

The Diary of Che Guevara

Book review

Hank Malone

1968

a review of

The Diary of Che Guevara, edited by Robert Scheer, Bantam Books, Inc., NYC, \$1.25 paperback.

The recently-captured Bolivian diary of Dr. Ernesto “Che” Guevara has now been published on the heels of his death. Since his canonization is nearly in full swing, it will probably be a long time before an objective unhandwringing account of the broad “meaning” of the diary will be apprehended. So before I wax into his charisma myself, I should like to make a few remarks I consider important about the diary.

Because I had been led to believe that “Che’s” secret activities as a revolutionary in South America were close to miraculous, I found the diary (if it is truly authentic) boring and disappointing. Despite the forwarding remarks, made for this edition by none other than Fidel himself (which claim that the diary provides “rigorously exact, priceless, and detailed information concerning the heroic final months of his life in Bolivia”), I found most of the entries in the diary indicative of embarrassing blunder and failure.

Despite the incredible courage and idealism of the guerrillas, carefully documented in this diary, I wonder if the world has not inherited another “Scott’s diary” (an account of courageous failure, reminiscent of Robert Falcon Scott’s legendary and ill-fated Antarctic expedition), rather than a systematic and at least semi-technical account of a revolutionary guerrilla operation by its leader.

For me, it seems genuinely tragic how very much could have been explored in this diary, and how very much was left out or ignored. In fact, it is easy to conclude that the entire mission was doomed from the beginning, lacking (as it surely did) a rigorous application of first principles and wisdom. If we, for instance, refer back to “Che’s” classic text, *Guerrilla Warfare*, we can almost predict (via his violation of so many of his own principles) an unfavorable outcome in Bolivia.

Perhaps the most appalling violation is his effort to take root in a locale where he utterly lacked the support of the peasant population. An error like this, compounded with an inability to speak the native dialect, spells sure death for the guerrilla!

Though “Che” has no doubt become a symbol (and a Saint) of revolutionary emancipation for radicals throughout the world, his Bolivian diary, I think, can be of little specific help to those revolutionaries who survive him except as another exemplary document of courage in the face of overwhelming odds.

The Bolivian diary is a tragic document, mirroring costly and mysterious violations of fundamental guerrilla principle. To the extent that others may learn (and learn well!) from the many mistakes of the Cuban guerrillas in Bolivia, and from their unflinching courage, the diary will remain part of that heroic literature of revolution in the Third World.

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