

Hasta la victoria siempre

A hundred beats

Sunday, October 07, 2007

Fatima Bhutto

Forty years ago in La Higuera, Bolivia, an executioner stood poised to make a kill. He lifted his gun to shoot and for a brief moment, hesitated. "Shoot, you coward, you are about to kill a man." Replied the man in his crosshairs. His name was Ernesto Che Guevara.

His murder, at the hands of the Bolivian military and their CIA backers, was hailed as a coup for the tyrants of history but in truth it was a rebirth. Che Guevara's uncompromising struggle and ideals of social action and resistance were not to be extinguished; they were not felled that day in La Higuera. Rather, the revolutionary romanticism and political rebellion inspired by Che Guevara has since spread across the stratosphere, surpassing time and symbolism.

Today, as his 40th death anniversary approaches, we remember Che not as those who feared his message would want us to remember him -- safely ensconced on Swatch watches and tee shirts -- but as a political force whose ideals remain, alive and vibrant even though embattled and rigorously contested, to this very day.

First, we remember Che in the world. We remember him as he is seen and felt across much of the Third World, the south, where the promise of socialist revolution, endogenous economic development, and political emancipation draws new breath. On her first visit to Venezuela, Aleida Guevara, Che's eldest daughter and a physician based at the William Soler Children's Hospital in Havana, met President Hugo Chavez to discuss the free healthcare offered across his country.

"Welcome back", President Chavez said to Aleida, who was quite certain that she had mentioned this was in fact her first visit to Venezuela. "It's my first time here", she replied slowly, repeating herself. "You have always been here," said President Chavez even more slowly.

Under the Bolivarian Revolution, the Venezuelan people have embarked upon a 21st century model of socialism, one that provides medical care and education as an inalienable right while reclaiming sovereignty and economic dignity. In Chile, free from the ghosts of Pinochet, the country is ruled by a former prisoner of conscience, a woman who broke

the silence about the dirty repression carried out by the military dictatorship that killed Salvador Allende, Che Guevara's compatriot and comrade. We remember Che as they remembered him in the streets of Santiago, Chile, where they gathered to mourn his murder by proclaiming 'No lo vamos a olvidar!' We will not let him be forgotten.

In Nicaragua the right wing oligarchy's grip on the country was broken last year by none other than a former Sandinista rebel leader. In Ecuador again, big business could not buy the elections, and the triumphant socialist Rafael Correa has vowed to cleanse his country of elitist corruption and political malfeasance. In Bolivia, the president has nationalised the country's oil and gas reserves -- the second largest in South America -- and booted aside the (multinational) economic pirates who pillaged his land for so very long. Evo Morales, an indigenous Bolivian and a simple, humble man, made one change to the Presidential Palace when he moved in: he hung a portrait of Che Guevara in his office. There is more, there will be more, much more to come.

Second, we remember Che through Cuba, his adopted home. Cuba's amazing doctors, who travel the world bringing healthcare to those whose countries deny them their most basic right, recently treated a man named Mario Tetan in Bolivia. Mario Tetan was going blind due to old age and cataracts and it was only through the services provided by the Cuban doctors that he could be treated. Mario Tetan was that executioner from forty years ago. Mario Tetan is the man who murdered Che Guevara, a man not facetiously thought of as Cuba's patron saint. 'Forty years after Mario Tetan attempted to destroy a dream and an idea, Che returns to win yet another battle' read the headlines of Granma, the Communist Party newspaper in Havana.

We remember Che and his perseverance through the struggle of the Cuban Five, held unjustly in American jails. The five, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino and Rene Gonzalez were in Miami monitoring anti-Cuban exile groups. They were in Miami, in the words of their noted attorney Leonard Weinglass, to track the terrorist activities of several exile groups that had previously attacked innocent civilians in Cuba (as well as bombing a Cuban airliner in 1976). The Cuban Five were rounded up, not having committed any crimes, and charged with conspiracies. They were handed life sentences -- sentences based not on any actual wrongdoing but on imaginary and fanciful conspiracies -- and have been held in maximum security prisons without contact with their government or their families for the last nine years despite a 2005 ruling of the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta that declared the original (non) legal proceedings null and void, called for a new free and fair trial

and revoked their unjust sentences. Amnesty International has

criticised the American government for their human rights violations of the Cuban Five, MPs in England lobbied former prime minister Tony Blair to raise the issue of the Cuban Five through his government (he didn't), and nine Nobel prize laureates, including Desmond Tutu, Harold Pinter, Jose Saramago and Nadine Gordimer, wrote an open letter to former US attorney-general Alberto Gonzales insisting that nothing justifies the arbitrary incarceration of the Cuban Five and demanding their "immediate liberation". You can sign the petition for their release at www.freeforfive.org.

Lastly, we remember Che Guevara through his words. In his last letter to his children he wrote: "If one day you must read this letter, it will be because I am no longer among you. You will almost not remember me and the littlest ones will remember nothing at all. Your father has been a man who acted according to his beliefs and certainly has been faithful to his convictions. Grow up as good revolutionaries. Study hard to be able to dominate the techniques that permit the domination of nature. Remember that the revolution is what is important and that each of us, on our own is worthless. Above all, try always to be able to feel deeply any injustice committed against any person in any part of the world. It is the most beautiful quality of a revolutionary."