

INTERVIEW WITH CHE GUEVARA

Havana, Cuba - February 1964

LISA HOWARD

Major Guevara, since the success of the revolution, the Cuban economy, according to all reports, has seriously deteriorated in every sector: industrial output, the vegetable crop, the sugar harvest which last year hit a low 3.5 million tons. How do you account for this economic regression?

CHE

This is not a question, this is an assertion. You must first destroy the assertion, and then go and answer the question.

The assertion that all aspects of the Cuban economy have deteriorated during the course of the revolution is wrong. The industrial output has increased since 1959, and it could have increased even more had it not been adversely influenced by the sugar industry, which has in fact decreased. The industrial output has increased at an annual rate of 7 percent, this does not include sugar, however. And the increase for 1963 and as estimated for 1964 will be still greater. For 1963 it amounts to 10 per cent, and the 1964 figure will be higher. And the sugar output will increase, too.

In the agricultural field we have had some problems, but not overwhelming. The production of sugar - which is our fundamental product (we are still mono-cultivators to a certain extent) has decreased considerably. This is due to a bad sugar policy we used to follow and to the extraordinary draught of these past two years. However, the same does not apply to other aspects of our agriculture, and we have had partial successes. Cotton is now a reality in Cuba, as is kenaf, both products which were previously unknown here.

I think the whole analysis has to be centered on sugar. As you said, the sugar harvest has been very poor - not 3,500,000 tons, but 3,800,000 tons, the lowest in many years. But already this year it will be higher; we still cannot say "how much", nor do we expect a substantial increase, because we have also had the cyclone which has adversely affected our crops, but still, there will be an increase. And from now on there will be a continuous increase.

The industrial output in general, as I told you, has substantially increased, and this is a major achievement if you consider the severe blockade to which Cuba has been subjected.

LISA HOWARD

How seriously is the economic blockade affecting the Cuban economy?

CHE

I cannot give you an exact figure of the effect the blockade has had on Cuba, and one of the reasons is that it has had both negative and positive effects. One of the positive effects is the development of the national conscience and of the fighting spirit of the Cuban people in order to overcome difficulties.

Che (contn.) But if you think that all Cuban equipment, almost the entire Cuban industrial machinery (some of which of an exclusive character) used to come from the United States, and that in addition Cuba was the receiver of all the used machines from the United States, whose capitalists sent those machines to Cuba to accumulate more profits, and that many of the product lines have been discontinued by now, you may get an idea of the extreme effort required to overcome the blockade.

Figures cannot be given. I don't know them. Obviously, it meant a serious drawback.

But it has at the same time been a positive lesson for us, and it has taught us how to manage our economy in the future. I think this more or less answers your question.

LISA HOWARD Russia is pouring a great deal of money into the Cuban economy each day. Now, what would happen to the economy of the Island if that aid suddenly stopped?

CHE These statements of daily amounts are typical of the American way of thinking, and the concept of investment perhaps reflects somehow the idea the Americans have of "aid." American aid to Latin American States eventually reverts to these very "aid," countries. In our case there has been what can be called "aid," namely pardoning of certain trade debts, and long-term loans granted on a purely commercial basis; as for the rest, there are normal trade relations between the two countries. Cuba no longer has the United States as its major import-export customer; the Soviet Union has taken its place.

If with your question as to what would happen should the Soviet aid stop, you refer to all of our exchange, then I have to answer you that the life of our country would be paralyzed, because, for example, all of our oil supply comes from the Soviet Union, and these are almost four million tons. But this is not aid, this is trade exchange, on a basis of absolute equality, and we pay with our sugar and other products.

The aid extended to us during those years of poor crops was surplus in excess of exports from the Soviet Union against imports from us. But now, with the increase in the sugar price, this has considerably diminished. Our terms of exchange are fairly balanced, even though the Soviet Union continues to give us a certain trade "imbalance". And then there is the aid in form of investments, which are considerable, and which, if they were to discontinue, would paralyze our industrial development. Therefore, it has to be stressed that the term "aid" is not the most accurate definition of our relationship with the Soviet Union, since what we maintain is a relationship of equality between Socialist countries who have a trade exchange which is mutually profitable.

LISA HOWARD Many critics of the Cuban regime believe that one really flourishing industry in Cuba is the Communist propaganda efforts to hide the difference between the Cuban image and the Cuban truth. What is your reaction to that, Major Guevara?

CHE I feel it would be better for me to ask you what your opinion is. Because I have my image of the revolution. And my image could perhaps be deformed by the position I hold. People in America, our America, and in general all over the world, have a different image of the revolution. When they come here, the two images confront each other, and then comes the shock. But this shock strikes those who come from outside Cuba. We here, used to criticizing, and to criticize all that is bad, and to seeing with a deep feeling of criticism the development of the revolution, we do not always realize the progress we have made, and it is you, those who visit us, who see from time to time and bring to our attention the progress we have made. And this is why I feel that I, as an interviewer, should ask you this question.

LISA HOWARD Major Guevara, much external evidence indicates that the Marxist system of economics simply doesn't work, doesn't provide bountiful life for its people. After 47 years of trying the Soviet Union still cannot feed, and house, and clothe their people properly. Do you think it possible that the Marxist system just doesn't provide the proper incentive to create a really high level of productivity?

CHE You have a tendency of making assertions in form of questions. Once again, I have first to destroy the assertion in order to then answer the question. You state that it has been proven that Marxism or the Marxist system does not provide for the people's well-being. I think it's just the opposite. If we take as a comparison the United States, then it is true the living standard of any other nation is lower, but if you speak of the American way of life and that of the free world, you must take into account in that free world, for example, the 200 million people who in Latin America die of hunger, or of diseases, or who do not reach adulthood, because they die of starvation as children. All these people contribute to the economic wealth of the United States, who exploits them in one form or another. The same happens in Africa, and it happens in Asia, too. And Marxism brings all this to an end.

Obviously, in Cuba today there are many people who are more restricted now than they were before, but for many more people the situation is much better now than it was before. And you can see this yourself when you travel in the interior, if you meet our peasants and if you know how our sugar workers used to live. And then perhaps you will get to the root of your question.

At the moment, being besieged by American imperialism, we cannot offer our people all the things we would like to, but we have given them all we could, all we have been capable of giving, so far, and under equal conditions, beginning with the minister

Che (cont.) down to any government employee, and this is the main reason why the people continue to fight for their liberation.

North Vietnam has been liberated, and yet South Vietnam did not find the American way of life any better, and it rose in rebellion, took ~~to~~ ^{up} the arms and is defeating American intervention.

Try and think whether there is not something behind this that incites the people to fight and whether it is not because Marxism offers a better life to the people.

LISA HOWARD ... Major, I remember once ^{at} a diplomatic party saying ~~he~~ ^{Major} was quite brilliant, and he had nothing to fear from any of my questions.

... I saw him at a diplomatic party once last year ...

... and recall saying to him, he was quite brilliant, he had nothing to fear from any of my questions.

LISA HOWARD The United States Government is quite aware of the problems in Latin America and through the "Alianza" is trying very hard to lift the standard of living of the people throughout the Hemisphere. Now, if the ruling classes agreed to make land reform and tax reforms and if the living standard were raised, won't the message of the Cuban revolution lose its effectiveness?

... Then, I say, the message of the Cuban revolution and Marxism will lose its meaning.

CHE Certainly, it would lose it immediately. The message of the Cuban revolution has a meaning because through its own gravitation, imperialism can only make very lukewarm reforms, which do not go to the heart of the matter. If all of Latin America were freed from imperialist domination, imperialism would face very serious problems. The foundation of imperialism is the domination of Latin American countries through unequal exchange; the exchange of manufactured goods for raw materials; the taking over of all decisive positions in each government through the national oligarchies subservient to imperialism. If all this changed, imperialism would have lost its force. It would then face the general crisis of capitalism, in other words, the crisis from the working class within its own country - the working class that is now being exploited, although its exploitation is not so evident since it is transferred to Latin America, Africa, and Asia. And then the conflict would be directly within the boundaries of the United States.

And, consequently, the message of the Cuban revolution would lose all of its importance. But it would not be needed either because this is precisely what we desire for all our people in Latin America. And once we would have achieved all that, there would be no further need to launch messages that would no longer have a meaning.

LISA HOWARD So in our desire for these reforms we agree.

CHE The true reforms? The access of the people to power? We agree.

LISA HOWARD Does Major Guevara feel this can come about through an evolutionary process or must it come about through violent revolutionary upheavals?

CHE That depends always on the reactionary classes, who refuse to give up power, to yield privileges inherent to power. Where the force of the people would be such that it could oblige the reactionary classes to give up power by peaceful means, it will be done so. This is much better for all. Where the reactionary classes try to maintain the power by all means, the spark will be ignited, regardless of the will or the desire of anyone, and it will burn in Latin America, or in parts of Latin America, and eventually the people will reach the power.

LISA HOWARD When Cuba produced raw materials for the United States and had to buy her manufactured goods from us, you called this the worst form of economic colonialism. Now again, Cuba is assigned a predominantly agricultural role within the Soviet economic system. Is this suddenly acceptable?

CHE No, this is not correct. In the first place, it must be stated that it is not only the exchange of raw materials for manufactured goods that leads to imperialism, but also the whole complex of mechanisms attached to this exchange pattern.

Cuba used to sell sugar to the United States, and in turn it received materials. But that sugar sold to the United States was transformed into dollars which also went to the United States; furthermore, the materials we received were mostly for American factories which manufactured products that were sold here, converted into dollars and also went to the United States. This was one of the aspects of imperialist domination of our country.

Now, with regard to the direct exchange of raw materials for manufactured goods, we have actually had thorough talks with the Soviet Union, resulting in a special price for sugar. This is an obvious demonstration of the fact that Socialist relations have an entirely different basis. The price paid by the Soviet Union for our sugar makes it possible for us to import sufficient machinery for the development of our industry and thus to become an agrarian-industrial country, rather than an exclusive exporter of raw materials.

LISA HOWARD When you were fighting in the Hills of the Sierra Maestra, did you foresee that the revolution would take so radical a turn?

CHE I had a feeling that it would. Of course, the course and the very violent development of the revolution could not be foreseen, nor was the Marxist-Leninist formulation of the revolution foreseeable. This was the result of a very long process which you know very well. We had a more or less vague idea to solve the problems which, as we could see so clearly, affected the peasants who fought with us, as well as the problems of the workers we knew. But it would be very long to recount the whole process of the transformation of our ideas.

Che Guevara

CHE (cont.)

Now, you must be sure of one thing, and that is that the United States had a very important part in the development of our revolution because of the way in which they acted toward our country. Or maybe it is more precise to say, in the acceleration of our revolution. The participation of the United States in the activation of the revolution in such violent and concentrated form was ^a most important factor.

Now, the outcome of the revolution is only natural. It is the accomplishment of a people who is beginning to solve its problems and who finds, naturally, that the only possible way out is Socialism, with the power in its hands and the capability of directing and using it for the people's well-being.

LISA HOWARD

There is a conviction in the United States that Major Guevara was one of the most radical influences in the revolution, and that he pulled Dr. Castro to the left, that what happened here was partially his blueprint. Does he accept or deny that?

CHE

In the United States as well as in many other countries I have for many years been given the honor of being considered the brain of the revolution, the mastermind, the man of the left, the power behind the throne. Personally, this does not bother me at all. But my honesty as a revolutionary, a born honesty, obliges me to confess that the top leftist in Cuba is Fidel Castro and that the greatest danger the United States faces here, if there is any danger in us, is Fidel and not me.

LISA HOWARD

In the Hills of the Sierra Maestra, when Fidel Castro said he was not a Communist, did you believe that he was not a Communist and that he would not become a Communist?

CHE

I knew he was not a Communist, but I believe I also knew that he would become Communist. Just as I at that time was not a Communist, but I also knew that I would become one within a short time, and that the natural development of the revolution would lead all of us to Marxism-Leninism. I cannot say that it was a definite and conscious knowledge, but it was an intuition, the result of an examination, the assessment of the development of the attitude of the United States and the manner in which they acted at that time against us and in favor of Batista.

LISA HOWARD

Then you are suggesting that the actions of the United States Government contributed to the Communization of the Cuban revolution?

CHE

Not as much as that. To the acceleration of the process and to that violent confrontation that has occurred. The natural development all over the world leads to Socialism. This is independent of the United States' actions.

LISA HOWARD

It has been said that Communism is inimical to the Cuban temperament. Do you find it hard, the Cubans, to accept the rigid discipline of a Communist society?

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- CHE That is one of the made-up ideas about Communism. Communism is made by the people, and the people build it to suit their image. The singularities of our ethnic, social and cultural structure pervade our way of building and modelling the new society. Moreover, discipline is not something alien to the peoples, it appears at a certain stage of development. When there is only one harvest a year, and the crop depends on wind and sun and rain, time has no importance, and discipline almost does not count. But when you have to follow a certain pace of development, when you have industries and every minute has its value in gold, then discipline comes automatically. And in our process of development and industrialization of the country, discipline has by its own weight settled in the country. It's a vital need, and the people so understand and adapt themselves to it.
- LISA HOWARD It has appeared to us, viewing the Cuban scene, that two of your chief problems are this difficulty in disciplining the people to a Communist State, and a kind of strangling bureaucracy. Do you feel these are two great problems?
- CHE Our two main problems are: imperialism, and imperialism ... After that, all other questions can be tackled.
- But let me now answer your question. Bureaucracy is a problem; it's the product of a society that has to develop rapidly, with "cadres" that were not prepared for the development work.
- LISA HOWARD Do you think it possible that this problem - bureaucracy - is intrinsic to the Communist system?
- CHE No. I was trying to tell you that. Bureaucracy was inherited by us as an aspect of the Cuban past. It exists in the United States, too. It is quite possible that at a certain moment in the development of Socialism bureaucracy increases excessively, maybe. I am not a theoretician to elaborate on this point, but it is obvious that bureaucracy exists in capitalism as well as in the Socialist system. In both of them.
- LISA HOWARD Really, I found the bureaucracy absolutely strangling. You have no idea how long it takes to get a paper.
- CHE What kind of paper?
- LISA HOWARD Any. I think that one of the problems is that the people in Dr. Guevara's position ...
- LISA HOWARD Major Guevara, Dr. Castro has often expressed his desire to normalize relations between Cuba and the United States. Do you desire such a normalization of relations?
- CHE On the basis of principles -- of course. And I would probably desire it more than anyone, for it is the industry that suffers most from the blockade. Industry and transport are perhaps the sectors of production which are hit hardest by the blockade. Transport has already freed itself, but not We (industry). And therefore, on the basis of principles and total equality, normalization of relations would seem ideal to us.

- LISA HOWARD Major Guevara, do you think a resumption of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States would be very beneficial to the Cuban economy?
- CHE Diplomatic relations?
- LISA HOWARD And commercial ... ?
- CHE Well, it would be beneficial, ~~sure~~ *sure, certainly...*
- LISA HOWARD Major Guevara, what do you think a resumption of diplomatic and commercial relations between Cuba and the United States would mean to the Cuban economy?
- CHE Of course, at the present moment a resumption of relations could only be done gradually. Our main export products have been detoured to other markets; but, obviously, it would always be easier for us to purchase products, especially spare parts manufactured by the United States, from a source closer to us.
- But in any event, at the moment it does not look as though this will be a reality in the near future, and we can also perfectly well manage without these relations.
- LISA HOWARD Isn't it rather difficult when your supply line is 7,000 or 7,500 miles away?
- CHE It is difficult. And it was extremely difficult in the beginning and it complicated things very much. But it is improving gradually. Soon we will be able to create reserves, and then with our deposits here in Cuba we will be able to remove most of the difficulties. As time passes, the distance is less of a problem for our supplies. And also the relationship becomes closer, and from year to year our needs will be better known, so that our suppliers can prepare the shipments adequately in advance, and year after year this shows favorably in the Cuban economy.
- LISA HOWARD Would you assess for us how effective has the United States blockade been?
- CHE This looks like an invitation almost to a leak of confidential information, right? We have recognized the importance of the blockade. We have also announced, with the same calm, that the blockade would not prevent us from advancing. But, firstly, it is difficult to be more specific, and it is not very convenient, either. After all, in spite of your good intentions, we are still enemies. And the enemy should only know generalities about the other party.
- LISA HOWARD Then I assume that you are telling me that the economic blockade has been very effective?
- CHE You have assumed quite a few things during our talk. Among other things, that Communism has no influence at all, that it retards productivity, that the blockade has been very effective and (your last assumption) that bureaucracy is strangling.

Che (cont.) At the same time, you have told me that Cuba looks a little different now from what it looked like when we had our last interview here. I can also assume that you have noticed a progress in the Cuban revolution, and I could ask you then: If everything here is that bad, and if the blockade is so effective, why then does the Cuban revolution advance?

LISA HOWARD I've often been told that the most frank man on the Island, the most candid man, is "Che" Guevara, so perhaps he will tell us how effective the blockade has been?

CHE I repeat that I cannot tell you that. If I gave you a figure, I would lie, no matter what the figure would be. But I have also told you that the blockade has had positive as well as negative aspects. But even supposing that I were the most frank person (and I don't believe that I should get special credit for this here in Cuba, where we are all frank), but even supposing this, there are times when in all frankness one must say that one cannot answer certain questions. And this also is frankness.

LISA HOWARD Cuba has recently purchased busses from London, you are negotiating for ships from Spain, I understand there is an economic mission in Switzerland. Does this represent for you a fundamental change in the Cuban economy?

CHE Are you referring to a change in economics or in the economic policy?

LISA HOWARD I'm talking about a change in the economic policy.

CHE I think not, there has been a change in the economic policy of certain countries, a certain split of the "monolithic unity of the free world," and there is more trade with Cuba now. Our commercial dispositions have always been the same, on the same bases. In other words, a merchandise is a merchandise, and it should be to the mutual benefit of both buyer and seller. On this basis we have traded with the whole world, including the United States, even after we severed our relations. The United States have exerted great influence so that certain goods would not be sold to us, and you are well aware of the discussions concerning the busses sold by the Leyland company. But actually, it is not we who have changed. Certain aspects of international politics have changed. I don't know whether we could have anything to do with this. We don't think we are that important.

LISA HOWARD Does he feel that these purchases represent a failure of the United States blockade?

CHE Yes.

LISA HOWARD A serious failure?

CHE That depends on how it affects the American ego.

LISA HOWARD Does he feel ...

LISA HOWARD Major Guevara, do you believe that this trade with the West which you are now engaged in will continue and perhaps expand in the near future?

CHE Yes, I hope so. Naturally, it does not depend on our wishes alone, but also on the wishes of the people with whom we trade today. But I have hopes that it will continue, and that we shall enter a new era as far as relations with Cuba are concerned, and that the European countries have realized that it is important to have relations with all countries of the world, and that Cuba is a good market, and a market that is reliable as well as stable, in other words, lasting.

LISA HOWARD I would like him to talk a little more about that. Can you tell us more on the subject?

CHE At the beginning of the revolution, even before we had serious problems with the United States, we had sent several delegations to different European countries. The general reaction at that time was one of abstention. People had no confidence in our capacity to survive. And this sentiment grew stronger with the deepening of our controversies with the United States. And there was a time when our exchanges were decreasing more and more every year. However, after Playa Girón, and later, especially after the October crisis, we witnessed a change, gradual first, and then more accelerated, in the attitude of the European countries toward the Cuban revolution. We are convinced of the permanency of our revolutionary government, of the permanency of the revolution, and it seems that this has transcended in all our actions and in our capacity to stand up in dealing with businessmen of other Capitalistic countries, so they have decided to maintain relations which were traditional with Cuba in many instances.

And all this makes us hope that these relations will not only continue, but that they will expand in the future. And we have a great interest in this. We have, for instance, closed deals for the acquisition of complete plants with several countries, with France, with England, with Japan, and we feel that in the future we can make this type of transaction with greater security, because in the past there was always the factor of insecurity with regard to the supply of spare parts, should the trade relations discontinue. But especially England and France have maintained very good relations with us in this respect, and they have guaranteed the supply of spare parts for the equipment we bought from them during the revolutionary stage, and this has further strengthened our confidence in the possibility to import new machines and to build up with first-class technical equipment of the latest models a whole series of industries which we are in the process of developing.

LISA HOWARD What would happen to the Cuban economy if this trade with the West were suddenly cut off?

CHE Nothing.

- LISA HOWARD But you feel it's necessary.
- CHE Es conveniente. It is convenient.
- LISA HOWARD What would you like to see the United States do as regards Cuba?
- CHE It is very difficult to give a precise answer. It's somewhat unrealistic. Perhaps the most frank and most objective answer would be "Nothing." Nothing in every respect: Nothing in our favor, and nothing against us. Just leave us alone, not pay any attention to us.
- LISA HOWARD Are you optimistic about the possibility of a normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States?
- CHE I think this is also difficult to answer. We are waiting, simply watching the situation, use our foresight for whichever way we will have to follow. It depends on a whole series of circumstances, on the very characteristics of the Government of the United States, and also on the manner in which they would assess the world situation. So far they have not proved capable of assessing accurately the alignment of forces in the world. Therefore, there is no clear prospect of a total normalization. Now, there are some facts that point to a different tone in the conduct of relations, in spite of recent provocations, like this absolutely piratical imprisonment of our fishermen. We might therefore at least co-exist. To become friends would be difficult for many years, with the American government, that is. And the people of the United States? I think you will have seen here that we have absolutely nothing against the people, and that there is not the least hatred in our country against the American people.
- LISA HOWARD Thank you very much, Major Guevara. Thank you very much, Major.
- CHE Thank you very much. I don't know how to say "de nada". I have to say it in Spanish.
- LISA HOWARD Thank you.
- CHE (says in English): You are welcome.
- LISA HOWARD If something would have to happen to Fidel Castro, what do you think would be the fate of the Cuban revolution and who do you think would accede to the power here?
- CHE From the type of your question, I suppose you are referring to something violent that could happen to him.
- CHE It would naturally be a serious blow to the Cuban revolution, we don't deny that. Fidel is our indisputable and undisputed leader; he has been our guide through a series of extremely difficult situations Cuba had to face, and during which he has given proof of his stature as a world leader. I think none of us has this stature. But during all those years of

fighting side by side with him, we have acquired revolutionary experience, and we have been trained in the same school, - a school of audacity, sacrifice, determination to defend our principles, of analysis of the problems, and with this background, we should be able to survive, even if something should happen.

Who would replace him? That would have to be a question to be discussed then. We do not make this sort of speculations, nor has any one of us any political ambitions. But, logically, his brother Raúl, not because he is his brother, but because of his own qualifications - he is Deputy Prime Minister, and naturally he would be the most suitable among us to follow the same path of the Cuban revolution.

LISA HOWARD

You have worked very closely with Dr. Castro for many, many years. What is your assessment of Fidel Castro as a man and as a leader?

CHE

This is one of so many questions that are difficult to answer and which you have asked me tonight, especially because if there is one thing I hate, it's adulation, or something that is a desire to adulate. But let me answer you frankly: I will tell you that as a man Fidel has many qualities. The fundamental ones are his extraordinary firmness, his humanism that transcends easily and embraces the whole people, and his unbreakable determination. As a leader he has a fundamental quality: to judge each and every moment, especially each and every difficult moment, what action to take, and after having taken the decision, to follow that way, with an absolute and firm perseverance, until triumph is his.

It is very difficult to describe a man like Fidel, but I think I have given his fundamental qualities.

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