

Che Guevara

Socialism and man in Cuba

Written: March, 1965

First Published: March 12, 1965, under the title, "From Algiers, for *Marcha* . The Cuban Revolution Today.&rdquo

Source: *The Che Reader*, Ocean Press, © 2005.

Translated: *See also:* [Alternate Translation](#)

Transcription/Markup: Ocean Press/Brian Baggins

Copyright: © 2005 Aleida March, Che Guevara Studies Center and Ocean Press. Reprinted with their permission. Not to be reproduced in any form without the written permission of Ocean Press. For further information contact Ocean Press at info@oceanbooks.com.au and via its website at www.oceanbooks.com.au.

This article was written in the form of a letter to Carlos Quijano, editor of *Marcha*, a weekly published in Montevideo, Uruguay. Guevara wrote it while on a three-month overseas trip, during which he addressed the United Nations General Assembly and then visited a number of countries in Africa. Subheads have been added.

Dear *compañero* ,^[29]

Though belatedly, I am completing these notes in the course of my trip through Africa,^[30] hoping in this way to keep my promise. I would like to do so by dealing with the theme set forth in the title above. I think it may be of interest to Uruguayan readers.

A common argument from the mouths of capitalist spokespeople, in the ideological struggle against socialism, is that socialism, or the period of building socialism into which we have entered, is characterized by the abolition of the individual for the sake of the state. I will not try to refute this argument solely on theoretical grounds but rather to establish the facts

as they exist in Cuba and then add comments of a general nature. Let me begin by broadly sketching the history of our revolutionary struggle before and after the taking of power.

As is well known, the exact date of the beginning of the revolutionary struggle — which would culminate in January 1959 — was July 26, 1953. A group led by Fidel Castro attacked the Moncada barracks in Oriente Province on the morning of that day. The attack was a failure; the failure became a disaster; and the survivors ended up in prison, beginning the revolutionary struggle again after they were freed by an amnesty. In this process, in which there was only the germ of socialism, the individual was a fundamental factor. We put our trust in him — individual, specific, with a first and last name — and the triumph or failure of the mission entrusted to him depended on that individual's capacity for action. Then came the stage of guerrilla struggle. It developed in two distinct environments: the people, the still sleeping mass that had to be mobilized; and its vanguard, the guerrillas, the motor force of the mobilization, the generator of revolutionary consciousness and militant enthusiasm. This vanguard was the catalyzing agent that created the subjective conditions necessary for victory.

Here again, in the framework of the proletarianization of our thinking, of this revolution that took place in our habits and our minds, the individual was the basic factor. Every one of the combatants of the Sierra Maestra who reached an upper rank in the revolutionary forces has a record of outstanding deeds to his or her credit. They attained their rank on this basis.

First heroic stage

This was the first heroic period, and in which combatants competed for the heaviest responsibilities, for the greatest dangers, with no other

satisfaction than fulfilling a duty. In our work of revolutionary education we frequently return to this instructive theme. In the attitude of our fighters could be glimpsed the man and woman of the future.^[31]

On other occasions in our history the act of total dedication to the revolutionary cause was repeated. During the October [1962 missile] crisis and in the days of Hurricane Flora [in October 1963] we saw exceptional deeds of valor and sacrifice performed by an entire people.^[32] Finding the method to perpetuate this heroic attitude in daily life is, from the ideological standpoint, one of our fundamental tasks.

In January 1959, the revolutionary government was established with the participation of various members of the treacherous bourgeoisie. The presence of the Rebel Army was the basic element constituting the guarantee of power. Serious contradictions developed right away. In the first instance, in February 1959, these were resolved when Fidel Castro assumed leadership of the government, taking the post of prime minister. This process culminated in July of the same year with the resignation under mass pressure of President Urrutia.^[33]

In the history of the Cuban Revolution there now appeared a character, well defined in its features, which would systematically reappear: the mass. This multifaceted being is not, as is claimed, the sum of elements of the same type (reduced, moreover, to that same type by the ruling system), which acts like a flock of sheep. It is true that it follows its leaders, basically Fidel Castro, without hesitation. But the degree to which he won this trust results precisely from having interpreted the full meaning of the people's desires and aspirations, and from the sincere struggle to fulfill the promises he made.

Participation of the masses

The mass participated in the agrarian reform and in the difficult task of administering state enterprises;^[34] it went through the heroic experience of the Bay of Pigs;^[35] it was hardened in the battles against various groups of bandits armed by the CIA; it lived through one of the most important decisions of modern times during the October [missile] crisis; and today it continues to work for the building of socialism.

Viewed superficially, it might appear that those who speak of the subordination of the individual to the state are right. The mass carries out with matchless enthusiasm and discipline the tasks set by the government, whether in the field of the economy, culture, defense, sports, etc. The initiative generally comes from Fidel, or from the revolutionary leadership, and is explained to the people, who make it their own. In some cases the party and government take a local experience and generalize it, following the same procedure.

Nevertheless, the state sometimes makes mistakes. When one of these mistakes occurs, one notes a decline in collective enthusiasm due to the effect of a quantitative diminution in each of the elements that make up the mass. Work is paralyzed until it is reduced to an insignificant level. It is time to make a correction. That is what happened in March 1962, as a result of the sectarian policy imposed on the party by Aníbal Escalante.^[36] Clearly this mechanism is not enough to ensure a succession of sensible measures. A more structured connection with the mass is needed, and we must improve it in the course of the coming years. But as far as initiatives originating in the upper strata of the government are concerned, we are currently utilizing the almost intuitive method of sounding out general reactions to the great problems we confront.

In this Fidel is a master. His own special way of fusing himself with the people can be appreciated only by seeing him in action. At the great public mass meetings one can observe something like the dialogue of two

tuning forks whose vibrations interact, producing new sounds. Fidel and the mass begin to vibrate together in a dialogue of growing intensity until they reach the climax in an abrupt conclusion crowned by our cry of struggle and victory. The difficult thing to understand for someone not living through the experience of the revolution is this close dialectical unity between the individual and the mass, in which both are interrelated and, at the same time, in which the mass, as an aggregate of individuals, interacts with its leaders.

Some phenomena of this kind can be seen under capitalism, when politicians appear capable of mobilizing popular opinion. But when these are not genuine social movements — if they were, it would not be entirely correct to call them capitalist — they live only so long as the individual who inspires them, or until the harshness of capitalist society puts an end to the people's illusions.

Invisible laws of capitalism

In capitalist society individuals are controlled by a pitiless law usually beyond their comprehension. The alienated human specimen is tied to society as a whole by an invisible umbilical cord: the law of value.^[37] This law acts upon all aspects of one's life, shaping its course and destiny. The laws of capitalism, which are blind and are invisible to ordinary people, act upon the individual without he or she being aware of it. One sees only the vastness of a seemingly infinite horizon ahead. That is how it is painted by capitalist propagandists who purport to draw a lesson from the example of Rockefeller^[38] — whether or not it is true — about the possibilities of individual success. The amount of poverty and suffering required for a Rockefeller to emerge, and the amount of depravity entailed in the accumulation of a fortune of such magnitude, are left out of the picture, and it is not always possible for the popular forces to expose this clearly. (A discussion of how the workers in the imperialist countries

gradually lose the spirit of working-class internationalism due to a certain degree of complicity in the exploitation of the dependent countries, and how this at the same time weakens the combativity of the masses in the imperialist countries, would be appropriate here, but that is a theme that goes beyond the scope of these notes.)

In any case, the road to success is portrayed as beset with perils — perils that, it would seem, an individual with the proper qualities can overcome to attain the goal. The reward is seen in the distance; the way is lonely. Furthermore, it is a contest among wolves. One can win only at the cost of the failure of others.

The individual and socialism

I would now like to try to define the individual, the actor in this strange and moving drama of the building of socialism, in a dual existence as a unique being and as a member of society.

I think the place to start is to recognize the individual's quality of incompleteness, of being an unfinished product. The vestiges of the past are brought into the present in one's consciousness, and a continual labor is necessary to eradicate them.^[39] The process is two-sided. On the one hand, society acts through direct and indirect education; on the other, the individual submits to a conscious process of self-education. The new society in formation has to compete fiercely with the past. This past makes itself felt not only in one's consciousness — in which the residue of an education systematically oriented toward isolating the individual still weighs heavily — but also through the very character of this transition period in which commodity relations still persist. The commodity is the economic cell of capitalist society. So long as it exists its effects will make themselves felt in the organization of production and, consequently, in consciousness.

Marx outlined the transition period as resulting from the explosive transformation of the capitalist system destroyed by its own contradictions. In historical reality, however, we have seen that some countries that were weak limbs on the tree of imperialism were torn off first — a phenomenon foreseen by Lenin.

In these countries, capitalism had developed sufficiently to make its effects felt by the people in one way or another. But it was not capitalism's internal contradictions that, having exhausted all possibilities, caused the system to explode. The struggle for liberation from a foreign oppressor; the misery caused by external events such as war, whose consequences privileged classes place on the backs of the exploited; liberation movements aimed at overthrowing neo-colonial regimes — these are the usual factors in unleashing this kind of explosion. Conscious action does the rest. A complete education for social labor has not yet taken place in these countries, and wealth is far from being within the reach of the masses through the simple process of appropriation. Underdevelopment, on the one hand, and the usual flight of capital, on the other, make a rapid transition without sacrifices impossible.^[40] There remains a long way to go in constructing the economic base, and the temptation is very great to follow the beaten track of material interest as the lever with which to accelerate development.

There is the danger that the forest will not be seen for the trees. The pipe dream that socialism can be achieved with the help of the dull instruments left to us by capitalism (the commodity as the economic cell, profitability, individual material interest as a lever, etc.) can lead into a blind alley. When you wind up there after having traveled a long distance with many crossroads, it is hard to figure out just where you took the wrong turn. Meanwhile, the economic foundation that has been laid has done its work of undermining the development of consciousness. To build

communism it is necessary, simultaneous with the new material foundations, to build the new man and woman.

New consciousness

That is why it is very important to choose the right instrument for mobilizing the masses. Basically, this instrument must be moral in character, without neglecting, however, a correct use of the material incentive — especially of a social character.^[41]

As I have already said, in moments of great peril it is easy to muster a powerful response with moral incentives. Retaining their effectiveness, however, requires the development of a consciousness in which there is a new scale of values. Society as a whole must be converted into a gigantic school.

In rough outline this phenomenon is similar to the process by which capitalist consciousness was formed in its initial period. Capitalism uses force, but it also educates people in the system. Direct propaganda is carried out by those entrusted with explaining the inevitability of class society, either through some theory of divine origin or a mechanical theory of natural law. This lulls the masses, since they see themselves as being oppressed by an evil against which it is impossible to struggle.

Next comes hope of improvement — and in this, capitalism differed from the earlier caste systems, which offered no way out. For some people, the principle of the caste system will remain in effect: The reward for the obedient is to be transported after death to some fabulous other world where, according to the old beliefs, good people are rewarded. For other people there is this innovation: class divisions are determined by fate, but individuals can rise out of their class through work, initiative, etc. This process, and the myth of the self-made man, has to be profoundly hypocritical: it is the self-serving demonstration that a lie is the truth.

In our case, direct education acquires a much greater importance.^[42] The explanation is convincing because it is true; no subterfuge is needed. It is carried on by the state's educational apparatus as a function of general, technical and ideological education through such agencies as the Ministry of Education and the party's informational apparatus. Education takes hold among the masses and the foreseen new attitude tends to become a habit. The masses continue to make it their own and to influence those who have not yet educated themselves. This is the indirect form of educating the masses, as powerful as the other, structured, one.

Conscious process of self-education

But the process is a conscious one. Individuals continually feel the impact of the new social power and perceive that they do not entirely measure up to its standards. Under the pressure of indirect education, they try to adjust themselves to a situation that they feel is right and that their own lack of development had prevented them from reaching previously. They educate themselves.

In this period of the building of socialism we can see the new man and woman being born. The image is not yet completely finished — it never will be, since the process goes forward hand in hand with the development of new economic forms.

Aside from those whose lack of education makes them take the solitary road toward satisfying their own personal ambitions, there are those — even within this new panorama of a unified march forward — who have a tendency to walk separately from the masses accompanying them. What is important, however, is that each day individuals are acquiring ever more consciousness of the need for their incorporation into society and, at the same time, of their importance as the motor of that society.

They no longer travel completely alone over lost roads toward distant aspirations. They follow their vanguard, consisting of the party, the advanced workers, the advanced individuals who walk in unity with the masses and in close communion with them.^[43] The vanguard has its eyes fixed on the future and its reward, but this is not a vision of reward for the individual. The prize is the new society in which individuals will have different characteristics: the society of communist human beings.

The road is long and full of difficulties. At times we lose our way and must turn back. At other times we go too fast and separate ourselves from the masses. Sometimes we go too slow and feel the hot breath of those treading at our heels. In our zeal as revolutionaries we try to move ahead as fast as possible, clearing the way. But we know we must draw our nourishment from the mass and that it can advance more rapidly only if we inspire it by our example.

Despite the importance given to moral incentives, the fact that there remains a division into two main groups (excluding, of course, the minority that for one reason or another does not participate in the building of socialism) indicates the relative lack of development of social consciousness. The vanguard group is ideologically more advanced than the mass; the latter understands the new values, but not sufficiently. While among the former there has been a qualitative change that enables them to make sacrifices in their capacity as an advance guard, the latter see only part of the picture and must be subject to incentives and pressures of a certain intensity. This is the dictatorship of the proletariat operating not only on the defeated class but also on individuals of the victorious class.

All of this means that for total success a series of mechanisms, of revolutionary institutions, is needed.^[44] Along with the image of the multitudes marching toward the future comes the concept of institutionalization as a harmonious set of channels, steps, restraints and

well-oiled mechanisms which facilitate the advance, which facilitate the natural selection of those destined to march in the vanguard, and which bestow rewards on those who fulfill their duties and punishments on those who commit a crime against the society that is being built.

Institutionalization of the revolution

This institutionalization of the revolution has not yet been achieved. We are looking for something new that will permit a complete identification between the government and the community in its entirety, something appropriate to the special conditions of the building of socialism, while avoiding at all costs transplanting the commonplaces of bourgeois democracy — such as legislative chambers, for example — into the society in formation.

Some experiments aimed at the gradual institutionalization of the revolution have been made, but without undue haste. The greatest brake has been our fear lest any appearance of formality might separate us from the masses and from the individual, which might make us lose sight of the ultimate and most important revolutionary aspiration: to see human beings liberated from their alienation.

Despite the lack of institutions, which must be overcome gradually, the masses are now making history as a conscious collective of individuals fighting for the same cause. The individual under socialism, despite apparent standardization, is more complete. Despite the lack of a perfect mechanism for it, the opportunities for self expression and making oneself felt in the social organism are infinitely greater.

It is still necessary to deepen conscious participation, individual and collective, in all the structures of management and production, and to link this to the idea of the need for technical and ideological education, so that the individual will realize that these processes are closely interdependent

and their advancement is parallel. In this way the individual will reach total consciousness as a social being, which is equivalent to the full realization as a human creature, once the chains of alienation are broken. This will be translated concretely into the reconquering of one's true nature through liberated labor, and the expression of one's own human condition through culture and art.

New status of work

In order to develop a new culture, work must acquire a new status.^[45] Human beings-as-commodities cease to exist, and a system is installed that establishes a quota for the fulfillment of one's social duty. The means of production belong to society, and the machine is merely the trench where duty is performed. A person begins to become free from thinking of the annoying fact that one needs to work to satisfy one's animal needs. Individuals start to see themselves reflected in their work and to understand their full stature as human beings through the object created, through the work accomplished. Work no longer entails surrendering a part of one's being in the form of labor power sold, which no longer belongs to the individual, but becomes an expression of oneself, a contribution to the common life in which one is reflected, the fulfillment of one's social duty.

We are doing everything possible to give work this new status as a social duty and to link it on the one hand with the development of technology, which will create the conditions for greater freedom, and on the other hand with voluntary work based on the Marxist appreciation that one truly reaches a full human condition when no longer compelled to produce by the physical necessity to sell oneself as a commodity. Of course, there are still coercive aspects to work, even when it is voluntary. We have not transformed all the coercion that surrounds us into conditioned reflexes of a social character and, in many cases, is still

produced under the pressures of one's environment. (Fidel calls this moral compulsion.) There is still a need to undergo a complete spiritual rebirth in one's attitude toward one's own work, freed from the direct pressure of the social environment, though linked to it by new habits. That will be communism. The change in consciousness does not take place automatically, just as change in the economy does not take place automatically. The alterations are slow and not rhythmic; there are periods of acceleration, periods that are slower, and even retrogressions.

Furthermore, we must take into account, as I pointed out before, that we are not dealing with a period of pure transition, as Marx envisaged in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, but rather with a new phase unforeseen by him: an initial period of the transition to communism, or of the construction of socialism. This transition is taking place in the midst of violent class struggles, and with elements of capitalism within it that obscure a complete understanding of its essence.^[46]

If we add to this the scholasticism that has held back the development of Marxist philosophy and impeded a systematic treatment of the transition period, whose political economy has not yet been developed, we must agree that we are still in diapers and that it is necessary to devote ourselves to investigating all the principal characteristics of this period before elaborating an economic and political theory of greater scope.

The resulting theory will, no doubt, put great stress on the two pillars of the construction of socialism: the education of the new man and woman and the development of technology. Much remains to be done in regard to both, but delay is least excusable in regard to the concept of technology as a basic foundation, since this is not a question of going forward blindly but of following a long stretch of road already opened up by the world's more advanced countries. This is why Fidel pounds away with such

insistence on the need for the technological and scientific training of our people and especially of its vanguard.

Individualism

In the field of ideas that do not lead to activities involving production, it is easier to see the division between material and spiritual necessity. For a long time individuals have been trying to free themselves from alienation through culture and art. While a person dies every day during the eight or more hours in which he or she functions as a commodity, individuals come to life afterward in their spiritual creations. But this remedy bears the germs of the same sickness: that of a solitary being seeking harmony with the world. One defends one's individuality, which is oppressed by the environment, and reacts to aesthetic ideas as a unique being whose aspiration is to remain immaculate. It is nothing more than an attempt to escape. The law of value is no longer simply a reflection of the relations of production; the monopoly capitalists — even while employing purely empirical methods — surround that law with a complicated scaffolding that turns it into a docile servant. The superstructure imposes a kind of art in which the artist must be educated. Rebels are subdued by the machine, and only exceptional talents may create their own work. The rest become shamefaced hirelings or are crushed.

A school of artistic experimentation is invented, which is said to be the definition of freedom; but this “experimentation” has its limits, imperceptible until there is a clash, that is, until the real problems of individual alienation arise. Meaningless anguish or vulgar amusement thus become convenient safety valves for human anxiety. The idea of using art as a weapon of protest is combated.

Those who play by the rules of the game are showered with honors — such honors as a monkey might get for performing pirouettes. The condition is that one does not try to escape from the invisible cage.

New impulse for artistic experimentation

When the revolution took power there was an exodus of those who had been completely housebroken. The rest — whether they were revolutionaries or not — saw a new road. Artistic inquiry experienced a new impulse. The paths, however, had already been more or less laid out, and the escapist concept hid itself behind the word “freedom.” This attitude was often found even among the revolutionaries themselves, a reflection in their consciousness of bourgeois idealism.

In countries that have gone through a similar process, attempts have been made to combat such tendencies with an exaggerated dogmatism. General culture became virtually taboo, and the acme of cultural aspiration was declared to be the formally exact representation of nature. This was later transformed into a mechanical representation of the social reality they wanted to show: the ideal society, almost without conflicts or contradictions, that they sought to create.

Socialism is young and has its mistakes. We revolutionaries often lack the knowledge and intellectual audacity needed to meet the task of developing the new man and woman with methods different from the conventional ones; conventional methods suffer from the influences of the society that created them. (Once again the theme of the relationship between form and content is posed.) Disorientation is widespread, and the problems of material construction absorb us. There are no artists of great authority who also have great revolutionary authority. The members of the party must take this task in hand and seek the achievement of the main goal: to educate the people.

What is sought then is simplification, something everyone can understand, something functionaries understand. True artistic experimentation ends, and the problem of general culture is reduced to assimilating the socialist present and the dead (therefore, not dangerous) past. Thus socialist realism arises upon the foundations of the art of the last century.^[47] The realistic art of the 19th century, however, also has a class character, more purely capitalist perhaps than the decadent art of the 20th century that reveals the anguish of the alienated individual. In the field of culture, capitalism has given all that it had to give, and nothing remains but the stench of a corpse, today's decadence in art.

But why try to find the only valid prescription in the frozen forms of socialist realism? We cannot counterpose “freedom” to socialist realism, because the former does not yet exist and will not exist until the complete development of the new society. We must not, from the pontifical throne of realism-at-all-costs, condemn all art forms since the first half of the 19th century, for we would then fall into the Proudhonian mistake of going back to the past, of putting a strait-jacket on the artistic expression of the people who are being born and are in the process of making themselves. What is needed is the development of an ideological-cultural mechanism that permits both free inquiry and the uprooting of the weeds that multiply so easily in the fertilized soil of state subsidies.

In our country the error of mechanical realism has not appeared, but rather its opposite. This is because the need for the creation of a new individual has not been understood, a new human being who would represent neither the ideas of the 19th century nor those of our own decadent and morbid century.

What we must create is the human being of the 21st century, although this is still a subjective aspiration, not yet systematized. This is precisely one of the fundamental objectives of our study and our work. To the

extent that we achieve concrete success on a theoretical plane — or, vice versa, to the extent that we draw theoretical conclusions of a broad character on the basis of our concrete research — we will have made a valuable contribution to Marxism-Leninism, to the cause of humanity.

By reacting against the human being of the 19th century we have relapsed into the decadence of the 20th century. It is not a very grave error, but we must overcome it lest we leave open the door for revisionism. The great multitudes continue to develop. The new ideas are gaining a good momentum within society. The material possibilities for the integrated development of absolutely all members of society make the task much more fruitful. The present is a time of struggle; the future is ours.

New revolutionary generation

To sum up, the fault of many of our artists and intellectuals lies in their original sin: they are not true revolutionaries. We can try to graft the elm tree so that it will bear pears, but at the same time we must plant pear trees. New generations will come that will be free of original sin. The probability that great artists will appear will be greater to the degree that the field of culture and the possibilities for expression are broadened.

Our task is to prevent the current generation, torn asunder by its conflicts, from becoming perverted and from perverting new generations. We must not create either docile servants of official thought, or “scholarship students” who live at the expense of the state — practicing freedom in quotation marks. Revolutionaries will come who will sing the song of the new man and woman in the true voice of the people. This is a process that takes time. In our society the youth and the party play a big part.^[48] The former is especially important because it is the malleable clay from which the new person can be built with none of the old defects. The

youth are treated in accordance with our aspirations. Their education is every day more complete, and we do not neglect their incorporation into work from the outset. Our scholarship students do physical work during their vacations or along with their studies. Work is a reward in some cases, a means of education in others, but it is never a punishment. A new generation is being born. The party is a vanguard organization. It is made up of the best workers, who are proposed for membership by their fellow workers. It is a minority, but it has great authority because of the quality of its cadres. Our aspiration is for the party to become a mass party, but only when the masses have reached the level of the vanguard, that is, when they are educated for communism. Our work constantly strives toward this education. The party is the living example; its cadres must teach hard work and sacrifice. By their action, they must lead the masses to the completion of the revolutionary task, which involves years of hard struggle against the difficulties of construction, class enemies, the maladies of the past, imperialism.

Role of the individual

Now, I would like to explain the role played by the personality, by men and women as individuals leading the masses that make history. This is our experience; it is not a prescription.

Fidel gave the revolution its impulse in the first years, and also its leadership.^[49] He always set its tone; but there is a good group of revolutionaries who are developing along the same road as the central leader. And there is a great mass that follows its leaders because it has faith in them. It has faith in those leaders because they have known how to interpret its aspirations.

It is not a matter of how many kilograms of meat one has to eat, or of how many times a year someone can go to the beach, or how many pretty

things from abroad you might be able to buy with present-day wages. It is a matter of making the individual feel more complete, with much more inner wealth and much more responsibility.

People in our country know that the glorious period in which they happen to live is one of sacrifice; they are familiar with sacrifice. The first ones came to know it in the Sierra Maestra and wherever they fought; later, everyone in Cuba came to know it. Cuba is the vanguard of America and must make sacrifices because it occupies the post of advance guard, because it shows the masses of Latin America the road to full freedom. Within the country the leadership has to carry out its vanguard role. It must be said with all sincerity that in a real revolution, to which one gives his or her all and from which one expects no material reward, the task of the vanguard revolutionary is both magnificent and agonizing.

Love of living humanity

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality. Perhaps it is one of the great dramas of the leader that he or she must combine a passionate spirit with a cold intelligence and make painful decisions without flinching. Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealize this love of the people, of the most sacred causes, and make it one and indivisible. They cannot descend, with small doses of daily affection, to the level where ordinary people put their love into practice.

The leaders of the revolution have children just beginning to talk, who are not learning to say “daddy”; their wives, too, must be part of the general sacrifice of their lives in order to take the revolution to its destiny. The circle of their friends is limited strictly to the circle of comrades in the revolution. There is no life outside of it.

In these circumstances one must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth in order to avoid dogmatic extremes, cold scholasticism, or an isolation from the masses. We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity is transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force.

The revolutionary, the ideological motor force of the revolution within the party, is consumed by this uninterrupted activity that comes to an end only with death, unless the construction of socialism is accomplished on a world scale. If one's revolutionary zeal is blunted when the most urgent tasks have been accomplished on a local scale and one forgets about proletarian internationalism, the revolution one leads will cease to be a driving force and sink into a comfortable drowsiness that imperialism, our irreconcilable enemy, will utilize to gain ground. Proletarian internationalism is a duty, but it is also a revolutionary necessity. This is the way we educate our people.

Danger of dogmatism

Of course there are dangers in the present situation, and not only that of dogmatism, 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 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.

In our case we have maintained that our children must have, or lack, those things that the children of the ordinary citizen have or lack; our families should understand this and struggle for it to be that way. The

revolution is made through human beings, but individuals must forge their revolutionary spirit day by day.

Thus we march on. At the head of the immense column — we are neither ashamed nor afraid to say it — is Fidel. After him come the best cadres of the party, and immediately behind them, so close that we feel its tremendous force, comes the people in its entirety, a solid structure of individual beings moving toward a common goal, men and women who have attained consciousness of what must be done, people who fight to escape from the realm of necessity and to enter that of freedom.

This great throng organizes itself; its organization results from its consciousness of the necessity of this organization. It is no longer a dispersed force, divisible into thousands of fragments thrown into the air like splinters from a hand grenade, trying by any means to achieve some protection from an uncertain future, in desperate struggle with their fellows.

We know that sacrifices lie ahead and that we must pay a price for the heroic fact that we are, as a nation, a vanguard. We, as leaders, know that we must pay a price for the right to say that we are at the head of a people that is at the head of America.^[50] Each and every one of us readily pays his or her quota of sacrifice, conscious of being rewarded with the satisfaction of fulfilling a duty, conscious of advancing with everyone toward the new man and woman glimpsed on the horizon.

Allow me to draw some conclusions:^[51]

We socialists are freer because we are more fulfilled; we are more fulfilled because we are freer. The skeleton of our complete freedom is already formed. The flesh and the clothing are lacking; we will create them. Our freedom and its daily sustenance are paid for in blood

and sacrifice. Our sacrifice is a conscious one: an installment paid on the freedom that we are building. The road is long and, in part, unknown. We recognize our limitations. We will make the human being of the 21st century — we, ourselves. We will forge ourselves in daily action, creating a new man and woman with a new technology.

Individuals play a role in mobilizing and leading the masses insofar as they embody the highest virtues and aspirations of the people and do not wander from the path. Clearing the way is the vanguard group, the best among the good, the party.

The basic clay of our work is the youth; we place our hope in it and prepare it to take the banner from our hands. If this inarticulate letter clarifies anything, it has accomplished the objective that motivated it. Accept our ritual greeting — which is like a handshake or an “Ave Maria Purísima”:

***Patria o muerte!* [Homeland or death!]**

Footnotes

^[29]. This letter was sent to Carlos Quijano, director of the Uruguayan weekly publication, *Marcha* . It was published on March 12, 1965, under the title, “From Algiers, for *Marcha* . The Cuban Revolution Today.” In the original edition the following editor's note was added: “Che Guevara sent this letter to *Marcha* from Algiers. This document is of the utmost importance, especially in order to understand the aims and goals of the Cuban Revolution as seen by one of the main actors in that process. The thesis presented is intended to provoke debate and, at the same time, give

a new perspective on some of the foundations of current socialist thought.” On November 5, 1965, the letter was republished and presented as “Exclusive: A Special Note from Che Guevara.” A memo explained that *Marcha* 's readers in Argentina had not been able to read the original publication, because the week that it was first published the magazine was banned in Buenos Aires. Subheadings are based on those used in the original Cuban edition. They have been added by the publisher.

[30]. When Che sent the letter to Quijano, he had been touring Africa since December 1964. During this African tour, Che held many meetings with African revolutionary leaders.

[31]. Che's concept of the man or woman of the future, as first evident in the consciousness of the combatants in Cuba's revolutionary war, was explored by his article, “Social Ideals of the Rebel Army” (1959). These ideas were further developed in a speech, “The Revolutionary Doctor” (1960), where he described how Cuba was creating “a new type of individual” as a result of the revolution, because “there is nothing that can educate a person... like living through a revolution.” These first ideas were deepened as part of Che's concept of the individual as a direct and conscious actor in the process of constructing socialism. This article presents a synthesis of his ideas on this question.

[32]. These two events in the early years of the revolution seriously tested the valor of the Cuban people in the face of disaster: first, the October [Missile] Crisis of 1962, during which the U.S. actions aimed at overthrowing the Cuban Revolution brought the world to the brink of crisis; and second, Hurricane Flora, which battered the eastern region of Cuba on October 4, 1963, resulting in over a thousand deaths. Nevertheless, Che believed that if, in fact, a new society was to be created, the masses needed to apply the same kind of consciousness in

everyday activities as they had heroically displayed in such special circumstances.

[33]. The revolutionary victory of January 1, 1959, meant that for the first time in their history, the Cuban people attained a genuine level of popular participation in power. At first, the government was made up of figures from traditional political parties that had in one way or another supported the revolution. As measures were adopted that affected the ruling classes, some dissent emerged that became the germ of the future counterrevolution, which was subsequently supported and funded by the U.S. Government. In this early confrontation, President Manuel Urrutia was forced to resign due to public pressure when it became clear that he was presenting obstacles to measures that would benefit the population as a whole. It was at this time, with the full backing of the Cuban people, that Fidel assumed government leadership and became Prime Minister.

[34]. The Agrarian Reform Law of May 17, 1959, after only four months of taking power, was seen as the decisive step in fulfilling the revolutionary program proposed at Moncada in 1953. Che participated in the drafting of this new law along with other comrades proposed by the revolutionary leadership.

[35]. On April 17, 1961, mercenary troops that were trained and financed by the U.S. Government, along with exile counterrevolutionary groups, invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. This was part of the U.S. plan to destabilize and ultimately overthrow the revolution. In these circumstances, the Cuban masses, who felt that they were the participants in a genuine process of social transformation, showed they were ready to defend the gains of the revolution and were able to defeat any attempt to destroy it.

[36]. The manifestations of sectarianism, which emerged in Cuba in the 1960s, forced the revolutionary leadership to take measures that would impede any tendency toward separating the government from the masses. As part of that leadership, Che participated in this process and analyzed on many occasions the grave consequences of such a separation. He expressed these views, for example, in the prolog he wrote for the book, *The Marxist-Leninist Party*, published in 1963, where he explained: “Mistakes were made in the leadership; the party lost those essential qualities that linked them with the masses, the exercise of democratic centralism and the spirit of sacrifice... the function of the driving force of ideology is lost... [F]ortunately the old bases for this type of sectarianism have been destroyed.”

[37]. The debate over the role of the law of value within the construction of socialism formed part of Che's outline of an economic framework and his initial ideas for the Budgetary Finance System. Due to his revolutionary humanist perspective, Che rejected any notion that included using capitalist tools or fetishes. These ideas were widely discussed in his article, “On the Concept of Value,” published in the magazine *Our Industry* in October 1963. Here we see the beginning of the economic debate that Che initiated in those years and which had international significance. This polemic was conducted in his typically rigorous style. Outlining the guidelines to be followed, Che wrote: “We want to make it clear that the debate we have initiated can be invaluable for our development only if we are capable of conducting it with a strictly scientific approach and with the greatest equanimity.”

[38]. Nelson Rockefeller, who became one of the wealthiest people in the United States, acquired his capital by a “stroke of luck,” so the story goes, when his family discovered oil. Rockefeller's economic power brought him great political influence for many years — especially with regard to Latin America policy — irrespective of who was in the White House.

[39]. For Che, socialism could not exist if economics was not combined with social and political consciousness. Without an awareness of rights and duties, it would be impossible to construct a new society. This attitude would be the mechanism of socialist transition and the essential form of expressing this would be through consciousness. In this work, Che analyzed the decisive role of consciousness as opposed to the distortions produced by “real existing socialism,” based on the separation of the material base of society from its superstructure. Unfortunately, historical events proved Che right, when a moral and political crisis brought about the collapse of the socialist system. Among Che's writings on this question are: “Collective Discussion: Decisions and Sole Responsibilities” (1961), “On the Construction of the Party” (1963), “Awarding Certificates for Communist Work” (1964) and “A New Attitude to Work” (1964).

[40]. From early on Che studied the concept of underdevelopment as he tried to define the realities of the Third World. In his article, “Cuba: Historical Exception or Vanguard in the Anticolonial Struggle?” (1961), Che asked: “What is 'underdevelopment'? A dwarf with an enormous head and swollen chest is 'underdeveloped,' insofar as his fragile legs and short arms do not match the rest of his anatomy. He is the product of an abnormal and distorted development. That is what we are in reality — we, who are politely referred to as 'underdeveloped.' In truth, we are colonial, semicolonial or dependent countries, whose economies have been deformed by imperialism, which has peculiarly developed only those branches of industry or agriculture needed to complement its own complex economy.”

[41]. Che argued that the full liberation of humankind is reached when work becomes a social duty carried out with complete satisfaction and sustained by a value system that contributes to the realization of conscious action in performing tasks. This could only be achieved by systematic education, acquired by passing through various stages in which collective

action is increased. Che recognized that this would be difficult and would take time. In his desire to speed up this process, however, he developed methods of mobilizing people, bringing together their collective and individual interests. Among the most significant of these instruments were moral and material incentives, while deepening consciousness as a way of developing toward socialism. See Che's speeches: "Homage to Emulation Prize Winners" (1962) and "A New Attitude to Work" (1964).

[42]. In the process of creating the new man and woman, Che considered that education should be directly related to production and that it should be conducted on a daily basis as the only way for individuals to better themselves. This should also be undertaken in a collective spirit, so that it contributes to the development of consciousness and has a greater impact. On a practical level he developed an education system within the Ministry of Industry that guaranteed a minimum level of training for workers, so that they could meet the new scientific and technological challenges Cuba faced.

[43]. Che discussed the role of the vanguard at key points. First, he defined the vanguard as a necessary element in leading the struggle and within the first line of defense. After the revolution, Che saw the vanguard as providing the real impulse for the masses to participate actively in the construction of a new society; at the head of the vanguard being the party. For this reason, Che occasionally insisted that the revolution was an accelerated process wherein those who play an active role have the right to become tired but not to become tired of being the vanguard.

[44]. In the period when Che was a leader, the Cuban Revolution had not yet reached a level of institutionalization so that old power structures had been completely eliminated. Nevertheless, Che argued that such institutionalization was important as a means of formalizing the integration of the masses and the vanguard. Years later in 1976, after the

First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, this task of institutionalization was codified, as an expression of the power structures created by the revolution.

[45]. It was Che's view that work played a crucial role in the construction of a new society. He analyzed the differences between work undertaken within a capitalist society and that which was free of alienation in a socialist society. He was aware of what was required so that workers would give their utmost and put duty and sacrifice ahead of individual gain. In a speech in 1961, Che referred to daily work as, “the most difficult, constant task that demands neither an instant violent sacrifice nor a single minute in a comrade's life in order to defend the revolution, but demands long hours ever day...”

[46]. In order to understand the construction of socialism as a process that would eliminate the persistent roots of the previous society, Che examined the inherited relations of production. He insisted that two fundamental changes must occur as the only way to put an end to the exploitation of one human being by another and to achieve a socialist society: an increase in production and a deepening of consciousness.

[47]. An article such as *Socialism and Man in Cuba* could not avoid a discussion of culture, given the enormous changes that were taking place in Cuban society and power structures at the time. It was not an easy task to reflect on the concept of socialist culture in a country that was just emerging from underdevelopment and was still characterized by a neocolonial culture, imposed by a dominant class. There was a constant struggle between the values of the past and the attempt to construct an all-encompassing culture based on solidarity between people and real social justice. The struggle was made more difficult, not only by the persistence of the past culture but also by dogmatic and authoritarian tendencies of so-called “socialist realism” in socialist countries. The antidote was to defend

the best and most unique aspects of Cuban culture, avoiding excesses, and by trying to construct a culture that would express the feelings of the majority without vulgarity and schemas. This is the perspective that has been maintained in the development of revolutionary culture in Cuba, and neither neoliberalism nor globalization has been able to impede the genuine process of popular culture. This is the expression of a truly socialist society.

[48]. The role of the party and revolutionary youth in the construction of a new society was broadly analyzed by Che: “On the Construction of the Party,” “The Marxist-Leninist Party,” “To be a Young Communist” and “Youth and Revolution.”

[49]. The harmony established between Fidel and Che from their first meeting in Mexico in 1955 represented a coming together of common ideals and a common approach to the liberation of Latin America and the building of a new society. Che referred to Fidel on many occasions in his writings and speeches, evaluating his qualities as a leader and statesman with sincere admiration and respect. Fidel reciprocated these feelings countless times. Their relationship should be investigated more deeply in order to gain a greater understanding of a transcendental historical era. For further reference see Che's *Episodes of a Revolutionary War* , *Guerrilla Warfare* , “Cuba: Historical Exception or Vanguard in the Anticolonial Struggle?”, “Political Sovereignty and Economic Independence” and “The Marxist-Leninist Party.”

[50]. The study of the different stages of the Cuban Revolution — from guerrilla warfare to the achievement of revolutionary power — is systematically reflected in all Che's writings and speeches. He always highlighted the significance of Cuba's example for the rest of the Third World, as a symbol of freedom and showing the fruits of the initial stages of constructing socialism in an underdeveloped country. Aside from those

already cited, see: “Farewell to the International Brigades for Voluntary Work” (1960) and “The Cuban Revolution's Influence in Latin America” (1962).

[\[51\]](#). Che's conclusions here summarized some of the most important concepts permeating his works, which are beautifully synthesized in this volume. These ideas provide a complete spectrum that encompasses philosophy, ethics and politics, spanning a range of complex questions.