



## **Socialist Philosophy of Che Guevara and Its Implication for the Development of Marxism**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper seeks to investigate the Socialist Philosophy of Che Guevara and its implication for the Development of Marxism. The study believes that the economic problems of the transition to socialism are inseparable from the nature of each political system. The Cuban case under Che Guevara was in contradiction with a conception of the plan as an economic decision by the masses, conscious of the people's interests, we are offered a placebo, in which only the economic factors determine the collective fate. This is a mechanistic, non-Marxist technique. The masses must be able to direct their fate, to decide which share of production will be assigned respectively to accumulation and consumption. Economic technique in Che-Guevara ideology must operate within the limits of this information and the consciousness of the masses must ensure its implementation. Employing the Philosophical and analytical perspectives, the study discovered that the inflow of capital from the developed countries is the prerequisite for the establishment of economic dependence. The study therefore concludes that this inflow of capital from the developed economies takes different forms: loans granted on onerous terms; investments that place a given country in the power of the investors; almost total technological subordination of the dependent country to the developed country; control of a country's foreign trade by the big international monopolies and in extreme cases,



the use of force as an economic weapon in support of the other forms of exploitation.

**Keywords:** Socialism, Philosophy, Development, Marxism

## **INTRODUCTION**

Socialism is that economics and social system under which essential industries and social services are publicly and cooperatively owned and democratically controlled with a view to equal benefit for all. The term socialism also refers to the doctrine behind this system and the political movement inspired by it.

I don't care if I fall as long as someone  
else picks up my gun and keeps on  
shooting. Che Guevara

Socialism was originally based on the working class and has generally been oppose to capitalism, which is based on the working class and has generally been opposed to capitalism, which is based on private ownership and a free-market economy. Socialists have advocated nationalization (government ownership and control) of natural resources basic industries, banking and credit institutions, and public utilities. Although the ultimate aim of early socialists was a communist or classless society, later socialists have increasingly concentrated on social reforms within capitalism.

I know you are here to kill me. Shoot, coward,  
you are only going to kill a man. Che Guevara

## **ORIGIN OF SOCIALISM**



Radical intellectuals who considered themselves the heirs of the 18th century Enlightenment began to use the term socialism in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The principal early theorist was British businessman and philanthropist Robert Owen and the French writers and social crusaders Claude Henri de San-Simon and Charles Fourier. They developed concepts of ideal societies to be attained through the spread of education and expansion of cooperative communities. These theorists were later dubbed utopian socialists for their belief in ideal societies or utopias. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels regarded the Utopian socialists as the fore-runner of their own concern of scientific socialism or communism. Socialism at its early stage could be seen as a reaction against the alleged emphasis of 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism – on individual achievements and private rights at the expense of the welfare of society as a whole. Yet socialists, in common with Liberals, were committed to the idea of progress and the abolition of Aristocratic Privileges. Unlike them, socialists denounced liberalism as a façade behind which capitalist greed could flourish unhindered.

The early socialists did more than out utopian plans. They provided a critique of industrialization from the current perspective rather than from a longing for the society of the past. Industrial society, they said was here to stay and it could, if regulated property, be a true copulation. They recognized industries in society; the existence of a new type of poverty among considerable wealth, the ever-increasing isolation of individuals, and the unceasing and heartless competition that prevailed. Moral outrage at poverty, individualism, and competition was, however, not limited to socialists. It was embraced by writers and thinkers as diverse as French novelist Honorel de Balzac, historian Thomas Carlyle and conservative British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. What distinguished the



early socialists from these conservative thinkers was an optimistic and position view of individualization. The point for the early socialists was not to return to a pre-individual society but to understand the need for a new organization of society.

Marx and Engels believed that capitalism was the result of an historical process characterized by a continual conflict between classes. In their view history proceeded through stages. Each stage consisted of a specific economic system to which correspond a particular system of power and hence a specific living class. The capital system was not everlasting, they claimed but a temporary historical phenomenon bound to die. By creating a large class of property less workers, capitalism sowed the seeds of its own destruction. It would, they claimed, eventually be succeeded by a communist society. Marx and Engels viewed the working class as fundamentally united with a common aim of improving their conditions of life. The working class had, as the communist manifesto put it, 'nothing to lose but their chains'. Workers were urged to organize themselves into political parties and trade union and to regret any attempt by the state to divide them on the basis of religion, ethnicity, nationality and gender. Such attempts they argued, played into the hands of the established powers, for divided working class was the surest way to ensure the continuation of capitalist rule.

After World War II, European Socialist Parties, frequently leading the government, concentrated on social and economic reforms under capitalism. Although these reforms varied from country to country, the first goal was the introduction of a comprehensive welfare plan that would protect all citizens 'from the cradle to the grave'. Secondly, socialist parties sought to maintain full employment using techniques of economic management developed by liberal



economist John Maynard Keynes. It was primarily after 1945 that socialism became associated with management of the economy by the government as expansion of the public sector through nationalization of major industries.

I am not a liberator. Liberators do not exist.

The people liberate themselves. Che

Guevara

### **POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF CHE- GUEVARA**

Che- Guevara, real name Ernesto Guevara (1928-1967), Latin American guerrilla leader and revolutionary theorist, who became a hero to the New left radicals of the 1960s. Guevara was a major figure in the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro in the late 1950s and in the subsequent Castro government. The author of two books on guerrilla warfare, Guevara also tried to promote peasant- based revolutionary movements elsewhere in the developing world. Ernesto Guevara de la Serna was born into a middle- cost family in Rosario, Argentina, on June 14, 1928. Troubled by asthma, he became a bookish child. He received a medical degree from the University of Buenos Aires in 1953. During and after his studies, Guevara travelled widely in central and South American and become convinced that revolution was the only remedy for Latin American's poverty, disease and social and political industries.

In 1954, he went to Mexico. He first met Castro there in 1955 and subsequently received training in guerrilla warfare along with Castro's exiled Cuban revolutionaries. In the late 1950s Guevara became Castro's main adviser and played an important role in Castro's guerrilla War against corrupt Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. After Castro came to power in 1959, he conferred Cuban



citizenship on Guevara, who then formally adopted as his first name the nickname ‘Che’ an Argentina expression that roughly means ‘Hey, You’, or ‘Hey, pal’.

In the Castro government, Guevara served as presenter of the National Bank of Cuba from 1959 to 1961, when he became minister of industry. He carried out plans for land redistribution and for the nationalization of industry. Strong opponent of United States influences in the Soviet Union and other communist nations. But Guevara gradually fell from favors as Cuba’s economy staggered in the wake of U.S trade sanctions and unsuccessful government efforts at agricultural and industrial reform. While others wished to modernize Cuba’s agriculture first, Guevara had pushed for rapid industrialization. Food storage was one result.

In 1965, Castro announced that Guevara had left Cuba to carry on revolutionary activities elsewhere; his whereabouts remained a secret. Guevara began in Africa, but after several months trying to train rebel forces in the Congo in guerrilla Warfare, he concluded that the mission was a failure. In 1965, Guevara reappeared as a leader of rebel forces trying to overthrow the military government of Bolivia. With the help of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, the Bolivian Army captured Guevara and his remaining guerrilla fighters on October 8, 1967. He was executed in the Bolivia village of la Higuera the following day. In 1997 Guevara’s remains were exhumed from the grave near vallegrande, Bolivia, and returned to Cuba, where he was reburied in the city of Banta Clara. Guevara became known as a revolutionary hero primarily after his death. In the year 2000, Time magazine named him one of the 100 most important people of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout his life, Guevara kept diaries. The diary of his travels through



South America in the early 1950s, with his friend Alberto Granada, was turned into the motorcycle Diaries (2004), a motion picture that introduced a new generation to Guevara's youthful idealism.

Che-Guevara In essence was an Argentine physician and revolutionary Marxist who played a key role in the Cuban revolution. He also served in the government of Cuba after the communist takeover before leaving Cuba to try and stir up rebellions in Africa and South America. He was captured and executed by Bolivian security forces in 1967. Che Guevara tends to have a double personality in the eyes of people thus, he is considered by many to be a symbol of rebellion and idealism, while others see him as a murderer.

Cruel leaders are replaced only to have new  
leaders turn cruel. Che Guevara

## **ORIGIN OF CHE-GUEVARA AND SOCIALISM IN CUBA**

The ideals of Che Guevara were socialist ideals. Socialism is an alternative to capitalism that is somewhat closer to communism. The ideal of socialism – and thus the ideals of Che Guevara – is a situation where a society is based on common ownership and collaborative decision-making. In addition to having socialist ideals, Che Guevara also had other ideals and beliefs as well. One of the major beliefs that Che Guevara had was that the Cuban government had to be overthrown in order to a socialist society that was better for all. The government of Cuba during this period of time was being run as a democratic government. However, one person still maintained all the powers and all the control in the country. To worsen issues, the Cuban government was supported by the United States many therefore did not like this and decided, like 'Che' that a government based on the



ideals of socialism would be better. These thoughts led them to revolt against the current government and attack them without relenting. Guevara became the primary figure in the efforts to overthrow the current Cuban government. Thus, socialists including Guevara believed that the only way they would achieve their ideals would be if the government was overthrown with deadly military force. Hence, Che Guevara was seen by many as a symbol of resistance, by a new generation as the beginning of a search for revolutionary socialist ideas which offer a viable alternative to capitalism. Che Guevara, with good reason remains the hero for an entire generation of revolutionaries in the fight against capitalism worldwide.

A new era will dawn in Africa, when the improvised masses of a nation rise up to rescue their right to a decent life from the hands of the ruling oligarchies. Che Guevara

## **POLITICAL HISTORY OF CUBA**

Cuba, largest and westernmost island of the West Indies, forms, with various adjacent islands, the Republic of Cuba. Cuba occupies a central location between north and South America and lies on the lanes of sea travel to all countries bounded by the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. For most of its history Cuba's fertile soil and abundant sugar and tobacco production made it the wealthiest island of the Caribbean. The republic of Cuba as an archipelago, or group of islands, consisting of the main island (named Cuba). In 2008, the nation's population was estimated to be 11,423,952 Cuba's proximity to Haiti, the United States, Mexico's Yucatan peninsula and Jamaica has allowed people to migrate



easily unto as off of the island. This movement contributed to the rich mixture of people and customs in Cuba and throughout the Caribbean area. Although agriculturally rich, Cuba exports only a few products, such as sugar, tobacco, citrus fruits, as several manufactured products.

In 1902, precisely May 20<sup>th</sup>, Cubans began to rule to themselves, through United States influence remained strong on the island. The United States still operates a naval base at Guantanamo bay on Cuban territory under agreements dating back to 1930. Throughout most of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Cuban government functioned under a series of corrupt presidents and dictators. Beginning in 1934 army officer Fulgencio Batista Y. Zaldwargoverned either directly or *indirectly* as a military dictator. By the mid- 1950s many Cubans opposed the corruption and political repression that developed under Batista's dictatorship. Oppression to Batista developed into a revolt known as the Cuban revolution.

Above all, try always to be able to feel deeply any injustice committed against any person in any part of the world. It is the most beautiful quality of a revolutionary. Che Guevara

## **PRACTICE OF SOCIALISM IN CUBA**

In 1959, Fidel Castro and a number of other revolutionaries, including his brother Raul Castro, overthrew the Batista government. From that time until 2008, Fidel Castro was the head of state and the ultimate authority n all policy decisions.



In 1961 Castro formally embraced Marxism-Leninism, the political philosophy that forms the basis to communism. Cuba adopted the form of Marxism that had been practiced up to that time by USSR, where a highly organized communist party controlled the government. Cuba has since been government according to socialist economic and political principles, with a centralized economy and a government under the control of the Cuban communist party. Under socialism, individuals' freedoms were sacrificed for the social advancement not forbidden, so that the allegiance of citizen would belong solely to the state. However, Cuban socialism could not and did not directly mimic the soviet model because Cuban history and culture were entirely different from that of Eastern European nations. Governing offices and agencies were similar, but in Cuba, Castro personally retained ultimate control over the communist party, all governing bodies, and the military until he resigned as president of Cuba in 2008 and was succeeded by his brother Raul. Although no longer president, Fidel remained the head of the Cuban communist party.

Prior to the Cuban revolution of 1958, Cuba had sharp class divisions. The larger class was made up of peasants who could barely support their families. On the small social scale were a handful of sugar mill-owners who enjoyed all the advantages of great wealth. Unlike most other Latin American countries, however, Cuba had a substantial middle class of lawyers, doctors, social workers and other professionals. Industrial workers organized into very active unions, and they had a higher living standard than many workers in other Latin American countries. There was also a large group of fairly prosperous colonos, share croppers and tenant farmers who grew sugarcane for the large mills under government protection.



While Cuba's social hierarchy allowed for some racial fluidity, the vast number of the poor and uneducated was poor of color.

Under the government of Fidel Castro and Che – Guevara class division and social differentiations, such as elite education and membership in country clubs disappeared. Most equitable salaries, guaranteed housing, nationalized medicine and education, and employment for all leveled the social and economic hierarchy formed between 1902 and 1958. In protest, middle and upper-class professionals left Cuba in large numbers between 1959 and 1962, which hastened the advent of a more socially level society. The income gap between peasants and urban workers narrowed as the government controlled wages and prices, and rationed commodities. In 1959 a guerilla force commanded by Fidel Castro, leftist revolutionary, unseated Cuba's dictatorial ruler Fulgencio Batista in the Cuba revolution. In 1961, Castro declared himself a Marxist -Leninist and pronounced Cuba a socialist country in the revolution.

Arms cannot be commodities in our world. They must be delivered to the peoples asking for them to use against the common enemy, with no charge and in the quantities needed and available. Che Guevara

## **SALIENT TRUTHS ABOUT CHE-GUEVARA'S SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY**

The Guevara's ideals on the construction of socialism were an attempt at heroic creation of something new. The search for something new though interrupted and incomplete for a distinct model of socialism, radically opposed in many respects to the actually existing bureaucratic caricature. From 1959 to 1967,



Che's thoughts evolved considerably. He distanced himself ever further from his initial illusions concerning soviet or soviet-style socialism, that is, from the Stalinist version of Marxism. In a 1965 letter to a Cuban friend, he harshly criticized the '*ideological tailism*' that was manifested in Cuba by the publication of soviet manuals for instruction in Marxism. These manuals '*soviet bricks*' to use his expression have the disadvantage of letting to think, the party has already done it for you and you have to digest it.

The Guevara death in October 1967 interrupted a process of independent political maturation and intellectual development. His work is not a closed system; it was rather a polished system of thought with an answer to everything on many questions, such as planning, the struggle against bureaucracy and so on, his thinking remains incomplete. But the discovery force behind his quest for socialism is in his comment that if socialism claims to fight capitalism and conquer it on its own ground, that of productivism and consumption, using the weapons of capitalism, the commodity form, competition self-centre-individualism, it is doomed for failure.

It is hard to argue that Che anticipated the dismantling of the USSR, but in a way he did have the intuition that a socialist system that does not tolerate differences, that does not embody new values, that attempts to imitate its adversary, that has no ambitious but to limit its adversary, that has no ambitions but '*to catch*' up and surpass the production of the imperialist metropolis has no future. Socialism for the Guevara represented the historical projects of a new society based on values of equality, solidarity, collectivism, revolutionary altruism, free discussion, and mass participation.



### 3 SOCIALIST ASPIRATIONS OF GUEVARA

Three things express in concrete terms the socialist aspirations of Guevara and his search for a new path. These are namely:

- ❖ The discussion on the methods of economic management
- ❖ The question of the free expression of differences
- ❖ The perspective of socialist democracy.

It must be noted that the first clearly occupied a central place in Che's thinking while the other two, which are closely related, are much less developed, with some lacunae and contradictions. But they are ever present in his concerns and his practice.

In March 1965, in his essay *socialism and man Cuba* in analyzing the models for building socialism that were applied in Eastern Europe, Che rejected the conception that claimed in to conquer capitalism with its own fetishes. The pipe dream that socialism can be achieved with the help of the dull instruments bequeathed to us by capitalism (the commodity as the economic cell, profitability, individual material interest as a lever and so on) can lead into a blind alley... To build socialism according to Che Guevara, it is necessary, simultaneous with the new material foundations, to build the new man.

In essence, Che Guevara adopted socialist democracy as a theory or ideology that guided his socialist revolution in Cuba and other parts of the world. This he achieved by rejecting the authoritarian and dictatorial conceptions that did so much damage to socialism during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although, he did not strike a relationship between democracy and planning, his arguments in defense of



planning and in opposition to market categories are extremely important and acquire new relevance in light of the neoliberal vulgate that now dominates with its market religion.

As long as imperialism exist it will, by definition exert it domination over other countries. Today that domination is called neo-colonialism. Che Guevara

### **ACHIEVEMENTS AND SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHE-GUEVARA TO CUBAN SOCIALISM**

- ❖ *Proletarianization of our thinking:* This sort of mental revolution as advocated by Che-Guevara took place at the individual level. It involved specifically our habits and our minds and how it must strive towards socialism and the enthronement of a better life for the proletariat. This will help to build the new man in us, and transform us into socially-inclined individuals.
- ❖ *Nationalization of industry:* Nationalization in this sense is the process of taking a private industry or private assets into public ownership by a national government or state. Nationalization of industry as advocated by CheGuevara ensured that those private industries where seized from the rich in Cuba and nationalized such that everyone in the state will have fair share of the national wealth.

- ❖ *Land redistribution*: land redistribution according to the socialist ideas of chi-Guevara ensured that the Laws, regulations or customs regarding the ownership of land was implemented. It consisted of government-initiated or government-backed property redistribution such that it would favour the poor or have-nots in the society. It involved the transfer of ownership from the more powerful to the less powerful, such as from a relatively small number of wealthy owners in Cuba with exclusive land holding (i.e. plantations, large ranches or agribusiness plots) to individual ownership by those who work the land.
- ❖ Socialism in Chi's view cannot exist without a change in consciousness to a new fraternal attitude toward humanity, not only within the societies which are building or have built socialism, but also on a world scale toward all peoples suffering from imperialist oppression.
- ❖ *Kicked against class and social differentiation*: As part of the socialist ideas of the Guevara to enshrine the doctrines of socialism in Cuba, he ensured that class and social differentiation was kicked against and reduced to its barest minimum. For instance, elite education and the membership in country clubs disappeared under his tenure. He ensured that most equitable salaries were given to all and sundry in the state. He equally guaranteed housing, nationalized medicine and education, and employment for all.
- ❖ *He leveled the social and economic hierarchy that was formed between 1902 and 1958*: It could be recalled that Cuba was a hierarchical state where resources were not shared equitably. Thus, on coming with socialism Che Guevara ensured that such hierarchies were leveled and this gave the common man in Cuba hope of a better living condition and standard.



- ❖ The construction of socialism for Che is inseparable from certain moral values: This was primarily and specifically, in contrast to Stalin's economic conceptions. According to Che Guevara 'economic socialism without a communist morale does not interest me. We're fighting poverty but at the same time alienation... if communism is dissociated from consciousness, it may be a method of distribution but is no longer a revolutionary morality.
- ❖ In this famous speech in Algiers (in February 1905), Ernest Guevara called on the countries claiming to be socialist to put an end to their implicit complicity with the exploiting countries of the West as expressed in the unequal exchange relationships they were carrying out with the engaged in struggle against imperialism.

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of Love. It is possible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality. Che Guevara

## **SUMMARY**

Che's death in October 1967 interrupted a process of independent political maturation and intellectual development. His work is not a closed system, a polished system of thought with an answer to everything. On many questions, such as planning, the struggle against bureaucracy, and so on, his thinking remains incomplete. The driving force behind this quest for a new road – over and above the specific economic issues – was the conviction that socialism is meaningless and consequently cannot triumph unless it holds out the offer of a civilization, a



social ethic, a model of society that is totally antagonistic to the values of petty individualism, unfettered egoism, competition, the war of all against all that is characteristic of capitalist civilization, the world in which man eats man.

Che Guevara being a Marxist-humanist travelled throughout South America and was radicalized by the poverty, hunger and disease he witnessed, his burgeoning desire to help overturn what he saw as the capitalist exploitation of Latin America by the United States prompted his involvement in Guatemala's social reforms under President Jacobo Arbenz, whose eventual CIA – assisted overthrow at the behest of the United Fruit Company solidified Guevara's political ideology. Following the Cuban revolution, Guevara performed a number of key roles in the new government. These included reviewing the appeals and firing squads for those convicted as war criminals during the revolutionary tribunals, instituting agrarian land reform as minister of industries, helping spearhead a successful nationwide literacy campaign serving as both national bank president and instructional director for Cuba's armed forces and traversing the globe as a diplomat on behalf of Cuban socialism.

Such position also allowed him to play a central role in training the militia forces that repelled the *Bay of Pigs invasion* and bringing the Soviet nuclear – armed ballistic missiles to Cuba which precipitated the 1962 Cuban missile Crisis. This paper summarizes by also mentioning the fact that Che Guevara was a prolific writer and diarist, composing a seminal manual on Guerilla warfare, along with an abestselling memoir about his youthful continental motorcycle journey. His experiences and studying of maximum–Leninism led him to posit that third world countries underdevelopment and dependence was an intrinsic result of imperialism,



neocolonialism and monopoly capitalism, with the only remedy being proletarian internationalism and world revolution.

*Better to die standing, than to live on your knees. Che Guevara*

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