

Draft

Speech by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, General Secretary
of the People's Progressive Party at
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Revolutionary Thinking of Commandante Che Guevara"
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Very few persons became legends in their life time. Che Guevara was one of them.

That Che was a giant, few can deny. He was a man of extraordinary qualities.

Regis Debray in his analysis of Che's military failure and tragic death in Bolivia quoted from Bernard of Clairvaux who in the year 1200 said these words! "We are dwarfs perching on the shoulder of giants. We can see better and further than they can - not because our sight is keener or our height greater, but because they are carrying us, raising us to their gigantic level".

We're all dwarfs when it comes to measuring a man of Commandante Che Guevara's stature. We can ask this question - which many have pondered - how is it that after 20 years Che continues to attract the same veneration and devotion that he did when he was alive?

Che was a man of many parts, a complex man. Among his many attributes, he was a person of unusual courage. His military exploits are renowned and revered. According to Fidel Castro, "Che was an incomparable soldier. Che was an incomparable leader. Che was, from a military point of view, an extraordinarily capable man, extraordinarily courageous, extraordinarily aggressive. If, as a guerilla, he had his Achilles' heel, it was this excessively aggressive quality, his absolute contempt for danger."

Che fits our vision of a perfect "new man" of the future -- physically and morally strong. With incredible strength, he overcame a serious ailment. And to practice what he preached -- a stern and sterling character, what the indomitable Vietnamese communist leader, Ho Chi Minh, described as revolutionary morality.

That accounts for the apt description of him as a capable and efficient administrator. From November 1959, he served as

Director of the National Bank of Cuba. In 1961, he was appointed as Minister of Industry. He was also Chief of the Industrial Department of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA).

As minister of Industry, he had to correct earlier mistakes which had been made in the immediate period of euphoria after the overthrow of Batista. In the zeal to move away from Cuba's one-crop economy, a policy of wide-ranging industrialisation had been pursued. A lot of industrial machinery was still in crates on the wharfs. With the blockade, Cuba now realised that raw materials for industry could not be imported without serious problems. As he told Comrade Janet Jagan - "build your industries around your raw materials and waste by-products". Wise advice.

Pointing out his qualities in the industrial field, a Soviet writer noted: "He held a guiding hand over the socialist transformation of industry for a period of four years. During this period private ownership of the means of production in Cuba was completely ended. Exploitation of the working people was halted. The country moved towards a planned economy. Chronic unemployment, the whip held over the working people in pre-revolutionary Cuba, was now eliminated. The level of consciousness of the working people grew. Thousands of workers upgraded their skills, boosted production and joined in socialist emulation. American imperialism hoped for a collapse of the Cuban 'experiment' ... Cuban workers disappointed their hopes. . . . Much of the credit for this belongs to the Communist Party of Cuba and to Che in particular, under whose leadership the complex and difficult transition from the rails of capitalist production to those of socialist production was effected".

But above all Che was an humanitarian, a revolutionary intellectual and fighter and an ardent internationalist.

As a doctor, Che was not content simply to practise his profession, cure sick individuals and live a comfortable middle-class life. His was a broader vision : national and social liberation; the curing of the ills of society through the elimination of imperialism and oligarchic domination, exploitation and oppression. Towards this objective, he dedicated his life. His humanity was expressed in the love for people -- ordinary people, for whom he was always prepared to risk his life.

In this regard, Che gave us some valuable lessons. In his book "Socialism and Man", he stated:

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling 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 must combine a passionate spirit with a cold intelligence and make painful decisions without contracting a muscle. Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealize this love of the people, the most sacred cause, and make it one and indivisible. They cannot descent to the level of the ordinary man's daily expenditure of sentimentality . . . one must have a great deal of humanity and a strong sense of justice and truth in order not to fall into extreme degradation and cold scholasticism, into isolation from the masses.

Che was a perpetual student, always studying always learning. At one time, he even mastered linear mathematics for the more effective functioning of his responsibilities as a Minister.

But his was not the position of a classroom intellectual. Theory and practice, thought and action, revolutionary intellectual and fighter were embodied in his personality as a single stream.

He applied the Marxist classics in a thoroughly practical manner. His theory guided him at all times, as for example when he made the simple but profound analysis that national sovereignty was unthinkable without economic independence. According to the editor of Che's "Episodes of the Revolutionary War", he is described as a "fully endowed revolutionary man, in whom the guerilla strategist and fighter embodied a Marxist outlook. He left many writings which show his eager search for fresh theoretical insights over a broad range of interest. His was a revolutionary, a Marxist mind, ever critical and open, aware that new revolutionaries always present new qualities and new problems".

Che showed excellent qualities as a writer. His highly esteemed classic on Guerilla Warfare is a bible for revolutionaries.

I had the privilege of having several discussions with Che both as head of government and as leader of the opposition in the National Assembly. Those talks were wide-ranging and illuminating. I could not help perceiving him as an intellectual and a visionary, one who was anxious to reshape the world, particularly the third world.

His internationalism and humanitarianism were especially evident in the sympathy and support towards our struggle in the then British Guiana. No doubt, this was in part influenced by the unreserved support given to revolutionary Cuba by the People's Progressive Party and Government which I had the honour of leading.

The agreements I concluded with Che were far-reaching and demonstrated the internationalism of revolutionary hydro-electric project; a wood-pulp factory; a rice agreement and a timber railway ties for cement barter deal; a Cuban Trade mission in British Guiana; a cultural exchange.

The rice deal with Cuba was deemed "blood money" by the opposition United Force, meaning the payment for the rice was coming from the suffering and blood of the Cuban people!

The hydro-electric project had been recommended by British consultants after we (the PPP government) had nationalised the Canadian-owned Demerara Electric Company. It was a tri-state (Guyana-Cuba-USSR) cooperation venture. Its implementation would have prevented the recurrent blackouts of many years and the huge bill for fuel imports.

The \$10 million (US) loan at a low 2 per cent interest rate for a wood-pulp project, to be paid for in supplies of pulp, would have been the impetus for a huge timber development. At first, Cuba had shown an interest in the development of the project through a lease of forest land, as was the practice in colonial times. But Che told me that smacked too much of imperialist exploitation.

On the rice deal, when I asked ^{why} he was paying us 2 cents a pound more than we were getting from the West Indies, he said: put that to the solidarity of the Cuban Revolution to the Guyanese peasants.

The trade and cultural exchanges were opening the way for a better relationship and understanding between the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking Caribbean peoples.

Washington was no doubt angry with us that we broke the blockade against Cuba. The CIA conspired with the then reactionary political opposition parties and trade union leaders, and fomented and financed strike, strife, arson and terrorist bombings.

The Cuban cement was inferior, the propagandists asserted; the building and hydro-dam would collapse.

And the Governor reserved the agreements I concluded for consideration by the Foreign Office, where they were stalled and killed, no doubt on advice from the US State Department.

Further, during the shipping airlines blockade and fuel cut-off from neighbouring Trinidad, when Cuba responded with two ships -- one with fuel, another with food -- terroristic violence was resorted to on a wide scale.

In his address to the United Nations, Che gave us firm political support, alerting the international community to the intrigues of imperialism to destabilise our government.

His authentic internationalism was shown in his decision in setting aside family, fame and fortune to continue the war of liberation in Africa and Latin America. Having reached the pinnacle of success -- the number two position in the Cuban leadership; the love and loyalty of the Cuban people -- only a true revolutionary and internationalist would have taken the course he adopted: to start from the bottom again with gun in hand.

From the late 1960's when Che fought in Bolivia, the crisis has deepened.

The plunder of Latin America and the Caribbean by imperialism which in the 1981-85 period caused a net outflow of US 36 billion annually, has caused increasing misery for the toiling masses. The evidence has been compiled, analysed and published in many countries and by many contributions, including the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), since Che was ambushed and killed in the jungles of Bolivia; and all the evidence goes to validate Che's uncompromising stand throughout his short but glorious life in defence of the people.

On this his 60th Birthday Anniversary, the best tribute we can pay to the heroic Che is to continue the struggle with the same dedication and zeal he demonstrated. Let us pledge to finish the job he started.

In the words of his epitaph:

"Wherever death may surprise us, it will be welcome provided that this, our battle cry, reaches some receptive ear, that another hand stretches out to take up weapons and that other men come forward to intone our funeral dirge with the staccato of machine guns and new cries of battle and victory.

Each and everyone of us will pay on demand his own sacrifice ... knowing that all together we are getting ever closer to the new man, whose figure is beginning to appear". Venceremos - Che.

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