

(Translation from Spanish)

CHE AND TODAY'S SOCIALISM

Fernando Martinez Heredia

The events and social changes that took place in the last few years were of such a density that they may only be compared with what had accumulated in the decades of 1940 and 1950. Then there were the zenith and the downfall of nazism, the Soviet and American presence in the centre of Europe, the recognition of the end of capitalism in seven European countries and in a part of Germany and the conformity with its continuity in Greece, Italy, Austria and the rest of Europe. There was the open predominance of the United States in the capitalist world; there were the "contention" and the Cold War - postwar geopolitics of two social regimes-, the end (incomplete) of colonialism and adolescent expansion of neo-colonialism. There were the triumph of the revolution in China, the Vietnamese victory in Dien Bien Phu, the war of liberation in Algeria, the triumph of the Cuban revolution. There were the postwar reconstruction of the U.S.S.R., the 20th Congress of the CPSU, the government of Kruschchev and the Soviet departure for the cosmos.

That world has been shaken today, emptied of sense, changed by gigantic commotions. The whole East European system and the political system of two counterpoised blocs that lasted four decades, has disappeared. The biopolarity was dismantled within a shortest period and the United States emerges as the only global power which imposes its military, ideological and economic power despite the fact that economically Western Europe and Japan have some predominance over it. The end of the U.S.S.R. is astonishing; there exists no other historical example of complete elimination of a powerful State without the intervention of a war. The maturity of imperialism, developed through economical and ideological processes during those decades,

now shows itself bare and proud. Its democracy, its market, remorseless way of living, its world order appear as victorious, desirable or inevitable - according to who judges or to whom the message is directed seeking to rise up against it seems absurd. The severe loss, the unpopularity and discouragement of the ideals of socialism have undergone can hardly be exaggerated. Carried away by those facts, the efforts for development and the struggles of liberation of the peoples of the Third World or even the most modest aspirations of survival and just treatment, of sovereignty of their States, seem far away.

The decades of 40-50, the years of adolescence and youth of Ernesto Guevara, were also those of his formation as a revolutionary. In 1959 he was already Che. These gloomy years which we are living today may make us forget Che's thinking. This forgetfulness would be part of the end of an epoch in which it was believed that the human being may become something more than an egoistic animal, that massive organised action can make the liberation and perfectibility of societies and individuals and the development of the Third World countries possible.

At the beginning of 1989 the final phase of an epoch that marked the 20th century elapsed. Throughout that period, the ideological influence and the general weight of the U.S.S.R. were decisive for socialism in the world. The only practical reference of state power of communist orientation during decades, protagonist of the first triumphant anti-capitalist revolution from the Commune of 1871, mother country of the most distinguished Marxist revolutionary leader, the U.S.S.R. headed a system of political parties almost the world over and made an impact on

millions of persons within all the confines. The magnificent epic of anti-fascism its people wrote renewed the Soviet prestige, although even then the revolution born in 1917 had been wounded to death due to a division in the power. After the victory its state power came to the zenith, in global controversy with the United States and though it was at the head of a group of countries, it proved to be incapable of recovering and deepening the Soviet socialist movement it had given birth to. It failed to generate a new culture that would be radically different from the culture of domination and would constitute the indispensable means for the transformation of the institutions, the relations and the persons that, in a long participatory process, would have to make the socialist transition a reality. That basic deficiency (that deprived the ethnically diverse USSR of an efficient foundation) extended itself to the bloc of countries under its leadership and prevented these countries from advancing towards a community of socialist societies. In spite of the global role it came to play, it could not constitute an attractive focus for the oppressed of the rest of the world. Everything came to an end in less than three years. The sudden disaster, the scandalous ways in which leaders, ideologists and officials, without the least decorum, abandoned the ideals they were proclaiming up to then and which destroyed the institutions and the whole of the system, the end with neither resistance nor exemplary gestures, the ample participation of the ring of leaders of the previous system in the new political and economic regimes, engaged in re-establishing capitalism, make the socialist analyses of what followed, more difficult. Nevertheless, it is indispensable to know and evaluate that process, independently of the overwhelming totalitarian system of the making of public opinion prevailing in the world today. I call the attention to the need of having our interpretations from Latin America, of the experiences of the so-called real socialism and its consequences.

The post-revolutionary power that prevailed during decades in the U.S.S.R. and the countries of the East European bloc attempted to develop a socialism of the productive forces and it was defeated by the development of the productive

forces of world capitalism. The almighty State in which the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin regarding the State as an instrument of socialist revolution, in practice were degenerated progressively asphyxiated the society, made permanent the power of a group and distributed privileges among them. State and society were splitting up in such a chronic and a gradual manner that it seemed somewhat natural and the system drew to a close, eroded to the marrow. The geopolitics of confrontation with the United States continued apparently, yet its rapid deterioration was one of the foreboding signs of the final crisis.

The downfall of the system did not take place through people's revolutions. It is obvious that the reaction to that order manifested and generalised itself when the dikes were removed. In certain movements and some new institutions there existed a rich potential favourable at least to renewals with people's participation. What is extraordinary, then, is as to how it was managed to stave off that possibility of the people taking the lead amidst such far-reaching changes and conforming at least up to now it has been so, to the roles assigned to them by the elements that promoted and controlled the changes - changes often stemming from the structures of the previous system. The major confusions, the ethnic and nationalist confrontations, some partial struggles, less interest in politics, ingenuous aspirations, form the image of the most generalised attitudes. It is paradigmatic: the ideological and moral disarmament, the castration of initiatives for the majorities which that regime secured referring its legitimacy to the most ambitious social plan of history: the Communist Utopia, the world solidarity struggle of the oppressed against capitalism, the creation of new societies based on the predominance of the bonds of solidarity, the Marxist theory.

The detestation of the revolutionary past and the denial, with all efficacy, of the epoch lived outside the capitalist system have been complete. Imperialism, overwhelmed by so many unexpected victories, has ended up by deriving the greatest benefit possible, setting a gigantic operation in motion for expropriating the hope that any defiance or any change

for the benefit of the people may be possible or at least conceivable and exalting wildly the neo-liberal ideology that exhibits its system today. Not only the ideas and the literature of real socialism, execrated even by those who were using them, have been condemned; it is also claimed that Marxism is obsolete and that its themes and its judgements are of no interest at all. At length, the same is presumed for all revolutionary thinking.

In reality, in Latin America a new historical phase has begun. The thinking compromised with the people's causes will have to be capable of being independent of ideological and cultural hegemony of capitalism and, opposing it, if it is to be valid and efficient. The same will have to be done by the popular political and social organisations and those seeking to direct them, although each means has its specificities. In the long process that begins, the idea of socialism will play a growing role. Therefore, it is indispensable to base its definition with respect for socialism that has existed or claimed to be, recover critically the accumulated heritage of socialist experiences, sentiments and theories, the universal heritage and especially Latin American, and work on a proper socialist alternative as part of the new revolutionary currents that will develop in the continent.

For all these purposes, the action, the thinking and the whole legacy of Che continue to be valid and useful. His criticism of socialism of East Europe - which Suslov would call "real" - is directed to the centre of its regime and the fundamental of its consequences. In the political setting of his militancy and his responsibilities within the first autochthonous socialist revolution followed in the West, linked progressively from the power with the regimes of socialism existing in the world, Che produces a body of thinking on Socialist transition and proposes a type of relations between the resulting political practices and the theoretical and doctrinaire activity, in the three antithetical cases of real socialism.

Che does not claim to be original, but an actor in the universalisation of Marxism of Marx and Lenin from the Latin American socialist revolution, although he is not an adaptor, but a creator; he is not a critic forced to the intellectual

exercise, but a protagonist of a socialist "construction"; he is not hostile to Soviet socialism due to prior formation and supports ample relations with the East European world from a position of prestige and power and with internationalist motivations. These three characteristics of Che give more weight and origin to his criticism of East European socialism and they make it more attainable and attractive for those having socialist convictions or considering socialism indispensable for winning liberation. They equally gave to his criticism a profoundly heretical character and rendered Che a dangerous, repudiated person, an object of attacks, distortions and oblivion.

The depth and richness of Che's criticism, elaborated thirty years back, is admirable when one studies it in the light of the recent events. In East Europe, emerged the practical proof, just as he believed, that the regimes of "market socialism", in all their varying practices, and up by becoming inviable, and that the societies those regimes promoted were not of a socialist transition, but of a deadlock in a permanent "intermediate stage" in which the mechanisms of the system were disguising the degeneration and abandonment of the original revolutionary values, the domination of a group, the impasses of the economic regime, the non-existence of internationalism victimised by the reason of State and the petty interests, the marginalisation of the majorities regarding the participation in politics and economy, the strangulation of the civil society. Che, as it is logical, had to change the same to reach his critical understanding, faced with a multitude of factors that tended to hamper the understanding. The lucidity, rigour and implications his thinking was bound to in relation to his situation, the extreme consequence with which he proceeded, are exemplary.

What I wish to project is that the said criticism is a result (and forms part) of some conception of Marxism and socialism, a practical philosophy articulating its conception on the struggle for socialism and communism from the power with the world revolutionary and anti-imperialist movement, the socialist transition conceived as a link between the communist

plan and the daily combat for its realisation that grants privilege to the conscious, massive and organised action as a creator of new realities in the individuals and in the society under transition, that works out rules of conduct, relations and institutions that may be effective in the struggle between the promotion of bonds of solidarity and the trading links, the individualism and the existing underdevelopment, struggle characterising all transition. A conception which, in an intimate and complex manner, links politics, ethics and economy, education with the former and with coercion, power and vanguard with service to the people, promotion of satisfaction and self-achievement of the individuals with the social struggle.

Che's thinking appears on the crest of a wave. In the 60's a gigantic contrast emerged, born from the very world of the 40's and 50's, evoked at the beginning of this text, but on the way of looking for its ultimate consequences, it came to deny that postwar world. The then recently named Third World was taken seriously, created instruments of co-ordination of its international roles and began to be pressed by their development. The universalisation of capitalism was made uneven due to the revolutions in a number of countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the rebellious climate they created. The picture of the East were the images of Vietnam, not the exotic trade of Gaugin. In the cities of central capitalism, protests appeared, which, at times, challenged the very order that had been considered intangible. The United States was shaken by the crime of Dallas, the struggle for the civil rights, the revolution in Cuba and Latin America, the rebellion of the black people, the opposition to the Vietnam war, Watergate. The apostles, the ideas, the daily accusation of such misery mixed with blood arriving from the Third World impressed millions of people in the developed world. The system and the way of living of imperialism underwent great impacts of illegitimacy and up to the 'musical' renewal coming about, it was stained with protests.

Yet, this is not the case of the capitalist world only. The 60's involved at the same time the challenge that cast aside primitivism, debility of the world, erected in the name of socialism. "Left against right"

with its pride and its distribution of rewards and penalties, disguised geopolitics, manipulation, reformism as the policy and dogmatism as the dominating ideology caused a crisis and fell bankrupt before the eyes and the needs of the countries, the masses and the new revolutionaries. Resulting from the hope given by the 20th Congress of the CPSU, this was called into question and the arrest of that process was rejected. "Monolithism" fell to pieces. The Maoist cultural revolution in China touched every country and many welcomed it according to their needs and deficiencies; their insufficiencies, errors and strict nationalism constituted a very hard blow for socialism promoted from the Third World. Numerous new voices were reclaiming Marx and revolutionary Marxist tradition, taking out for discussion the theory and the historical experiences, including Lenin and Bolshevik revolution, elaborating ideas, inquiring and expressing opinion about the nature of socialism, its effective ways and its distortions, its rules and obligations. The communist Utopia as a possible 'beyond' and the need of approaching it through action acquired a new vigour in new environments and territories.

The revolutionary Cuba was a protagonist of all that challenge. Contrary to what was believed about the dimensions of space and time, it triumphed and lasted out at the moment and the place least indicated for both. It was seen as a wonder of the will and its way of condensing and realising the historical plan of liberation of a nation, its socialism emerging outside the existing international communist movement, the youthfulness of its protagonists, the novelty of its language, the determined radicalism of its measures, its limitless popularity, the die-hard confrontation with imperialism, its internationalist calling marked its originality and converted it into a revolutionary paradigm and a magnet for those acting in favour of liberation in the world or wishing for it. So strong was the challenge involved in it, that it then took way into the United States and the U.S.S.R. a more serious rivalry existing for forty years: the imminence of a nuclear war during the Crisis of October 1962. In these days that Che would call "bright and sad" both powers knew the absolute

(Cont. from page 30)

turn of mind of the Cuban people to brave everything for its sovereignty and its revolution.

Cuba was a revolutionary call for Latin America, the most evolved continent of the Third World and the most contradictory. In Latin America a stage was then coming to a close and another was beginning, in which capitalist domination underwent very notable transformations in the economic formations, the State, the civil society, the ideologies. The dominating classes of the Latin American countries were working precisely for maintaining their hegemony and adapting themselves profitably to inevitable changes, inspired by the development of the world capitalist system, although this involved the growing U.S. control on their countries and all the characteristics and consequences which we today call transnationalisation. Such classes, thus, were identified with imperialism and worked against their people by means of repressive models on a large scale that would ensure the order during the changes, maintaining and increasing the levels of exploitation and marginalisation and avoiding or confronting with the protesting and rebellious organisations and the revolutions of liberation.

The repression prevailed, despite the great reformist efforts, as the protest had very grave reasons and the revolution had been placed to the order of the day. The new rebellion was beyond, from the accumulation of revolutionary culture of the previous Latin American history and generalised the most radical objectives; national liberation against capitalism, opposing its dominant classes led many people to identify and condemn both imperialism and reformism. The Cuban revolution was a happy coincidence and revolutionary cycle that embraced the continent: both influenced and fertilised each other.

The revolution was the card of introduction of Latin America to the world. Revolution of the events; guerrilla bands, inflamed masses, the Cuban people in power revolution of the conscience: political and ideological heresies, theory of dependence, theology of liberation, compromised social thinking; renewal of the languages, from the Plaza of Revolution to Havana to literature and art. Che

personified and constituted the synthesis of that Latin American challenge. Therefore, the apotheosis that ensued with his sacrifice was exceptional and thus was so short in time. As such, all the powers that had been combative so much, coincided in seeking to forget Che when the wave that rose in the 60's was breaking. The order of what was established prevailed again, in some cases recognising irreversible changes and advances while in others, assassinating, destroying and dispersing the agents and sympathisers of the changes. Then, came a new message of moderation, of renunciation of all dreams, of defence, of reconciliation, as part of the effort for legitimising the domination. Che's image may be, at the most, tolerated by this order if it is limited to be one among so many idols whose veneration certifies the diversity accepted by the power which is, in reality, a function of the domination. Che's example and thinking, on the contrary, are unacceptable to that power, as they continue to be absolutely subversive and useful at the present time.

The rectification sought to advance in its objectives within the frame of some international economic relations in which the U.S.S.R. and its camp were determinants for a small country which was forced to maintain its economic structure depending much on the foreign links. In reality, the rectification was also a precaution in the face of the gradual deterioration of the economic bonds with East Europe that was expected, and it proposed to recover and deepen the proper economic forces through the predominance of the subjective factor, profound and radical changes in the economic activity, popular dominion of socialism over the corresponding economy, ideology and culture, more efficiency, more diversity of bonds, more self-sufficiency. The constant adverse principal constituted by the American aggressiveness and blockade continued, as it has been up to now; the juncture brought about negative results in 1987 and internally the process proved to be insufficient for its economic objectives.

On the other hand, instead of undergoing a gradual deterioration, the links with East Europe collapsed in hardly two years. The foreign trade of Cuba came

down in its value to less than the half between December 1989 and December 1991. The food supply to the population and the very functioning of economy remained strictly embarrassing, the other part of fulfilling its obligations coming to a halt in an abrupt manner. The situation is more serious if one remembers that the long-term agreements were giving to the economic structure and the Cuban efforts an orientation, characteristics and objectives profoundly bound to those links. The provision for fuel, raw material, food-stuffs that were essential to us, collapsed; the markets of our principal products tumbled down; the system of prices and payments ground to a halt, leaving us almost internal, faced with the market and the world finance of the current transnational capitalism. The national security is threatened in various manners and the historical enemy of the Cuban nation has increased suddenly its activities.

I cannot examine here the themes of today's Cuba and its prospects. I shall point out at least that Cuban socialism faces a triple threat: *survival* of its population at decent levels, its national sovereignty and its socialist regime, before a very adverse juncture; *viability* of the economic structure and strategy seeking to be maintained and developed, before a heap of difficulties and enemies it has and it will have; and *nature of the system* that will emerge from the continuity and the transformations of economic structure that is underway, from the political evolution of the more or less hard and long struggles the country is bound to, from the international contexts and adequacies.

The downfall of the system of East Europe threw into relief the aptness of Cuban rectification as a socialist way and showed in a dramatic manner the abyss existing between both. The permanence of the Cuban regime, on its part, proved its popular hold, its capacity of resistance and its specificity. But it has also shed more light on the grave negative effects the assimilation to "real socialism" brought to Cuba, complicated with the same old and recent defects, at times children of revolutionary virtues or of other affiliations. And the so difficult situation that has been created conspires

SOCIALISM

against the deepening of popular socialist participation and control as the centre and motive of activity in society at the crucial stage we are going through. It is indispensable to identify well that exercise ever so arduous and risky, to be able to solve the fundamentals and solve them with success.

Cuba remains socialist and its existence, its rebelliousness, its anti-imperialism, its values, its revolutionary culture, the way of living of its people, constitute the Latin American proof that socialism is possible; there it is so. Referred to the Utopia of a society based on solidarity, total liberation and realisation of person, the Cuban regime is very insufficient and defective; that reality is more visible today than the disaster of real socialism makes more lucid to the true followers of socialism. Yet, due to the ambition of its objectives and its achievements, the permanent tension maintained between power and plan, its self-critical capacity and its internationalist calling, Cuba is a tremendous socialist experience. If we exclude that of the open enemies from all experience of people's power, the criticism that requires of Cuba to adapt itself to the hegemony of capitalism along the road of "reforms" is, in the best of the cases, ingenuous; or it is a sign of worthiness of whom seeking to be accepted by the bourgeois political system as premitted left. Solidarity without conditions of those defending, with Cuba, the socialist alternative and Utopia for their own countries, is a permanent reminder to the Cubans of the need to deepening participative socialism, precisely for strengthening it in the new and complex situations that were created and for fulfilling thus what Marti in his anti-imperialist struggle at the end of the last century called "the duty of Cuba in America" and it moreover involves today to continue to be the example of a true and possible socialism.

In an intelligent movement, socialism seems to have folded over towards Utopia, looking for new force in it to move ahead. Latin America offers exceptional conditions for that movement. The excluding, marginalising and anti-national character of its capitalism, the impasses for the majorities where they have been placed by transnationalisation, the growing structural misery, of sovereignty, do no contrast from the political and ideological

system. The politicians in power or around it and those controlling the making of public opinion preach the abstract virtues of liberalism, the atomisation of the people confronted with egoism, the associations proving to be innocuous or tributary of the hegemony of the system, the conformity and inaction. The petty democracy of the 80's has become exhausted, devoid of social fruits and has been political monsters or tiresome moves of responsibilities and promises.

The popular camp has suffered a prolonged crisis of plans, of relation between what is social and political, of strategy, of effective and wise organisation; crisis aggravated by the consequences of the end of real socialism. But, it is also certain that the popular camp has accumulated political culture, social organisations and development of its capacities and its sensibility, an immense potential that did not exist thirty years back and that permits millions of people to recognise situations and those responsible for same and to be self-identified. If the idea is correct that a new historical phase is about to begin in the continent, socialist Utopia has to be a decisive instrument to project the visions, enthusiasm and conduct much beyond which reach the meagre instruments of today.

In all the efforts, ideas, feelings, organisations and current struggles are the sources of the future movements and changes. However, future remains blockaded by a wall that seems insurmountable: hegemony of the dominating classes, assisted by external mechanisms of hegemony which gives the justification of what exists and the index of actions and changes possible within the system; and facing that, the disintegration and lack of self-confidence of those under domination in their autonomy.

I shall not refer to the debilities, characteristics and conditioning of both camps, much less shall I make predictions of the tendencies, of their conflicts and the future. I however risk the comment that only with tremendous labour Latin America will be able to produce an activity and a thinking capable of breaking the core of the systems of domination in force and their terrible social consequences. The motivations and the leaders of those events will bring forward the means and proportions in which the needs, yearnings, national accumulations and other types revealing themselves, are combined and manifest. I believe that if events like these take place, they will much resemble a new crusade and very soon a triumph of democratic reason.