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"Welcome" ... Trotsky

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"There is a dimension that is lacking in the German film *Goodbye Lenin*. I know, because I lived in the GDR not long before the Wall came down. This wall was brought down before it was even built. The immense tragedy of the transition to capitalism in Eastern Europe cannot be measured by the few years that elapsed between the vulgar and decadent perestroika and the festive tearing down of statues of Lenin. You cannot say goodbye to Lenin if he was never welcomed. They did nothing but import his image, marginalize him, turn him into a clown subordinated to the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The Lenin to whom they said goodbye in this film had nothing to do with the person who initiated socialism in the world. Their statues were empty of content, and I think, also of form.

So there. We will not understand it as long as the life and ideas of Leon Trotsky remain hidden in many places. It may seem ironic, but the only way to bring Lenin back is to understand the reasons for the banishment of his best contemporary. We will not succeed in understanding what happened if we do not render understandable the obscure mechanism by which the Soviet bureaucratic caste monopolised socialism, betraying the International and demolishing the revolutionary spirit in the world.

Of course there remains an alternative for us: take the mask away entirely, from the beginning, something that will take us time, a thing that is increasingly rare, besides the fact that we lack first-hand information. It is as if, while a ship was sinking, the engineer sent an on-the-spot report on the how and the why of the shipwreck, and that people were nevertheless intending to weigh anchor and head for the same seas with the same intentions, without seeking to know the causes of the catastrophe, burying in the sand, ostrich-like, the message in the bottle.

The 20th century has not finished speaking to us. The vicissitudes that revolutionary practice experienced remain hidden from view. And if there is someone who can be a witness to the 20th century, it is certainly Leon Trotsky.

Ernest Mandel put it much better: "*Of all the most important socialists of the 20th century, Trotsky was the one who most clearly recognised the fundamental tendencies of development of the principal contradictions of the epoch, and it is also Trotsky who most clearly formulated an adequate strategy of emancipation for the international workers' movement*". [\[1\]](#)

Yes, we need Lenin, who will only come back on condition that we listen to what Trotsky has to say to us. They defended the same thing, except that Trotsky survived him and was able to interpret in his life and in his death the forces that were exterminating socialism. I challenge, at this point in time, any thinker who is sincerely trying to understand what happened, to ignore the experiences of Trotskyism, even if only to refute them. Those who avoid them, those who leave them to one side, are not real Leninists.

They say that without Lenin, Karl Marx is of no use. I would add that without Trotsky there is no Lenin. All the Marxist

thinkers, especially genuinely revolutionary Marxists, are indispensable for understanding Karl Marx, who did not have a crystal ball. He only pointed the direction for revolutionary ideas, the philosophy, so that for the first time in history people could dig the tunnel towards their - globalised - happiness.

Let us use this simile. Socialism is supposed to be a tunnel, a path that we can take, in this world where we have only things to win and nothing to lose but our chains. Well, it was the October Revolution that was the first attempt to dig this tunnel that Marx told us about.

But Stalinism dynamited it from within. When it was being built, dynamite had been left to destroy it. Trotsky was the engineer who showed where the explosives were. They didn't want to listen to him. We know what happened then... the planet Earth was ravaged.

Today we declare very poetically that the tunnel we are going to build will be the socialism of the 21st century. Whether it is of the 21st or the 31st century, the tunnel can be dynamited because of exactly the same insufficiencies and we will continue, full of tears, waiting for the socialism of the future century...this time turned into cockroaches.

The possibility of a transition to socialism is a scientific discovery. It is not a poem or a way of speaking. The only way to get there is through the class struggle. It's as simple as that.

The discovery of the origin of capitalist exploitation is a scientific truth of the same value and the same objectivity as the rotating movement of the earth around the sun. We don't need Einstein, the Laws of General Relativity and of Geodesy to explain to us why we go from summer to autumn. Newton is more than sufficient. The results are identical and the mathematics are infinitely more simple.

We don't need to understand black holes or Hawking's theories to put a satellite into orbit. It may be that communications, computers and so on have somewhat complicated the reality of modern capitalism, but it nonetheless remains true that the essence ("the chicken from rice to the chicken") is still the same as several centuries ago. There is no need for "quantum economists" or "tensorial mathematics" to explain to us the origin of the exploitation of the capitalist system and its present weakening.

What we call "socialism of the 21st century" amounts to saying that we have to build "the aeroplane of the 21st century". But this plane will have to overcome gravity, just as the plane of the 20th century did. In this 21st century, as for millions of years, the constant G of Universal Gravitation is still the one that Newton calculated ($G = 6.7 \times 10^{-11} \text{m}^3/\text{kg}\cdot\text{s}^2$).

I admit that we have to make more comfortable, faster and more secure aeroplanes, because the demands of the 21st century are different from those of the 20th century, but the ultimate reason for a machine that has to conquer gravity is the same.

By way of comparison, we could say that our plane, which tried to conquer gravity in 1917, took off and crashed on the earth's surface. It would be better to look for the causes before engaging in nay futuristic discourses, because whatever the 21st century is, G remains invariable. From the 19th to the 21st century, the primary causes of capitalist exploitation are identical: the expropriation of labour. So there is only one way to go "from the reign of necessity to the reign of liberty". Enough of cutting capers, when each instant that passes counts against us.

The plane fell, and now we believe that with our computers, our cellphones or the internet we are going to be able to defy gravity without taking G into account. Of course not! Gravity will continue in the same way until the planet

disintegrates. We had better get a move on, drop the rhetoric and realise once and for all that the enemy has not changed. He is perhaps more aggressive and dangerous, but still the same. Let us hurry, at last, to find out who we really are.

But why then Leon Trotsky? I don't have a fixation with a historical figure, as many people reproach me with having. It's just that this man knew a lot of things about the black box of this plane that wanted to make history take off.

Leon Trotsky was assassinated 65 years ago, in the most grotesque manner. After 65 years, we are still spattered by his blood. This assassination ought to have put an end to the Kremlin's right to try and monopolise and transmit socialist thought, but they continued and it became transformed into a salt statue.

With the Red Star medal awarded to Ramon Mercader, they celebrated, with secret and cowardly hurrahs, the death of socialism. This assassination was one of the most perverse terrorist acts in history. It was the glorious October 1917 that committed suicide on August 20th.

Mercader, having served his sentence in Mexico, went to Cuba (in 1960). I still don't understand who he met and how, nor if he could look in the face Marti's crown of martyrdom and Mella's ashes. The man who had in his hands, without realising it, the mission of wiping out the left wing of socialist ideas, died in Cuba, something I have difficulty in coming to terms with. He was there in those luminous years of Che Guevara. That seems to me so impossible ...

Of course the road of the ideological survival of the Cuban Revolution had nothing to do with Mercader, the GPU and Stalinism. Quite to the contrary, what enabled my revolution to survive was the spirit of Leon Trotsky, although we didn't know it, because it had been hidden in the folds of historical memory. The truth is stubborn and it makes its way like slow but constant water that nothing can stop.

There is a mysterious circuit in the Cuban Revolution, which was born with the Cuban Revolutionary Party, continued with Mella, then with the most radical wing of the July 26th Movement, culminating in a sublime way with Che Guevara. This is the circuit of resolute class commitment and internationalism.

Leon Trotsky walks here, silent, unknown and slandered, with a malicious smile. Why was it forbidden for so many years to put Leon Trotsky in relation with the Cuban Revolution? I haven't managed to find out, but I know that if there is a revolution that has been radical, it is certainly ours. And if there was someone who called for revolutions that were radical and never-ending, it was certainly Leon Trotsky. Perhaps Marti was not mistaken when he declared that "in politics the real is what is not seen".

We should speak at length of Julio Antonio Mella and analyse in depth his activity in Mexico. Fortunately we have the excellent works of Olivia Gall [\[2\]](#) and Alejandro Galvez Cancino, [\[3\]](#) which analyse in an absolutely clear and precise fashion, with considerable documentation, the communist activity of Mella in this period.

Mella referred to Trotsky after returning from the USSR and knew the objectives of the Left Opposition through Andreu Nin (assassinated, just for a change, by the GPU during the Spanish Civil War). He wrote to a comrade in the book *The Platform of the Left Opposition*: "For Alberto Martinez, with the aim of rearming communism. Julio Antonio Mella". [\[4\]](#) His declared Trotskyism is not what should be most important for us. Much more transcendent were his radical positions in Mexico. In fact, and in his political consequences, "Mella is considered by the Trotskyists as the initiator of the current that later constituted the Left Opposition in the Mexican Communist Party", says the historian Olivia Gall. [\[5\]](#)

It was also Julio Antonio Mella who introduced us to the road to socialism in Cuba. It was he who established the superb bridge between Marti and Bolshevism, which represents the best of our recent past and the near future of the world. Whatever might be said, and even if some people would like to wrap him up in a pathetic patriotic flag and attribute a narrow discourse to him, this valiant, vigorous and polemical Mella - and no other - was the first Cuban communist.

The Stalinism which subsequently contaminated us, and which in a certain fashion had its importance during the course of the socialist revolution, is nothing other than a contagious virus, in spite of which, and not without battles, the ideal of socialism was able to survive, because it was the very essence of the revolutionary process. The Stalinist parties did not contribute ideologically to our process, neither when they expelled Mella from the party, nor when they collaborated with Machado, or any many other occasions, thank God!

There are still some comrades here who have a lot to tell us, faithful to the socialist revolution...and grateful to have been helped and listened to by another Marxist who figures alongside Mella on the emblem of the Union of Communist Youth of Cuba: Che.

And it is precisely Che that I want to invite, in his totality and with the star on his forehead, to extend a welcome to Trotsky on this 65th anniversary of his assassination. Che Guevara, symbol of the most radical communism, managed to fashion an instrument out of a Trotskyism that he didn't know. And that was only because the theoretical truths of Trotsky have the same constancy as the value of G, the constant of Universal Gravitation. Che found his own way to many of Trotsky's theses, without ever knowing it...without being allowed to know it.

I am going to give two examples which enabled me to begin to discover a secret communion between the two of them.

Che Guevara was the revolutionary who best understood the principles of the permanent revolution, to such an extent that he died for having tried to defend these principles. But he not only died for having wanted to implement these theses, he also died for having sought, intellectually, to reach its essence.

For this 65th anniversary I am going to take up again here the three fundamental aspects of the permanent revolution.

First aspect: *"The theory of the permanent revolution, which originated in 1905, declared war upon these ideas and moods. It pointed out that the democratic tasks of the backward bourgeois nations lead directly, in our epoch, to the dictatorship of the proletariat and that the dictatorship of the proletariat puts socialist tasks on the order of the day."* [6]

Che was categorical on this subject. Here is what Nestor Kohan has to say about it: *"He (Che) at no time accepted that in Latin America (I would add: and in the world) the tasks consist of building a "national revolution", "democratic", "progressive", or a capitalism with a human face, which leaves socialism till later. He expounds in a trenchant fashion, very polemical, that if we do not propose to make the socialist revolution, then what results is a caricature of revolution, or ends in failure or tragedy, as has happened so many times."* [7]

These two exposés are identical. The underdeveloped countries don't have to wait till an English or German person decides to organise the revolution in their countries. Trotsky said that in the *Manifesto of the Conference known as the "emergency" conference of the Fourth International* in May 1940: *"...the perspective of the permanent revolution in no way signifies that the backward countries must wait for the signal from the advanced countries, or that the colonial peoples must patiently wait for the proletariat of the metropolitan centres to free them. Help comes to those*

who help themselves!"

In its second aspect, *"The second aspect of the 'EurosÜpermanent' theory has to do with the socialist revolution as such. For an indefinitely long time and in constant internal struggle, all social relations undergo transformation. Society keeps on changing its skin. ... Revolutions in economy, technique, science, the family, morals and everyday life develop in complex reciprocal action and do not allow society to achieve equilibrium. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such."* [8]

For his part, Che wrote in *Socialism and Man in Cuba*: *"In this period of the building of socialism we can see the birth of the new man. His image is not yet quite fixed. It will never be able to be, given that the process is parallel to the development of new economic structures."* [9] For Che, *"the only rest for revolutionaries is the tomb"*.

Third aspect: international. For Trotsky, *"The international character of the socialist revolution, which constitutes the third aspect of the theory of the permanent revolution, flows from the present state of economy and the social structure of humanity. Internationalism is no abstract principle but a theoretical and political reflection of the character of world economy, of the world development of productive forces and the world scale of the class struggle. The socialist revolution begins on national foundations-but it cannot be completed within these foundations. The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs, even though, as the experience of the Soviet Union shows, one of long duration. In an isolated proletarian dictatorship, the internal and external contradictions grow inevitably along with the successes achieved. If it remains isolated, the proletarian state must finally fall victim to these contradictions."* [10]

Che said on the subject of revolutionaries: *"If their revolutionary ardour dulls when the most pressing tasks have to be carried out at the local level and proletarian internationalism is forgotten, then the revolution ceases to be a driving force and falls into a gentle somnolence, of which our irreconcilable enemy, imperialism, takes advantage to gain ground. Internationalism is a duty, but also a revolutionary necessity."* [11]

I will not waste time. If there is someone who always fought to make the Cuban Revolution ever more socialist, it was Che. He threw himself into the building of socialism in a backward land, deepening day after day its socialist character...only to completely abandon it in the name of the world revolution. I do not know anyone else who did the same. I don't think there is any greater fidelity to the theses of the permanent revolution. That the conditions in Bolivia were not favourable...that is another subject than the permanent revolution. We can certainly criticise him for having been too permanent or too consistent a revolutionary.

The other element of convergence, in different circumstances, between Trotsky's thought and Che's, resides in their firm commitment to planned economy. It is certain that Trotsky initially opted for the NEP, given the terrible economic circumstances in which the young Soviet state found itself with what was known as War Communism.

But Trotsky very quickly criticised the new state of affairs. He considered, as Isaac Deutscher describes to us, that *"with the move to the NEP, the necessity of planning became more urgent (...). Precisely because the country was reviving under a market economy, it was necessary to see that the market was controlled, and to have the means of exercising this control. He went on to raise the question of the Single Plan, without which it was impossible to rationalise production, to concentrate industrial resources and to establish equilibrium between the different sectors of the economy."* [12]

Che's positions in favour of the plan and his proverbial aversion to the NEP are well known. Che considered that Lenin, if he had had the time, would have revised his opinion of the NEP. And there was not only the plan. Che also took a position, at the end of his life, in favour of socialist democracy. Michael Lowy writes in *Rebellion*: *"We know*

that in the last years of his life Ernesto Che Guevara had made considerable progress in distancing himself from the Soviet paradigm (...) But a large part of his later writings still remains unpublished, for inexplicable reasons. Among these documents there is a radical critique of the Manual of Political Economy of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, written in Prague in 1966 (...) One of its passages is very interesting, because it demonstrates that in his later political thinking, Guevara was coming round to the idea of socialist democracy." [13]

That was what Che was like. Although he had insufficiently studied Leon Trotsky, he was going in the direction of the most consistent Trotskyist theses. Perhaps he wasn't conscious of it, but that is of little importance. It indicates in any case that these theses are correct and in return gives even more force to Trotsky's thought. In 1965, Che wrote to Armando Hart from Tanzania about his choices concerning Marxist philosophy, and in paragraph VII he told him: "*And we should find there your friend Trotsky, who it seems existed and wrote.*" [14]

That may make us think that he didn't know a lot about the founder of the Red Army. It appears nevertheless that during the last year of his life he drew closer to his works. Juan Leon Ferrer, a Trotskyist comrade who worked in the Ministry of Industry, assured me of this. Furthermore, Che received the periodical of his organisation, and it was Che who had the imprisoned Trotskyists freed on his return from Africa. Comrade Roberto Acosta, who has since died, shared a close comradeship with Guevara. According to Jose Leon Ferrer, during the sugar harvests (zafra), they spoke of these subjects. This comrade says that Che had read Permanent Revolution, and we know that in Bolivia he was carrying in his backpack the History of the Russian Revolution.

We could add many examples which show that these two exemplary revolutionaries lit up the same path.

Both of them brilliantly and successfully led an army and a nascent socialist state, fully applying the teachings of Karl Marx; both of them were revolutionary ideologues who took power and sought to deepen the revolutionary process while remaining, respectively, loyal to Lenin and Fidel, leaning to their left. For representing the most developed ideal of internationalism and revolutionary consistency, both were assassinated.

Ernesto Guevara made me a Trotskyist. When I had access to Trotsky's writings, very belatedly for my liking, I realised that many things had already been told to me from my childhood onwards, by Che. From the first pages, I had the confirmation of what I had so many times felt in reading Che: that the revolution has nothing to do with national idiosyncrasy; that there is no room in socialism for the pronouns "our" or "your"; that revolutionary theory, like the laws of physics, is a universal language. As Armando Hart stated in another epoch: "*Our struggle is not only for Cuba, but for all the workers and the exploited of the world. Our frontiers are moral. Our limits are those of class.*" [15]

What I most appreciate in Trotsky is his way of speaking, the passion that his discourses always awaken in me. It is the same thing that subjugated me with Che Guevara. That is why I am fighting in his army, as in Che's, without betraying anyone. Both of them express with the same truth the word, the gun and the heart.

Comrades: let us finally come of age. There is too much injustice, too much exploitation, the evidence of the unique solution is only too great; too many of ours are dead. Leon Trotsky is calling us back to the struggle. Let us bid him unconditionally welcome!

Che Guevara is his amphytron, and the peoples of Latin America are demanding socialism. Trotsky has won the theoretical match in a dramatic way. Let us without delay and with confidence arm our revolutionary movements. Trotsky and Che are in our party. Let us once and for all give the tree a good shake, so as to unmask the new reformists who are preventing the Bolivarian revolution from advancing - this revolution which is the spearhead, the first rung on the ladder of an unprecedented continental revolution.

Let us remember once again that the sun, the stars and gravity are our allies. Workers of all lands, unite!"

[1] Ernest Mandel: Trotsky as Alternative, London, Verso, 1995.

[2] Olivia Gall: Trotsky en Mexico, Coleccion Problemas de Mexico, 1991. Olivia's Gall's doctoral thesis (in French), Trotsky et la vie politique dans le Mexique de Cardenas (Université de Grenoble 2, 1986) is also essential reading.

[3] Alejandro Galvez Cancino: Julio Antonio Mella. Un marxista revolucionario, Critica de l'Economia Politica, 1986.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Olivia Gall, op. cit.

[6] Leon Trotsky, The Permanent Revolution, 1931 Introduction to the Russian edition 1929, available on www.marxists.org

[7] Nestor Kohan: Ernesto Che Guevara. Otro mundo es posible, Editorial Nuestra America, 2003.

[8] Trotsky, op. cit.

[9] Ernesto Guevara: Socialism and Man in Cuba.

[10] Trotsky, op. cit.

[11] Guevara, op. cit.

[12] Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed.

[13] Michael Lowy, "Ni calco ni copia: Che Guevara en busqueda de un nuevo socialismo ". Rebelion, August 5th, 2002.

[14] Ernesto Guevara, Letter of December 4th, 1965 to Armando Hart, published in 1997 by the Cuban journal Contracorriente. In his book mentioned in note 7 above, Nestor Kohan presents and analyses this letter, which remained unpublished for over 30 years.

[15] Armando Hart "Greetings from the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party to the 23rd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union". (Published in Politica internacional de la Revolucion Cubana, Editora Politica, 1966).