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Reflections on Che Guevara's Legacy

by
Richard Harris

I was in Chile 30 years ago when I learned of Che Guevara's death at the hands of the Bolivian military. Shortly afterward I went to Bolivia to discover for myself why one of the most famous revolutionary leaders of the twentieth century had met his death there. I told the Bolivian authorities and the U.S. embassy in La Paz that I was researching the failure of the revolutionary guerrilla *foco* that Che Guevara and his comrades had established in southeastern Bolivia during 1966 and 1967, but my real interest was in the purposes of Che's revolutionary mission and the exact circumstances that had led to his death. I was also motivated by my own growing personal need to gain greater insight into the revolutionary convictions of men like Che and the revolutionary spirit that was spreading throughout the world. My journey to Bolivia was in a very real sense an intellectual and spiritual quest that I hoped would help me define my own role as a socially concerned scholar and a political activist.

After my return to the United States, I wrote a book about Che's last revolutionary mission and his death (Harris, 1970). During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Che became one of the heroes of the student and antiwar movements in the United States and Western Europe and many revolutionary movements around the world. Because of my book on Che I was invited to talk about him at universities, colleges, political gatherings, and academic conferences in various countries. As Jorge Castañeda so aptly states in the concluding paragraph of his recent book on Che, "Many of us today owe the few attractive and redeeming features of our daily existence to the sixties, and Che Guevara personifies the era, if not the traits, better than anyone" (Castañeda, 1997: 410). Since my encounter with the legacy of Che Guevara 30 years ago, I have lived a life influenced to a considerable degree by my research on him. Consequently, I have often reflected on the personal as well as historical effects of his legacy.

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My most recent reflections can be attributed to the request of my colleague for the past 30 years, Ronald Chilcote, the managing editor of *Latin American Perspectives*, that I write an essay on some of the recent literature about Che in conjunction with the 30th anniversary of his death. Therefore, once again, I find myself writing about the life and death of this remarkable and controversial man whose revolutionary legacy continues to inspire or incense those who knew or know of him.

Hundreds of books and articles about Che Guevara and many of his own writings have been published in Spanish and English and in various other languages. The selected bibliography in Jon Lee Anderson's book, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (1997: 777-787), and the section on sources at the end of Paco Ignacio Taibo's book, *Ernesto Guevara, también conocido como EL CHE* (1996: 827-860), are excellent compendiums of the many publications about and by Che.

The authors of the recent works on Che Guevara have benefited greatly from the wealth of information that has been published about him over the past three decades. Moreover, many of his own writings have been published. Nevertheless, as Taibo (1996: 10) notes, there is still "an enormous quantity of unpublished materials by Ernesto Che Guevara that remain to be published." It is quite possible, therefore, that we will discover even more about him in the years ahead.

This essay focuses on the recently published biographies of Che written by Jon Lee Anderson, Jorge Castañeda, and Paco Ignacio Taibo, a fascinating book by the Bolivian scholar Juan Ignacio Siles del Valle on the effects of Che's legacy on Bolivian politics and literature, and Che's own narrative of his 1951-1952 journey through South America with his friend Alberto Granado, entitled *The Motorcycle Diaries: A Journey Around South America* (1995). While the biographies provide a detailed and comprehensive account of Che's life and death, his motorcycle diaries shed light on a little-known period in his young adulthood and offer important insights into his personality and the development of his views about the world. When combined, these books reveal nearly everything that one who knows very little about Che might want to know about him. For those who already know a good deal about Che they are well worth reading because they not only amplify and clarify many aspects of his life and death but also provide new perspectives on his ideas, exploits, and historical legacy.

Although one can take exception to or quibble with some of Anderson's, Castañeda's, and Taibo's interpretations and conclusions, their biographies are well researched and well written. In tone and perspective they are sympathetic and admiring but not apologetic or uncritical. Anderson's work stands out in providing an excellent account of the historical contexts in which the

different phases of Che's life must be understood if one wants to gain a true understanding of the significance of his role in history. Castañeda's biography also describes and explains the historical context well but provides less detail. Taibo declares at the outset that the reader will find his work is lacking in explanations and descriptions of the historical context of Che's life because he wanted to focus primarily on the political debate between him and others at various moments in his life. Nevertheless, he does provide information on the historical circumstances surrounding the different points in Che's life. Taibo's style is distinguished from Anderson's and Castañeda's primarily by his frequent use of quotations from Che's writings and speeches, which he deftly weaves into his own narrative.

Che's motorcycle diaries are quite different. These lucid and brief accounts written while he was traveling around South America bring us into intimate contact with him at an important and formative period in his life. They allow us to hear his thoughts, view the world through his eyes, and sense his spirit. In a way they allow us to travel back in time to meet the man before he became a revolutionary.

Juan Ignacio Siles del Valle's book, *La guerrilla del Che y la narrativa boliviana* (1996), is an excellent account of the effects on Bolivian politics and literature of Che's final mission and death in Bolivia. His analysis reveals the extent to which Che's Bolivian expedition has influenced both Bolivian political life and the content of Bolivian literature, with the most recent influence stemming from the 1997 discovery of his remains in Vallegrande, where they were secretly buried by the Bolivian military. What strikes me as one of the most important contributions of Siles del Valle's book, as well as the biographies by Anderson, Castañeda, and Taibo, is the insights they provide into Che's convictions, plans, motives, decisions, and actions during the last years of his life. Siles del Valle's book explores the ideological underpinnings of Che's goals and actions in Bolivia and the ideals of the Bolivian revolutionaries who, inspired by Che's example, unsuccessfully attempted to create a revolution in Bolivia in the years immediately following his death.

Siles del Valle asks why Che and his Cuban comrades chose the relatively isolated and scarcely populated southeastern region of Bolivia as the location for their guerrilla base. He examines the different views on this question and makes a convincing case that the site was chosen as an initial training base and the jumping-off place for what they hoped would ultimately become a continental revolutionary struggle (1996: 29-38). Che's plan was to expand his base of operations to other parts of Bolivia and then into neighboring Argentina (his homeland) and Peru.

Siles del Valle (1996: 47-92) also explores the concept of "el hombre nuevo" (the new man), which he considers the ideological cornerstone of

Che's revolutionary theory and practice and an important source of inspiration for those who followed his example. As Siles del Valle notes, Che was dedicated to living his life in accordance with his concept of the new man. For Che this new type of human being would arise out of the revolutionary struggle to liberate humanity from the egoistic individualism, exploitation, and social alienation of capitalism.

Che felt that the struggle against capitalism and the construction of a new socialist society required a new type of human being who would be willing to make personal sacrifices for the good of others. Nowhere is this concept of the new man presented more explicitly than in Che's essay "Socialism and Man in Cuba," written early in 1965 while he was traveling in Africa and later published in Cuba. What follow are some brief excerpts from this essay (Gerassi, 1968: 398-400):

> Let me say, at the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of a true revolutionary without this quality. . . . Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealize their love for the people.
>
> There is no life outside the revolution. In these conditions the revolutionary leaders must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth, to avoid falling into dogmatic extremes, into cold scholasticism, into isolation from the masses.
>
> Each and every one of us punctually pays his share of sacrifice, aware of being rewarded by the satisfaction of fulfilling our duty, aware of advancing with everyone toward the new human being who is to be glimpsed on the horizon. . . . The road is long and in part unknown; we are aware of our limitations. We will make the twenty-first century man, we ourselves.

Siles del Valle argues rather convincingly that Che's views on the new man motivated him and his comrades and the young Bolivian revolutionaries who followed in their footsteps a few years later to sacrifice their lives for a new society and a new kind of human being. He compares and links Che's vision of the new man and revolutionary love with the Christian body of theory and practice known as liberation theology, which originated in Latin America during the 1960s.

As Siles del Valle notes, in the late 1960s and early 1970s this body of socially concerned and unorthodox religious praxis gained significant support among the more progressive elements of the Catholic Church in Latin America. Many of the adherents of this new theology established close links with popular revolutionary movements throughout the region. In Bolivia, after the failure of Che's guerrilla movement, and in other countries, such as Chile, Peru, Brazil, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the most progressive

sectors of the church, influenced by the ideals of liberation theology, associated themselves with Marxist and neo-Marxist revolutionary movements.

In Bolivia this tendency resulted in the participation of certain younger members of the Christian Democratic party in a revolutionary guerrilla movement that attempted to establish a base of operations in 1970 around the mining town of Teoponte, north of the capital of La Paz. This movement was led by the younger brother of Inti and Coco Peredo, both of whom had served under Che in his failed expedition in the Ñancahuazú region.

Siles del Valle reveals the convergence of Che's model of popular revolution based on guerrilla warfare, and his vision of the new man with the basic concepts of liberation theology in the aftermath of his fatal attempt to ignite a continental revolutionary movement in Bolivia. He argues that after the massacre by the Bolivian army of most of the young participants in the Teoponte guerrilla effort an important change took place in Bolivian politics and popular culture. Although the idea of guerrilla warfare was no longer accepted as a viable form of resistance to the military regime, important elements within the Bolivian people began to idealize and even venerate the guerrillas. Siles del Valle's book demonstrates how Che's death, his concept of the new man, the ideals of liberation theology, and the political movements inspired by Che's example have influenced Bolivian popular literature and politics right up to the present.

The biographies by Anderson, Castañeda, and Taibo provide a great deal of insight into Che's views about the Cuban revolution, socialism, the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, the United States, Africa, and Latin America. They also shed light on Che's role in installing guerrilla focos in Central America, his unsuccessful effort to launch a guerrilla foco in northern Argentina in 1963, his decision in 1965 to leave his important position in Cuba's revolutionary government, his plans for creating a continental revolution in South America, and his unsuccessful mission to the Congo in 1965.

Anderson, Castañeda, and Taibo piece together Che's plans, decisions, and actions from his writings and from the remembrances, observations, and opinions of the people who were closest to him. The combination of these sources allows them to present convincing interpretations of the motives behind Che's actions during the last years of his life. For example, they provide a great deal of insight into Che's abortive mission to the Congo in 1965. Their accounts are based on interviews they conducted in Cuba and elsewhere with some of his closest companions in the Congo and others who were involved in Che's unpublished account of this unsuccessful mission. We learn from all this that Che was impatient to leave Cuba and foment revolution elsewhere in Latin America—especially in his former homeland, Argentina. We also learn

that Fidel Castro supported Che's idea of assisting the rebels in the Congo. It appears that Fidel did this in part to keep Che from involving himself without sufficient preparation in fomenting a revolutionary foco in Latin America after the recent failure of the guerrilla foco in northern Argentina led by Che's friend and operative Jorge Masetti (Taibo, 1996: 522-523). In this regard, Taibo notes that Che's second-in-command in the Congo, Víctor Drake, claims that Che went to the Congo "contrary to his original idea of going to fight in Argentina" (Taibo, 1996: 523). He also quotes Pablo Rivalta, who as the Cuban ambassador to Tanzania assisted Che's Congo mission and gave him refuge after it failed, as saying that "the Congo was to serve as a base, as a detonator, to revolutionize all the African countries. . . . The struggle, the training and activation of the Congolese liberation movement, was to serve all the countries, and fundamentally South Africa."

Taibo adds his own perspective on Che's reasons for leaving Cuba to fight in the Congo and afterwards in Bolivia; by doing so "he had recovered his freedom of action, he was no longer a government minister who had to speak in the name of a revolutionary government in power, subject to silences, diplomacies, and protocols; he was again a guerrilla fighter, and once more Ernesto on his motorcycle" (1996: 530). Here Taibo refers to Che's adventurous nature, his desire to return to the life of a revolutionary guerrilla fighter, and his disdain for the constraints and conventional obligations imposed upon him by his official obligations as an important leader in the Cuban government. Anderson, Castañeda, and Taibo provide considerable testimony to support this characterization.

Che's unpublished 153-page manuscript on his Congo mission, written while he was staying in the Cuban embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in the days immediately following the forced withdrawal of his contingent of Cuban volunteers from the eastern Congo, reveals that he had decided to lead a contingent of armed Cubans into the rebellious eastern Congo without the knowledge and consent of the rebel leader Laurent Kabila (who, ironically, is now the head of the current regime in the Congo as a result of a successful rebellion initiated in the eastern Congo). According to Che (quoted in Anderson, 1997: 631-632):

> I hadn't told any of the Congolese about my decision to fight there. In my first conversation with Kabila I had not been able to do so because nothing had yet been decided, and after the plan was approved [by Fidel] it would have been dangerous for my project to be known before I arrived at my destination; there was a lot of hostile territory to cross. I decided, therefore, to present a fait accompli and act according to however they reacted to my presence. I was not unaware of the fact that a negative would place me in a difficult position, because

> now I couldn't go back, but I calculated that it would be difficult for them to refuse me.

And in Taibo's biography we learn from the same unpublished diary that once Che was in the Congo he soon realized that there was little prospect for the Congolese rebels to achieve victory because of their poor leadership, failure to organize the local population, distrust of one another, and lack of discipline. According to Taibo (1996: 569), Che wrote:

> The leaders of the movement spend most of their time outside of the territory. . . . Organizational work is almost nil because the mid-level leaders do not work, in fact do not know how to work, and everyone distrusts everyone else. . . . Lack of discipline and lack of self-sacrifice are the dominant characteristics of the guerrilla troops. Naturally, with these troops one cannot win a war.

Taibo reveals that Che also recognized his own responsibility for the failure of the mission. He quotes Che as follows: "I have left with more faith than ever in the guerrilla struggle, but we have failed. My responsibility is large; I will not forget the defeat or its precious lessons" (1996: 607). From the passages quoted from his diary it is clear that Che was quite critical of his own behavior and his own limitations. He engaged in self-critique with a view to avoiding a repetition of the errors that he felt he had committed in the Congo.

However, Che's mission to Bolivia appears to have failed for some of the same reasons as the Congo mission. As Anderson notes, Che repeated the tactic of secretly entering another country at the head of a foreign military group without the approval of his presumed political allies. According to Anderson (1997: 701), "he neatly replicated his Congo *chantaje* [blackmail], once again appearing on alien turf without an invitation, convinced that the Bolivian Communist Party (BCP) leadership wouldn't back out of the impending guerrilla war once he presented it with the fait accompli of his presence." Anderson asserts somewhat harshly that the difference in the case of Bolivia was that "this time his mistake would prove fatal."

With hindsight it is clear that Che's mission was doomed from the outset; neither the objective nor the subjective conditions for a successful revolutionary foco existed in Bolivia. The political situation there at the time was not comparable to the situation in Cuba in 1956 and 1957. The conditions for a successful revolutionary movement (even if it had been "home grown" instead of directed by "outsiders") were not present in Bolivia (as the subsequent efforts undertaken solely by Bolivians themselves proved), and the conditions for a continental struggle against U.S. imperialism—which is

what Che and his comrades hoped to detonate in Bolivia—were even more remote.

Yet Che and his men were convinced that they could organize a successful revolutionary foco in Bolivia that would ultimately lead to a continental revolution in Latin America. Both Anderson and Taibo make it clear that this misreading of the situation in Bolivia was due in part to the strength of Che's and Castro's convictions about the feasibility of "exporting" the Cuban revolution to Latin America. Both writers also reveal that Che's mission to Bolivia was founded in part on the "bad intelligence" Che and Fidel received on the situation there from the Cuban intelligence service, Che's own sources in Bolivia, and the BCP.

In this respect, the failure of the mission can in part be attributed to the duplicity of the BCP's leadership, particularly Mario Monje, the head of the party. As Anderson notes, "Pombo [the code name of Harry Villegas Tamayo, Che's former bodyguard and one of the survivors of the Bolivian mission] insists that what Monje perpetrated was an act of 'conscious treason,' [and] thirty years after the event, Che's widow Aleida still considers Monje . . . as the man who betrayed her husband" (Anderson, 1997: 705). The reason for this is that Monje strung Fidel and Che along even though he and the other leaders of the party were in fact opposed to a Cuban-led guerrilla expedition in their country.

My own research in Bolivia clearly indicated that Monje had purposively misrepresented his intentions to the Cubans and denied Che's group the support it needed (Harris, 1970: 147-165), but my conclusions were not well received at the time by many leftists. Today, in the light of the information that is available, it is hard to dismiss this conclusion. Che himself referred to Monje and his party's behavior as traitorous. Taibo (1996: 647) quotes Che's diary on this issue—"As I expected, Monje's attitude was evasive initially and traitorous afterwards"—and notes that Che also wrote, "Now the party has turned against us and I don't know where it will lead, but this will not stop us and perhaps, in the long run, it may be beneficial (I am almost sure of this)." The reason Che believed the party's opposition would be beneficial is that he thought it would clear the air and create a situation in which "the most honest and combative people will be with us, even though they may pass through a more or less grave crisis of conscience."

Che's brand of revolutionary internationalism and belief in revolutionary guerrilla warfare were not shared by the leaders of most of the pro-Soviet Communist parties in Latin America or, for that matter, the Soviet Union. On the basis of his research in the former Soviet Union, Anderson concludes that while the Soviets regarded Che's "adventurism" as contrary to their own strategy, there was also sympathy for him, especially since his influence had

been decisive in persuading Fidel to align himself with the Soviets in the first place. For example, Anderson quotes Feder Burlatsky, a former adviser to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, as saying, "We disliked Che's position. He became an example for adventurers, [and this] could have provoked a confrontation between the USSR and the U.S." (1997: 581). However, Burlatsky went on to say,

> Even though Che was against our interests, there was still some sympathy for him. . . . There was a romantic aura around him; he reminded people of the Russian Revolution. . . . Opinion was divided. . . . Some compared him to Trotsky, or to some of the Bolshevik terrorists. Advisors of Khrushchev like Mikhail Suslov, who described themselves as revolutionaries, had sympathy for Che.

According to Anderson, Nikolai Metutsov, who was Soviet Party Secretary Yuri Andropov's deputy in charge of relations with non-European socialist states, "fell in love" with Che upon meeting him. He quotes Metutsov as follows (1997: 585):

> Externally one could truly say that, yes, Che Guevara was contaminated by Maoism because of his Maoist slogan that the rifle can create power. And certainly he can be considered a Trotskyite because he went to Latin America to stimulate the revolutionary movement . . . but in any case I think these are external signs, superficial ones, and that deep down, what was most profound in him was his aspiration to help man on the basis of Marxism-Leninism.

Anderson reports that in Metutsov's view Che's dedication to armed struggle, while a source of worry for some members of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist party, was not a matter of significant concern to the Soviet leadership.

Castañeda's account of Che's position vis-à-vis the Soviet-Chinese conflict relies heavily upon memoranda written by Che's Soviet friend Oleg Daroussenkov. According to Daroussenkov, Che was concerned about the fact that his views were misperceived by the Soviets and by some of the Cuban leadership as pro-Chinese. For example, Castañeda quotes from a memorandum on a conversation that took place between Daroussenkov and Che about this problem (1997: 252):

> Several Soviet comrades tend to think that my views on topics like guerrilla warfare as the principal means for the liberation of the Latin American peoples, or the issue of financial self-management as opposed to the system for budgetary finance, are Chinese positions and conclude that Guevara is pro-China. Can't I have my own opinion on these issues, independently of what the Chinese think?

Actually, Che's views were closer to those held at the time by the Chinese leadership, and he was increasingly critical of the Soviets. He considered the course adopted by the Soviet Union under Khrushchev a "rightist" deviation from socialism (1997: 256). He also considered Cuba's renewed emphasis on sugar production, material incentives, and decentralized financial self-management at the production-enterprise level—all of which were encouraged by Cuba's Soviet advisers—a betrayal of the revolutionary regime's commitment to industrialization and the replacement of capitalist material incentives with communist moral incentives.

As Castañeda points out, Che believed that the revolutionary regime needed to promote the development among Cuba's working class of a new communist consciousness based on moral rather than material incentives. And he also believed strongly that the regime needed to adopt a centralized budgetary system for the equitable allocation of resources between different sectors of the economy in order to build socialism in Cuba's underdeveloped capitalist economy (1997: 261-263). He was vehemently opposed to what has today become the accepted strategy in the remaining few socialist countries—marketization, material incentives, and enterprise financial self-management. Moreover, he predicted that the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc would return to capitalism if they continued to rely on this approach (Anderson, 1997: 697).

Castañeda, Anderson, and Taibo reveal the extent to which Che was committed to both fomenting socialist revolution on a truly international scale and personally putting into practice his thesis that it was possible for a small but committed guerrilla force to ignite a full-scale popular revolution in Third World countries saddled by oppressive regimes and U.S. imperialism. His commitment to these beliefs was shared by most of his closest friends and comrades as well as many admirers and sympathizers around the world. It is interesting, however, that one of his oldest and closest Argentine friends—Alberto Granado, who traveled with Che around South America on his famous motorcycle trip—did not agree with Che about "jump-starting" revolution in Latin America through guerrilla warfare (Anderson, 1997: 571), although he did help recruit people for the foco in northern Argentina. This question about the viability of guerrilla warfare in igniting and carrying out a popular revolution remains an important question of revolutionary theory and practice, and no one has made more of a contribution to this issue than Che Guevara.

In modified form, Che's ideas were adopted with some success by armed revolutionary movements in Central America in the 1970s and 1980s, and to some extent his model of guerrilla warfare appears to be reflected today in the contemporary Zapatista movement in southern Mexico. Thus, Anderson as-

serts: "Those who believed that Che, or guerrilla warfare, had passed from 'fashion' with the eclipse of Marxist insurgency and the end of the Cold War have been proven wrong, as the three-year-old indigenous 'Zapatista' uprising led by the balaclava-clad 'Subcomandante Marcos' in southern Mexico has shown" (1997: 753). While he acknowledges that "the Zapatistas' less than aggressive military tactics and avowed political goals . . . are far more modest than were Che's" he argues that Che's legacy is apparent in this movement and that "the charismatic figure of Marcos himself—gun-wielding, pipe-smoking, reflective, ironic, and lyrical"—is reminiscent of Che. He concludes that "it is not hard to see Marcos as a reborn Che Guevara, adapted to modern times" (1997: 753).

What both Anderson and Castañeda argue is that Che was unrealistic in his expectations about the prospects for launching popular revolutions through guerrilla warfare and expected too much of those around him. According to Castañeda (1997: 389),

> Just as he had at the Ministry of Industries, Guevara asked too much—of the Revolution, the Cuban population, the island's economy, and the USSR. In Bolivia, his demands became increasingly exorbitant. His companions sought to humor him, attend to his needs, and fulfill his aspirations . . . [but] they were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the mission, especially when they were tacitly asked to share in the Christlike destiny which Che had pursued since his early youth.

As Anderson notes, "to many, he seemed altogether too serious about revolution, unrelentingly moralistic, and holier-than-thou" (1997: 571). Moreover, his own austerity and disregard for flattery and personal gain were "a constant reproof to many of his high-living and philandering fellow revolutionaries." During the period in which he was one of the most important members of the Cuban revolutionary government, he was famous for his careless appearance—he always wore his uniform shirt out of his pants and open at the throat, and his boots were never laced to the top. Some of these traits are clearly evident in Che's trips around South America as a young man. He seems to have delighted in traveling for days without bathing or changing his clothes and was not distressed by traveling with little or no money or having no idea where he would spend the night. He expected the same from his traveling companions. Ironically, these experiences helped him later as a guerrilla fighter, when he often had to go without food and water for days.

Che's early writings reveal a great deal about his character and values. For example, in the prologue to the motorcycle diaries (reprinted from Guevara Lynch, 1988), his father (now deceased) notes that it is from the letters he wrote while on his travels through South America that we can "come to un-

derstand that he was following a truly missionary impulse which never left him" (Guevara, 1995: 3). According to his father, we can also see in Che's early writings that he was a man who had a great deal of faith in his own ability to see the triumph of his ideals achieved (Guevara, 1995: 4): "Ernesto had faith in himself as well as the will to succeed, and a tremendous determination to achieve what he set out to do. Add to this an intelligence of which he gave ample evidence and you can understand how he achieved so much in such a short time." His motorcycle diaries also reveal his growing sense of indignation and his early leanings toward socialism as he became aware of the extent and intensity of the social injustice and political oppression he witnessed on his travels through Latin America.

Taibo sees Che's travels as a young man as the basis for his determination to do everything he could about the ills and injustices that he saw the majority of humanity suffering (1996: 612):

> The horror of Peruvian social inequality, Bolivian demagoguery, the all-powerful Colombian military, the abuse of imperialist gangsters in Central America, the cardboard dictators who ordered tortures, the malnutrition, the hunger, the ignorance, the fear, were the real images that Che had recorded in his retina during his trips as a youth. From there came Che's tenacity, his clear consciousness that the Latin American revolution was not only a moral necessity but one that could not be deferred.

However, what strikes me most about the motorcycle diaries is that Che's indignation about the extent of social injustice in Latin America and his desire to help the less fortunate and the oppressed were not coupled with the self-righteousness or exaggerated piety that one often associates with zealous militants and missionaries. As Anderson notes, he had an ironic and sarcastic wit (1997: 572) and practiced a curious blend of romanticism and pragmatism, and while he did demand a great deal of those around him, he demanded even more of himself.

He exemplified the principles of individual sacrifice, honesty, dedication to cause, and personal conviction in his beliefs. In fact, the example he created by the way he lived his life and met his death has "transcended time and ideology to nurture and inspire new generations of fighters and dreamers" (Anderson, 1997: xiv). Che's "defiant visage" has become the "ultimate icon" of revolutionary spirit and commitment in the late twentieth century. He was truly a man who died for his beliefs, and because of his almost mythical self-sacrifice for his revolutionary ideals he has been the single most important "figure of veneration" for revolutionaries and guerrilla fighters around the world.

Castañeda links Che's legacy to what he sees as the legacy of the international youth revolt that took place in the 1960s (1997: 409):

> What the sixties wrought everywhere was, first, an acknowledgment of the existence of power in society outside of politics, economics, and the state; and second, the need to resist these latter powers, erode their prerogatives, question their legitimacy, deny their permanence. This is the lasting legacy of that decade. . . . It is also what made Che the perfect fit, the supreme emblem of that cultural revolt—a man whose politics were conventional but whose attitude toward power and politics attained epic and unique dimensions.

Castañeda argues that "Che can be found . . . in the niches reserved for cultural icons, for symbols of social uprisings that filter down deep into the soil of society," but while there is truth in this assertion it is also clear that Che's legacy is greater than this.

In Bolivia, where Che's secretly hidden remains were recently discovered, Siles del Valle reveals that there has been a reencounter with the guerrilla-warfare episode that has taken the form of an effort to "purify" the guerrillas and examine their motives in terms of their ideological underpinnings—particularly the concepts of the new man and liberation theology. Bolivian literature, in particular, according to Siles del Valle, is testimony to the influence on Bolivian society of Che's guerrilla mission and death.

In Latin America, as Taibo (1996: 10) reminds us, Che continues to be the "herald" of a Latin American revolution that is the more necessary the more impossible it seems. His spirit lives on in the minds of people all over the world, and his revolutionary myth has grown. The revolutionary ideals that he lived and died for have transcended the gap in generations and cultures, and the familiar slogan of the late 1960s and early 1970s, "¡Che Vive!" (Che lives!), appears to have as much meaning now as it did then. His revolutionary legacy continues to influence not only those of us who were inspired by him then but also those who are discovering him today.

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