and become a purely negative factor in the struggle for life and, consequently, a source of bitterness for the healthy members of the community who resent their illness as if it were a personal insult to those who have to support them.”

Ernesto Che Guevara moved on from Venezuela on a cargo boat to Miami and from there through Central America to Mexico. He later learned about Guatemala’s President Arbenz’s assassination by a CIA-led *coup d’état* in 1954 on behalf of United Fruit – which Arbenz wanted to nationalize. Che became increasingly a revolutionary, whose goal it was to fight for justice and equality, for a better world and to free oppressed people throughout the globe from nefarious capitalism – starting with Latin America.

In Mexico, Che met with Fidel and Raul Castro. Together with a small revolutionary armada, they sailed on the now famed yacht Granma, participating in the historic 26th of July 1953 Movement (**M-26-7**) against the Moncada army Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. The assault failed. Che was injured, Castro was captured and sentenced to 15 years in prison but freed after two years in an armistice. They then returned to Mexico, where they organized and planned another, better prepared attack on the Batista regime.

In 1955, together with others by now renowned Cuban revolutionaries, like Camilo Cienfuegos and Juan Almeida Bosque, Fidel, Raul and Che formed a disciplined 82 men-strong guerilla force, aiming at overthrowing Batista. They left Veracruz, Mexico in late November 1956 and targeted the small town of Niquero, Oriente Province of Cuba. However, they were discovered by Cuban air force helicopters and had to land on 2 December 1956 on a beach called Los Colorados, about 25 km south of the designated spot where Celia Sánchez, a comrade revolutionary in Cuba, waited for them with jeeps, petrol, weapons and food. Due to the emergency landing, they could not benefit from this essential guerilla war materiel.

They fought hard against Batista's troops and lost 70 of the 82 men that sailed aboard Granma. But they did not give up. They regrouped in the Sierra Maestra mountains, where they attracted hundreds of young Cuban volunteers. They won many battles against Batista's army. These battles became the Cuban Revolution and eventually ended on New Year's Eve of 1958, when they marched victoriously into Havana. In January 1959 Batista fled to the Dominican Republic.

Following the triumphant Cuban Revolution, Che Guevara gained prominence and was soon promoted to second-in-charge to Fidel. He occupied several key roles in the new government, like instituting the agrarian land reform, leading a successful countrywide literacy campaign; he was Minister of Industry, Director of Cuba's Central Bank, instructed Cuba's armed forces. As such, he also trained the militia forces who repelled the Bay of Pigs Invasion and was instrumental in bringing the Soviet nuclear missiles to Cuba which prompted the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Che also toured the world as Cuba's chief diplomat, representing Cuba's socialism at the United Nations in both New York and Geneva, as well as everywhere he traveled.

In 1965, Che decided to leave Cuba. His major contribution to the Cuban Revolution, though ongoing to this day – was done. He was heavily influenced by Marxism-Leninism and saw the so-called Third World's underdevelopment – poverty, destitution, disease – as a dependence on the abusive exploitation by the west – that which, in turn, is the inherent result of imperialism and monopoly capitalism. The only remedy to fight it was socialist internationalism, a world revolution.

Che left Cuba for Congo-Kinshasa, now Zaïre, where he was unsuccessful in fomenting a revolution against Joseph Mobutu, one of the most corrupt and murderous dictators Africa has known until this day. Che Guevara was particularly inspired to help the people of then Congo (a former Belgian colony, today neocolony), because his comrade Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected President of the Congo in 1960, was overturned in a coup d'état by Colonel Mobutu, helped by Belgian forces. Mobutu ordered Lumumba's murder by firing squad in January 1961.

After a second coup, the brutal authoritarian Mobutu assumed power in 1965. With the help of the neocolonial US and the UK, he stayed in power more than three decades, until 1997,

putting the extraordinary riches of minerals and petrol basically at western disposal (against a hefty fee, of course, for his own (Swiss) bank accounts, not for his country), to the detriment of the Congolese people. Che Guevara was powerless against these boundless and ruthless military forces – forces that continue to protect also the Kabila dynasty that followed Mobutu in 1997, first by Laurent Kabila, and after his assassination in 2001, by his son Joseph – who to this day is ruling mineral-rich Zaïre, while sustaining bloody civil war-like conditions that has killed millions of people, including women and children, all for the benefit of western – mostly US – mineral giants feeding mainly the US military industrial complex.

Back to Che. After his unfortunate experience at revolution in Africa, he went back to his roots – Latin America, a culture which he was familiar with and where he believed a true and lasting revolution was possible – to bring dignity and sovereignty back to the peoples who were miserably oppressed by Washington backed military regimes for decades. On November 4, 1966, Che crossed the border into Bolivia under false identity. He thought Bolivia, the center of South America, was ideal to start and spread a revolution throughout Latin America.

Che formed a small army of 47 fighters from Bolivia, Cuba, Peru and Argentina, the '*Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Bolivia*' – ELN (The Bolivian National Liberation Army). Che and his people fought on several occasions the army of the cruel military dictator, René Barrientos, (1964-1969), who came to power in 1964 by a coup helped – by whom else – Washington. Che and his troops had also a non-fighting network that kept them informed and supplied them with food and water as their hardship and information inaccessibility made them vulnerable in the jungle of Bolivia.

Two members of Che's support team, Régis Debray (French) and Ciro Bustos (Argentinian), were captured and tortured. It is said, but has been often contested, that they revealed Che's whereabouts, which allowed Barrientos' army to intensify its battle and eventually by the end of September 1967 have a clear advantage over Che's guerilla army. Che and his men fought their last battle on 8 October in the Churro gorge, when they were captured and taken to an area called La Higuera, in the Department of Santa Cruz in Bolivia. Che was executed on 9 October and his body hidden by the military, though his diary made the way into Fidel's hands. Fidel eventually published it.

In 1995, Fidel Castro initiated with the President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, also called *Goni the "Gringo"*, a search for Che's remains. They were found in Vallegrande near La Higuera and sent to Cuba, where they were laid to rest in Santa Clara in a Mausoleum especially built for Che.

On 17 October 1997 CNN reports "Cuba paid tribute to revolutionary hero Ernest "Che" Guevara ... with a pomp-filled state burial and a ringing tribute from Fidel Castro, the man he helped propel to power nearly four decades ago. He said:

"His inerasable mark is now in history, and his luminous gaze of a prophet has become a symbol for all the poor of this world.""

Fidel's words still keep ringing through the ether of the universe. Undoubtedly, Che, Fidel and Hugo Chavez were among the most influential revolutionaries of the Western Hemisphere in the 20th Century. Their legacy keeps emitting signals of peace and justice

throughout the world.

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