

[Speech by the Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz at the solemn evening in memory of Commander Ernesto Che Guevara, in the Plaza de la Revolución, on October 18, 1967 \[1\]](#)

Date:

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Revolutionary comrades:

It was a day in the month of July or August of 1955 when we met Che. And in one night - as he tells in his accounts - he became a future expeditionary of the "Granma". But at that time that expedition had no ship, no weapons, no troops. And it was like this, along with Raúl, Che joined the group of the first two on the list of "Granma".

Since then 12 years have passed; They have been 12 years full of struggle and history. Throughout those years, death cut short many valuable and irreplaceable lives; but, at the same time, throughout those years, extraordinary people emerged from our Revolution who and were forged among the men of the Revolution, and between men and the people, bonds of affection and bonds of friendship were built which go beyond all possible expression.

And tonight we gather, you and us, to try to somehow express those feelings in relation to who was one of the closest to us, one of the most admired, one of the most loved and, without a doubt, the most extraordinary of our revolutionary comrades; to express those feelings to him and to the heroes who have fought with him and to the heroes who have fallen with him, his internationalist army, which has been writing a glorious and indelible page in history.

Che was one of those persons to whom everyone immediately took affection, for his simplicity, for his character, for his sincerity, for his comradeship, for his personality, for his originality, even though we still did not know the other singular virtues which characterized him.

During those first moments he was our troop's doctor. And so the bonds were forged and the comradeship feelings arose.

He was imbued with a deep spirit of hatred and contempt for imperialism, not only because his political background had already acquired a considerable degree of development, but because he had only

recently had the opportunity to witness in Guatemala the criminal imperialist intervention through the mercenary soldiers who ruined the revolution in that country.

For a man like him, not so many arguments were necessary. It was enough for him to know that Cuba lived in a similar situation, it was enough for him to know that there were men determined to fight with weapons to change that situation, it was enough for him to know that those men were inspired by genuinely revolutionary and patriotic feelings. And that was more than enough.

This way, one day, by the end of November 1956, with us, he started the march towards Cuba. I remember that that journey was very hard for him since, given the circumstances in which it was the departure was organized, he could not even provide himself with the medicines he needed and he spent the whole voyage suffering a serious asthma attack without a single chance of relief, but also without a single complaint.

We arrived, we started the first walks, we suffered the first setback, and after a few weeks we met again - as you know - a group of those who remained from the "Granma" expedition. Che continued to be a doctor of our troop.

The first victorious combat took place and Che was already a soldier of our troop and, at the same time, he was still the doctor; the second victorious battle took place and Che was not only a soldier, but the most distinguished of the soldiers in that action, performing for the first time one of those singular feats that characterized him in all actions; Our strength continued to grow and a battle of extraordinary importance was fought at that time.

The situation was difficult. The information was in many ways wrong. We were going to attack in the middle of the day, at dawn, a strongly defended position, by the sea, well armed and with enemy troops to our rear. Not far away, and in the midst of that situation of confusion in which it was necessary to ask the men a supreme effort, once comrade Juan Almeida took up one of the most difficult missions. However one of the flanks was completely devoid of forces. So, one of the flanks was left without an attacking force, which could endanger the whole operation. And in that moment Che, who was still a doctor, asked for three or four men, among them a man with a machine-gun rifle, and in a matter of seconds he quickly set out to take the attack mission from that direction.

And on that occasion he was not only a distinguished combatant, but he was also a distinguished doctor, assisting wounded comrades, while assisting wounded enemy soldiers. And when it was necessary to leave that position, once all the weapons were seized and a long march began, harassed by different enemy forces, it was necessary to leave someone to stay with the wounded, and Che remained with the wounded. Helped by a small group of our soldiers, he took care of them, saved their lives and later those men joined the column.

From that moment he stood out as a capable and brave leader, the kind of men who, when faced with carrying out a difficult mission, do not wait to be asked to carry out the mission.

So he did during the combat of El Uvero, but had also done so on an occasion we hadn't mentioned. It was during the early days when as a result of a betrayal, our small troop was attacked by surprise by several planes and when we retired under the bombing and had already walked a fair distance, we

remember some of the rifles some peasant soldiers who had been with us in the first actions had left when they asked permission to visit their relatives at a time when there was still not much discipline in our incipient army. And at that moment the possibility was considered that those rifles were lost.

We remember how after we just raised the issue, and under the bombing, Che volunteered and by doing so he quickly left to recover those rifles.

That was one of its essential characteristics: the immediate, instantaneous willingness to offer himself to carry out the most dangerous mission. And that, of course, caused aroused the admiration, the double admiration towards that comrade who fought with us, who was not born on this land, who was a man of profound ideas, who was a man whose mind was full of dreams of struggle in other parts of the continent and yet, that altruism, that selflessness, that willingness to always do the most difficult, to risk your life constantly.

This is how he earned the rank of Commander and chief of the second column organized in the Sierra Maestra; This is how his prestige began to grow, as he began to acquire his reputation as a magnificent combatant which he took to the highest levels in the course of the war.

Che was an unsurpassable soldier; Che was an insuperable boss; Che was, from the military point of view, an extraordinarily capable man, extraordinarily courageous, extraordinarily aggressive. If as a guerrilla he had an Achilles heel, that Achilles heel was his excessive aggressiveness; it was his absolute contempt for danger.

The enemies try to draw conclusions from his death. Che was a master of the war, Che was an artist of the guerrilla struggle! And he showed it countless times but he showed it especially in two extraordinary feats, as was one of them the invasion leading a column, a column which was being pursued by thousands of soldiers through absolutely flat and unknown territory, carrying out - together with Camilo - a formidable military feat. But, in addition, he demonstrated it in his fulminating campaign in Las Villas; and he proved it, above all, in his audacious attack on the city of Santa Clara, penetrating with a column of barely 300 men in a city defended by tanks, artillery and several thousand infantrymen.

These two exploits consecrate him as an extraordinarily capable leader, as a teacher, as an artist of the revolutionary war.

However, after his heroic and glorious death others try to deny the truth and value of his ideas and guerrilla ideas.

The artist may die, especially when he is an artist of such dangerous art as the revolutionary struggle, but what will not die in any way is the art to which he dedicated his life and to which he devoted his intelligence.

What is strange about that artist dying in a fight? Still more extraordinary is the fact that on the countless occasions when he risked this life during our revolutionary struggle he would not have died in combat. And there were many times when it was necessary to act to prevent the loss of his life in actions of minor transcendence.

And so, in a fight, in one of the many battles he fought, he lost his life. We do not possess sufficient elements of judgment to be able to make any deduction about all the circumstances that preceded that combat, about the degree to which he could have acted in an excessively aggressive manner, but, we repeat, if as a guerrilla he had an Achilles heel, that heel Achilles was his excessive aggressiveness, his absolute contempt for danger.

What is what it is difficult to agree with him, since we understand that his life, his experience, his ability as a seasoned leader, his prestige and all that he meant in life, was much more, incomparably more, than the evaluation that maybe he made himself.

The idea that men have a relative value in history, the idea that causes are not defeated when men fall and the irrepressible march of history does not stop or stop before the fall, may have profoundly influenced their behavior of the leaders.

And that's true, that can not be doubted. That shows his faith in men, his faith in ideas, his faith in example. However, as I said a few days ago, we would have wished with all our heart to see him as the forger of the victories, forging our comrades and people under his leadership, forging victories under his direction, since the men of his experience, his caliber, his really singular capacity, They are rare men.

We are able to appreciate the full value of his example and we have the absolute conviction that this example will serve as encouragement and will serve to bring men similar to him from the bosom of the people.

It is not easy to combine in a person all the virtues that were conjugated in him. It is not easy for a person to spontaneously be able to develop a personality like his. I would say that he is one of those kind of men who are difficult to match and practically impossible to outclass. But we will also say that men like him are capable, with his example, of helping men similar to him to emerge.

The point is that it is not only the warrior what we admire in Che or the man capable of great feats. And what he did, and what he was doing, that fact in itself of facing with only a handful of men an entire oligarchic army, instructed by the Yankee advisers supplied by Yankee imperialism, supported by the oligarchies of all neighboring countries, that fact in itself constitutes an extraordinary feat.

And if you look in the pages of history, you will not possibly find any case in which someone with such a small number of men has undertaken a task of greater importance, in which someone with such a small number of men has undertaken the fight against such considerable forces. This proof of self-confidence, that proof of confidence in the people, that proof of faith in the ability of men to fight, can be sought in the pages of history, and yet nothing similar can be found

And he fell.

The enemies believe they have defeated his ideas, defeated his guerrilla conception, defeated his views on the armed revolutionary struggle. And what they achieved was, with a stroke of luck, to eliminate his physical life; what they did was to achieve the accidental advantages that an enemy can achieve in war. And that stroke of luck, that stroke of fortune we do not know to what extent helped by that characteristic to which we referred before of excessive aggressiveness, of absolute contempt for danger, shown in a combat like so many combats.

As it happened also in our War of Independence. In a fight in Dos Ríos they killed the Apostle of our independence. In a fight in Punta Brava they killed Antonio Maceo, veteran of hundreds of combats. In similar combats, countless leaders died, countless patriots of our independence war. And yet, that was not the defeat of the Cuban cause.

The death of Che - as we said a few days ago - is a hard blow, it is a tremendous blow for the revolutionary movement, as it deprives it without any doubt of any kind, of his most experienced and capable leader.

But those who sing victory are wrong. Those who believe his death is the defeat of his ideas, the defeat of his tactics, the defeat of his guerrilla conceptions, and the defeat of his thesis are mistaken. Because that man who fell as a mortal man, as a man who was exposed many times to bullets, as a soldier, as a leader, is a thousand times more capable than those who killed him with a stroke of luck.

However, how should revolutionaries face this adverse blow? How should we face that loss? What would be the opinion of Che if he had to make a judgment on this matter? That opinion he already gave, that opinion expressed it clearly, when he wrote in his message to the solidarity conference of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America that if he was surprised by death anywhere, it was always welcome that his shout of war, has reached a receptive ear, and another hand is extended to take up the weapon.

And that, his war cry, will reach not a receptive ear, but millions of receptive ears! And not a hand, but millions of hands, inspired by his example, will be extended to take up arms!

New leaders will emerge. And the men, the receptive ears and the extending hands, will need leaders who will emerge from the ranks of the people, as the bosses have emerged in all the revolutions.

These hands will not more count with a leader of the extraordinary experience, the enormous capacity of Che. Those leaders will be formed and trained in the process of the struggle, those leaders will emerge from the bosom of the millions of receptive ears, from the millions of hands that, sooner or later, will reach out to take up arms.

It is not that we consider that in practical terms his death will have an immediate repercussion in the revolutionary struggle. that in practical terms for the development of the struggle his death may have an immediate repercussion. But it is that Che, when he took up arms again, was not thinking of an immediate victory, was not thinking of a quick victory against the forces of the oligarchies and imperialism. His experienced combatant mind was prepared for a long fight of 5, 10, 15, 20 if necessary. He was willing to fight five, ten, fifteen, twenty years, all his life if necessary!

And it is with that perspective in time, that his death, his example -which is what we should say-, will

have a tremendous repercussion, will have an invincible force.

Those who cling to a stroke of luck try in vain to deny his capacity as leader as well as his experience. Che was an extraordinarily capable military leader. But when we remember Che, when we think of Che, we are not thinking mainly about his military virtues. No! War is a means and not an end, war is an instrument of the revolutionaries. The important thing is the revolution, what matters is the revolutionary cause, the revolutionary ideas, the revolutionary objectives, the revolutionary feelings, the revolutionary virtues!

And it is in this field, in the field of ideas, in the field of feelings, in the field of revolutionary virtues, in the field of intelligence, apart from its military virtues, where we feel the tremendous loss his death has meant for the Revolutionary movement.

Because Che possessed, in his extraordinary personality, virtues that rarely appear together. He excelled as a man of insurmountable action, but Che was not only a man of insurmountable action: Che was a man of profound thinking, visionary intelligence, a man of great culture. That is to say, he had in himself the man of ideas and the man of action.

But it is not that he just had those two features of being a man of ideas, a man of profound ideas, and also a man of action, but Che had in himself as a revolutionary the virtues that can be defined as the most complete expression of the virtues of a revolutionary: an upright, righteous man to the full, a man of supreme honesty, of absolute sincerity, a man of Stoic and Spartan life, a man to whom it is almost impossible to find a single stain in his conduct. He is because of his virtues what can be called a true revolutionary model.

Ordinarily, at the time of the death of men, speeches are made, virtues are highlighted, but rarely as it is the case today, it can be fairly said, seldom it can be spoken with more accuracy that a man was a man of virtue when we say of Che: That he was a true example of revolutionary virtues!

But we should also add to this another quality, which is not a quality of the intellect, which is not a quality of the will, a quality derived from experience, from the struggle, but a quality of the heart, because he was an extraordinarily human man, an extraordinarily sensitive human being!

That is why we say, when we think about his life, when we think about his conduct, that he was the singular case of a very strange man, as he was able to combine not only the characteristics of a man of action, but also those of a man of thought, in his personality. Of a man of immaculate revolutionary virtues and of extraordinary human sensibility, together with an iron forged character of iron, to a will of steel, to an indomitable tenacity.

And that is why he has bequeathed to future generations not only his experience, his knowledge as an outstanding soldier, but also the works of his intelligence. He wrote with the virtuosity of a classic. His narrations of the war are insurmountable. The depth of his thought is impressive. He never wrote about anything if he didn't do it with absolute and extraordinary seriousness, with extraordinary depth; and we do not doubt that posterity will remember some of his writings as classic documents of revolutionary thinking.

And so, as a result of that vigorous and profound intelligence, he left us countless memories, countless stories that, without his work, without his effort, could have been forgotten for ever.

Unflagging worker, during the years he was at the service of our country he did not know a single day of respite. Many responsibilities were assigned to him: as President of the National Bank, as director of the Planning Board, as Minister of Industries, as Commander of military regions, as head of political, economic or fraternal delegations.

His multifaceted intelligence allowed him to undertake any task with confidence and certainty no matter how difficult. And so, he brilliantly represented our country in numerous international conferences, just as he brilliantly led the soldiers in combat, just as he was a model worker at the head of any of the institutions that he was assigned to run. , And for him there were no days of rest, for him there were no hours of rest! and if we looked to the windows of his offices, we could see the lights remained on until late at night, while he was studying, or rather, working and studying. Because he was a scholar of all problems, he was an tireless reader. His thirst to embrace human knowledge was practically insatiable, and the hours he snatched from sleep were devoted to study; and the days that were supposed to be days of rest were dedicated to volunteer work.

He was the inspirer and the greatest promoter of volunteer work which today is the activity of hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country, the driver of this activity which becomes stronger and stronger every day among the masses, among our people. And as a revolutionary, as a communist revolutionary, as a truly communist. He had an infinite faith in moral values, he had an infinite faith in

the conscience of men. And we must say that in his conception he saw with absolute clarity that in the building of communism in the human society moral incentives were to be the main driver.

Many things he thought, developed and wrote. And there is something that must be said on a day like today, and that is that the writings of Che, the political and revolutionary thinking of Che will have a permanent value in the Cuban revolutionary process and in the revolutionary process in Latin America. And we do not doubt that the value of his ideas, of his ideas as a man of action, as a man of thinking, as a man of moral virtues, as a man of unsurpassed human sensibility, as a man of irreproachable conduct, have and will have a universal value .

The imperialists chant voices of triumph in the face of the fact of the guerrilla killed in combat; the imperialists sing the triumph in face of the stroke of fortune that led them to eliminate such a formidable man of action. But the imperialists may ignore or pretend to ignore that the character of a man of action was one of the many facets of that combatant's personality. And if it is about pain, it hurts us not only that a man of action has been lost as, it hurts that a virtuous man has been lost , what hurts us is that a man of exquisite human sensibility and intelligence has been lost. It hurts us to think that he was only 39 years old at the time of his death, it hurts us to think of how many fruits of that intelligence and experience in growth we have missed the opportunity to witness in its full potential.

We can comprehend the dimension of the loss for the revolutionary movement. But, nevertheless, that is where the weak side of the imperialist enemy is: to believe that with the physical man they have killed they have liquidated his thinking, to believe that with the physical man he has liquidated his ideas, to believe that with the physical man he has killed his virtues, to believe that with the physical man they have killed his example. And they believe it in such an impudent manner that they do not hesitate to publish, as the most natural thing in the world, the circumstances almost universally accepted in which they killed him after having been seriously wounded in combat. They have not even noticed the repugnance of the procedure, they have not even noticed the impudence of recognition. And they have divulged as right of the henchmen, they have disclosed as right of the oligarchs and the mercenaries, the shooting against a revolutionary combatant seriously wounded.

And the worst is that they also explain why they did it, alleging that the trial in which they would have had to judge Che would have been tremendous, arguing that it would have been impossible to seat such a revolutionary on the bench.

And not only that, but also they have not hesitated to make his remains disappear. And be it true or lie, is the fact that they claim to have incinerated his body, with which they begin to show their fear, with which they begin to show they are not so convinced that killing the physical life of the fighter they killed

his ideas and killed his example.

Che did not fall defending any other interest, defending any other cause but the cause of the exploited and the oppressed in this continent; Che did not fall defending any other cause but the cause of the poor and the humble of this Earth. And the exemplary and selfless way in which he defended that cause is something that not even his most bitter enemies dare to dispute.

and before history, men who act like him, men who do everything and give everything for the sake of the humble, become bigger and bigger every day get deeper and deeper into the hearts of the people .

And the imperialist enemies are already beginning to notice it, and it will not be long before they prove that his death will eventually be like a seed from which many men determined to emulate his deeds will emerge, many men determined to follow his example.

And we are absolutely convinced that the revolutionary cause in this continent will recover from the blow, that the revolutionary cause in this continent will not be defeated by that blow.

From the revolutionary point of view, from the point of view of our people, how should we look at the example of Che? Do we think that we have lost him? It is true that we will not see new writings again, it is certain that we will not hear his voice again. But Che has left the world with a heritage, a great patrimony, and we, who knew him so closely, can be heirs of his heritage.

He left us his revolutionary thinking, he left us his revolutionary virtues, he left us his character, his will, his tenacity, his spirit of work. In a word, he left us his example! And the example of Che should be a model for our people, the example of Che should be the ideal model for our people!

If we want to express how we aspire our revolutionary combatants to be, our militants, our men, we must say without hesitation of any kind: Let them be like Che! If we want to express how we want the men of future generations to be, we must say: Let them be like Che! If we want to say how we want our children to be educated, we must say without hesitation: We want them to be educated in the spirit of Che! If we want a model of man, a model of man that does not belong to this time, a model of man that belongs to the future, I say with my heart that model without a single stain in his behavior, without a single stain in his attitude, Without a single blot on his performance, that model is Che! If we want to express how we want our children to be, we must say with the whole heart of vehement revolutionaries:

We want them to be like Che!

Che has become a model of man not only for our people, but for any people in Latin America. Che brought to its highest expression the revolutionary stoicism, the spirit of revolutionary sacrifice, the combativeness of the revolutionary, the working spirit of the revolutionary, and Che took the ideas of Marxism-Leninism to its freshest, purest, most revolutionary expression.

No man like him in these times has taken the proletarian internationalist spirit to its highest level!

And when one speaks of proletarian internationalist, and when one looks for an example of proletarian internationalist, that example, above any other example, is the example of Che! In his mind and in his heart the flags, the prejudices, the chauvinisms, the selfishness had disappeared, and his generous blood he was willing to shed for the fate of any people, for the cause of any people, and willing to shed it spontaneously, and ready to pour it instantly!

And so, his blood was shed on this earth when he was wounded in various battles; His blood for the redemption of the exploited and the oppressed, of the humble and the poor, was shed in Bolivia. That blood was shed for all the exploited, for all the oppressed; that blood was shed for all the peoples of America and spilled over Viet Nam, because there, fighting against the oligarchies, fighting against imperialism, he knew that he was offering Viet Nam the highest expression of its solidarity!

That is why, comrades of the Revolution, we must firmly look to the future and with determination; That is why we should look with optimism at the future. And we will always look to Che's example for inspiration, inspiration in struggle, inspiration in tenacity, inspiration in intransigence against the enemy and inspiration in internationalist sentiment!

That's why we tonight, after this impressive demonstration, after this incredible -for its magnitude, for its discipline and for its devotion- massive demonstration of acknowledgement, which shows how this is a sensitive people, which shows how this is a grateful people, which shows how this people knows how to honor the memory of the brave men who fall in combat, that shows how this people knows how to recognize those who serve them, that demonstrates how this people stands in solidarity with the revolutionary struggle, how this people will always raise and maintain the revolutionary flags and the revolutionary principles aloft; today, in these moments of remembrance, we raise our thoughts and, with optimism in the future, with absolute optimism in the definitive victory of the peoples, let us say to Che, and with him the heroes who fought and fell with him: Ever onward to victory!

Homeland or Death!

We will be victorious!

(OVATION)

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