

# 50 years since the murder of Che Guevara

Including a republication of *Castroism and the Politics of Petty-Bourgeois Nationalism*

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October 9 marked 50 years since the murder of the Argentine-born guerrilla and co-leader of Cuba's 1959 revolution, Ernesto Che Guevara, who was captured after the collapse of a disastrous 11-month-long attempt to foment a guerrilla war in Bolivia.

The anniversary has been widely marked by the media as well as in speeches and ceremonies in Cuba, Bolivia and elsewhere. Much of the press coverage serves to deliberately obscure the political significance of Guevara's life and death, while those marking the anniversary have, for the most part, exploited the occasion as a means of lending a left cover to their reactionary politics and masking their own betrayals.

The *New York Times* published a lengthy feature article Monday on the anniversary, interviewing witnesses to Che's capture and subsequent assassination by Bolivian soldiers. Notably absent from the piece was any mention of the presence at Guevara's execution of the CIA agent Felix Rodriguez, a Bay of Pigs veteran assigned to hunt down the guerrilla leader. Rodriguez went on to participate in the Operation Phoenix assassination campaign in Vietnam and the Iran-Contra affair. This professional killer subsequently claimed that his intention had been to transport the guerrilla leader to Panama for interrogation and, undoubtedly, torture, but that the order to kill him had come down from the Bolivian army command.

This omission amounts to a form of historical revisionism that defies innocent explanation. Rather, the attempt to write the CIA out of what constituted a criminal assassination is in keeping with the close ties between the *Times* editorial board and the US intelligence apparatus.

The anniversary was marked in various ways in Latin America. Among the most hypocritical and absurd was the observing of a minute of silence by the corrupt politicians of the Mexican House of Deputies, a proposal made by a leading member of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), a political formation deeply implicated in the disappearance and presumed mass murder of the 43 *Ayotzinapa* teaching students three years ago.

In Bolivia, President Evo Morales marked the anniversary by traveling to the site of Che's murder and sleeping there in a tent. He used this stunt to launch his campaign for a fourth consecutive term, despite a 2016 popular referendum rejecting a repeal of the Bolivian constitution's term limits. The move has sparked widespread demonstrations under conditions in which the Morales government, part of Latin America's so-called "left turn" begun at the end of the 1990s, has come into increasing confrontation with the working class.

In Cuba, the main event marking the anniversary was held in Santa Clara, the site of a mausoleum containing the remains of Guevara, which were transferred from Bolivia to Cuba in 1997. Miguel Díaz-Canel, first vice president of Cuba's Councils of State and Ministers and the expected successor to the presidency when 86-year-old Raul Castro steps down next year, gave the main speech, sounding the familiar themes of Guevara as a kind of secular saint and inspiration for Cuban youth based on his upholding of "the sanctity of study, work and fulfilling one's duty."

He said Che had taught that "imperialism cannot be trusted, even a bit," adding that recent events had borne out this advice. He was apparently referring to the

recent moves of the Trump administration to roll back the rapprochement initiated between the Obama administration and the Castro government, which has thrown into crisis the plans of Cuba's ruling elite to solidify their privileged position by forging closer relations with US capitalism.

In Venezuela, President Nicolas Maduro, confronting the country's deepest economic crisis, a mounting corruption scandal, growing popular hostility to his government and threats of intervention from Washington, delivered a statement on the anniversary proclaiming, "Today we revolutionaries, the *guevaristas-chavistas* of this time, can say that 50 years ago, a man did not die, but a myth was born."

Neither Maduro nor any of the others issuing such tributes have cared to delve too deeply into the precise content of this "myth," which has been promoted not only by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists in Latin America, but also by a host of middle class and pseudo-left groups in Europe and North America, most notably the Pabloite revisionist tendency that broke with the Fourth International.

In their heyday, these tendencies openly embraced the Guevarist conception that guerrilla war waged by small bands based in the countryside represented a new road to socialism, eclipsing the revolutionary role of the working class and the necessity of forging its conscious vanguard through the building of independent mass revolutionary parties.

The attempt to implement this retrograde guerrilla perspective led to a series of catastrophic defeats in Latin America, separating a layer of revolutionary youth from the working class and helping to pave the way to decades of military dictatorships.

While the successor organizations to the Pabloite groups that promoted guerrillaism in the 1960s and 1970s have long since moved on, entering capitalist governments and supporting imperialist regime change operations, some of them still exploit the image of Che as a kind of phony revolutionary window-dressing for their reactionary operations. None of them have attempted a serious reappraisal of Che's legacy, not to mention their own reprehensible role.

The following lecture on these questions was delivered in January 1998, in the aftermath of the 30th anniversary of Guevara's death, when the slain guerrilla leader's remains were returned to Cuba.

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## **Che's revival**

## **Proletarian socialism versus petty-bourgeois nationalism**

## **The political role of the petty bourgeoisie**

## **The roots of the Cuban Revolution**

## **Castro and Castroism**

## **The myth of guerrillaism**

- Popular forces can win a war against the army.
- It is not necessary for all conditions to be present to make a revolution; the insurrectional foco [term for guerrilla unit] can create them.
- 3. In the underdeveloped Americas the terrain of the armed struggle must be primarily the countryside.[3]

## **The fiasco of Guevarism**

## **Cuba and the Fourth International**

## **Pabloism and the crisis of leadership**

## **Balance sheet of guerrillaism**

## **Cuba today**

## **Summation**

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