

At the Afro-Asian Conference

From Algeria Guevara traveled to Mali, Congo (Brazzaville), Guinea, Ghana, Dahomey, Tanzania, and the United Arab Republic. He then returned to Algiers to attend the Second Economic Seminar of the Organization of Afro-Asian Solidarity. The speech he made there, particularly in its passages regarding economic relations between underdeveloped countries and the countries of the Soviet bloc, was one of the most important of his career. His speech, delivered on February 26, 1965, is here translated in full.

Dear Brothers: Cuba is attending this conference to raise on her own the voice of the peoples of America; and as we have emphasized on other occasions also, Cuba speaks both in her capacity as an underdeveloped country and as a country building socialism.

It is not by accident that our delegation is permitted to give its opinion here among the peoples of Asia and Africa. A common aspiration unites us in our march toward the future: the defeat of imperialism. A common past of struggle against the same enemy has united us along the road.

This is an assembly of embattled peoples, and the battle is being developed on two equally important fronts which require all our efforts. The struggle against imperialism for liberation from colonial or neocolonial shackles, imposed by political arms or firearms or a combination of the two, is inseparable from the struggle against backwardness and poverty; both are steps on the same road leading toward the creation of a new society of justice and plenty.

It is imperative to take political power and to liquidate the oppressor classes; but then the second stage of the struggle, which perhaps may have more difficult features than the first, must be faced.

Ever since monopoly capital took over the world it has kept the greater part of humanity in poverty, dividing all the profits among the most powerful nations. The higher standard of living in those nations is based on the misery of ours. Thus to raise the standard of living of the underdeveloped peoples, there must be a fight against imperialism. And each time a country is torn away from the imperialists, it is not only a partial battle won against the main enemy, but it also contributes to the general weakening of that enemy and is one step more toward final victory.

There are no boundaries in this struggle to the death. We cannot be indifferent to what happens anywhere in the world, for a victory by any country over imperialism is our victory; just as any country's defeat is a defeat for all of us. The practice of proletarian internationalism is not only a duty for the peoples struggling for a better future, it is an inescapable necessity. If the imperialist enemy, American or any other, develops its attack against the underdeveloped peoples and the socialist countries, simple logic determines the necessity of an alliance between the underdeveloped peoples and the socialist countries. If there were no other uniting factor, the common enemy should be it.

Of course this alliance cannot be made spontaneously, without discussions or previous birth pangs, which sometimes can be painful.

Each time a country is freed, we say, it is a defeat for the world imperialist system, but we must agree that real liberation or breaking away from the imperialist system is not achieved by the mere act of proclaiming independence or winning an armed victory in a revolution. Freedom is achieved when imperialist economic domination over a people is brought to an end.

Therefore the socialist countries have a vital stake in making these acts of breaking away from the imperialist system successful; and it is our international duty, a duty determined by our guiding ideology, to make this liberation as rapid and thoroughgoing as possible.

A conclusion must be drawn from all this: The development of countries now starting out on the road to liberation should be paid for by the socialist countries. We state it this way without any intention whatsoever of blackmail or dramatics, nor of currying favor with the Afro-Asian peoples, but as a profound conviction. Socialism cannot exist without a change in conscience to a new fraternal attitude toward humanity, not only within the societies which are building or have built socialism, but also on a world scale toward all peoples suffering from imperialist oppression.

We believe the duty of aiding dependent countries should be approached in such a spirit. There should not be any more talk about developing mutually beneficial trade based on prices rigged against underdeveloped countries by the law of value and the inequitable relations of international trade brought about by that law.

How can one apply the term "mutual benefit" to the selling at world-market prices of raw materials costing limitless sweat and suffering in the underdeveloped countries and the buying of machinery produced in today's big, automated factories?

If we establish that kind of relation between the two groups of nations, we must agree that the socialist countries are, in a way, accomplices of imperialist exploitation. It can be argued that the amount of exchange with underdeveloped countries is an insignificant part of the foreign trade of the socialist countries. That is a great truth, but it does not eliminate the immoral character of the exchange.

The socialist countries have the moral duty of liquidating their tacit complicity with the exploiting countries of the West. The fact that the trade

today is small does not mean much. In 1959, Cuba sold sugar only occasionally to a socialist-bloc country, usually through English brokers or brokers of other nationalities.

Today, 80 per cent of Cuba's trade is with that area; all her vital supplies come from the socialist camp, and in fact she has joined that camp. We cannot say that this was brought about solely by the increase in trade, nor that the increase in trade was brought about by the destruction of the old order and the adoption of the socialist form of development; both extremes touch and are interrelated.

We did not start out on the path that ends in communism, foreseeing all steps as logically predetermined by an ideology advancing toward a fixed goal. The truths of socialism and, even more, the naked truths of imperialism forged our people and showed them the path which we consciously took later. The peoples of Asia and Africa that are advancing toward their own complete liberation should take the same path. They will follow it sooner or later, regardless of what modifying adjective their socialism may take today.

There is no other definition of socialism valid for us than that of the abolition of the exploitation of man by man. As long as this has not been achieved, we are in the stage of the building of socialist society; and if instead of achieving this goal, the elimination of exploitation comes to a halt, or worse, is reversed, then it is false even to speak of building socialism.

We have to prepare conditions so that our brothers can directly and consciously take the path of the complete abolition of exploitation, but we cannot ask them to take that path if we ourselves are accomplices of that exploitation. If we were asked what the methods were for establishing just prices, we could not answer because we do not know concretely the full scope of the problems involved. All we know is that, after political discussions, the Soviet Union and Cuba signed agreements

advantageous to us, in accordance with which we will sell five million tons of sugar at prices fixed above those of the so-called Free World Sugar Market. The People's Republic of China also pays those prices in buying from us.

This is only a beginning; the real task consists of fixing prices that will permit development. A great ideological change is needed to change the character of international relations; foreign trade should not determine politics, but should on the contrary be subordinated to the politics of fraternity toward peoples.

Let us briefly analyze the problem of long-term credits for developing basic industries. Frequently we find that beneficiary countries attempt to create industrial bases too large for their actual capability, whose products would not be all consumed domestically. And they mortgage their reserves in this effort. Our reasoning is that in the socialist states investments weigh directly on the state budget, and are only paid off through the utilization of what is produced by the investment in the entire manufacturing cycle. We propose that some thought be given to the possibility of making these kinds of investments in the underdeveloped countries.

In this way an immense hidden force in our continents - miserably exploited but never aided in their development - could be tapped and a new era begun of a real international division of labor, based not on the history of what has been done up to now, but rather on the future history of what can be done.

The states, in whose territories the new investments are to be made, will have all the inherent rights of sovereign property over them without any payment or credit due, but they would be obligated to supply agreed-upon quantities of products to the investor countries for a certain number of years at fixed prices.

The method for financing the local expenses incurred by the investor

country in such projects also deserves study. The supplying of marketable goods on long-term credits to the governments of underdeveloped countries could be one form of aid not requiring the expenditure of freely convertible funds.

Another difficult problem is the mastering of technology. The shortage of technicians in underdeveloped countries is well known to all. Educational institutions and teachers are lacking. Sometimes we even lack an understanding of which of our needs should be given priority in a program of technical, cultural, and ideological development. The socialist countries should supply the aid for organizing centers for technical training; they should insist upon the great importance of this, and supply technicians to fill the present need.

It is necessary to insist further on this last point. The technicians who come to our countries must be exemplary. They are comrades who find themselves in a strange environment, often one hostile to technology, with a different language and totally different customs. The technicians facing this difficult task should be, first of all, communists in the most profound and noble sense of the word. With this single quality, plus flexibility and a modicum of organization, wonders can be accomplished.

We know it can be done because brother countries have sent us a certain number of technicians who have done more toward the development of our country than ten institutes, and have contributed more to our friendship than ten ambassadors or a hundred diplomatic receptions.

If we could achieve the above-listed points, and also if the underdeveloped could acquire all the technology of the advanced countries unhampered by the present system of patents, which prevents the spread of the inventions of different countries, we would progress a great deal in our common task.

Imperialism has been defeated in many partial battles. But it remains a

considerable force in the world, and we cannot expect its final defeat save through effort and sacrifice on the part of all of us.

The proposed steps, however, cannot be taken unilaterally. The development of underdeveloped countries should be paid for by the socialist countries, we agree. But the underdeveloped countries must also exert all their forces to embark resolutely upon the road of building a new society - whatever its name may be - where the machine, an instrument of labor, is no longer an instrument of the exploitation of man by man. Nor can the confidence of the socialist countries be expected by those who play at balancing between capitalism and socialism, trying to use each force as a counterweight in order to derive certain advantages from such competition. A new policy of absolute seriousness should govern the relations between the two groups of societies. It is worth emphasizing again that the means of production should preferably be in the hands of the state, so that features of exploitation may gradually disappear.

On the other hand, development should not be left to complete improvisation; it is necessary to plan the construction of the new society. Planning is one of the laws of socialism; and without it, it would not exist. Without correct planning there can be no adequate guarantee that all the various sectors of a country's economy will combine harmoniously for the forward strides which our epoch demands. Planning is not an isolated problem of each of our small countries, distorted in their development, possessors of some raw materials or producers of some manufactured or semimanufactured goods, but lacking in most others. From the very beginning, planning should tend toward some regional view in order to coordinate the various national economies, and thus bring about an integration on the basis of a genuine mutual benefit.

We believe the road ahead is full of dangers, not dangers conjured up or foreseen in the distant future by some superior mind, but palpable dangers deriving from the realities besetting us. The fight against colonialism has reached its final stages; but in the present era, colonial

status is only a consequence of imperialist domination. As long as imperialism exists, it will, by definition, exert its domination over other countries. Today that domination is called neocolonialism.

Neocolonialism was first developed in South America, throughout the whole continent, and today it begins to be felt with increasing intensity in Africa and Asia. Its forms of penetration and development have distinct characteristics. One is the brutal aggression we have seen in the Congo. Brute force, without concealment or disguise of any kind, is its final weapon. But there is another more subtle form: political penetration in liberated countries, alliances with the growing indigenous bourgeoisies, development of a parasitic bourgeoisie closely linked to the old metropolitan interests. This development may be fostered by a certain temporary rise in the popular standard of living, because in a very backward country the simple step from feudal to capitalist relations marks a great advance, although it may later bring dire consequences for the workers.

Neocolonialism has shown its claws in the Congo. That is not a sign of strength, but of weakness; it had to resort to force, its final weapon, as an economic argument. This has evoked opposition of great intensity. But at the same time a much more subtle form of neocolonialism is being practiced in other countries of Africa and Asia, and is rapidly bringing about what some have called the South- Americanization of these continents; that is, the development of a parasitic bourgeoisie, which adds nothing to the national wealth of their countries, but even goes so far as to deposit its huge dishonest profits in capitalist banks abroad; and to obtain more profits, this parasitic bourgeoisie signs pacts with foreigners with absolute disregard for the welfare of the people of their countries.

There are also other dangers such as competition between brother countries, which are politically friendly and sometimes neighbors, because both are trying simultaneously to develop the same investments in markets which cannot take the increased volume of products, This

competition has the disadvantage of wasting energies that could be used for much greater economic cooperation, and furthermore it allows the imperialist monopolies to play games with us.

When it has been impossible to get a certain investment from the socialist camp, there have been occasions when it has been obtained by agreements with the capitalists. Such capitalist investments not only have the disadvantage of the way the loans are made, but others, such as the creation of a joint corporation with a dangerous neighbor. Since these investments in general parallel those made in other states, they tend to cause divisions between friendly countries by the creation of economic rivalries; and further, they create the dangers of corruption flowing from the constant presence of capitalism which is so skillful in conjuring up visions of advancement and luxury in the minds of many people.

Later on, when prices in the saturated market decline, the countries engaged in the parallel production find themselves obliged to seek new loans, or to permit additional investments for further competition. The falling of the economy into the hands of the monopolies, and a slow but sure return to the past is the final consequence of such a policy. As we see it, the only safe way of obtaining investments from the capitalist powers is for the state to have direct control as the sole purchaser of goods, limiting imperialist participation to the supplying of goods in accordance with the contracts and not permitting them to get beyond the street door to our house. And here it is just and proper to take advantage of inter-imperialist contradictions in order to secure the least burdensome terms.

It is necessary to watch the "disinterested" economic, cultural, and other aid which imperialism grants directly or, since it is better received that way in some parts of the world, through puppet states.

If all of the dangers pointed out are not seen in time, some countries that began their task of national liberation with faith and enthusiasm may find

themselves unwittingly stepping onto the neocolonial road, and find further that monopoly domination has been gradually establishing itself within their territories with such subtlety that its effects are difficult to discern until they brutally make themselves felt.

There is a big job to be done. Immense problems confront our two worlds - that of the socialist countries and that called the "third world" - problems directly concerning man and his welfare, and the struggle against the main culprit for our backwardness. In the face of these problems, all countries and peoples aware of their duties, of the dangers inherent in the situation, of the sacrifices required by development, should take concrete steps to cement our friendship in the two fields - which can never be separated - the economic and political. And we should organize a great solid bloc which, in its turn, helps new countries to free themselves not only from political domination, but from imperialist economic domination as well.

Our attitude toward liberation by armed struggle against an oppressor political power should be in accordance with the rules of proletarian internationalism. If it is absurd to imagine that in a socialist country at war a factory manager would demand a guarantee of payment before shipping to the front the tanks produced by his factory, it is no less absurd to inquire of a people fighting for liberation, or needing arms to defend its freedom, whether or not they can guarantee payment.

Arms cannot be regarded as merchandise in our world. They should be delivered to the peoples asking for them for use against the common enemy without any charge at all, and in quantities determined by the need and their availability. That is the spirit in which the USSR and the People's Republic of China have offered us their military aid. We are socialists, we constitute a guarantee of the proper utilization of those arms; but we are not the only ones. And all of us should receive the same treatment.

To the ominous attacks by American imperialism against Vietnam and the Congo, the answer should be the supplying of all the defense equipment

they need, and to offer them our full solidarity without any conditions whatsoever.

In the economic field we must conquer the road to development with the most advanced technology possible. We cannot climb the long ascending road from feudalism to the atomic and automated era. That would be the road of immense and largely useless sacrifices. It is necessary to seize technology at the height it has attained today to make the great technological leap ahead which will reduce the gap between the more developed countries and ourselves. This means big factories and a properly developed agriculture. And above all, its foundation must be a technological and ideological culture with enough mass base and strength to guarantee the continuing sustenance of the institutes and research organizations which have to be created in each country - as well as the men who, utilizing the present technology, may be capable of adapting themselves to the newly mastered technology.

These cadres must be conscious of their duties to the society in which they live. There cannot be an adequate technological culture if it is not complemented by ideological culture. And in most of our countries a proper foundation for industrial development, which is what determines the growth of modern society, cannot exist if we do not begin by assuring for our people the necessary food, the essential consumer goods, and adequate education.

A good part of the national revenues must be spent on the so-called unproductive investment in education, and special attention must be given to the development of agricultural productivity. The latter has reached incredible levels in many capitalist countries, producing the senseless crisis of overproduction and a surplus of grain and other food products and industrial raw materials in the developed countries while the rest of the world suffers hunger, although it has enough land and labor to produce several times over what is needed to feed the entire world.

Agriculture must be considered a fundamental pillar of our development, and therefore changes in the agricultural structure, adjustment to the new technological possibilities, as well as the new duties of eliminating the exploitation of man, should be fundamental aspects of the work

Before making costly decisions that could cause irreparable damage, a careful study of the national territory is needed. This is one of the preliminary steps in economic research and an absolute prerequisite for correct planning.

We warmly support Algeria's proposition for institutionalizing our relations. We would like to make some supplementary suggestions: First, for the Union to be an instrument in the struggle against imperialism, the cooperation of Latin American countries and the alliance of the socialist countries is necessary.

Second, we should be vigilant about the revolutionary character of the Union, preventing the admission into it of governments or movements not identified with the general aspirations of the people, and creating mechanisms that would permit the separation from it of any government or movement diverging from the just road.

Third, we must advocate the establishment of new relations which create a revolutionary jurisprudence to defend us in case of conflict, and to give new meaning to the relations between us and the rest of the world.

We speak the language of revolution and we honestly fight for the victory of that cause. But frequently we entangle ourselves in the nets of an international law created as the result of confrontations between the imperialist powers, and not by the free peoples, the just peoples, in the course of their struggles.

For example, our peoples suffer the painful pressure of foreign bases established on their territories, or they have to carry the heavy burdens of

foreign debts of incredible size.

The history of these burdens is well known to all of us. Puppet governments, governments weakened by long struggles for liberation or by the operation of the laws of the capitalist market, have acquiesced to treaties which endanger us internally and compromise our future.

This is the time to throw off the yoke, to force renegotiation of oppressive foreign debts, and to force the imperialists to give up their bases for aggression on our territories.

I would not want to conclude these remarks, this repetition of concepts you all know, without calling the attention of this gathering to the fact that Cuba is not the only American nation; it is simply the only one that has the opportunity of speaking before you today; and that other countries are shedding their blood to win the rights we have; and that when we send our greetings from here, and from all the conferences and the places where they may be held, to the heroic peoples of Vietnam, Laos, so-called Portuguese Guinea, South Africa, or Palestine - to all exploited countries fighting for their emancipation - we should simultaneously extend our voice, our hand, our encouragement, to our brother peoples in Venezuela, Guatemala and Colombia who today, arms in hand, are giving a resolute No! to the imperialist enemy.

And there are few settings from which to declare this as symbolic as Algiers, one of the most heroic capitals of freedom. And the magnificent Algerian people, steeled as few others in suffering for freedom, and firmly led by its party headed by our dear comrade Ahmed Ben Bella, serves as an inspiration to us in this fight without quarter against world imperialism.