

Remembering Che

Hector Arturo

[CHE... is one of the most noble, exceptional and altruistic men whom I have ever known, which would have no importance if one did not believe that people like him exist in their millions, millions and millions among the masses. People who stand out in a singular manner would not be able to do anything, if many millions, like him, did not have the embryo or did not have the capacity to acquire those qualities. That is the reason why our Revolution took so much interest in fighting against illiteracy and developing education, so that everyone would be like Che. —Fidel, in his conversations with Ignacio Ramonet.]

His birth and asthma in the intense cold of Rosario. Taking his first steps, mounting a tricycle, playing with his dog, learning vowels, consonants and numbers with Don Ernesto and Dona Celia (his parents) and a rural teacher, but the asthma there, constantly, suffocating the child who refuses to succumb to the lack of air because he wants to do everything just like other children, not knowing that he will come to be better.

Growing and kicking ball, climbing mountains, constantly reading and constantly studying literature and science.

Replacing his childhood tricycle with a defiant adolescent's motorbike to travel all over Latin America and find out for himself without anyone else telling him how people living from Bravo to Patagonia survive.

He enrolls in Medical School and graduates as a doctor, not in order to open a private clinic but to place himself at the service of leprosy sufferers, who no other colleague dares to attend.

Rowing upriver and downriver on a rustic raft, taking photographs of landscapes and people, writing letters and a few poems. And the asthma? Fine, thanks!

In Guatemala a popular government is in danger, and there he is in Guatemala with a bufo, which is what Argentines call revolvers, to defend the paltry advances that the Yankees have allowed Jacobo Arbenz to make. Mexico opens its doors to the tireless traveler and, in the home of Maria Antonia, in barely one night of conversation with another youthful dreamer like himself, Fidel Castro, he becomes the first on the list of ex-peditionaries aboard a pleasure yacht, converted in the midst of a stormy sea into a warship to make Cuba's freedom.

A shipwreck rather than a landing. Enemy surprise and a baptism of fire. Dilemma: load himself with the backpack of medicines or a gun. He decides on the latter to save a people from the social ills that were consuming them, worse than any other sicknesses and bullet wounds. Mountains again, which he now has to ascend between combats, then to descend, and climb to the highest with the incomparable feat of the East to West invasion, in which he cut Cuba into two and reunite it more, by halting the enemy in Santa Clara and accelerating the dawn of January 1, 1959.

Commander and economist. Minister and cane cutter. Full Cuban citizen. Politician and constructor. Scholar and critic. Creator of voluntary work. Forger of inventions. Accelerator of ideas. Revolutionary. Communist. Internationalist. "I leave here the purest of my hopes as a constructor and leave a people who have taken me in like a son; that lacerates and cures in bounds any heartbreak... Nothing legal ties me to Cuba, only bonds of another kind that can never be broken like appointments... Other lands in the world are claiming the support of my modest efforts..." And his steps take him to other lands in Africa and Latin America, feeling under his heels the ribcage of Rocinante, with the leather shield on his arm, to create two, three, many Vietnams with the rattle of machine guns and new cries of war and victory.

It is October 9, 1967, he has been imprisoned in the little and unknown school-house in La Higuera, he has given his finest history class. The self-confessed terrorists who assassinated him on Washington's express orders never imagined that a man of only 39 years of age could multiply himself so many times, to be born at each moment in all the confines of the planet.

And in Cuba people have him, in marble, stone, bronze, graffiti calling for strikes and demonstrations; on posters and photos that fill the avenues, streets, parks, plazas, schools and factories of the world; in poems and songs that are sung by millions in all languages.

In the present and future, because one can never talk of Che in the past, as he continues convening receptive ears to this united march in which there is no other alternative than his phrase that resounds with the force of an universal and unanimous echo : *Hasta la victoria siempre...!* □□□

[October 8, 2008 marked the 41st death anniversary of Che Guevara. Events in tribute to Che took place across the world. Source : Granma International, Havana]