

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

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October 1, 2009 - Issue 344

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Che: A Friend to the World's 1 Billion in Poverty

Represent Our Resistance

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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Because he was a man who fought and died for what he thought was fair, so for young people, he is a man who needs to be followed. And as time goes by and countries are governed by increasingly corrupt people ... Che's persona gets bigger and greater, and he becomes a man to imitate. He is not a God who needs to be praised or anything like that, just a man whose example we can follow, in always giving our best in everything we do.

-Alberto Granado

Che's life is an inspiration for every human being who loves freedom. We will always honor his memory.

-Nelson Mandela

One billion people, that is, "one in every 6 inhabitants of the planet," according to the UN World Food Program, writes Jerry White, are going hungry this year ("UN Report, 1 Billion of the World's People Going Hungry"). Only 8% of the world's hungry population is the result of floods, droughts, or temporary food shortage. As White explains, this "catastrophe" is *product* of the "capitalist profit system" that continues the "oppression of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia." "Sixty-five percent of the

world's hungry people live in just six countries: India, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan and Ethiopia."

The present crisis, he argues, "underscores the criminal misallocation of financial resources by governments around the world."

Who benefits from the capitalist profit system?

"IMF-dictated "development" programs" benefit "the banks in London, New York and Tokyo" and "the native ruling elites."

And the government tells you that things are looking up! Well, keep looking up because that is where things are getting better!

One percent own 40% of the world's total assets, according to *Global Issues*. The richest 20% consume 76.6% of the world's income. And more! Half the world (3 billion people) lives on \$2.50 a day. Twenty five thousand children die each day from poverty! That is - *each day*!

"Five hundred and sixty-three thousand people lost their jobs in April of this year," according to David North in "Economic Crisis and the Resurgence of Class Conflict in the United States." Another 6,000,000 workers have been thrown out of work, he writes. The "highest unemployment rate is in the West, where it now stands at 9.8%. It is 9.0% in the Midwest." In Michigan, the unemployment rate (as of March) is the highest in the country at 12.6%.

These unemployment rates translates "into other indices of extreme social distress," North writes, such as the "tidal wave of foreclosures and personal bankruptcies, declining college enrollments, rising crime rates, and [the] general deterioration in the health and well being of the population." Imposed on workers are "wage cuts of 10% and higher" which are "eroding [the] living standards and pushing millions of workers to the very brink of financial disaster."

The situation is worse for Black Americans. Barbara Ehrenreich and Dedrick Muhammed in "The Recession's Racial Divide," points out that "Blacks are the ones who are taking the brunt of the recession, with disproportionately high levels of foreclosures and unemployment."

Blacks have passed a recession: "What's happening now," Ehrenreich and Muhammed write, "is more like a depression."

A "socialist solution" is required to end the injustice of this worsening condition, writes David North. The American and international working class must seize political power and "establish popular democratic control of industrial, financial and natural resources" and develop "a scientifically-planned global economy that is dedicated to the satisfaction of the needs of society as a whole, rather than the destructive pursuit of profit and personal wealth."

Each of us would have to feel the fight in order to arrive at this solution! Who could motivate us to pursue this goal?

This isn't a tale of derring-do, nor is it merely some kind of 'cynical account'; it isn't meant to be, at least. It's a chunk of two lives running parallel for a while, with common aspirations and similar dreams. In nine months, a man can think a lot of thoughts...And if, at the same time, he's a bit of an adventurer, he could have experiences which might interest other people and his random account would read something like this diary...

The person who wrote these notes died the day he stepped back on Argentina soil. The person who is reorganizing and polishing them, me, is no longer me, at least I'm not the me I was. Wandering around our 'America with a capital A' has changed me more than I thought...

On an October morning, two young Argentineans drink sweet mate under a vine tree. A question, "as if part of our fantasy," comes before them: "Why don't we go to North America?"

"North America? How?"

"On La Poderosa, man."

"I was restless, too, mainly because I was a dreamer and a free spirit; I was fed up with medical school, hospitals and exams."

That's how it began - two middle class young men from Argentina take leave of their medical careers to begin a journey to discover "our America." They set off from Cordoba, Argentina in 1951 and arrive in Caracas, Venezuela July 14, 1951. One, Alberto Granado, will return to become a biochemist in Santiago, Chile. The other, writing of their adventure in his diary, went on to become a citizen of the world, a champion for the poor and working class, a revolutionary - Ernesto Guevara de la Serna - "Che" to his many comrades around the world.

Along the way, Che begins to feel the fight. It is out there. It is in the stories people him about their personal, and therefore, very political struggles. The married couple in Baquedano, Chile, teaches the young Che to feel the outrage. While the four, the couple, Che and Alberto broke bread and drank mate, the older man spoke in "expressive language." They were "Chilean workers who were Communists." In order to pursue a "fruitless pilgrimage in search of work," the couple had to leave their children behind with neighbors. In the meantime, the community was aware of the "mysteriously disappeared" who were believed to be "somewhere at the bottom of the seas." Fear cannot stop them from pressing on, and they were headed for the sulphur (sic) mines in Chuquicamata where "the weather is bad and the conditions so hard that you don't need a work permit and nobody asks what your politics are." It is the paradox of capitalism, Che surmises. The workers receive "meager crumbs" and long-term health conditions for their eagerness to work. Capitalists win in a no-win scenario where individuals and families survive and may resist in their own way but without organization and unification of their communal struggle. Even as communist workers, Che recognized, the couple and, many like them, were politically conscious enough to recognize the wrong done against them but suffered from the lack of an effective movement to push back the waves of capitalist abuse. As Che writes in [The Motorcycle Diaries](#):

It's really upsetting to think they use repressive measures against people like these. Leaving aside the question of whether or not 'Communist vermin' are dangerous for a society's health, what had burgeoned in him was nothing more than the natural desire for a better life, a protest against persistent hunger, transformed into a love for this strange doctrine, whose real meaning he could never grasp but, translated into 'bread for the poor,' was something he understood and, more importantly, filled him with hope.

But Che did not miss the outrage and the potential to educate others to see it and feel it as he did in the faces of this couple.

There is a schoolteacher from Puno in the "realms of Pachamama" - Peru. "Wasn't he in fact a typical product of an education which damages the person who is granted it as a favor to demonstrate the magic power of that precious 'drop of blood'?" Nonetheless, Che listened as the teacher's voice "took on a strange inspired resonance whenever he spoke about his Indians, the formerly rebellious Aymara race." He listened as the teacher spoke of "the need to set up schools which would help individuals value their own world [and] enable them to play a useful role in it," Che writes. There was a need to change completely the present system of education (education, that is, according to the white man's criteria), only fills them [the Indians] with shame and resentment, leaving them unable to help their fellow Indians and at a tremendous disadvantage in a white society which is hostile to them and doesn't accept them.

The courageous display of the schoolteacher was not lost on Che.

In Puno, too, were the fishermen who had never seen a white man and who lived according to "age-old customs, eating the same food and fishing with the same methods they used five hundred years old"

There are the workers, the fishermen and the Quechua of Cuzco, "the navel of the world."

The only word to sum up Cuzco adequately is evocative. An impalpable dust of other ages covers its streets, rising in clouds like a muddy lake when you disturb the bottom.

Che and Alberto pass the walls of Sacsahuaman where the "Quechua warriors" an "inventive" people and skilled in mathematics, had established "serrated walls" in what seems to Che a "pre-Inca" stage of civilization. Nonetheless, the warriors were successful in driving their enemies back beyond the borders of Cuzco. As Che writes, the serrated walls were formidable": "when enemies attack, they can be fought from three sides, and if they penetrate this line of defence, (sic) they come up against a similar kind of wall and then a third," writes Che. Once the conquistadors arrived in search of gold, the temples of Cuzco were "razed to their foundations" and the walls "used to build the churches of the new religion."

Remnants of the old religion at the Temple of the Sun, with its carefully cut stones, rise above the base and the tombs of the Incas. The surrounding area betrays "various social classes...each of them occupied a distinct place according to category, more or less independent from the rest." Even on the luxurious buildings, Che found only "straw

roofs." Cuzco was no longer the navel of the world, and the "indians no longer worked the barren earth with the same devotion and the conquistadores had certainly not come to eke out a living from the land, but to make an easy fortune by heroic deed or simple greed." Cuzco can evoke, writes Che, two or three cities, as it turns out. There is the land the Incas nurtured, the land of divided wealth and material resources, and the land it could be...if only...

On the way to the colony in San Pablo, the two young men witness "a ragged group of young lads," Peruvian conscripts, suffering from lethargy, "put up with their instructor's anger" as they run through drills every Sunday. But "they are all victims," Che writes, of the absurd. On Huambo, Che and Alberto stop by a hospital where they witnessed patients "wait for death with indifference." While those who work at the hospital "do an unsung but praiseworthy job," the general conditions are "appalling" and the sanitary conditions "terrible." Even the new hospital, a few kilometers from the old one, "has the same disadvantages as the old" it has no laboratory or surgical facilities...and it is infected by mosquitoes," writes Che. The leper's colony in San Pablo "lacks basic amenities, like all-day electric light, a refrigerator and a laboratory."

But, again, it is the people - the Yaguas, "the indians of the red straw" living under wooden planks with "tiny hermetic straw hut to shelter in at night." The children have "big bellies and are rather skinny. Among other things, the adults suffer from rotting teeth. By the time Che and Alberto arrive in Bogotá, Che writes that he feels he has been around the world twice! "There is more repression of individual freedom here than in any country we've been to, the police patrol the streets carrying rifles and demand your papers every few minutes which some of them read upside down," Che writes to his mother.

Finally, Alberto and Che reach Venezuela where, as Che writes, he drifted away from the city of Caracas to think. At the end of [The Motorcycle Diaries](#), Che tells us he knows who he is and where he belongs: "I now knew...I knew that when the great guiding spirit cleaves humanity into two antagonistic halves, I will be with the people." It was possible, indeed, imperative to construct a movement of enlightened people in union with an enlightened indigenous people. When the U.S.-backed Bolivian army surrounded Che Guavara and his men on October 9, 1967 and prepared to execute him, Che told them to bring it on! But the fighting will continue! As long as there is injustice in the world and imperialist powers unwilling to desist in the killing of the majority of the world's population, there will be the potential for the fight to continue!

I think of a man who could not sit still while people suffered through no fault of their own when I think of Che. People were born into abysmal poverty and forced to live and ultimately die, he realized, in the same status, if not worse, while others flourished. Much like our beloved Malcolm, Che operated out of a sense of urgency. Time was not money; it was passing while people suffered and died in misery. He could not return to Argentina from his journey through South America and donned the white coat of a medical doctor. Che, we know, had to have his green fatigues and in fatigues. Even Commandant Fidel could not keep Che behind the desk in the Ministry of Interior. Because he saw *violence* in the needless suffering and death of others, he was in search of battles where people embraced the chant: enough is enough!

"Along the way," Che writes in 1954 from Guatemala, "I had the opportunity to pass

through the dominions of the United Fruits, convincing me once again of just how terrible these capitalist octopuses are." He put on his boots and green fatigues to join the Lumumba Battalion in the Congo, in Algiers, and in Angola. There he *is* standing among the people and witnessing the global struggle against the inhumanity of capitalism.

I cannot imagine a Che taking the gloves off today with 1 billion people living in poverty. Che, the ordinary citizen who dared to repeat the message of the symbolic message of "Jesus of Nazareth," is honored in the western world by capitalism as the iconic image of political marginalization. While Che's face appears on *designer* apparel for the *youthful rebel*, the Church's marketing of crosses and framed pictures of the long-haired white-looking Jesus halts human resistance to the mass action of States against the pursuit of freedom. The exchange of money and material items, the *unthinkable* is concealed. That is, the sacrifice of comfort on behalf of the world's hated majority and a dangerous idea that could result in serious change for the world's majority is not for sale. The legacy of Pax Romana and the survival of its newest descendent, Pax Americana, flourish.

But there is Che in Honduras and in Gaza! There he is in Lakota land, and he's there in New Orleans.

What if we look to the memory of Che Guavara with our hearts and not our cash? Rather than a billion people in poverty, can we imagine a billion Ches as all of us fighting against capitalism and imperialism and fighting for the human rights of indigenous people? Imagine billions of diary entries recording the day each writer recognized his or her role in the war against Mother Earth? And what if each writer wrote: I am listening to hear the beating hearts, and I am synchronizing my heartbeat with the heartbeat of the world's majority. The sound would be deafening and instantly disappear the destroyers of the world. The denigrated would throw off despair and Mother Earth would agree to circulate clean air and water. Gardens of food and medicine products would sprout everywhere in abundance. Imagine as Che once did so many year ago. And it could be so...

I see myself being sacrificed to the authentic revolution, the great leveler of individual will, pronouncing the exemplary *mea culpa*...I brace my body, ready for combat, and prepare myself to be a sacred precinct within which the bestial howl of the victorious proletariat can resound with new vigour (sic) and new hope.

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