

**ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA,
R. I. P.**

Che is dead, and we all mourn him. Why? How is it that so many libertarians mourn this man; how is it that we just received a letter from a brilliant young libertarian, a former objectivist and Birchite, which said, in part: "if they did finally get Che . . . I am sure that his memory will live to haunt both Latin America and the U. S. for decades to come. Long live Che!" How come? Surely not because Che was a Communist. Precious few people in this country or anywhere else will mourn the passing, for example, of Brezhnev, Kosygin, or Ulbricht, Communist leaders all. No, it is certainly not Che's Communist goals which made his name a byword and a legend throughout the world, and throughout the New Left in this country.

What made Che such an heroic figure for our time is that he, more than any man of our epoch or even of our century, was the living embodiment of the principle of Revolution. More than any man since the lovable but entirely ineffectual nineteenth-century Russian anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, Che earned the title of "professional revolutionary." And furthermore, to paraphrase Christopher Jencks in a recent perceptive, if wrongheaded, article in the New Republic, we all knew that his enemy was our enemy--that great Colossus that oppresses and threatens all the peoples of the world, U. S. imperialism.

Trained as a physician in Argentina, witnessing CIA-fomented counter-revolution by the thug Castillo Armas in Guatemala, Guevara dedicated the rest of his life to the Revolution. He found a promising field first in Cuba,

where, as everyone knows, Che was second only to Fidel Castro in waging and then winning the revolution there.

Che was a notable revolutionary, but not a distinguished administrator, and even poorer as an economist. It was Che who led the policy of coercively shifting Cuba from specialization in sugar toward a greater self-sufficiency--an arbitrary and uneconomic gesture that almost wrecked the Cuban economy until Fidel, spurred by the economic realists in Russia, called a halt and reversed the trend. Frustrated as an administrator, realizing that such work was not his forte, Che left Cuba to follow his chosen career of revolutionary, to ignite and spur revolutionary combat throughout Latin America. But before he did so, Che distilled his own experiences to become a distinguished theorist of revolutionary warfare, his book of Guerilla Warfare coming to rank with the writings of Mao and General Glap in this new and burgeoning discipline.

Che's disappearance for years ignited and accelerated the living legend that grew about him. It was a great and romantic legend, but it would all too quickly grow to destroy him. For as the cause of the Revolution began to become increasingly wrapped around the person of Che, Guevara began to forget his own vital principle that the revolution must grow out of the indigenous consciousness and struggles of the local peasantry. In his head Che knew full well that he and a handful of Cubans, no matter how carefully trained, could never export revolution, could never impose revolution upon a Bolivian or a Venezuelan peasantry who were not ready for the struggle. But in his mighty heart Che could not refrain from leaping a whole raft of stages, from plunging romantically but recklessly into the premature adventure of armed struggle in Latin America. And so, with tragic irony, Che Guevara, in his daring and courage, was betrayed by the very Bolivian peasantry whom he was trying to liberate, and who barely understood the meaning of the conflict. Che died from violating his own principles of revolutionary war.

There are other ironies in the death of Che Guevara. It was reported that as Che's martyred body was brought in triumph to Vallegrande, Bolivia, a Cuban emigre and CIA-agent rushed over, and, on the public streets, began to embalm the body. The ubiquitous CIA was there to claim its own.

The CIA might claim Che's body, but it will never be able to shackle his spirit. The most fitting memorial to Che was the intensely moving speech about his death de-

livered by his old comrade-in-arms, Fidel Castro. In that speech, Fidel declared:

No matter how difficult it may be to imagine that a man of his stature, of his prestige, of his personality, could have died in a clash between a guerrilla patrol and an army force, no matter how illogical it may seem, we who know him well realize, however, that it is not at all strange. Because he was always, during the whole time that we knew him, characterized by an extraordinary daring, by an absolute scorn of death, by his way, in every difficult and dangerous moment, of doing the most difficult and dangerous things. He did this many times during our struggle....

We were always worried lest his temperament, his habit of always being present during the moments of danger, should lead him to his death in combat.

No one could ever be sure that he would take even the slightest precautions. Many times he went forward with the advance patrols....

Above all else we would have liked to have seen him as the builder of the great victories of the people rather than as the precursor of those victories. But the fact is that a man of that temperament, of that personality, of that character, of that way of reacting before certain circumstances, is unfortunately usually destined to be the precursor rather than the one who realizes the victories. And the precursors are also, of course, the builders of victory, the greatest builders of victory....

It should not surprise anyone that he was among the first to fall in a guerrilla combat, since it would have been almost a miracle, almost impossible for it to have been otherwise....

The imperialists' cries of victory in which they say that this will discourage revolutionary struggle will be shortly disproven by actual events. The imperialists also know the power, the impact of an example, and they also know that even though a man can be physically eliminated, an example like that can never be eliminated by anything or anyone....

Newspapers of all tendencies have universally recognized Che's virtues.... He is an almost unique example of how a man could win the recognition and

respect of his enemies, of the very enemies he faced with his arms in his hands, of those who have been ideological enemies and have nevertheless expressed feelings of admiration and of respect toward Che...

Has the history of revolutions or of revolutionary peoples been characterized perhaps by the absence of hard blows? Aren't true revolutionaries the ones who rise above those blows, those setbacks, and are not discouraged? Aren't we revolutionaries precisely the ones who proclaim the value of moral principles, the value of example? Aren't we revolutionaries the ones who believe in the durability of man's works, of man's principles? Aren't we revolutionaries the first to recognize how ephemeral the physical life of man is and how durable and lasting man's ideas, conduct and example are, when it has been man's example that has guided the people throughout history? ¹

"Fidel Confirms Death of Che", National Guardian October 21, 1967), p. 5.