

# The Week

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## CHE GUEVARA'S SOCIALISM

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80

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# THE GUEVARA'S SOCIALISM

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The last issue of The Week for 1965 is entirely given over to this moving text by Che Guevara, one of Cuba's great heroes and certainly our Man of the Year.

Living in England, even at the foggy end of a bleak year, in which the political climate has been even danker than the mouldering seasons, it is still difficult to imagine either the extreme, crippling misery of the majority of the oppressed peoples of the rest of the world, or its complement, the astonishing and giant courage it has engendered among the increasing numbers of people who have found the will to resist. The British appetite for moderation has, by imperceptible degrees, engendered an inescapable aptitude for mediocrity. Faced with a prolonged but masked crisis, British institutions gather moss. Moderate squalor, moderate but insistent decline of public services, moderate but ominous loss of economic potency, moderate but menacing attacks upon the democratic powers of the people, moderate and suffocating servility to the American oligarchs, all combine to produce a persistent numbing of the feelings of the moderately unsensual man. Political life becomes a sludge of balked issues, dishonoured principles and caponised ideals. Politicians decline from Aldermaston marchers into policemen for colonialism. As the radical leaders of a former decade caricature their erstwhile opponents, so the condition of the people declines, at a moderate velocity, into a swampy and apathetic hopelessness, in which philistinism and cowardice can be accepted as the norms of public conduct, and no man may aspire to better things without at once accepting that he must politely gouge, claw and knife his way towards them. Such conditions produce the men they need to administer them, and the extreme moderation of Mr. Wilson personifies, with cruel and satirical accuracy, all the failure, loss and human waste that they represent.

The worm will turn, and it may turn soon. It is becoming impossible for an honest man to accept the limits imposed by institutionalised choices, delicately regulated though they be. 'Slight' attacks upon the standards of the people are producing sharp reactions. Continued lack of moderation of glaring injustices begins to be seen as the injustice it is. Perhaps 1966 may begin a process which will end in the dispersion of the fog, as bovine British complacency and phlegmatic drift give way to anger and irreconcilable insight.

As this begins, a new generation of Englishmen will go to school with Che Guevara. His voice is not only the clear voice of revolution, sharp to cut through all the lies and complacencies which keep men from doing what they should. It is also the voice of humanism, at once of the poor people of the earth and the great poems of their unlimited potential; of the torments of hunger, cold, and lack of compassion, and the incredible, beautiful people men have it in themselves to be.

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The text of this pamphlet was translated by D.B.Pitt from La Gauche the Belgian socialist weekly.

MAN AND SOCIALISM IN CUBA - a letter to a Uruguayan friend.  
by Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

Dear Comrade,

I am finishing these notes in the course of a voyage to Africa in order to fulfil, if belatedly, my promise to you. I would like to develop the theme of Man and Socialism in Cuba. I believe this could be of interest to Uruguayan readers. One hears currently from the mouths of the spokesmen for the capitalists the ideological objection that the period of socialist construction in which we are engaged is characterised by the sacrifice of the individual on the altar of the State.

I am not going to attempt to refute this statement in a purely theoretical way, but I will re-establish the facts as they have been experienced in Cuba whilst adding a general commentary.

Firstly, I will sketch, very broadly, the history of our revolutionary struggle before and after the taking of power. It was on the 26th of July 1953 that the revolutionary struggles began which ended in the Revolution of 1st January 1959. A group of men, led by Fidel Castro, at dawn on that day, attacked the Moncada Barracks in Oriente Province. The attack received a set-back and the set-back became a disaster. The survivors found themselves in prison, but recommenced the struggle as soon as they were amnestied.

During the state of affairs when socialism only exists as an influence, Man is a fundamental factor. It is in him, an individual, unique being, a creature with a first and second name, that people place their confidence. It is on his ability in action that the success or failure of each struggle depends.

Next came the stage of guerilla warfare, which took place at two distinct levels; among the people, a mass still largely asleep and needing to be mobilised, and among the guerilla fighters themselves, who strove to arouse people's revolutionary conscience and enthusiasm for battle. It was this avant-garde which provided the catalyst which brought into being the necessary subjective conditions for victory. And, to the extent that we made our ideals those of the proletariat, to the extent that a revolution worked in our habits and our spirit, the individual still remained a fundamental factor.

Every fighter of the Sierra Maestra who obtained a superior rank in the revolutionary forces could claim a number of notable personal feats to his credit. It was on this basis that rank was awarded.

It was during this first, heroic period that people argued with each other to get the tasks which carried the greatest responsibility and the biggest dangers, with no other satisfaction to be obtained than that of a duty well done. In our work of revolutionary education we come back again and again to the salient fact. The attitude of our fighters already showed the image of the future man. This total self-dedication to the revolutionary cause has been repeated many times in our history; during the October Crisis and under the hurricane "Flora" we saw acts of courage and exceptional sacrifices accomplished by all our people.

One of our fundamental ideological tasks is to find a formula for perpetuating this heroic attitude in everyday life.

In January 1959, the revolutionary government was set up with the participation of various members of the reactionary bourgeoisie. The presence of the rebel army, the factor of force, constituted the guarantee of power. There very soon arose serious contradictions which were partly overcome when in February 1959 Fidel Castro assumed the direction of the government as Prime Minister. This process came to a head in July of the same year when President Urrutia was dismissed under popular pressure. At this point there appeared clearly in Cuban history an element which would manifest itself systematically - the masses.

At first glance, it is possible to believe that those who speak of the subordination of the individual to the State are right. The masses achieved, with an enthusiasm and discipline without equal, all the tasks that the government fixed for them, whether these concerned the economy, culture, defence or sport, etc. The initiative came, as a rule, from Fidel and the High Command of the Revolution and was explained to the people who made it their own goal. But at other times local experiments were launched by the Party and the government and the results were generalised by the former procedure. However, the State made mistakes sometimes. When one of these errors occurred, the lack of enthusiasm of the masses was made apparent through the decrease of each person's activity, and work became paralysed to the point where it practically ceased.

Such a state of affairs occurred in March 1962 in the face of the sectarian policies imposed by Anibal Escalante.

The blind laws of capitalism, invisible to the eyes of most people, work upon the individual without his being aware of it. He sees only a vast horizon which seems limitless. It is thus that capitalist propaganda claims to present the case of Rockefeller - whether true or not - as a lesson on the possibilities of success. The misery that must be piled up - the sum total of baseness, that a fortune of this size implies, simply does not come into the picture, and it is not always possible for the mass of people to see such phenomena clearly. (Here one ought to study the way in which, in the imperialist countries, the workers lose their internationalist conscience under the influence of a certain complicity in the exploitation of dependent countries, and how from this fact, their combativity in their own country weakens - but this is really getting away from the subject.)

In every way in such a society the path to take is full of obstacles and apparently only an individual possessing certain qualities can break through them to arrive at his goal; he strives after the distant reward, but the road is lonely, and, moreover, it is the law of the jungle and only by trampling on other people can he win success.

I will now try to define the individual, the actor in this strange and passionate drama called socialist construction, in his double existence as a unique being and a member of the community.

I think the simplest way of looking at it is to recognise his quality as an unfulfilled being. The blemishes of the old society are perpetuated in the individual consciousness and it needs incessant work to make them disappear. The process is a double one - on the one hand society works with its direct and indirect education; on the other it is the individual himself who undertakes conscious effort of self-education.

What with the fact of under-development on the one hand, and the flight of capital to the "civilised" countries on the other, a swift improvement without sacrifices is impossible. We have still a long way to go before we arrive at a sufficiently high level of development, and the temptation to stick to the beaten track and to use individual material interest as a lever to achieve an accelerated economic growth is a big one.

Then you run the risk of not seeing the wood for the trees; in pursuing the spectre of a "socialism" achieved by means of all the armoury inherited from capitalism (the commodity as the economic unit, criterion of profitability, individual material interest as the stimulant, etc., etc.) you risk arriving at an impasse. In fact you come to a halt after travelling a long way on a road with many intersections, so that when you finally stop, it is difficult to know at exactly which point you went wrong. During all this time the economic system you have adopted has been doing its deadly work of undermining the social consciousness.

In order to construct genuine socialism you must change Man at the same time as you change the economic basis of society.

From all this it is clearly of vital importance to choose the correct instrument for mobilising the masses. The instrument needed must be fundamentally of an ethical sort, without denying the proper usage of material stimulants, especially those of a social nature.

During this period of socialist construction we can help in the birth of the New Man. His image is not yet clearly fixed in our minds, nor indeed can it ever be, given that his development proceeds parallel to that of the new economic structures. Outside of those whose poverty of education pushes them into a solitary oath concerned with the egotistic satisfaction of their own ambitions, there are those who, even within the ranks of the new cadres, have a tendency to advance in isolation from the masses who accompany them.

The important thing is that men should acquire every day a greater and greater consciousness of the need to be integrated into society and at the same time a greater consciousness of their own importance as its motor force. They must no longer filter separately along winding paths towards their distant aspirations. They must advance together with their avant-garde, made up of the Party, the advanced workers, an avant-garde inseparably linked with the masses and in direct communion with them.

The leadership has its eyes on the future and on its reward. But this is not something individual; this reward is the new society itself where men are different - the society of Socialist Man.

The road is long and full of difficulties. Sometimes, having taken a wrong path, we have to go back. At other times, having advanced too fast, we get separated from the masses. Occasionally we go too slowly and we feel their breath on the back of our necks. As revolutionaries, we ought to go as fast as possible, blazing the trail, but we must always remember that it is from the masses that we draw our strength, and the masses will not advance faster than the speed of the encouragement they get from our example.

In spite of the importance of moral stimulants, the very fact that society is divided into two principal groups (not counting the small minority which for one reason or another stands aloof from the socialist construction) indicates that the social consciousness is still insufficiently developed.

We have not yet arrived at the point of fully installing the institutions of the Revolution. We are seeking for something new which will achieve a perfect identification of government and the community. This means institutions adapted to the special conditions of socialist construction and utterly removed from the commonplaces of bourgeois democracy (such as Legislative Chambers, etc.,) We have carried out various experiments with a view to creating, little by little, the institutions of the Revolution, but without too much haste. Our greatest constraint has been the fear that a formal link might separate us from both the masses and the individual, and even make us lose sight of the most important revolutionary ambition - to see man liberated from alienation.

In spite of the shortage of institutions, which should be overcome gradually the masses are making history as a conscious assembly of individuals fighting for the same cause. Under a socialist regime, in spite of its apparent standardisation, Man is more complete. In spite of the absence of a perfectly adapted mechanism, his ability to express himself and to make his weight felt in the social apparatus is infinitely greater.

If Man is to retake possession of his own nature, it is necessary that commodity-man should cease to exist and that society should turn over to him a "quota" in exchange for the accomplishment of his social duty. The means of production belong to society and the machine is like the "front line" where one's duty is done. Man is now beginning to free his thought from the anguish caused by the need to satisfy his immediate wants by work. He begins to recognise himself in his work, and to recognise his grandeur as a human being in

relation to the object created and, to his labour, transformed. His work no longer requires the loss of a part of his being in the shape of labour-power sold, and no longer belonging to him. It becomes an expression of himself, a contribution to the community, the achievement of his social duty.

Of course, there are still coercive aspects to work, even when it is voluntary. Man has not yet succeeded in doing work as a conditioned reflex, and he often produces under pressure from his environment (that is what Fidel calls "moral constraint"). He cannot give fully of his work, accomplished in the manner of a new habit, unless this environmental pressure is there. In other words he cannot work as under "Communism" in the full sense.

The change will not happen automatically in his consciousness any more than it will in the economy. Progress in this direction is slow and irregular. There are periods of acceleration but there are other periods of standstill - even of retrogression.

When the revolution took power, those intellectuals who were completely domesticated went into exile. The others, whether revolutionaries or not, entered upon a new course. Research received a new boost. Meanwhile, these roads had been already more or less traced out, and the absconders were dissimulating their ideas under the word "liberty". Among the revolutionaries this attitude is often supported reflecting the influence of bourgeois idealism on their thoughts.

In other countries which have undergone a similar process, they have tried to attack these tendencies with an exaggerated dogmatism. General culture has thus been transformed almost into a taboo, and the sum total of cultural aspiration has been declared to be a formally exact representation of nature. This in turn has transformed itself into a mechanical representation of a social reality that is desired to be seen, a kind of idealised society virtually without conflicts or contractions, that is to be created sometime in the future.

Socialism is young; it makes mistakes. We revolutionaries often lack the knowledge and the intellectual boldness that is needed to face the task of developing the new kind of man by different methods from these which are too conventional and hallmarked by the society which has created them. Once more there appears the problem of the relationship between content and form.

We are in great disarray and the problem of material construction absorbs much of our time. There are no great artists who happen also to be revolutionaries of authority.

The Party members ought to take this matter in hand and seek to attain the principle objective - educating the people.

Instead, what happens is a search for the simplification on a level that everyone can understand, meaning, of course, a level that the functionaries can understand. Authentic artistic research goes to the wall and the problem of general culture is reduced to an appropriation of the socialist present and of the past which is dead (and therefore inoffensive !)

This is how "socialist realism" was born on the basis of the art of the last century. But the realist art of the 19th century is a more purely capitalist art form, perhaps, than this decadent art of the 20th century through which there truly breathes the anguish of alienated men.

The more we enlarge the field of culture and the possibilities of expression, the more we will have the chance of seeing exceptional artists arise. Our task is to make sure that the present generation, torn by its conflicts, does not become perverted, and in its turn pervert future generations. We ought not to create a body of salaried officials who submit to "official thought", nor a class of bursaried intellectuals living comfortably in the shelter of their grants, and exercising a "freedom", in inverted commas.



The revolutionaries who sing of the "new man" with the real voice of the people are on the way. But it is a process which demands time.

The leaders of the Revolution have children who, in their first stuttering, do not learn the names of their fathers; wives who are also sacrificed to the dream of the Revolution. Outside the revolution there is no life. Under these conditions we must have much humanity, a great sense of justice and truth in order not to fall into dogmatism, into frigid scholasticism, in order not to become isolated from the masses. Always we must struggle to ensure that this love of humanity assumes concrete forms in deeds which serve as an example to others.

The revolutionary in his Party - the ideological motor of the Revolution - consumes himself in this uninterrupted task which will end only with death, at least until the construction of socialism starts on a world scale.

If his revolutionary enthusiasm fades once the most urgent local tasks have been accomplished, and if he forgets his proletarian internationalism, then the Revolution he controls will cease to be a motor force and will sink into a comfortable torpor. This will be quickly put to profit by our irreconcilable enemies, the imperialists, who will thus gain ground.

Proletarian internationalism is a duty, but it is also a revolutionary necessity. That is what we teach our people.

It is certain that the present situation holds great dangers. Not only that of dogmatism or of losing our links with the masses in the middle of our great work, but the danger of weaknesses we can fall into.

We have always maintained that our children ought to possess the same things as other children, but also that they should be deprived of what other children are deprived. Our family ought to understand and fight for this.

The Revolution is made by man, but it is required that day by day he forges his own revolutionary spirit.

And so we all advance. At the head of the immense column (we are not ashamed of saying it !) marches Fidel. Behind him come the avant-garde of the Party, and behind them - so close that you can feel their enormous force - come the people, all marching resolutely towards their common goal. This assembly is composed of individuals who have acquired the necessary consciousness of what needs to be done, of men who are struggling to quit the realm of necessity, and enter the realm of freedom.

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'CHE' GUEVARA'S LETTER TO CASTRO

The following is the complete text of the letter from Ernesto 'Che' Guevara to Fidel Castro explaining why he was leaving Cuba. Castro told the Cuban people the letter had been delivered to him last April to be made public at a time of his choosing. He indicated that it had not been made public until now for reasons of Guevara's personal security and that his present whereabouts would not be disclosed for the same reason. He said Guevara had written other letters to his family and various of his comrades and that they would be asked "to donate them to the revolution because we consider that they are documents worthy of being part of history."

"Fidel, At this moment I remember many things - when I met you in Maria Antonia's house, when you suggested my coming, all the tensions involved in the preparations. One day they asked who should be notified in case of death, and the real possibility of that fact affected us all. Later we knew that it was true, that in revolution one wins or dies (if it is a real one). Many comrades fell on the way to victory. Today everything is less dramatic because we are more mature. But the fact is repeated. I feel that I have fulfilled the part of my duty that tied me to the Cuban revolution in its territory, and I say good-bye to you, the comrades, your people, who are already mine.

I formally renounce my positions in the national leadership of the party, my post as minister, my rank of major, and my Cuban citizenship. Nothing legal binds me to Cuba. The only ties are of another nature; those which cannot be broken as appointments can. Recalling my past life, I believe I have worked with sufficient honour and dedication to consolidate the revolutionary triumph. My only serious failing was not having confided more in you from the first moments in the Sierra Maestra, and not having understood quickly enough your qualities as a leader and a revolutionary. I have lived magnificent days and I felt at your side the pride of belonging to our people in the brilliant yet sad days of the Caribbean crisis.

Few times has a statesman been more brilliant than you in those days. I am also proud of having followed you without hesitation, identified with your way of thinking and of seeing and of appraising dangers and principles. Other nations of the world call for my modest efforts. I can do that which is denied you because of your responsibility as the head of Cuba and the time has come for us to part. I want it known that I do it with mixed feelings of joy and sorrow: I leave here the purest of my hopes as a builder, and the dearest of those I love. And I leave a people that received me as a son. That wounds me deeply. I carry to new battle fronts the faith that you taught me, the revolutionary spirit of my people, the feeling of fulfilling the most sacred of duties: to <sup>against</sup> fight imperialism wherever it may be. This comforts and heals the deepest wounds. I state once more that I free Cuba from any responsibility, except that which stems from its example. If my final hour finds me under other skies, my last thought will be of this people and especially of you. I am thankful for your teaching, your example, and I will try to be faithful to the final consequences of my acts.

I have always been identified with the foreign policy of our revolution and I will continue to be. Wherever I am, I will feel the responsibility of being a Cuban revolutionary, and as such I shall behave. I am not sorry that I leave my wife and my children nothing material. I am happy it is that way. I ask nothing for them as I know the state will provide enough for their expenses and education. I would like to say much to you and to our people, but I feel it is not necessary. Words cannot express what I would want to, and I don't think it's worth while to banter phrases. Ever onwards to victory! Homeland or death! I embrace you with all my revolutionary fervour."