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Ann Zulawski

The National Revolution and Bolivia in the 1950s

What Did Che See?

To read Che Guevara's diaries of his Latin American trips in the early 1950s is to witness his transition from a middle-class student traveling on the cheap to a serious supporter of revolutionary movements by the time he reaches Mexico in 1954. It seems logical that in this traveling education Bolivia would have had special significance since, when Guevara arrived, the country was in the throes of a revolutionary transformation, and it was to Bolivia that he returned in 1966 to set up a guerrilla base. Yet although Guevara clearly drew some conclusions about the nature of revolutionary processes from what he saw in Bolivia, it is striking how little time he actually spent in the country during his road trip, and how little the country's social reality and political history influenced him when he went back thirteen years later.

Guevara and his traveling companion Carlos "Calica" Ferrer arrived in Bolivia in July 1953. A little more than a year before, in April 1952, a nationalist revolution led by a reformist sector of the middle class had overthrown the political elite that represented the country's major mining interests and landowners. In October of 1952 the revolutionary government of President Víctor Paz Estenssoro had nationalized Bolivia's biggest tin mines. While Guevara and Ferrer were in the country, in August of 1953, the government took action in the countryside and declared a sweeping agrarian reform. These two actions certainly represented the most radical steps of the Bolivian government of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), yet Che apparently was not impressed. In his diary he expressed rather detached criticism of the government and spent

much of his time in La Paz visiting members of the Argentine expatriate community.[1]

In this article I review the political and social history that created both a revolutionary situation in Bolivia and the conditions for that revolution to be undermined. I conclude that Guevara's ignorance of, or willful disregard for, the country's situation in the 1950s ultimately contributed to his defeat there in 1967. This conclusion does not simply result from hindsight more than half a century after the fact. While some of what is now known about Bolivia in the 1950s derives from recent scholarship, other foreign travelers who visited the country at about the same time as Guevara left remarkably insightful accounts of the reality of Bolivian life. I compare some of these descriptions to Guevara's and will speculate about his seeming myopia or lack of interest in the country. Why did he "see" less than other visitors in the same period? A postscript briefly discusses Guevara's legacy in Bolivia today.

Revolution or Reformism?

The general impression one has reading the relatively little that Guevara wrote about Bolivia during his visit in 1953 is that for the short amount of time he put in, he managed to draw quite accurate conclusions about the political sentiments of the middle and upper classes, as well as about the nature of the MNR government. He importantly observed that a populist, multiclass coalition like the MNR was unlikely to produce revolutionary change and that controlling armed force would prove key to controlling the state. As he wrote to his friend Tita Infante: "The MNR is a conglomerate with three more or less clear tendencies: the Right represented by Siles Suazo, the vice president and a hero of the revolution; the Centre represented by Paz Estenssoro, more slippery but probably as right wing as the first; and the Left represented by Lechín, the visible head of a serious protest movement but personally an upstart much given to partying and chasing women. The power will probably remain in the hands of the Lechín group, who can count on the support of the armed miners, but the resistance of other people in the government may prove serious, especially as the army is now going to be reorganized."[2] Guevara probably had a sharp eye for the situation because

wrote to his friend Tita Infante: "The MNR is a conglomerate with three more or less clear tendencies: the Right represented by Siles Suazo, the vice president and a hero of the revolution; the Centre represented by Paz Estenssoro, more slippery but probably as right wing as the first; and the Left represented by Lechín, the visible head of a serious protest movement but personally an upstart much given to partying and chasing women. The power will probably remain in the hands of the Lechín group, who can count on the support of the armed miners, but the resistance of other people in the government may prove serious, especially as the army is now going to be reorganized."[2] Guevara probably had a sharp eye for the situation because of his experience with Peronism in Argentina. He had seen Juan Perón build his power base in the working class (à la Lechín) and was critical of Perón's attempt to form a coalition between workers and sectors of the capitalist class. It was not farfetched to imagine that the leaders of the MNR wanted to emulate many aspects of Peronism, including taking power through a military coup. In 1945 the party briefly governed in alliance with the military, and many MNR leaders continued to see the army as a more reliable ally than workers or peasants. However, the comparison with the Argentine experience may have caused Guevara to underestimate the Bolivian situation's radical potential. Rather than coming to power through a military coup and then cultivating working-class support, the MNR had to first cultivate that support for an armed insurrection and then try to control it.

With respect to Bolivia's white minority Guevara wrote in his diary:

> The "well-to-do," refined people are shocked by what is happening and complain bitterly about the new importance conferred on Indians and mestizos, but in all of them I thought I could detect a spark of nationalist enthusiasm for some of what the government has done.
>
> No one denies that it is necessary to end the state of affairs symbolized by the power of the three tin-mine bosses, and young people think this has been a step forward in the struggle to make people and wealth more equal.[3]

Here Guevara reflects the middle- and upper middle-class opposition to the monopoly of the biggest tin miners and the sense that Bolivia's resources should in some way be nationalized. In the early 1950s many people also believed that for Bolivia to become a respected, modern nation, a greater degree of social and economic equality was inevitable, perhaps even desirable. Young people, who were very well represented in the MNR government, sometimes proved enthusiastic supporters of expanded political rights and economic opportunities for indigenous peasants, and a number of them worked actively in government ministries to bring abusive landlords and employers to account.[4] On the other hand, complaints and fears about the new importance of Indians and mestizos were widespread. Even today, many of the twenty-first-

century counterparts of the "refined people" Guevara refers to feel deeply ambivalent about living in a country in which the indigenous majority has its rightful share of political power.

Although he makes many acute observations, Guevara seems to be just passing through Bolivia as an educated tourist. He and Calica visit the semitropical Yungas valleys near La Paz and Lake Titicaca and the Isla del Sol (both common side trips from the capital). They hang out in cafés on La Paz's central boulevard, enjoy the hospitality of the Argentine exile Isaías Nogués, and have amorous relationships with young women. The two do not even particularly seem to be roughing it: the account lacks the details of daily struggles so common in other parts of Guevara's diary.[5]

In fact, the political situation that Guevara encountered in 1953 was shaped by the contention among the different groups forming the revolutionary coalition of the previous year. These included militant workers and peasants as well as the middle-class reformers who through co-optation and repression attempted to gain control of the revolutionary process.

Various aspects of the Bolivian social and political situation in the 1940s and early 1950s make it possible to argue that the country was moving toward a revolutionary situation. These included the political and social ferment in the country after the Chaco War with Paraguay (1932–35), the existence of a radical workers' movement, especially among the tin miners, and a long history of peasant struggle for land and citizenship rights.

The Chaco War proved a military and political disaster for Bolivia. Provoked by Bolivia,[6] the war with Paraguay sharpened the contradictions of a society divided by class and ethnicity, reproducing existing social hierarchies in the army. The majority of the front-line troops comprised Aymara- or Quechua-speaking peasants and workers who often walked most of the way to the front without sufficient food, water, or clothing.[7] Officers, generally young criollos from socially prominent families,[8] suffered fewer privations and often received assignments behind the lines. Of the approximately 50,000 Bolivian troops who died in the war (out of 250,000), the majority succumbed to disease, the most common illness being "avitaminosis," which actually meant severe malnutrition and dehydration.[9]

As the war dragged on and Bolivia lost most battles and ceded

ever more ground to Paraguay, President Daniel Salamanca was forced to resign. The execrable conditions of front-line troops and the apparent incompetence of the general staff became a national scandal. Some outright troop mutinies occurred, while at other times officers had to watch powerlessly as their men deserted while looking for water or something to eat.[10]

In the aftermath of the war there was a repudiation of the traditional political class, and centrist parties adopted some of the rhetoric of the Left in an effort to remain relevant. Their experiences in the conflict had made even some middle- and upper middle-class men recognize the gross inequalities in their society as the poorest people had been asked to make the greatest sacrifices for the homeland. Furthermore, as Guevara reported, many people in Bolivia, including some of the prosperous and prominent, resented that three firms (Patiño, Hochschild, and Aramayo), all with close ties to the government, controlled 80 percent of the tin industry, in turn responsible for 80 percent of national exports.[11] The three major tin industrialists further faced resentment for investing abroad and denationalizing key sectors of their enterprises.[12]

In the post-Chaco ferment new radical working-class parties formed, especially the Trotskyist Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) and the more Moscow-oriented Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (PIR). In 1941 the group that was to lead the revolution of 1952, the MNR, was organized by a group of middle-class university graduates who had fought in the war. They subscribed to a rather undefined nationalism opposing government collusion with the major tin producers and foreign control of the Bolivian economy.

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If these parties formed and attracted popular support after 1936, they were not without antecedents or natural allies. Bolivia had a considerable tradition of worker organization. Historically the industrial union movement in Bolivia has been associated with the organized tin miners who worked in isolated areas of the country in extremely dangerous conditions for poor pay. Although always representing a small percentage of the population, organized mine workers potentially held great power because of the centrality of tin to the Bolivian economy. Such was the importance of tin that mine owners and the state rarely hesitated to use massive repression against the miners, who could literally shut down the economy. Yet despite suffering serious defeats, the miners' unions tended to re-

cuperate, reorganize, and continue to press their demands for better wages and improved working conditions.[13]

While the MNR influenced and strongly encouraged the formation of the national miners' confederation, the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB), in 1943, the union in 1946 adopted a radical program for struggle known as the "Tesis de Pulacayo." Influenced by the POR, the thesis was based on the Trotskyist conception of raising strategic transitional demands (nationalization of the mines, agrarian reform, control of the mines by the workers) that would educate the union rank and file about what they could realistically expect from their employers and the state. It is worth mentioning that while the drafters of the "Tesis" believed in the ultimate necessity of armed struggle to create a socialist Bolivia, their approach contrasted sharply with the *foco* theory later embraced by Guevara, since it raised demands designed to win broad working-class support. On the theoretical level the thesis classified Bolivia as a backward capitalist country, not a feudal one, and therefore maintained that the tasks usually associated with the bourgeois-democratic revolution would be accomplished by the working class (whose vanguard was the miners) in coalition with the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie as "a phase" of a socialist revolution.[14]

Modern peasant political organization in Bolivia goes back to the late nineteenth century, when indigenous people organized to keep or regain communally held lands threatened by the liberal laws privatizing land. Initially Indian communities and expropriated *comuneros* found ways to make alliances with opposition political groups to regain their lands.[15] While these alliances generally proved unsatisfactory for rural people in the long run,[16] they nonetheless demonstrate that from the late 1800s indigenous people thought strategically about how to advance their interests and did not, as an MNR minister of education claimed in the 1950s, "inhabit a hermetic world, inaccessible to the white and the mestizo."[17]

In the first decades of the twentieth century a series of rebellions in peasant communities occurred in the high plateau area surrounding La Paz. These revolts were often provoked by specific abuses (e.g., the death of a community member at the hands of a local official), but frequently they also focused on the issue of land. These rebellions also often raised demands for schools in rural areas, political representation for native people, and access to markets.[18]

During the Chaco War alarmed hacendados and townspeople reported protests and even uprisings by *colonos* and members of nearby Indian communities all over the countryside.[19] The reasons for the discontent were multiple: communities that had gladly contributed food to the war effort at its beginning later saw themselves well-nigh expropriated of animals and provisions by the authorities. The abusive military conscription of rural workers, who often were supposed to be exempt, and the usurping of lands by haciendas while community members were off at war provoked a wave of resistance that some political authorities attempted to blame on communist agitators or the Paraguayan government.[20]

In the post-Chaco period peasant organization became more coordinated as rural leaders now had contacts with students, union leaders, and members of the newly formed radical and reformist parties. In 1943 the MNR joined with a group of dissident army officers to overthrow the conservative president Enrique Peñaranda, putting the army major Gualberto Villarroel in office. During Villarroel's term a National Indigenous Congress was held in La Paz. Yet the conference's outcome was controlled by the government and fell far short of meeting the demands for agrarian reform raised by hacienda workers and community members. Still, it set important precedents. Its final document outlawed *pongueaje* (unpaid personal service demanded of hacienda *colonos*) and mandated the establishment of schools on all haciendas.[21]

Villarroel was overthrown in 1946 by an alliance of traditional politicians and the pro-Soviet Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria. After his assassination at the hands of a mob outside the presidential palace, Villarroel was turned into a martyr by many indigenous people, a fallen hero to be vindicated by the MNR. With the demise of Villarroel, hacendados, freed of his decrees, attempted to reestablish total control in the countryside. As a result a new cycle of rural protests commenced in 1947; President Enrique Hertzog characterized them as the most serious in the nation's history.[22]

Thus a number of factors made Bolivia ripe for some kind of revolutionary coalition: (1) nationalist discontent with the economic and political elite in many sectors of the population, including the military, the middle class, and even the upper middle class; (2) traditions of militancy and organization among peasants and workers; and (3) the formation of new political parties that represented these

groups or sought to make alliances with them. If Guevara had known a little more about the nature of popular movements in the country he might have seen that the situation had more radical potential than he initially assumed and possibly reconsidered his strategy and alliances when returning in the 1960s. If he had known more about the means by which the MNR gradually undermined its more militant allies, and what that could mean for future revolutionary efforts, he might in fact have decided not to return at all.

Skillful maneuvering by the MNR and U.S. Cold War policies gradually put a brake on the radical wing of the revolutionary movement. Although the MNR initially favored alliances with the military and even the traditional parties, rather than the workers and peasants, sectors of their leadership eventually realized the importance of developing a mass base. To do this the party successfully undercut the Marxist parties by adopting strategic points of their programs (nationalization of the mines and agrarian reform). Once in power, the MNR managed to deliver on some of its promises to peasants and workers and then to neutralize these groups through clientelism, compromise, foot dragging—and repression when the other measures did not work. That Bolivia's main market for its tin was the United States further limited the country's possibilities for nationalist action.

A major MNR effort to cultivate a mass base took place with the miners' union (FSTMB), which the party had helped to create. As Guevara noticed, the mine union president Juan Lechín Oquendo was an extremely astute and charismatic leader, though frequently guilty of opportunism. His political savvy and personal appeal seem to have swayed even many of the most militant labor leaders. When pressed to do so by radicals in the union, Lechín sometimes showed independence from the centrist MNR leaders, but once the MNR held power, he also frequently took on the role of convincing the rank and file of the political and economic necessity of highly unfavorable agreements with the United States and former mine owners.[23]

In 1949 the MNR led an armed revolt against President Mamerto Urriolagoitia. The revolt failed but the party received tenacious support from the mine workers. In the year or so after the failure of the rebellion the MNR made efforts to broaden its base. When the party entered the presidential elections in 1951 with Paz Estenssoro as its

appeal seem to have swayed even many of the most militant labor leaders. When pressed to do so by radicals in the union, Lechín sometimes showed independence from the centrist MNR leaders,

candidate, the MNR presented a program that in effect undercut the appeal of its left-wing rivals. For the first time it called for the nationalization of the mines, an agrarian reform, and universal suffrage.[24] What the party meant by the first two, and how it would carry out these measures, were to be issues of major contention later, but finally the MNR had laid out a program addressing the country's key problems and able to attract a majority of the population.

Although the MNR won the presidential election in 1951, Paz Estenssoro did not have an absolute majority and the final outcome should have been decided in congress. However, the military, supported by the major mining interests, staged a coup and Urriolagoitia turned the government over to a military junta headed by General Hugo Ballivian.

In 1952 the MNR finally led a successful revolution. But even in this effort sectors of the party still hoped to receive significant military support. The party's right wing even envisioned a joint MNR-military government that would bypass Paz Estenssoro, who had just won the election. In the end the majority of the military remained loyal to the Ballivian government, and armed factory workers and miners were responsible for the revolt's success.[25] Unlike the military coup in Argentina in 1943 that marked the beginning of Perón's ascendancy, the shift to power for the MNR had occurred in a way that the center-right of the party had not anticipated and did not support: they had been pushed into office by the armed workers. This fact made it imperative for the new government to find ways to bring the working class and the peasantry under party control.

Shortly after Paz Estenssoro's inauguration, a national labor confederation was founded. The MNR supported the creation of the Confederación Obrera Boliviana (COB), probably hoping that it would be able to make clients of militant workers in a manner

federation was founded. The MNR supported the creation of the Confederación Obrera Boliviana (COB), probably hoping that it would be able to make clients of militant workers in a manner similar to the Mexican or Argentine government. Yet although the MNR leader Lechín was elected head of the new union confederation, members of other parties were also active in the COB, and the organization's leaders always had to contend with the militancy of the unions' rank and file. The MNR government had thus not entirely succeeded in co-opting the labor movement and had to find ways to maneuver to win on a number of issues. These included the nationalization of the mines, the role the working class would have in running them, and whether the country should have a traditional

army or people's militias such as those that had put the MNR in power.

While Paz Estenssoro talked about studying the possibilities of nationalizing the mines, the COB called for expropriation without compensation and worker co-management of the new state-owned enterprises. The MNR undercut this radical challenge in a variety of ways, most importantly by stalling and making COB representatives (particularly Lechín) complicit in government decisions. During this period government officials stridently repudiated the radicalism of the COB as communist internationalism. In the end the MNR took over the mines and ultimately paid the companies 27 million dollars in compensation. Rather than with workers' control of the mines, the FSTMB ended up with two representatives on the Compañia Minera Boliviana (COMIBOL) board, but these representatives were neither elected by nor accountable to the workers.[26]

With respect to the army, while those on the Left pushed for people's militias, and the government symbolically closed the military academy, Paz Estenssoro actually invited U.S. military advisers into the country and opened a new air force academy in Santa Cruz. Military buildup with U.S. support proceeded apace, with several of the officers trained in the new facilities eventually becoming leaders of military coups that overthrew elected governments.[27]

Of course the MNR government had the United States to contend with, and Paz Estenssoro and Hernán Siles Suazo, his vice president, were at pains to convince the U.S. embassy that theirs was a nationalist, not a communist, movement. During the deliberations about nationalizing the tin mines the Bolivian ambassador to Washington, Víctor Andrade, repeatedly assured the U.S. government that the only nationalizations would be those of the major tin barons and that the MNR had no intention of touching other private property.[28]

ington, Víctor Andrade, repeatedly assured the U.S. government that the only nationalizations would be those of the major tin barons and that the MNR had no intention of touching other private property.[28]

Perhaps because U.S. economic interests were less directly affected, Bolivia was further away from the United States, and the MNR leaders proved more conciliatory than the Arbenz government in Guatemala, the United States chose to co-opt the new government rather than overthrow it.[29] In fact, Paz Estenssoro, Siles Suazo, and the center-right of the MNR probably welcomed U.S. involvement as a counterweight to the demands of the domestic Left.

The U.S. secretary of state John Foster Dulles expressed worry that a lack of U.S. economic aid and a tin contract would create

chaos in Bolivia and that the country "would become a focus of Communist infection in South America."[30] Once the Eisenhower administration was satisfied that the Paz Estenssoro government had entered into good-faith negotiations to compensate the "Big Three," the United States renewed its tin contract with Bolivia and sent the country food and other types of economic aid.[31] In 1956, during the administration of Siles Suazo, the United States made an economic stabilization plan a requirement for further assistance.[32] The reforms implemented proved so devastating for the working class that Lechín and his wing of the labor movement were eventually forced to move into opposition.[33] Nonetheless, the government managed to hold on to an alliance with peasants that was, from the government's point of view, more successful than that with labor.

The MNR had more success co-opting peasant groups than it did the working class, even though rural indigenous people had a long history of organizing to achieve their demands. Peasants' willingness to go along with the MNR probably derived from it being the party of Villarroel, a man revered by hacienda *colonos* and community members. The MNR also had moral capital with many peasants because it was through the party that they had received land. As Xavier Albó describes it, in the first years, "with greater or lesser radicalism, the mobilized peasants had no doubts about the legitimacy of taking over the land, nor about the good intentions of the MNR."[34] According to Albó, when the question of land was no longer an issue, the MNR, determined to maintain peasant support, had to find other means of tying rural leaders to the party. These included various types of clientelist blandishments, with those leaders most loyal to the MNR tending to receive the most for their unions and themselves. This kind of patronage in many places even-

included various types of clientelist blandishments, with those leaders most loyal to the MNR tending to receive the most for their unions and themselves. This kind of patronage in many places eventually developed into a passive dependency on the government.[35]

As the MNR moved steadily to the right throughout the 1950s, it sought ever more to use the peasant unions as allies against the working class.[36] In 1964 Paz Estenssoro, who had just been elected president again, was overthrown by General René Barrientos, an MNR military man. Barrientos made official the subordination of the peasantry to the government by proclaiming the Pacto Militar-Campesino. This alliance specifically joined the peasants (especially those from Cochabamba) to the military government in their con-

flict with supposedly communist mine workers. But as Albó points out, this "subordination of the peasantry to an authoritarian regime was in reality the culmination of a long populist process" that had begun with Villaroel and the MNR.[37]

Contrasting Views of the Bolivian Revolution

First of all a proviso: Guevara's commentaries on his travels come in the form of diaries and letters. Diaries are primarily written for their authors, and letters have a specific limited audience. They can provide good sources for historians, but Guevara's early writings were not designed as travel books or analytical articles, so some degree of caution is necessary when comparing his descriptions with works more explanatory and detailed.

One thing that clouded the vision of nearly all observers of Bolivia in the 1950s was racism. Almost all writers, whether Bolivian or foreign, succumbed to stereotypes about indigenous Bolivians' temperament, intelligence, physical fortitude, work capacity, emotional life, and integration into the nation. Guevara was no exception to this pattern. While critical of the attitudes of many of the leaders of the new Bolivian government toward the country's indigenous majority, he himself tended to see Indians as long suffering and impervious to contemporary political realities. For instance, on his trip to Peru in 1952 Guevara described the Aymara people he met in this way: "But the people are not the same proud race that time after time rose up against Inca rule and forced them to maintain a permanent army on their borders; these people who watch us walk through the town streets are a defeated race. They look at us meekly, almost fearfully, completely indifferent to the outside world."[38]

While most observers at this time made similar statements at town streets are a defeated race. They look at us meekly, almost fearfully, completely indifferent to the outside world."[38]

While most observers at this time made similar statements at various points, it is striking that some travel writers or journalists exhibited almost a dual vision with respect to Bolivia's native peoples. When speaking generally they repeated many stereotypes, ones probably fed to them by Bolivian contacts or culled from Bolivian classics such as Alcides Arguedas's *Pueblo enfermo*.[39] Yet when reporting on actual conditions in the country or on conversations with indigenous people, they sometimes provided a more complex and active picture, one that helps the reader understand the way indigenous people actually lived and the demands they were making

of the new government. Guevara's descriptions very seldom reach this level of detailed reporting. While he had a more sophisticated analysis of the political situation in the country and the problems facing a populist coalition like the MNR than many journalists, other writers tell us more about what the country was like in the 1950s and why there was a revolution. Guevara actually might have benefited from reading some of the accounts written by his contemporaries.

Guevara expressed outrage at the abuse Indians suffered at the hands of the Bolivian elite, including the new revolutionary leadership. One of his more vivid descriptions is of a visit to the Ministry of Peasant Affairs. He wrote that "masses of Indians from various groups in the Altiplano wait their turn to be given an audience. Each group, dressed in typical costume, has a leader or indoctrinator who speaks to them in their own native language. When they go in, the employees sprinkle them with DDT."[40] According to Ricardo Rojo, an anti-Peronist exile whom Guevara befriended in La Paz, Guevara was incensed enough about this humiliating procedure that he demanded an explanation for it from Ñuflo Chávez, the minister of peasant affairs, who agreed that the practice was deplorable but that the Indian was ignorant of soap and water. According to Rojo, Guevara later ruminated about this incident: "This revolution is bound to fail if it doesn't manage to break down the spiritual isolation of the Indians, if it doesn't succeed in reaching deep inside them, stirring them right down to the bone, and giving them back their stature as human beings."[41] What Guevara apparently did not know was that in the aftermath of the revolution a wave of protest and violence had occurred in the countryside as indigenous people demanded land, schools, a labor code, and the end of abuse by local officials. In fact, the creation of the Ministry of Peasant Affairs

and violence had occurred in the countryside as indigenous people demanded land, schools, a labor code, and the end of abuse by local officials. In fact, the creation of the Ministry of Peasant Affairs marked an attempt to control this uprising.[42] This kind of massive mobilization can hardly be attributed to the passive creatures Guevara thought he saw and understood.

This idea of the degraded Indian who needs to be rehumanized by the revolutionaries also was not challenged by any conversations with actual Indians. The one minimal interaction with an indigenous person that Guevara mentions is with a porter he and Calica hired at Lake Titicaca. They rather cruelly nicknamed him Túpac Amaru after the great Andean revolutionary, and Guevara

commented that "he looked a sorry sight: each time he sat down to rest, he was unable to get up again without our help."[43]

The account of another foreign traveler who visited Bolivia a few months after the revolution gives more information on what Indians hoped to accomplish when they lined up at the Ministry of Peasant Affairs. Lilo Linke, a German woman who lived in Ecuador and wrote extensively about her travels in Latin America and elsewhere, arrived in Bolivia in August 1952. Linke spent considerable time in the Ministry of Peasant Affairs listening to people's petitions and observing the actions of the staff. The complaints varied: physical abuse of *colonos* by hacendados, theft of peasant property by landowners or their employees, unpaid salaries to rural workers, and even a petition from Joaquín Ronquillo, *autoridad indígena* of the Hacienda Huancayo, demanding that the owner of the hacienda be forced to abolish servitude and all unpaid services.[44] In many cases the ministry employees dispatched orders to local authorities to force the landowners to return land or animals or to cease the abuse of which they were accused. Although the agrarian reform had not yet become law, peasants clearly believed the MNR on their side and were using the mechanisms newly available to them to redress grievances.[45] From the landowners' point of view the Indians Guevara and Calica met were nowhere close to passive. At the ministry one landowner who had been called in to discuss a complaint said condescendingly to an official, "If you think you are going to arrive at an understanding with these people, you are mistaken." When she was told by the official to go back to the hacienda and immediately return the property she had taken from the *colonos*, the woman retorted: "But I'm not going back and neither is my husband. The Indians have threatened to kill us."[46]

torted: "But I'm not going back and neither is my husband. The Indians have threatened to kill us."[46]

Linke was aware of the potential threat to the elite posed by an agrarian reform and full citizenship rights for Bolivia's indigenous majority. She wrote that it was in these demands that:

> the real revolution resided. The nationalization of the mines, after all, was something approved by the majority of Bolivians, even if only for reasons of national pride. As an economic measure it could be successful or not, but in any case it was not going to overthrow Bolivia's social structure. On the other hand, that was exactly what many people thought would happen if the Indians were considered as equals. More than 60 percent of Bolivians were Indian. Once they considered themselves as good as the white minority, would anyone be able to contain them?[47]

Here Linke very perceptively captures the same ambivalence about the revolution on the part of white Bolivians that Guevara had observed. In fact, many in the upper class supported the conservatives in the MNR, assuming that they would promote a mild nationalism, which included nationalizing the biggest tin mines, while preventing more fundamental social change.

Several times in his account Guevara refers to the organized mine workers as the radical wing of the revolution who, as long as they were armed, posed a potential threat to this more conservative leadership. While they were in Bolivia a local doctor arranged for Guevara and Ferrer to work in the medical facility of a tin mining camp. Yet they ultimately decided they were not interested enough in staying in Bolivia to spend two months working there. Had he taken the job, Guevara might have had an understanding of the social and political processes underway in the country that could have served him well in his later career as a revolutionary. Instead of going to work in the mines he and Calica settled for an overnight trip to a Wolfram mine not in operation the day they visited because the miners were in La Paz for the inauguration of the agrarian reform.[48] So they visited a mine that was not functioning and also missed the official ceremonies for the second most important reform of the revolution.

Linke did not work in a mining camp either during her stay in Bolivia, but she did spend a lot of time in mines, seeing the underground work, talking to miners about their living conditions and health, and meeting with union delegates and company officials. During her time there the mines had not yet been nationalized, but the MNR and the union movement had enough power already that at each mine she was guided by a union leader as well as a representative of the company, who often told very different stories. In the mines Linke, far from being a revolutionary herself, received some of the education Guevara missed.

She says that to understand the situation in the mines a person has to have lived in them, going on to describe the bleakness of the landscape, since most of the camps were located at between twelve

and fifteen thousand feet above sea level. The cold, the wind, the lack of natural vegetation, and the squalor of the workers' housing that lacked minimal amenities made mining communities for Linke among the least inviting places imaginable.[49]

As she walked around the company housing at Llallagua, the mine company representative pointed out that the company cleaned the unpaved streets every day. He commented that if it did not the streets would prove intolerable. "The people don't have any sense of hygiene. They are too lazy even to use the latrines."[50] A little later Linke entered a house that had originally been built for a single man. The young man living there told her of four of them actually using the house, which only had two beds, a wash basin, and a rope suspended from the ceiling from which they hung their clothes. He explained that "the latrine is 300 yards away. At night it is too terribly cold to go that far so we try to avoid it if at all possible."[51] She saw other workers and their families crowded into one room in which the company had only recently replaced a dirt floor with a wooden one. These hovels had no water, and people had to wait at the neighborhood spigot in the middle of the day because it was the only time the water pipes were not frozen.

Linke also saw underground working conditions firsthand in many mines, including at the Compañia Huanchaca de Bolivia at Pulacayo, reportedly the hottest mine in the world with temperatures sometimes reaching 140 degrees Fahrenheit. In Pulacayo she studied statistics on the number of injuries each month and, as in other mines, saw evidence of silicosis and tuberculosis (TB) that disabled most miners after short underground careers. At the time she was in Bolivia most of the workforce inside the mines was between twenty and thirty years of age. A mine administrator at Pulacayo told Linke that after eight years on the job miners could get an indemnity for voluntary retirement, further commenting that if they even lasted eight years, laborers certainly were in the first stages of TB or silicosis and could no longer keep up with the other workers. Linke also saw figures on the alarmingly high infant mortality rate in the mining camp (seventy deaths in the previous month). Most of the children and babies succumbed to whooping cough, intestinal ailments, and other infections in an epidemiological pattern that had not changed since the early twentieth century.[52]

Even though she visited shortly before the mines' nationalization, at the company hospital in Pulacayo Linke saw the kind of place that Guevara and Ferrer might have worked in had they accepted employment. The hospital's doctor reported that workers did not have periodic medical checkups nor wanted them because, if they were found to have *mal de minas* (mine sickness), the company discharged them with a tiny pension insufficient to live on. He also claimed that the hospital only treated the least serious cases of TB (TB was more common in Pulacayo than silicosis). More severely ill patients were, according to law, released from the hospital, but the doctor did not know what happened to them since no provision for their treatment was made and Bolivia had no tuberculosis hospitals.[53]

Pulacayo of course was the place where the famous working-class program, the "Tesís de Pulacayo," had been drafted in 1946. During her stay Linke attended union meetings and learned about working-class life. She reported that many of the miners there and in other mines had come from the countryside, where they had been hacienda *colonos* or had had access to small plots of land.[54] This information shows a connection between peasants and workers that Guevara did not recognize, seeing the miners as militant proletarians and the peasants as indigenous people unable to defend themselves. The MNR government likewise sought to deny or obscure the similarity of background and interests of peasants and workers.

At union meetings Linke heard a sampling of rank-and-file miners' grievances and their demands for nationalization. There were complaints about mine safety and the company's unwillingness to spend money on security measures. Workers felt particularly outraged that the mining administration always blamed supposedly inattentive or lazy workers for accidents. Linke also heard from union miners that no one who worked inside the mines kept his health for more than two years, far short of the eight needed for the indemnity. This seemed particularly alarming since some of the laborers were boys in their early teens who should have been in school. One worker pointed out that the mining capitalist Simón Patiño had let the French government use one of his mansions in France as a hospital during the First World War but neglected the health of his workers in Bolivia.[55]

The union workers were full of hope about the benefits to them and to the nation that the impending nationalization would bring.

One said: "Nationalization will bring progress to Bolivia, which has for so long been exploited by Yankee capitalists. . . . The companies weren't interested in anything except taking our riches out of the country. For us the mines are everything, they mean progress, fraternal cooperation, schools for our children."[56] The workers at the meeting uniformly opposed the compensation of mining companies for the nationalization. The common position was articulated by "an indigenous miner" who asked the group: "Do you think compensation is reasonable? The foreign companies have exploited our riches for many years. It's true that they brought the machinery, but now it's old and the companies have made so much money that the equipment has paid for itself at least three times over. So why is the Bolivian government going to compensate them? Bolivia is poor while the companies have gotten rich."[57]

Although Guevara was told about the militant miners by people he met in Bolivia, he had no personal experience with them. We cannot know if living in a mining camp would have changed his ideas about the possible strategy for a revolutionary movement in Bolivia or made him hesitate before planning a guerrilla movement that had no real contact with workers or working-class parties, but it might have. In any event, Guevara left Bolivia for Peru after he had traveled there for a little over a month. According to Rojo, he, Ferrer, and Guevara went to Peru by truck.[58] Turning down the more comfortable possibility of riding in the truck's cab with the driver (what the ticket agent called "Panagra class"),[59] they piled into the back with indigenous peasants. Rojo described the experience this way: "The trip was an indispensable step in our education about Indian America. We entered a hostile world and were trapped between bundles and people who looked like bundles. Silence. Bruising jolts and silence. We discovered that it was impossible to try and show America. We entered a hostile world and were trapped between bundles and people who looked like bundles. Silence. Bruising jolts and silence. We discovered that it was impossible to try and show the sympathy we felt before those scrutinizing, metallic eyes, those lips clamped together forbiddingly, refusing to answer our questions. From time to time, a mouth would gape and let out a foul breath of chewed *coca*, a breath it didn't seem possible could have fermented inside a human body."[60] Rojo's account has the merit of revealing something more complicated than Indian passivity. He and his companions had to confront the silent hostility that three young white men bumming around might have expected. As they

jolted out of Bolivia they may have learned a lesson, as Rojo maintains, but the lesson was not followed up with further education.

Alicia Ortiz, another Argentine visitor to Bolivia after the revolution, was a literary essayist and travel writer. She came to the country in late 1952 with a lot more illusions than Guevara about the revolutionary potential of the MNR. In July 1953, when she finished her book, *Amanecer en Bolivia*, she still believed that Paz Estenssoro, Siles Suazo, and other leaders had "a clear notion of justice and patriotic enthusiasm [and] were proposing to end the backwardness of the exploited Indians and the country's situation as a semicolonial, monoproducer."[61] Like Guevara, Ortiz was not above repeating stereotypes about Indians or romanticizing them. On the fishermen at Lake Titicaca she rhapsodized: "How interesting it would be to see those fishermen up close! To observe the indigenous race in its ancient tasks . . . would be like a glimpse of the most elemental forms of life in the Inca empire."[62] Yet Ortiz also actually got out and talked to people, and when she did, she gave concrete information about workers' and peasants' lives and demands, the splits in the MNR, the compromises the government was making, and other political groups in the country.

At various times during her trip Ortiz and her accompanying daughter had experiences similar to Guevara's and Ricardo Rojo's in the back of the truck. She remarked on how everyone seemed to be on the move. "With children and innumerable packages they travel by train or by truck, where they risk falling off while balanced on top of their bundles. [They are] exposed to the cold and snow in the mountains, the burning sun, the lukewarm mist in tropical zones. [These travelers] are dedicated to commerce. They bring bananas from the Yungas [tropical valleys near the city of La Paz] to exchange for chuño [freeze-dried potatoes] from the high plateau."[63] Ortiz [These travelers] are dedicated to commerce. They bring bananas from the Yungas [tropical valleys near the city of La Paz] to exchange for chuño [freeze-dried potatoes] from the high plateau."[63] Ortiz did not seem to know that the elaborate trade she saw in Bolivia was probably a modern-day version of the ancient Andean practice of maximizing resources by having access to products from different ecological niches. Nonetheless she seemed aware of its purpose and felt impressed by the risks facing the traveling petty merchants.

Arriving in La Paz, Ortiz visited the working-class neighborhoods of Chijini and Villa Victoria with another Argentine woman who remarked on how picturesque the people were. Ortiz asks if

one can really "be dazzled by the multicolored hues of a strange race, be blinded by the *pollera* [multi-layered skirt worn by urban indigenous women], . . . the striped poncho, the *quena* [reed flute], or the *charango* [small guitar, sometimes made out of the shell of an armadillo] when confronted with the *q'epiri* [indigenous person who carries burdens for people on the streets of La Paz] who disappears underneath the weight and size of the load tied to his curved back. . . . Who can feel the pleasure and the color of the landscape in the presence of this woman who with effort ascends the steep alleyway with a three-year-old child on her back and who says to you in passing 'I get tired because I have heart problems'? And who can find it amusing and entertaining to learn that the child isn't walking only because his legs are not sufficiently calcified and the mother only still has three of the nine children she brought into the world?"[64]

During her stay in Bolivia there was much agitation for the agrarian reform, which was finally promulgated in August of 1953. Visiting rural Sorata, Ortiz had the opportunity to talk with an agricultural *colono* about the situation and his efforts for the reform. The man said "*Ojalá* [I hope] that it becomes reality, all of us *colonos* want it. God should enlighten our *tata Presidente* [father in Quechua, used affectionately]." When she asks what benefits he expects from the reform, the man answers: "Now we are in bad shape. I work with my family in the fields every day. But that doesn't do us much good because I have to hand over to the landowner a large part of the harvest. Besides, two days a week I have to work for the *patrón*, either in the countryside or in his house in La Paz. Is this fair? I scarcely am able to eat some potatoes and corn, everything else is taken by the landowner. . . . It's not fair that such beautiful fields are in the hands of an owner who doesn't love them, who only wants to benefit at the expense of other people's labor."[65]

This exchange with the *colono* sheds light on the grievances and desires of rural people who Guevara only saw as automatons shuffling through the agrarian reform offices. Ortiz also learned that they were not simply waiting passively for the *tata Presidente*'s enlightenment. A little way from Sorata she and her daughter encountered the brother of a policeman who was traveling with them. The brother reported, and other *colonos* confirmed his story, that the owner of the hacienda where he worked had stockpiled arms to be

used in a failed coup against the government that had occurred on 6 January. His *colonos* had observed the hacendado's actions and had taken turns watching his house to report any attempts to distribute them. One of the *colonos* explained of the landowner, "What is hurting him the most is the agrarian reform. He's fighting against it and that's why he is our enemy."[66]

Ortiz was in La Paz when the attempted coup took place and joined the people who filled the plaza outside the presidential palace to defend the government. Truckloads of miners arrived from outside La Paz, and Ortiz and her daughter found themselves surrounded by armed workers. While they were standing cheek to jowl with thousands of people, leaflets were dropped on the crowd by the *golpistas* organizing the coup. The leaflets explained that those supporting the coup were "not against Paz Estenssoro but opposed to the communists in the government."[67] According to Ortiz, the mass of people turned furiously on the person who threw the leaflets, an elegant upper-class woman who Ortiz said would have been lynched had soldiers not protected her. The assembled multitude listened to speeches by Paz Estenssoro and Lechín, but when came the turn of Sergio Almaraz, a representative of the Communist Party, to speak, the microphone went dead and Paz Estenssoro disappeared from the balcony. Furthermore, Ortiz reported that elements of the MNR right wing who had been involved in the coup received a generous amnesty. She seemed to believe that this was a proper conciliatory gesture and that the rightists in the MNR were only disoriented and still in favor of "national liberation."[68] Nonetheless, she saw for herself and reported on the MNR's political opportunism that Guevara had learned about secondhand.

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At the MNR's national convention in February 1953 there was more evidence that the party was moving to the right and trying to control more radical elements. According to Ortiz, at that event the president's address aimed at "calming the national bourgeoisie's fears of leftism and braking the leftwing deviations" of the proletariat and the peasantry. Paz Estenssoro further declared that the MNR was "profoundly revolutionary but not communist."[69] Another exchange at the convention displayed the leadership's attitude toward the peasantry and that indigenous leaders opposed it. It occurred when Ñuflo Chávez made what Ortiz called "an unfortunate intervention," saying that a commission on peasant affairs

ought to be made up of intellectuals who understood the issues because the Indians, due to their backwardness, were unable to defend their own interests. The auditorium apparently erupted in protest, and Chávez was answered by one of only four indigenous delegates at the convention. This delegate said that Indians "might be ignorant and not know how to express themselves with beautiful words or make eloquent speeches, but that nobody was more qualified than one who suffered an unjust and painful situation to know what its remedies might be."[70]

Why?

Anyone who supports revolutionary, or even progressive, change in Latin America must view Guevara's failure in Bolivia in 1967 as a sad chapter in the region's history. It caused his death and the deaths of many of his supporters, was a pretext for the Bolivian government's repression of the Left, and amounted to a victory for the United States and its Latin American allies. Ironically, Guevara's tragic miscalculations can partially be attributed to the success of the Cuban Revolution, which revolutionaries sought to duplicate elsewhere although the particular conditions that made revolution in Cuba possible did not exist in other parts of the world. The success in Cuba led Guevara and many leftists of the period to embrace the *foco* theory as a politico-military shortcut to organizing a revolutionary movement.[71] Yet Guevara's near-fatal experience in the Congo should have disabused him of the universal applicability of that model.

Perhaps given Guevara's experience, temperament, and class background he would never have been capable of engaging in a different type of political work for an extended period. Yet one has to wonder how he could have so misread the situation in Bolivia and if more time spent there in the 1950s might have made him more circumspect about using it as a base from which to launch his South American revolution. Guevara underestimated (or chose to ignore) both the revolutionary and the counterrevolutionary potential in Bolivia in the 1950s. His lack of knowledge about working-class, peasant, and radical movements made him seemingly unaware of what alliances might have proven useful in the 1960s. At the same time, although he understood that a populist coalition controlled by a

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middle-class party was unlikely to be revolutionary unless pushed by the armed workers, his lack of attention to how the MNR won and co-opted the support of peasants and workers left him unprepared for the dangers awaiting him in 1966–67.

When Guevara was in Bolivia in 1953 he correctly recognized the power of the armed workers and saw how the MNR maneuvered to disarm them. He viewed the peasants as passive recipients of the revolution's benefits, although other writers of the period showed them to be more active in making demands of the government. In 1966, when Guevara returned to Bolivia, dismissing peasants as clients of the government was probably realistic. In the military campaign against Guevara there was even a Barrientos Regiment made up of Cochabamba peasants organized specifically to fight the guerrillas. Still, he could hardly have found a less politically auspicious place to set up his camp than in rural Santa Cruz. Peasants there generally had sufficient land and no history of autonomous organization or connections with radical politics. Furthermore, the area was very thinly populated and isolated from national political events.[72] It was a good location for looking toward the Southern Cone that was Guevara's ultimate objective, but for winning recruits it proved hopeless.

When he went to Bolivia in 1966 Guevara almost seemed intentionally to ignore both the history of working-class and radical politics stretching back at least to the 1930s and the situation of the country under military rule. He maintained strained relations with the Bolivian Communist Party, a grouping far from the most important working-class organization in Bolivia. Arguably the Trotskyists had more influence among workers, and Bolivian working-class politics had always had a decidedly syndicalist tendency; political demands were often channeled through the unions. Although a few followers of the former mine worker Moises Guevara (who had broken from the pro-Chinese Partido Comunista-Marxista Leninista, or CP-ML) joined up with Guevara, many politically active miners remained ignorant of the Argentine's presence in the country.[73]

The MNR had been working since even before the revolution to bring the miners and other radical workers under control, either by the co-optation of their leaders or through direct repression. In 1966–67 the party used direct repression, leaving the union movement fighting for its life, while the official peasant organizations

stood firmly behind the government. Guevara was apparently so wedded to the *foco* theory, as opposed to other revolutionary strategies that relied on working-class and popular organization, that he thought it could succeed despite the extremely unfavorable conditions. In the case of Bolivia, unfortunately, underestimating the strength of the military government and ignoring the history of worker and peasant organization undid both him and his theory.

Postscript

Since Guevara's death his portrait has become ubiquitous in Bolivia as a memorial to the man and as a symbol of defying U.S. imperialism. It is almost as if the country is compensating for not knowing of his presence in 1967 by making him almost omnipresent now. Since his election in 2005 President Evo Morales and his MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) party have openly embraced Guevara for his commitment to social justice, even while the president has carefully distanced himself from Guevara's strategy. In an interview in 2007 Morales said, "Che Guevara continues to be a symbol of someone who gave his life for the peoples, when in Bolivia and in other countries around the world military dictatorships reigned. So that's why it's amazing to see that all over the world Che Guevara is still there, forty years later. But now, we're living in other times. But to value and recognize that thinking, that struggle . . . doesn't mean to mechanically follow the steps that he took in terms of military uprising."[74]

So in Bolivia Guevara is revered as the youthful *guerrillero heroico* who fought for social justice and as a symbol of Cuba, a small country, like Bolivia, that stood up to the United States. But there is more. That Guevara died in Bolivia has produced mixed emotions and commemorations. Many feel shame or frustration that to some foreigners their country is exclusively known as the place where Guevara died. For others Guevara, particularly because of the Christ-like photograph taken of his cadaver, has become a folk saint referred to as San Ernesto de La Higuera (the village where he was killed) or El Cristo de Vallegrande (a larger town near La Higuera). It is said that after his death people who viewed the body tried to cut off strands of hair as relics. A recent report claimed that each of the thirty-five houses in La Higuera had some kind of a shrine or altar dedicated to Guevara.[75]

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A Bolivian film from 2005, *Di buen día a papá* (*Say Good Morning to Papá*), focused on a family in Vallegrande in 1997 when Guevara's body was exhumed from a grave at the town's airport. With flashbacks to 1967 the film explores questions of guilt and the possible complicity of local people in the capture and assassination of Guevara. But the film also conceptualizes Guevara as a lost soul of Andean traditions who, having died before his time, wanders through the world acting as an intermediary between the living and the dead. The image of the wanderer seems particularly apt, and in death Guevara does serve as a connection for many people, in Bolivia and around the world, to an earlier generation of revolutionaries.

Notes

1 Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *Back on the Road: A Journey to Latin America*, trans. Patrick Camiller (New York: Grove, 2001).

2 Ibid., 17–18.

3 Ibid., 4–5.

4 Lilo Linke discusses the youth of the MNR ministerial staff and also the number of young, middle-class women employed in government offices. See her *Viaje por una revolución* (Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1956), 24–31.

5 According to Calica Ferrer's memoir, during their stay in the Bolivian capital the two travelers "alternated somewhat schizophrenically between La Paz society parties and the discovery of an emerging social reality." Carlos "Calica" Ferrer, *De Ernesto al Che: El segundo viaje de Guevara por Latinoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Marea Editorial, 2005), 101.

6 The most plausible explanation for President Daniel Salamanca leading Bolivia into conflict with Paraguay is that he hoped to rally nationalist support at a time at which he came increasingly under attack due to the world economic depression and his repression of opposition groups. See Herbert S. Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society*, 2nd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 181–85. Competing oil company interests in the Chaco region and Bolivia's desire for an outlet to the sea via river routes also have been proposed as reasons. See Bruce W. Farcau, *The Chaco War: Bolivia and Paraguay, 1832–1935* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996), 8–9, 138–39; and Roberto Querejazu Calvo, *Masamaclay: Historia política, diplomática, y militar de la Guerra del Chaco* (La Paz: Empresa Industrial Gráfica E. Burillo, 1965), 465–66.

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7 René Danilo Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales: El caso rural boliviano durante la campaña del Chaco* (La Paz: CERES, 1987).

8 In Bolivia the term *criollo* is generally used to refer to the white, or near-white, elite.

9 James Dunkerley, "The Origins of the Bolivian Revolution in the Twentieth Century: Some Reflections," *Proclaiming Revolution: Bolivia in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Merilee Grindle and Pilar Domingo (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2003), 144; Aurelio Melean, ed., *La sanidad boliviana en la campaña del Chaco (1933–1934)* (Cochabamba: Imprenta de la Universidad, 1938), 137–39; Ann Zulawski, *Unequal Cures: Public Health and Political Change in Bolivia, 1900–1950* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 61–64.

10 Farcau, *The Chaco War*, 74; Querejazu Calvo, *Masamaclay*, 108–9.

11 James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952–1982* (London: Verso, 1984), 6.

12 Ibid., 8–9.

13 Guillermo Lora, *Historia del movimiento obrero boliviano*, 5 vols. (Cochabamba: Los Amigos del Libro, 1967–80); June Nash, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in Bolivian Tin Mines* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

14 Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia, *Tésis de Pulacayo* (La Paz: Ediciones Masas, 1988). The text is also available at http://pulacayo.blogcindario.com/2006/05/00004-la-tesis-de-pulacayo.html. See also Steven Sandor John, "Permanent Revolution on the Altiplano: Bolivian Trotskyism, 1928–2005" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2006), 170–76. For a discussion of whether Bolivian Trotskyists thought there would be a separate bourgeois-democratic revolution, see John, "Permanent Revolution on the Altiplano," 173–74.

15 A *comunero* was a member of an indigenous community or *ayllu*.

16 Marie Danielle Demelas. "Darwinismo a la criolla: El darwinismo social en Bolivia, 1880–1910," *Historia Boliviana* 1:2 (1981), 55–82; Ramiro Condarco Morales, *Zarate, el "temible" willka: Historia de la rebelión indígena de 1899 en la república de Bolivia*, 2nd edn. (La Paz: Imprenta y Libreria Renovación, 1982); Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *"Oprimidos pero no vencidos": Luchas del campesinado aumara u qhechwa de Bolivia 1900–1980* [illegible] *indígena de 1899 en la república de Bolivia*, 2nd edn. (La Paz: Imprenta y Libreria Renovación, 1982); Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *"Oprimidos pero no vencidos": Luchas del campesinado aymara y qhechwa de Bolivia, 1900–1980* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1986).

17 Robert J. Alexander, *The Bolivian National Revolution* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 17.

18 Rivera Cusicanqui, *"Oprimidos pero no vencidos,"* 25–38.

19 *Colono* was the term used to refer to a person who lived on hacienda lands and in return for the right to farm a small piece of land had a rental or labor agreement with the hacendado. Many *colonos* were former *comuneros* who had lost their lands to large landowners in the privatization process, either because they could not prove they had proper titles or because they could not afford to buy the lands they worked.

20 Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*, 83–115; Carlos B. Mamani Condori, *Taraqu, 1866–1935: Masacre, guerra y "renovación" en la biografía de Eduardo L. Nina Qhispi* (La Paz: Ediciones Aruwiyiri, 1991), 134–39.

21 Laura Gotkowitz. "Revisiting the Rural Roots of Revolution," in Grindle and Domingo, *Proclaiming Revolution*, 164–82; and Laura Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880–1952* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), esp. chap. 7; Jorge Dandler and Juan Torrico A., "From the National Indigenous Congress to the Ayopaya Rebellion: Bolivia: 1945–1947," *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18th to 20th Centuries*, ed. Steve J. Stern (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 334–78.

22 Rivera Cusicanqui, *"Oprimidos pero no vencidos,"* 69.

23 Ken Lehman, "Braked But Not Broken: The United States and Revolutionaries in Mexico and Bolivia," in Grindle and Domingo, *Proclaiming Revolution*, 106.

24 James M. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), 149.

25 Ibid., 156–58.

26 Ibid., 175–78; Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*, 58.

27 Malloy, *Bolivia*, 179–82; Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*, 48–50.

28 Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*, 58; Malloy, *Bolivia*, 176–77.

29 Alan Knight, "The Domestic Dynamics of the Mexican and Bolivian Revolutions," in Grindle and Domingo, *Proclaiming Revolution*, 77.

30 Secretary of State to the Director of Foreign Operations Administration (Stassen), Washington, 2 September 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954*, vol. 4, *The American Republics*, ed. Warren Z. Slany (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 535.

31 Ambassador in Bolivia (Sparks) to the Department of State, La Paz, [illegible] *States," 1952–1954*, vol. 4, *The American Republics*, ed. Warren Z. Slany (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 535.

31 Ambassador in Bolivia (Sparks) to the Department of State, La Paz, 7 May 1953, ibid., 527–28.

32 The outline of the stabilization plan is available in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, vol. 7, *The American Republics: Central and South America*, ed. John P. Glennon (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 581–84.

33 Telegram from the Ambassador in Bolivia (Drew) to the Department of State, La Paz, 19 December 1956, ibid., 584.

34 Xavier Albó, "From MNRistas to Kataristas to Katari," in Stern, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18th to 20th Centuries*, 383.

35 Ibid., 385.
36 Knight, "The Domestic Dynamics of the Mexican and Bolivian Revolutions," 88.
37 Albó, "From MNRistas to Kataristas to Katari," 386.
38 Ernesto Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries: A Journey through Latin America* (New York: Grove, 1995), 77.
39 First published in 1909, Alcides Arguedas's *Pueblo enfermo* was an exegesis on the difficulties of creating a modern nation in a country in which the majority of the population was made up of Indians and mestizos. It was the origin of many often repeated stereotypes about different population groups in the country: the Indian was isolated and removed from national life, the mestizo or cholo only thought about his personal benefit, and the tiny white population was the only group concerned with the progress of the nation. The book was popular for many years and was revised several times. See *Pueblo enfermo*. 3rd edn. (La Paz: Librería Editorial "Juventud," 1991).
40 Linke, *Viaje por una revolución*, 9.
41 Ricardo Rojo, *My Friend Ché*, trans. Julian Casart (New York: Dial Press, 1968). 28. See also Ferrer's account of this episode, *De Ernesto al Che*, 110.
42 Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights*, 269–71.
43 Guevara, *Back on the Road*, 10.
44 The *autoridad indígena* was the leader of an indigenous community. Most likely, in this case, the community had lost its lands to a hacienda and was living on some of their former lands and working for the new landowner. However, they still retained their own leader and spokesman.
45 Linke, *Viaje por una revolución*, 216–22.
46 Ibid., 221.
47 Ibid., 209.
48 Guevara, *Back on the Road*, 7–8.
49 Linke, *Viaje por una revolución*, 145–46.
50 Ibid., 147.
48 Guevara, *Back on the Road*, 7–8.
49 Linke, *Viaje por una revolución*, 145–46.
50 Ibid., 147.
51 Ibid., 148.
52 Ibid., 345–46. Jaime Mendoza, a Bolivian physician and writer, describes similar health conditions in the mines in the first decades of the twentieth century. See his "Una indicación (en favor de los niños de la clase obrera)," *Revista del Insituto "Sucre,"* no. 38 (1920), 455–72; and Mendoza's famous novel of the mines: *En las tierras del Potosí* (1911; La Paz: Los Tiempos-Amigos del Libro, 1988).
53 Linke, *Viaje por una revolución*, 346–47.
54 Ibid., 348.

55 Ibid., 352–54.
56 Ibid., 356.
57 Ibid., 358.
58 Rojo, *My Friend Ché*, 32–33. It is worth noting that this account of events is denied by Ferrer, who claims that Rojo did not accompany them in this trip but met up with them later in Peru. See Ferrer, *De Ernesto al Che*, 113.
59 Panagra was the predecessor to Pan American Airlines.
60 Rojo, *My Friend Ché*, 33.
61 Alicia Ortiz, *Amanecer en Bolivia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Hemisferio, 1953), 197.
62 Ibid., 94.
63 Ibid., 17.
64 Ibid., 25.
65 Ibid., 98–99.
66 Ibid., 103.
67 Ibid., 59.
68 Ibid., 68–69.
69 Ibid., 112.
70 Ibid., 107.
71 The *foco* theory argued that revolution could be sparked by the exemplary military actions of a guerrilla unit. That revolution would spread out from bases, or *focos*, as workers and peasants became aware that through armed struggle change was possible. It rejected the need for long-term organizing among workers or in various types of popular movements and questioned the necessity of a traditional vanguard party. One of the best-known leftist intellectuals supporting this strategy was Guevara's sometime comrade in Bolivia, Régis Debray. See his *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*, trans. Bobbye Ortiz (New York: MR Press, 1967).
72 Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*, 140.
73 Ibid., 142.
Bobbye Ortiz (New York: MR Press, 1967).
72 Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*, 140.
73 Ibid., 142.
74 Interview with Amy Goodman and Juan González on Democracy Now!, 26 September 2007, www.democracynow.org; my translation from online text.
75 Paul Dosal, "San Ernesto de La Higuera: The Resurrection of Che Guevara," in *Death, Dismemberment, and Memory: Body Politics in Latin America*, ed. Lymand L. Johnson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004) 217–41.

Cindy Forster

"Not in All of America Can There Be Found a Country as Democratic as This One"

Che and Revolution in Guatemala

Guatemala lay at the center of Che's thinking about revolution in Latin America. Ernesto Guevara was a young traveller recently graduated from medical school when his fascination with social justice drew him to Guatemala and held him there during the final year of that country's national revolution. Called the October Revolution, it followed a series of long dictatorships. The tyrant associated with the 1930s, Jorge Ubico, was driven out by a popular upheaval in 1944. Workers and peasants organized feverishly across the course of the next decade. They won a progressive labor code, social security, and broad popular representation in the electoral arena. In 1952, campesino pressure finally gave birth to the land reform signed into law by President Jacobo Arbenz. Guevara arrived in December 1953 and moved into the circles of the urban Left. The communist party (called the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo, or PGT) had been muzzled by President Juan José Arévalo who held office from 1945 to 1951. Under Arbenz, however, it entered an era of euphoria, winning new supporters, helping shape laws, and wielding influence in the highest halls of power. It was always one among a multitude of competing parties. Even so, it was viewed as a Cold War threat in the United States. President Eisenhower approved the plan for an invasion force. The era ended disastrously as Ernesto among others tried to defend the revolution from the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) coup. They were out-maneuvered. Widespread assassinations ensured the success of the CIA candidate at the head of a sort of Guatemalan Falange (the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, or MLN) that held the reins of state for a while. The overthrow of Arbenz unleashed nearly half a century of bitter struggles. Soon the Right fractured into an array of former colleagues, occasionally murdering each other, and developed in Byzantine relations with the generals. Across the 1960s, they escalated their terror against anyone who organized for the rights of the poor. As Che moved from Mexico City to Cuba's Sierra Maestra, many of his acquaintances in Guatemala moved into clandestine resistance. Many also drew the same moral about armed struggle, based on Guatemala's failure to mount a sustained defence when its revolution came under attack by imperial force in 1954.

In the early 1960s, various guerrilla groups were emerging in Guatemala. This first wave of insurgency began with junior officers protesting their superiors' decision to join the U.S. assault on Cuba at Playa Girón. Among the dissident army officers was Luís Turcios Lima, who received a hero's welcome in revolutionary Cuba. The charismatic Turcios Lima was soon assassinated. His co-conspirators suffered the same fate as that of Che in Bolivia, for reasons that pose interesting parallels. Two years of guerrilla warfare in eastern Guatemala against the U.S. Green Berets and the national military ended in a slaughter of several hundred rebels and many thousands of civilians.

Across half a century the popular movement has held fast to the memory of Che. After his death in Bolivia, three Guatemalan guerrilla armies built their strategies in response to the failed rebellions of the 1960s. They each claimed Che as their own. One of them, called the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP or Guerrilla Army of the Poor) took Alberto Korda's silhouette of Che as its emblem, and Che's theories as a foundation. They built links to a vast network of indigenous organizing in a country where the Ladino or non-Maya elite regularly employed terror to defend their dominance.[1] The EGP applied Guevara's thought in the most systematic and intriguing manner, while the other wings of the rebel forces took a more schematic approach to the *guevarista* legacy. This essay focuses on Ernesto Guevara's sojourn in Guatemala. It then turns briefly to a less well-known and possibly more critical history, the sojourn of Guatemalans with the thinking of Che ever since the time he left their soil.