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Ernesto (Che) Guevara has become an international icon of the left. Pictures of the martyred revolutionary are widely seen on tee-shirts and posters, not to mention coffee cups. Movies have been of his life. He appears even in musicals and movies about unrelated people (for example, "Evita"). He is admired by people who know little or nothing about him, including liberals who would never advocate a revolution in their own country. He is also admired by people who would like a revolution, one which would reorganize the U.S. to have the same system as Castroite Cuba. There are those who condemn Che (and Castro's Cuba) in the name of democracy and freedom, but they are mostly supporters of U.S. imperialism and Western capitalism, with little appeal to radicals.

Aside from a few books by anarchists (see Dolgoff 1976; Fernandez 2001), it is rare, and immensely valuable, to read a discussion of Che and Cuba from a viewpoint that is anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist but also against authoritarian "socialism". (Farber 2011) Samuel Farber is a Cuban-born writer and activist who lives in the US. He has described his politics as "revolutionary democratic socialist." (Farber 1976; xii) "My political roots are in the classical Marxist tradition that preceded Stalinism.…To be a fully participatory democracy, socialism must be based on the self-mobilization and organization of the people, and the rule of the majority has to be be complemented by minority rights and civil liberties." (xvii—if I do not give the year, then I am citing Farber 2016.) Although rooted in the Leninist and Trotskyist tradition, he has written insightfully on the deficiencies in Lenin's outlook which contributed to the rise of Stalinist totalitarianism, in a way in which anarchists would find much to agree. (Farber 1990) His radically democratic values do not prevent him from writing dispassionately and objectively, even about individuals and social forces he is opposed to.

Che was born in 1928, into a progressive bohemian middle class family in Argentina. Before and after becoming a physi-

cian, Che traveled around Latin America, becoming aware of the poverty and suffering of the people and the domination of U.S. imperialism. He was living in Guatemala in 1954, when soldiers backed by the CIA overthrew the democratically elected liberal nationalist Jacobo Arbenz , killing his supporters. He participated in the Cuban revolution (1956—1959), as one of the top supporters of Fidel Castro, and served at the highest levels of the Cuban government for six years (1959—1965). In 1965, he attempted to participate in revolutionary struggles in the eastern Congo, an effort he described as a "failure." Then he tried to build a revolutionary movement in Bolivia, in 1966, another failure. He was captured and then murdered by the Bolivian military.

The Choice of "Communism"

When Che became a revolutionary in the 1950s, he became a Marxist, of the sort which admired the Soviet Union as a model of "socialism," including its one-party dictatorship and nationalized, centralized, economy. In 1957 he wrote, "I belong to those who believe that the solution to the world's problems are behind the so-called iron Curtain…." (27) He admired the tyrant Joseph Stalin. Visiting the Soviet Union in 1960, he wanted to put flowers on Stalin's grave. The Cuban ambassador advised against it (it was four years since Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin's atrocities). But Che did it anyway.

Given the pressures of the Cold War, it was not surprising that many radicals turned against the evil they knew (Western imperialism) toward the obvious alternative of the Soviet Union and its "Communist" Parties. (See Price 2016) "Democracy" they knew only as the corrupt and brutal politicking of pro-U.S. oligarchies. Yet this was still a choice, not an inevitability.

making—and therefore of decentralization—that is contrary to Guevara's approach." (98—99)

Anarchists can agree on this much, and more. Farber concludes that anticapitalist radicals "who may have been inspired by the intransigent revolutionary spirit represented by Guevara's iconic image may attain their goals…only through a process that brings together the politics of socialism, democracy, and revolution." (119—120)

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and people and who relates to people as to things. …Man loses his individuality and initiative;…the bureaucratic system eventually tends to produce machines that act like men and men who act like machines." (Fromm 1960; xi—xii; also see Lipow 1982)

But Che admired this vision, it was "what we are proposing."

As Farber shows, Che hated poverty, U.S. imperialism (the Soviet Union's imperialism was more-or-less acceptable), capitalism (at least traditional capitalism), and other evils of this oppressive, bloody, system. That is what he was against. But what he was for was an authoritarian—if not totalitarian—vision of "socialism."

Opposing Castroite authoritarianism, Farber is in solidarity with the Cuban people against U.S. imperialism. That is, he supports their right to national self-determination. It is for the Cuban workers and oppressed to decide the fate of the ruling bureaucracy, not the U.S. imperialists. Supporting self-determination does not at all mean political support for the Communist Party government. It means solidarity with the Cuban people (mostly workers and peasants) against the U.S. The U.S. continues (even now) to embargo Cuban travel and trade; it tries—one way or another—to dominate the Cuban state and economy; and it still holds Guantanamo as a U.S. military base and prison on Cuban soil. As can be seen, this opinion does not lessen Farber's revolutionary opposition to the Cuban state oligarchy.

This is a brilliant and insightful book. Despite its small size, I have not been able to cover all the topics it raises. Samuel Farber is on the side of the working class and the oppressed. He is not an anarchist. Unfortunately he believes that there can be a revolutionary democratic state of some sort. Yet he wants a society where "workers have the power to decide; that is self-management at the workplace and decision-making in society at large by the whole working class and population.…But workers' control at the workplace entails a degree of local decision-

Other revolutionaries made different choices. For example, one of the Cuban guerrillas, "Daniel" (who was killed in the mountains) opposed both the policies of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. He was described as a "radical workerist nationalist." (27) Inside the loosely organized July 26th Movement, there was a trend which opposed the policies of the U.S. and the USSR. It was anti-imperialist but in opposition to the old Cuban Communist Party. They sought to create a revolutionary organization which was democratically controlled, excluding the old Communists. This tendency was sometimes called "humanist." After Batista fled, these revolutionary humanists won the leadership of most of the Cuban unions, throwing out the corrupt allies of Batista and beating the Communists in elections. The Castro government maneuvered to get rid of these democratic radicals, using both Castro's prestige among the workers (which was very high at that point) as well as state power. The humanist anti-imperialists were effectively purged, union democracy undermined, and the old (and unpopular) Communists put into union offices. (56—58) Eventually the Castroites merged with the old Communists, as Che had been advocating.

Besides this, Cuba has a long history of revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist unions and activists. "Anarchist influence was strong in working class circles in Cuba in the first twenty-five or thirty years of this century." (Farber 1976; 65; see also Fernandez 2001; Shaffer 2010)

Fidel, Che, and Raul Castro insisted on a strategy which made the guerrilla struggle the center of the revolutionary struggle, and the guerrilla leader the overall boss. The organization in the cities, in the unions, the work places, and the schools, was subordinated to the guerrilla leadership, and was limited to being basically a support structure. Farber asks, "Was guerrilla warfare as a military strategy inherently incompatible with an orientation to the working class?…A guerrilla strategy is compatible with many different political ideologies and class commitments.…A large and well-organized labor

or multi-class urban movement in a prerevolutionary period might have its own fighting units and military commands both in urban and rural areas." (49) This is consistent with the experience of anarchist-led guerrilla armies, such as Makhno in the Ukraine during the Russian revolution.

The point is that Che and the other Cuban leaders did not turn to the authoritarian state "Communism" because they had to—although there were great pressures on them—but as a deliberate political choice.

Che's Authoritarian Views

In the Sierra mountains, Che insisted that the guerrilla army be organized in a top-down, undemocratic, fashion—even in matters such as managing the base camps. "Revolutionary democracy has never been applied to the running of armies…." (quoted on 36) In industry under "socialism", Che did not feel that union officials should defend their workers from management. "[It is] necessary to change the way of thinking of labor union leaders. Their function is not to shout louder than the boss or to impose absurd measures within the production system such as getting wages for people that do not work." (quoted on 67) Rene' Dumont, the French radical agronomist, tried to persuade Che to support workers' democracy in agricultural cooperatives, to promote their sense of "ownership." He responded, "It is not a sense of ownership that they [the workers] should be given, but rather a sense of responsibility." (quoted on 68) Farber summarizes, "He never considered the possibility of developing democratic mechanisms to integrate local workplaces with higher national levels of decision-making." (101)

Che believed in equality but not in individuality (although he himself was quite a distinctive individual). In 1960 he stated, "One has to constantly think on behalf of masses and not of

In 1988, Fidel Castro told a group of Mexican businesspeople, whom he wanted to invest in Cuba, "We are capitalists, but state capitalists. We are not private capitalists." (quoted in Daum 1990; 232)

In any case, Farber concludes that, "under Raul Castro's leadership, the Cuban government has been striving…toward…a form of state capitalism calling for the development of Cuban and especially foreign private enterprise while the state, under the exclusive control of the Communist Party, retains the commanding heights of the economy, a far cry from Guevara's model of state control of the whole economy." (xv—xvi)

Looking Backward

Che liked science fiction and he had read the U.S. utopian novel, Looking Backward. (Bellamy 1960) This was written by Edward Bellamy in the late 19th century. It presented an imaginary future socialist society, organized cooperatively and producing for use, not profit. The collectivized economy is merged with the state. The workers are organized into labor armies, modeled on the military, and, to an extent, on the biggest corporations. Democracy is almost nonexistent; the worker-soldiers do not vote. Society is run by a benevolent bureaucracy. According to a friend of Che's, he very much admired this book, declaring that "it coincided with what we are proposing." (quoted on 110)

In his "Foreward" to the 1960 edition of Looking Backward, Erich Fromm notes that the main criticism it has received is about its "hierarchical bureaucratic principle of administration….Bellamy's state is a highly centralized one, in which the state not only owns the means of production, but also regulates all public activities….Bellamy did not see the dangers of a managerial society….He did not recognize that the bureaucrat is a man [or woman—WP] who administers things

commodities, and sold the commodities (for money) to the workers. That is, there was a capital/labor exchange in the process of production as well as on the market. As under traditional capitalism, the goal of the system would be ever greater accumulation of wealth. And even if Cuba was regarded as one enterprise (Cuba Inc.), it still was enormously dependent on the world market, buying and selling commodities.

"Guevara also recognized that the law of value had to operate [in Cuba], if only partially, because of Cuba's highly developed foreign trade sector.…[Also] Che cited the type of exchange that took place between the state as a supplier and the individual consumer." (108)

Farber does not agree with me that either Cuba or the Soviet Union, in the 60s, was state capitalist. Instead of capitalism, he feels that they "represented instead another form of class society, albeit one not organized on the basis of private capitalist property." (95) "Such bureaucratic societies are characterized by the production of use values.…The state apparatus appropriates this surplus through the mechanisms of planning and control—by determining what, how much, and where goods are produced." (119) I think he overestimates how much real control the bureaucratic ruling class had over the production process as an overall system; to repeat, national plans were never fulfilled. "The surplus…goes first to fund accumulation and investment, defense, and other forms of spending as decided by the bureaucracy, and as the capitalists and the capitalist market do under capitalism." (119) I agree that the bureaucratic class played a similar function as the traditional capitalists and the market. However, this analysis underplays the element of competition, inside the system and between the national system and other states and corporations. And it does not really analyze the relation between the accumulating state and the exploited working class, which (I believe) is in essence the same as traditional capitalism.

individuals.…The needs of the individual becomes completely weakened in the face of the needs of the human conglomeration." In 1964, he declared that the individual "becomes happy to feel himself a cog in the wheel, a cog that has its own characteristics and is necessary, though not indispensable, to the production process…that consciously tries to push itself harder and harder to carry [on]…the construction of socialism.…" (quoted on 18) This is quite different from Marx and Engels' goal, in the Communist Manifesto, of "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." (1955; 32)

Che's views meshed with those of Fidel Castro. Castro did not begin as a Marxist-Leninist ideologue, unlike Che (and Raul). It is Farber's opinion that Fidel might have taken another road than "Communism" as such. But from the earliest days he had a personally authoritarian approach, which was congruent with Che's Stalinist Marxism. In short, Fidel believed that he should be boss. As early as 1954, Fidel wrote to a close friend,

"Conditions which are indispensable for the integration of a truly civic movement [are] ideology, discipline, and chieftainship.…Chieftainship is basic.…A movement cannot be organized where everyone believes he has the right to issue public statements without consulting anyone else.…" (quoted in Farber 1976; 197) There is no big jump from that to Fidel's 1965 statement, "Educating and orienting the revolutionary masses is an unrenounceable prerogative of our party, and we will be very jealous defenders of that right." (in same; xiii)

This is a direct rejection of the goal of the democratic self-organization of the working class and its allies. Anarchists want to establish the most radical, participatory, democracy of all, replacing the bureaucratic-military state with the self-organization of the working class and all oppressed people—through federations and networks of workplace and neighborhood councils, assemblies, and democratic militias.

What Was Cuban "Socialism"?

The economic system first established in the Soviet Union had collectivized, state-owned, industry, without stocks or other share-holding, run by an oligarchy of managers. In Cuba, as in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, and elsewhere, the system vacillated between two poles. One pole—perhaps the ideal vision of what its supporters wanted "socialism" to look like—was of a totally coordinated economy, run from one center by bureaucrats, carrying out a conscious, integrated, plan. It would look something like a single capitalist corporation or even a single factory. The overall goal was to accumulate and grow as a total system. In the 60s, Che wrote, "…Centralized planning is the way of life of a socialist society." (quoted in 107)

The other pole was of a lot of distinct (but state-owned) enterprises, competing with each other on the market, buying and selling with each other, each trying to make its own profit—under the overall supervision and regulation of the central planners.

Both approaches had inherent weaknesses. The first one worked to squeeze a surplus out of workers through brute force, as in the early days of Stalin's Russia. But it lacked incentives to keep the workers producing when more sophisticated methods were needed. And the central planners lacked accurate feedback from the lower levels—since they had ruled out workers' democratic participation. The central plans were never fulfilled. The Stalinist planners kept on turning toward the other pole to improve production.

But the more decentralized, pluralistic, method still lacked workers' participation (so it could not benefit from the workers' creativity, nor get accurate information from below upwards). The overall system became chaotic and deeply conflictual, at every level. The plans were still not fulfilled. The ultimate logic

of the system was the eventual restoration of traditional, stock-holding, capitalism.

In Cuba in 1963—65, this was argued out in terms of a "centralized budgetary system of finance", which Che had carried out in his Ministry of Industry, versus "enterprise self-finance," which was supported in Cuba by Soviet advisors. (I say it was "argued out," but the debate was limited to a small layer of officials.)

This was tied up with a debate over "moral" versus "material" incentives for the workers. Che was for "moral" incentives, which fit his ascetic personal values (he often went for weeks without changing shirts or taking baths). Since the workers had no control over production, locally or nationally, then "moral" incentives meant that they were encouraged to work harder without an increase in pay.

Che condemned the Soviet Union for its use of "enterprise self-finance," regarding it as recreating commodity production and the "law of value." (Which means that an economy is dominated by the exchange of commodities on the market, commodities being bought and sold for money, including the ability of the workers to work [the commodity of labor power]—and that the price of these commodities is ultimately determined by the socially necessary amount of labor which goes into them; without a conscious plan, the economy is determined by the exchange of labor-created commodities produced separately.)

In my opinion, the Soviet Union (and Cuba) was not moving toward capitalism (and the law of value) but was already capitalist—state capitalist. (For state capitalist theory, see Daum 1990; Hobson & Tabor 1988) In a distorted form, it already was dominated by the laws of capitalism. Even the totalitarian, completely merged, model which Che wanted would still be capitalist. The state would still have bought the workers' labor power as commodities (for money), worked them as hard as possible, made them produce more value than they are paid, made them produce consumer goods as