

It Is Time to Settle Accounts: The Communists, Che and the Road of the Bolivian Revolution

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It is time to settle the historical accounts of the Bolivian Communists with Comandante Ernesto “Che” Guevara, to make a correct demarcation regarding the capitulationist and treacherous positions of the revisionist leaderships (Khrushchevite and Maoist), also making known the position of the Revolutionary Communist Party (PCR) regarding the road of the Bolivian Revolution.

Let us start by establishing the socio-historical situation in the country at the time the Comandante arrived, in 1966, 14 years of the National Revolution¹ had taken place and President Barrientos had taken power through a coup d'état, deepening the sell-out and pro-imperialist positions of the MNR [Revolutionary Nationalist Movement] of Paz Estensoro. The reactionary officers who were removed from the Armed Forces in 1952 were already restored, and the peasant movement was largely subject to the Military-Peasant Pact.

The consequences of the Sino-Soviet split in the International Communist Movement had already taken its toll in Bolivia, with the holding of the first Extraordinary Congress in 1965 (less than a week after the arrival of Che, the anti-revisionist leader Federico Escobar² had already died, with Oscar “Motete” Zamora³ assuming the leadership of the PCML [Marxist- Leninist Communist Party]).

The discussion among communist organizations and leaders about the road to the Bolivian revolution at that time could be summarised into three general trends.

1. The line of peaceful parliamentary transition put forward by Khrushchevite revisionism (PCB – Monje), which underhandedly called for the armed struggle, but actually never carried it out.
2. The line of Protracted People’s War mechanically transplanted from Maoist revisionism (PCML – Zamora), which proved not only to be invisible and failed, but those who advocated it never carried it out!
3. The Guevarist line of the guerrilla foco⁴ (which the ELN [National Liberation Army] would take up), the only line that was carried out in fact, with so much courage and heroism; however that was not a correct road, due to the lack of links with the masses. If it were an honest discussion among communists, the way to resolve this dispute would have been a profound debate of analysis of the national reality, the history of the revolutionary struggles in the country, the objective and subjective conditions; however the revisionist leaderships (Khrushchevite and Maoist) had no interest in entering into this political discussion. Both cliques sought the way to monopolise the public role and legitimise the briefcases with money from Moscow and Beijing respectively.

In the case of the Khrushchevites, the revisionist troika (Monje, Kolle and Domich) who usurped the leadership of the PCB beyond the attempts of historical justification (who did not know the extent of Che's plans, that tactical differences existed, etc.), there was a despicable betrayal of the revolutionary cause. In the report presented to the C.C., Monje argued that "the Party did not know of the arrival in the country of comrade Guevara, it never invited him and, therefore, it was not responsible for his presence... the Party did not inspire, did not plan, nor did it unleash the struggle, nor did it make any commitment with comrade Guevara" (copy of Monje's report, typewritten, 1967). Despite having held meetings in Havana and contacts through liaisons, the revisionist leadership denied all political responsibility for the heroic deed for liberation, expelling from its ranks the courageous militants who made the decision to join the guerrilla ranks. Monje offered himself as a combatant under Che by resigning as First Secretary, but then recanted and raised three conditions (a national meeting of the left, a Latin American meeting of pro-Soviet parties, the subjection of the military command to the Bolivian political leadership within Bolivia). In these meetings with Che, revisionist leaders such as Kolle, Otero and Ramirez also took part. Monje concluded by stating that "one cannot say: 'they should not have tried to make the revolution'. But, on the other hand, it should be stated: 'we should have tried to make the revolution in a new way'." (December 9, 1967, taken from the magazine Rojo y Negro [Red and Black], Montevideo Year 1, No. 1). It is clear that the new way to which he referred was a peaceful and parliamentary transition, following Moscow revisionism, renouncing the historical necessity of revolutionary violence for the transformation of society. Comandante Che Guevara was completely correct when he said about Monje in his Diary of December 31, 1966, that: "he was vacillating and adaptationist and preserved the historical name of those who should be condemned for their opportunist position. Time will prove me right. "

The action of Bolivian Maoism, like that of the PCB, had been to expel from its ranks the consistent militants who enrolled in the ranks of the ELN, since in his Necessary Response addressed to Fidel Castro, Zamora as First Secretary of the PCML labelled as revisionism the whole armed experience in Bolivia, adhering to 'Mao Tse Tung Thought' and alleging that the tactical difference exonerated his organization from the responsibility for what happened. On the verge of extinction, from their comfortable government desks, both revisionist offspring still upheld the decisions of their leaderships in 1966-67; on the one hand, Khrushchevism raised Monje as a hero (he died as a businessman in Russia) and the supposed correctness of his position according to which the 'process of change' would have fulfilled its historical expectations. On the other hand the pro-Peking forces had the audacity to consider Monje and Che as two sides of the same coin, while uncritically enjoying the benefits of state management.

Despite the shameful positions of the revisionist leaders, the Bolivian workers' movement showed its level of revolutionary combativeness: the Mining Assembly that was to be carried out in the Siglo XX mine and motivated the San Juan Massacre³ to stop its development. The miners wanted to morally and materially support Che's heroic deed for liberation, which would have substantially changed the fate of the guerrillas, with the organic incorporation of the vanguard of the working class in the combat. Our Party (PCR) pays tribute to all those consistent and honest militants, whether from the PCB, PCML or other political force, who joined the ranks of the National Liberation Army, under the leadership of Comandante Che Guevara, fighting Yankee imperialism and its puppet government for the true national and social liberation of Bolivia.

We consider it necessary to specify concepts from Marxism-Leninism that differentiates the foco road from the programmatic approaches of the PCR. We start from the teachings of Lenin that: “a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, it is not every revolutionary situation that leads to revolution” (*The Collapse of the Second International*, 1915), that is, the role of the revolutionary is to prepare to the working people for the revolution under objective and subjective conditions. Enver Hoxha reminds us that: “Marxism-Leninism teaches us that only by taking measured and sure steps, and only by firmly supporting the principles of Marxist-Leninist theory and making the masses conscious, is it possible to achieve success in the preparation and unleashing of the armed insurrection, and never falling into adventurism” (Interview with PCMLE [Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Ecuador], 1968). The revolution will always be the work of the organised masses, tempered in combat and guided by the revolutionary programme.

The Party Programme studies the history of the Bolivian peoples, the experiences of the struggle of the Federal War⁶, the National Revolution of 1952, the confrontations of the people with military coups and anti-neoliberal resistance, and considers as the road to the Bolivian revolution – the popular armed insurrection. In order to guarantee victory, the united action of the peoples is necessary, to incorporate the vast majorities in the revolutionary insurrectional struggle in order to overthrow the class enemy and seize power, winning people’s democracy and building socialism.

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Translated from the Spanish and annotated by George Gruenthal.

Endnotes:

1 The National Revolution of 1952 was begun by the MNR and supported by armed miners. It carried out certain reforms, such as the nationalisation of the major tin companies and an agrarian reform.

2 Federico Escobar was a leader of the miners of the Siglo XX mine and founder of the PCML. He was assassinated on November 8, 1966.

3 Zamora led a brief armed struggle in Bolivia in the 1970s, but later took up various positions in the Bolivian government. In 1993 he was the vice-presidential running-mate of former military dictator Hugo Banzer.

4 The foco theory basically held that a small group of people could make the revolution, even without mass support.

5 A massacre of mining families from the area of the Siglo XX mine on June 24, 1967.

6 The Federal War, 1899-1905, began as an alliance between the Liberals and the indigenous people, which was supposed to lead to the indigenous people regaining their communal lands. The alliance broke up when the Liberals themselves decided to expropriate these lands.