

# document

Che Guevara

## Vietnam must not stand alone

*Now is the time of the furnaces, and only  
light should be seen.*

JOSÉ MARTÍ

Twenty one years have already passed since the end of the last world conflagration; numerous publications, in every possible language, celebrate this event, symbolized by the defeat of Japan. There is a climate of apparent optimism in many areas of the different camps into which the world is divided. Twenty one years without a world war, in these times of maximum confrontations, of violent clashes and sudden changes, appears to be a very high figure. However, without analysing the practical results of this peace (poverty, degradation, increasingly large exploitation of enormous sectors of humanity) for which all of us have stated that we are willing to fight, we would do well to inquire if this peace is real.

It is not the purpose of these notes to detail the different conflicts of a local character that have been occurring since the surrender of Japan, neither do we intend to recount the numerous and increasing instances of civilian strife which have taken place during these years of apparent peace. It will be enough just to name, as an example against undue optimism, the wars of Korea and Vietnam.

In the first one, after years of savage warfare, the Northern part of the country was submerged in the most terrible devastation known in the annals of modern warfare: riddled with bombs; without factories, schools or hospitals; with absolutely no shelter for ten million inhabitants.

Under the discredited flag of the United Nations, dozens of countries under the military leadership of the United States participated in this war with the massive intervention of US soldiers and the use, as cannon fodder, of the South Korean population that was enrolled. On the other side, the army and the people of Korea and the volunteers from the Peoples' Republic of China were furnished with supplies and advice by the Soviet military apparatus. The US tested all sorts of weapons of destruction, excluding the thermonuclear type, but including, on a limited scale, bacteriological and chemical warfare.

In Vietnam, the patriotic forces of that country have carried on an almost uninterrupted war against three imperialist powers: Japan, whose might suffered an almost total collapse after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; France, who recovered from that defeated country its Indo-China colonies and ignored the promises it had made in harder times; and the United States, in this last phase of the struggle.

There were limited confrontations in every continent although in our America, for a long time, there were only incipient liberation struggles and military *coups d'état* until the Cuban revolution sounded the alert, signalling the importance of this region. This action attracted the wrath of the imperialists and Cuba was finally obliged to defend its coasts, first in Playa Girón, and again during the Missile Crisis.

This last incident could have unleashed a war of incalculable proportions if a US—Soviet clash had occurred over the Cuban question.

### The focal point

But, evidently, the focal point of all contradictions is at present the territory of the peninsula of Indo-China and the adjacent areas. Laos and Vietnam are torn by a civil war which has ceased being such by the entry into the conflict of US imperialism with all its might, thus transforming the whole zone into a dangerous detonator ready at any moment to explode.

In Vietnam the confrontation has assumed extremely acute characteristics. It is not our intention, either, to chronicle this war. We shall simply recall and point out some milestones.

In 1954, after the annihilating defeat of Dien-Bien-Phu, an agreement was signed at Geneva dividing the country into two separate zones; elections were to be held within a term of 18 months to determine who should govern Vietnam and how the country should be reunified. The US did not sign this document and started manoeuvring to substitute the emperor, Bao-Dai, who was a French puppet, for a man more amenable to its purposes. This happened to be Ngo-Din-Diem, whose tragic end—that of an orange squeezed dry by imperialism—is well known by all.

During the months following the agreement, optimism reigned supreme in the camp of the popular forces. The last pockets of the anti-French resistance were dismantled in the South of the country—and they awaited the fulfilment of the Geneva agreements. But the patriots soon realized there would be no election—unless the United States felt itself capable of imposing its will in the polls, which was practically impossible even resorting to all its fraudulent methods. Once again fighting broke out in the South and gradually grew to dreadful intensity. At present the US army has increased to over half a million invaders while the puppet forces decrease in number and, above all, have totally lost their combativeness.

Almost two years ago the United States started systematically bombing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, in yet another attempt to overcome the belligerence of the South and impose, from a position of strength, a meeting at the conference table. At first, the bombardments were more or less isolated occurrences, allegedly reprisals for alleged provocations from the North. Later on, as they increased in intensity and regularity, they became one gigantic attack carried out by the air force of the United States, day after day, for the purpose of destroying all vestiges of civilization in the Northern zone of the country. This is an episode of the infamous and notorious 'escalation'.

The material aspirations of the Yankee world have been fulfilled to a great extent, regardless of the unflinching defence of the Vietnamese anti-aircraft artillery, of the numerous planes shot down (over 1,700) and of the socialist countries aid in war supplies.

### **Vietnam**

There is a sad reality: Vietnam—a nation representing the aspirations, the hopes of a whole world of forgotten peoples—is tragically alone. This nation must endure the furious attacks of US technology, with practically no possibility of reprisals in the South and only some of defence in the North—but always alone.

The solidarity of all progressive forces of the world towards the people of Vietnam today is similar to the bitter irony of the plebeians coaxing on the gladiators in the Roman arena. It is not a matter of wishing success to the victim of aggression, but of sharing his fate; one must accompany him to his death or to victory.

When we analyse the lonely situation of the Vietnamese people, we are overcome by anguish at this illogical moment of humanity.

US imperialism is guilty of aggression—its crimes are enormous and cover the whole world. We already know all that, gentlemen! But this guilt also applies to those who, when the time came for a definition, hesitated to make Vietnam an inviolable part of the socialist world; running, of course, the risks of a war on a global scale—but also forcing a decision upon imperialism. The guilt also applies to those who maintain a war of sneers and abuse—started quite some time ago by the representatives of the two greatest powers of the socialist camp.

We must ask ourselves, seeking an honest answer: Is Vietnam isolated, or is it not? Is it not maintaining a dangerous equilibrium between the two quarrelling powers?

And what great people these are! What stoicism and courage! And what a lesson for the world is contained in this struggle! Not for a long time shall we be able to know if President Johnson ever seriously thought of bringing about some of the reforms needed by his people—to iron out the barbed class contradictions that grow each day with explosive power. The truth is that the improvements announced under the pompous title of the 'Great Society' have dropped into the cesspool of Vietnam.

The largest of all imperialist powers feels in its own land the bleeding inflicted by a poor and under-developed country; its fabulous economy feels the strain of the war effort. Murder is ceasing to be the most convenient business for its monopolies. Defensive weapons, and never in adequate number, is all these extraordinary soldiers have—besides love for their homeland, their society, and unsurpassed courage. But imperialism is bogging down in Vietnam, is unable to find a way out and desperately seeks one that will overcome with dignity the dangerous situation in which it now finds itself. Furthermore, the Four Points put forward by the North and the Five Points of the South now corner imperialism, making the confrontation even more decisive.

Everything indicates that peace, this unstable peace which bears that name for the sole reason that no *worldwide* conflagration has taken place is again in danger of being destroyed by some irrevocable and unacceptable step taken by the United States.

What role shall we, the exploited people of the world, play? The peoples of the three continents focus their attention on Vietnam and learn their lesson. Since imperialists blackmail humanity by threatening it with war, the wise reaction is not to fear war. The general tactics of the people should be to launch a constant and a firm attack in all fronts where the confrontation is taking place.

In those places where this meagre peace we have has been violated, what is our duty? To liberate ourselves at any price.

The world panorama is of great complexity. The struggle for liberation

has not yet been undertaken by some countries of ancient Europe, sufficiently developed to realize the contradictions of capitalism, but weak to such a degree that they are unable either to follow imperialism or even to start on their own road. Their contradictions will reach an explosive stage during the forthcoming years—but their problems and, consequently, their own solutions are different from those of our dependent and economically under-developed countries.

### **The three under-developed continents**

The fundamental terrain of imperialist exploitation comprises the three under-developed continents: America, Asia and Africa. Every country has also its own characteristics, but each continent, as a whole, also presents a certain unity.

Our America is integrated by a group of more or less homogeneous countries and in most parts of its territory US monopolist capital maintain an absolute supremacy. Puppet governments or, in the best of cases, weak and fearful local rulers, are incapable of contradicting orders from their Yankee master. The United States has nearly reached the climax of its political and economic domination; it could hardly advance much more; any change in the situation could bring about a setback. Their policy is to maintain that which has already been conquered. Their line of action, at the present time, is limited to the brutal use of force with the purpose of thwarting the liberation movements, no matter of what type they might happen to be.

The slogan 'we will not allow another Cuba' hides the possibility of perpetrating aggressions without fear of reprisal, such as the one carried out against the Dominican Republic or before that the massacre in Panama—and the clear warning that Yankee troops are ready to intervene anywhere in America where the ruling régime may be altered to endanger their interests. This policy enjoys an almost absolute impunity: the OAS is a suitable mask, in spite of its unpopularity; the inefficiency of the UN is ridiculous as well as tragic; the armies of all American countries are ready to intervene in order to smash their peoples. The International of Crime and Treason has in fact been organized. On the other hand, the local bourgeoisies have lost all their capacity to oppose imperialism—if they ever had it—and they have become the last card in the pack. There are no other alternatives; either a socialist revolution or a make-believe revolution.

### **Asia**

Asia is a continent with many different characteristics. The struggle for liberation waged against a series of European colonial powers resulted in the establishment of more or less progressive governments, whose ulterior evolution has brought about, in some cases, the deepening of the primary objectives of national liberation and in others, a setback towards the adoption of pro-imperialist positions.

From the economic point of view, the United States had very little to lose and much to gain from Asia. These changes benefited its interests;

the struggle for the overthrow of other neo-colonial powers and the penetration of new spheres of action in the economic field is carried out sometimes directly, occasionally through Japan.

But there are special political conditions, particularly in Indo-China, which create in Asia certain characteristics of capital importance and play a decisive role in the entire US military strategy.

The imperialists encircle China through South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, South Vietnam and Thailand at least.

This dual situation: a strategic interest as important as the military encirclement of the Peoples' Republic of China and the penetration of these great markets—which they do not dominate yet—turns Asia into one of the most explosive areas of the world today, in spite of its apparent stability outside of the Vietnamese war zone.

The Middle East, though it geographically belongs to this continent, has its own contradictions and is actively in ferment; it is impossible to foretell how far the cold war between Israel, backed by the imperialists, and the progressive countries of that zone will go. This is just another one of the volcanoes threatening eruption in the world today.

### **Africa**

Africa offers an almost virgin territory to the neo-colonial invasion. There have been changes which, to some extent, forced neo-colonial powers to give up their former absolute prerogatives. But when these changes are carried out gradually, colonialism continues in the form of neo-colonialism with similar effects as far as the economic situation is concerned.

The United States had no colonies in this region but is now struggling to penetrate its partners' fiefs. It can be said that following the strategic plans of US imperialism, Africa constitutes its long range reservoir; its present investments, though, are only important in the Union of South Africa and its penetration is beginning to be felt in the Congo, Nigeria and other countries where a violent rivalry with other imperialist powers is starting to take place (in a pacific manner up to the present time).

So far the United States does not have great interests to defend there, beyond its pretended right to intervene in every spot of the world where its monopolies detect huge profits or the existence of large reserves of raw materials.

All this past history justifies our concern regarding the possibilities of liberating the peoples within a long or a short period of time.

If we stop to analyse Africa we shall observe that in the Portuguese colonies of Guinea, Mozambique and Angola the struggle is waged with relative intensity, with a concrete success in Guinea and with variable results in the other two. We still witness in the Congo the dispute be-

tween Lumumba's successors and the old accomplices of Tshombe, a dispute which at the present time seems to favour the latter: those who have 'pacified' a large area of the country for their own benefit—though the war is still latent.

In Rhodesia we have a different problem: British imperialism used every means within its reach to place power in the hands of the white minority, who, at the present time, unlawfully maintains it. The conflict, from the British point of view, is absolutely unofficial; this Western power, with some diplomatic adroitness—also called hypocrisy in the strict sense of the word—presents a façade of displeasure before the measures adopted by the government of Ian Smith. Its crafty attitude is supported by some Commonwealth countries that follow it, but is attacked by a large group of countries belonging to Black Africa. It depends whether or not they are servile economic boot-boys of British imperialism.

Should the insurrectionary efforts of the nationalists succeed and this movement receive the effective support of neighbouring African nations, the situation in Rhodesia may become extremely explosive. But for the moment all these problems are being discussed in innocuous organizations such as the UN, the Commonwealth and the OAU.

The social and political evolution of Africa does not lead us to expect a continental revolution. The liberation struggle against the Portuguese should end victoriously, but Portugal means little in the imperialist field. The confrontations of revolutionary importance are those which challenge the whole imperialist apparatus; but this does not mean that we should stop fighting for the liberation of the three Portuguese colonies and for the deepening of their revolutions.

When the black masses of South Africa or Rhodesia start their authentic revolutionary struggle, a new era will dawn in Africa. This is so whenever the impoverished masses of a nation rise up to rescue their right to a decent life from the hands of the ruling oligarchies.

Up to now, army putsches follow one another, a group of officers succeeds another or substitutes a ruler who no longer serves their caste interests or those of the powers who covertly manage him—but there are no great popular upheavals. In the Congo these characteristics appeared briefly, inspired by the memory of Lumumba, but they have been losing strength in the last few months.

In Asia, as we have seen, the situation is explosive. The points of friction are not only Vietnam and Laos, where there is fighting; such a point is also Cambodia, where at any time a direct US aggression may start, Thailand, Malaya, and, of course, Indonesia, where we can not assume that the last word has been said, regardless of the annihilation of the Communist Party in that country when the reactionaries took over. And also, naturally, the Middle East.

## Latin America

In Latin America the armed struggle is going on in Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela and Bolivia; the first uprisings are cropping up in Brazil. There are also some focuses of resistance which appear and are then extinguished. But almost all the countries of this continent are ripe for a type of struggle that, in order to achieve victory, can not be content with anything less than establishing a government of a socialist character.

In this continent practically only one tongue is spoken: the exception is Brazil, but anyone who speaks Spanish can easily make himself understood there since the two languages are virtually the same. There is also such a great similarity between the classes in these countries, that they have attained identification among themselves of an *international americano* type, much more complete than in the other continents. Language, habits, religion, a common foreign master, unite them. The degree and the form of exploitation are similar for both the exploiters and the men they exploit in the majority of the countries of this continent. And rebellion is ripening swiftly in it.

We may ask ourselves: how shall this rebellion flourish? What type will it be? We have maintained for quite some time now that, owing to the similarity of their characteristics, the struggle in our America will achieve, in due course, continental proportions. It shall be the scene of many great battles fought for the liberation of humanity.

Within the frame of this struggle of continental scale, the battles which are now taking place are only episodes—but they have already furnished their martyrs, they will figure in the history of our America as having given their necessary blood in this last stage of the fight for the total freedom of man. These names will include Comandante Turcios Lima, padre Camilo Torres, Comandante Fabricio Ojeda, Comandantes Lobatón and Luis de la Puente Uceda, all outstanding figures in the revolutionary movements of Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela and Peru.

But the active movement of the people creates its new leaders; César Montes and Yon Sosa raise up their flag in Guatemala; Fabio Vázquez and Marulanda in Colombia; Douglas Bravo in the Western part of the country and Américo Martín in El Bachiller, both directing their respective Venezuelan fronts.

New uprisings will take place in these and other countries of Latin America, as it has already happened in Bolivia, and they will continue to grow in the midst of all the hardships inherent in the dangerous profession of being modern revolutionaries. Many will perish, victims of their errors; other will fall in the hard battle that approaches; new fighters and new leaders will appear in the heart of the revolutionary struggle. The people will create their own fighters and leaders as the war itself—and Yankee agents of repression shall increase. Today there are US military missions in all the countries where armed struggle is growing; the Peruvian army apparently carried out a successful action against the revolutionaries in that country, an army also trained and



advised by the Yankees. But if the focuses of war grow with sufficient political and military insight, they will become practically invincible and will force the Yankee to send reinforcements. In Peru itself many new figures, practically unknown, are now reorganizing the guerrilla. Little by little, obsolete weapons, which are sufficient for the repression of small armed bands, will be exchanged for modern armaments and the US military aid missions will be replaced by actual fighters until, at a given moment, they are forced to send increasingly greater numbers of regular troops to ensure the relative stability of a government whose national puppet army is disintegrating before the impetuous attacks of the guerrillas. This is the Vietnamese road; it is a road that should be followed; it is the road that will be followed in our America, with the advantage that the armed groups could create Co-ordinating Councils to embarrass the repressive forces of Yankee imperialism and accelerate the revolutionary triumph.

America, a forgotten continent in the last liberation struggles, is now beginning to make itself heard through the Tricontinental Solidarity Organization and, in the voice of the vanguard of its peoples, the Cuban Revolution, will today have a task of much greater relevance: to create a second or a third Vietnam, or the second *and* third Vietnam of the world.

We must bear in mind that imperialism is a world system, the last stage of capitalism—and it must be defeated in a world confrontation. The strategic end of this struggle should be the destruction of imperialism. Our share, the responsibility of the exploited and under-developed of the world is to eliminate the foundations of imperialism: our oppressed nations, from which they extract capital, raw materials, technicians and cheap labour, and to which they export new capital—instruments of domination—arms and all kinds of articles; thus submerging us in an absolute dependence.

The fundamental element of this strategic goal will be the real liberation of all people, a liberation that will be brought about through armed struggle in most cases and which shall be, in our America, almost inevitably, a Socialist Revolution.

### **The Enemy**

When envisaging the destruction of imperialism, it is necessary to identify its centre of command—none other than the United States.

We must carry out a general task with the tactical purpose of getting the enemy out of its natural environment, forcing him to fight in regions where his own life and habits will clash with the existing reality. We must not under-rate our adversary; the US soldier has technical capacity and is backed by weapons and resources of a magnitude that renders him frightful. He lacks the essential ideological motivation which his bitterest enemies of today—the Vietnamese soldiers—have in the highest degree. We will only be able to overcome this army by undermining its morale—and this is accomplished by defeating it and causing it repeated suffering.

But this strategy for victory will require immense sacrifices from the people, sacrifices that should be demanded from today, in plain daylight, and which perhaps may be less painful than those we would have to endure if we constantly avoided battle in an attempt to have our chestnuts out of the fire.

It is probable, of course, that the last liberated country will accomplish this without an armed struggle and the sufferings of a long and cruel war against the imperialists—this they might avoid. But perhaps it will be impossible to avoid this struggle or its effects in a global conflagration; the suffering would be the same, or perhaps even greater. We cannot foresee the future, but we should never give in to the defeatist temptation of being the vanguard of a nation which yearns for freedom, but abhors the struggle it entails and awaits its liberation as a crumb of victory.

### No Illusions

It is absolutely just to avoid all useless sacrifices. Therefore, it is important to establish the genuine possibilities that dependent America may have of liberating itself through peaceful means. For us, the solution to this question is quite clear: the present moment may or may not be the proper one for starting the struggle, but we cannot harbour any illusions, and we have no right to do so, that freedom can be obtained without fighting. And these battles will not be mere street fights with stones against tear-gas bombs, or of peaceful general strikes; neither will it be the battle of a furious people tearing down in two or three days the lowering gibbets of the ruling oligarchies; the struggle will be long and harsh, and its front will be in the guerrilla's refuge, in the cities, in the homes of the fighters—where the repressive forces will go seeking easy victims among their families—in the massacred rural population, in the villages or cities destroyed by the bombardments of the enemy.

They are pushing us into this struggle; there is no alternative: we must prepare for it and we must decide to carry it through.

The beginnings will not be easy; they will be extremely difficult. All the oligarchies' powers of repression, all their capacity for brutality and demagoguery will be placed at the service of their cause. Our mission, in the first hour, will be to survive; later, we will follow the perennial example of the guerrilla, carrying out armed propaganda (in the Vietnamese sense, that is, the bullets of propaganda, of the battles won or lost—but fought—against the enemy). The great lesson of the invincibility of the guerrillas taking root in the dispossessed masses. The galvanizing of the national spirit, the preparation for harder tasks, for resisting even more violent repression. Hatred as an element of the struggle; a relentless hatred of the enemy, impelling us over and beyond the natural limitations that man is heir to and transforming him into an effective, violent and selective instrument of war. Our soldiers must be thus; a people without hatred can not vanquish a brutal enemy.

We must wage the war in every corner the enemy happens to carry it: to his home, to his centres of entertainment; a total war. It is necessary to prevent him from having a moment of peace, a quiet moment outside his barracks or even inside; we must attack him wherever he may be; make him feel like a cornered beast wherever he may move. Then his moral fibre will begin to decline. He will even become more degenerate and the signs of decadence will begin to appear.

### **Internationalism and Solidarity**

And let us develop a true proletarian internationalism; with international proletarian armies; the flag under which we fight would be the sacred cause of redeeming humanity. To die under the flag of Vietnam, of Venezuela, of Guatemala, of Laos, of Guinea, of Colombia, of Bolivia, of Brazil—to name only a few scenes of today's armed struggle—would be equally glorious and desirable for an American, as Asian, an African, even a European.

Each spilt drop of blood, in any country under whose flag one has not been born, is an experience passed on to those who survive, to be added later to the liberation struggle of his own country. And each nation liberated is a phase won in the battle for the liberation of one's own country.

The time has come to settle our differences and place everything at the service of our struggle.

### **The Real Enemy**

We all know great controversies rend the world now fighting for freedom; no one can hide it. We also know that they have reached such intensity and such bitterness that dialogue and reconciliation seem extremely difficult, if not impossible. It is a useless task to search for ways and means to initiate a dialogue which the hostile parties avoid. However, the real enemy is here; it strikes every day, and threatens us with new blows and these blows will unite us, today, tomorrow, or the day after. Whoever understands this first, and prepares for this necessary union, will have the people's gratitude.

Owing to the virulence and the intransigence with which each cause is defended, we, the dispossessed, cannot take sides for one form or the other of these differences, even though sometimes we agree with the contentions of one party or the other, or in a greater measure with those of one part more than with those of the other. In time of war, the expression of current differences constitutes a weakness; but at this stage it is an illusion to attempt to settle them by words. History will erode them or will give them their true meaning.

In our struggling world every difference regarding tactics, the methods of action for the attainment of limited objectives should be analysed with due respect for the other's opinions. Regarding our great strategic objective, the total destruction of imperialism by armed struggle, we should be uncompromising.

Let us sum up our hopes for victory: total destruction of imperialism by eliminating its firmest bulwark: the oppression exercised by the United States of America. To carry out, as a tactical method, the peoples' gradual liberation, one by one or in groups: driving the enemy into a difficult fight away from its own territory; dismantling all its bases of sustenance, that is, its dependent territories.

### **A long war**

This means a long war. And, once more we repeat it, a cruel war. Let no one fool himself at the outset and let no one hesitate to start out for fear of the consequences it may bring to his people. It is almost our sole hope for victory. We cannot elude the call of this hour. Vietnam is pointing it out with its endless lesson of heroism, its tragic and everyday lesson of struggle and death for the attainment of final victory.

There, the imperialist soldiers endure the discomforts of those who, used to enjoying the US standard of living, have to live in a hostile land with the insecurity of being unable to move without being aware of walking on enemy territory:—death to those who dare take a step out of their fortified encampment. They have to face the permanent hostility of the entire population. All this has internal repercussions in the United States; it begins the resurgence of a conflict which is minimized in spite of its vigour by all imperialist forces: class struggle even within its own territory.

How soon we could look into a bright future should two, three or many Vietnams flourish throughout the world with their share of deaths and their immense tragedies, their everyday heroism and their repeated blows against imperialism, impelled to disperse its forces under the sudden attack and the increasing hatred of all peoples of the world!

If we were all capable of uniting to make our onslaughts strong and accurate and so increase the effectiveness of all kinds of support given to the struggling people—how great and near would that future be!

### **Everything for the Struggle**

If we, in a small corner of the world map, are able to fulfil our duty and place at the disposal of this struggle whatever little of ourselves we are permitted to give—our lives, our sacrifice; if some day we have to breathe our last breath on land already ours, sprinkled with our blood—let it be known that we have measured the scope of our actions and that we only consider ourselves a part of the great army of the proletariat. We are proud of having learned from the Cuban Revolution, and from its highest leader, the great lesson emanating from his attitude in this part of the world: 'What do the dangers or the sacrifices of a man or of a nation matter, when the destiny of humanity is at stake?'

Our every action is a battle cry against imperialism, and a battle hymn for the people's unity against the great enemy of mankind: the United

States of America. Wherever death may surprise us, let it be welcome, provided that this, our battle cry, may have reached some receptive ear and another hand may be extended to wield our weapons and other men be ready to intone the funeral dirge with the staccato chant of the machineguns and new battle cries of war and victory. CHE