

CIA Biographic Register on Che

This five-page CIA document, from August 1964, contains extensive information about Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the Argentine-born revolutionary who the CIA tracked until his death. The biographic summary is one of thousands of secret papers about Che that U.S. authorities collected.

[document begins]

CUBA

Ernesto "Che" GUEVARA de la Serna Minister of Industries

Economic-czar Ernesto Guevara presently serves the Cuban Government as secretary of JUCEPLAN (the board of economic planning and coordination), as a national director of PURS (the developing monolithic Cuban party), and as the unofficial but powerful political advisor to Fidel Castro. As original member of the Granma expedition of 1956, he rose to become one of the most prominent military commanders in the mountains and later became one of the major voices in the Cuban economy. An advocate of rapid industrialization despite the cost, Guevara recently has been forced to reverse his position to one of concentration on consumer goods. He maintains that Cuba's economic future lies in industrialization and, consequently, is frequently at odds with Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, Minister-President of the Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA), who feels that Cuba must develop her agricultural resources. Rodriguez seems to have won the argument for the moment and Cuba presently appears to be concentrating on agricultural development. A prime mover in the drive for the nationalization and centralization of various facets of the economy, Guevara is extremely anti-United States and was one of the main instigators in antagonizing US economic interests and in forcing Cuban reliance on the Soviet bloc early in the Castro regime. Moreover, he has traveled to the Soviet bloc many times to negotiate trade agreements and also has gone to various Afro-Asian and European countries to establish new trade patterns for Cuba. Despite his reliance on the USSR for economic aid, Guevara seems to follow the Chinese Communist Party line ideologically. One indication of his militancy and disdain for Soviet policy was his threat, however empty, during the October 1962 crisis to launch rockets against the United States. An admirer of Mao Tse-tung, he has persistently agitated for expansion of the Cuban revolution throughout Latin America. His manual on guerrilla warfare has been circulated clandestinely throughout Latin America and he is regarded as the principal Cuban official supporting the revolution movements of various hemispheric exile groups seeking refuge in Cuba. Notably, he was a prominent figure in assisting the proposed invasions of the Dominican Republic and Haiti (March 1959), Nicaragua (June 1959) and Guatemala (November 1959). He has tenaciously encouraged revolution in Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina. [page break]

Accused of being a Communist since his university days, Guevara claims that he was never affiliated with the Communist Party either in Argentina, Guatemala or Cuba. His

reply to a 1959 accusation was: "If it appears to you that what we do is Communist, then we are Communists." No evidence is available to the effect that he was ever affiliated with any Communist Party, although he seems to have had many contacts with party members and associates in Argentina, Guatemala and Mexico. On any count, Guevara plainly has a strong, emotional anti-US bias and a sympathetic outlook toward Communism. He especially condemns the US role in replacing the pro-Communist Arbenz government in Guatemala with a military junta in 1954.

Because he is so steadfast in his opinions, Guevara has, from time to time, reportedly been somewhat out of favor with Fidel Castro. One issue of contention between them was a variation of the usual "guns or butter" problem. Guevara, arguing for the latter, considered the maintenance of a large standing army to be wasteful when the personnel could be better used in domestic industrial production. He was also concerned about the fact that the money going into the armed forces was providing no return for the national economy. In a television speech in January 1961 Guevara criticized Castro openly on this issue. However, Castro reportedly is influenced by and relies on Guevara to such a degree that Guevara is the only leader who can offer any opposition to Castro with impunity.

Ernesto Guevara de la Serna was born in Rosario, Argentina, on 6 June 1928, the eldest of five children of a comfortable, middle-class family. His parents have been separated since his university days. Guevara's father, Ernesto R. Guevara Lynch, is an architect and surveyor of Spanish-Irish descent who reportedly approved of the Castro movement at its inception. His mother, Celia de la Serna, claims not to be a Communist but has been active in the Latin American Woman's Congresses and in speaking in support of the Cuban revolution. Suffering from asthma since childhood, "Che" (the Argentine equivalent of "hey you" or "bud") underwent a program of rigorous physical exercise--hunting, fishing and other mountain activities--to counteract this deficiency, under the direction of his father. (Nevertheless, he still carries an oxygen inhaler with him at all times.)

In 1947 Guevara entered the University of Buenos Aires to study medicine, reportedly receiving his medical degree in 1952. Politically active during his student days, he participated in several incipient revolutionary movements against the Peron regime. In his final year at medical school Guevara and a friend left on a "study" tour of loprozariums and allergy clinics. It has also been reported that he made the trip to escape his military obligations in Argentina. In any case, indicative of his adventurous nature, he made the trip by motorcycle across the Andes, through Chile and Peru, and by canoe along a portion of the upper Amazon to Colombia and Venezuela. His travels [page break] finally carried him to Miami, where he was turned back by US immigration authorities. After graduation from medical school Guevara left on a similar tour which ended in Guatemala, where he became involved in that country's domestic politics.

Guevara's role in the pro-Communist regime of former President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman (1951-54) has been the subject of much controversy and has never been satisfactorily resolved. [Approximately 2 lines redacted] maintains that he never knew Arbenz personally, that he was having financial difficulties while in Guatemala, and that his sole

employment by the Guatemalan Government was as a medical orderly during Arbenz's last days (June 1954). Whatever may have been his true role in Guatemalan politics, he has consistently defended the Arbenz regime while bitterly criticizing the United States for effecting its overthrow.

After the Arbenz government fell, Guevara moved to Mexico, where he allegedly made contact with Vincente Lombardo Toledano, leader of Mexico's Marxist Popular Socialist Party (PPS) and prominent leader in hemispheric pro-Communist agitation. An unsubstantiated report alleged that Lombardo obtained two sinecures for Guevara in Mexico City, one as a doctor at the General Hospital and another as a teacher on the Medical Faculty of the National University. In the summer of 1956, Fidel Castro reportedly met Guevara by chance at the home of a mutual friend in Mexico, and in the ensuing discussion Castro outlined his political ideas and a general plan for invading Cuba with the 26th-of-July group then forming in Mexico. Apparently attracted by the prospect of a guerrilla war, Guevara agreed to join in a medical capacity and underwent guerrilla training under the supervision of Spanish Republican General Alberto Bayo Giroud.

In July 1956 Castro's fellow conspirators, including Guevara, who even then was considered to be one of the most important, were rounded up by the Mexican security police for conspiring to overthrow the Cuban Government. They were released on 25 July and in December 1956 embarked on the Granma expedition which set the revolt in motion. When the 82-man force landed in Cuba all but 12 of the group were either killed or captured. Guevara was among the survivors, wounded but still active. As the Sierra Maestra-based movement gained strength, Guevara proved to be a capable fighter and military leader and, consequently, stepped up to a high position in the rebel military organization. He practiced medicine infrequently and only when absolutely necessary. Commander of one of the largest of the five rebel columns (Column 4), he gained a reputation for bravery and military prowess second only to Fidel Castro himself. Further, he led the march from Oriente Province through government lines to central Las Villas Province in November 1958 which eventually culminated in the surrender of the provincial capital of Santa Clara. [page break] Ernesto "Che" GUEVARA de la Serna (cont)

After the success of the revolution in January 1959, Guevara elected to remain in Cuba and was awarded "naturalized citizenship" by a special decree which was tailor-made to make him eligible for the presidency. Guevara's first position in the new government was that of commander of La Cabana Fortress in Havana. There he had jurisdiction over the notorious "war criminals" trials, which allegedly resulted in the execution of 600 civilian and military officials. Able to arrest, try and execute anyone at all under the Revolutionary Code of Justice, he took a personal interest in the prosecutions of former members of Batista's Bureau for the Repression of Communist Activities (BRAC), gaining possession of the BRAC files. Guevara also assisted Raul Castro in purging and reorganizing the national army to make it the "principal political arm of the people's revolution." As head of the armed forces' Department of Instruction he was conspicuous in promoting political indoctrination courses which reportedly followed the Communist line. Guevara is also credited with the development of Cuba's civilian militia.

Guevara's first position of non-military nature was that of head of the industrial department of INRA. Although he had an intensive interest in land reform, he remained at the post only two months (September-November 1959). He publicly espoused the principle of ownership of land by the farmer who worked it, but he is alleged to have privately favored a system of national collectives. Appointed president of the National Bank in November 1959, Guevara, lacking formal qualifications for the post, surrounded himself with able advisors and soon demonstrated a quick grasp of technical matters. As bank president, he led the drive for nationalization and centralization of various facets of the economy. His solution for paying the cost of the revolution was to increase the amount of money in circulation by 62 per cent, while curbing inflation by other means.

In February 1961 Guevara became Minister of Industries and continued his efforts to submit the nation's economic activities to government control. He fixed prices for staples, reduced rents, and introduced measures prohibitive to the accumulation of private capital. He set up a strict licensing system to reduce imports and cut down on the outflow of dollars. His austerity program rigorously taxed the upper and middle income sectors while attempting to placate the working classes, but his policies furnished Castro with the necessary currency to carry on his ambitious development program while minimizing inflation.

Guevara's influence in Cuban economic affairs increased steadily thereafter. In late 1960 he led an economic mission to Europe and the Soviet bloc, where he succeeded in negotiating trade agreements for capital goods for Cuba. Since then, he has led many other trade missions to bloc and non-bloc countries and has hosted several delegations to international conferences, including the Punta del Este meeting in August 1961 and the April 1964 UN Conference on Trade and Development. [page break]S E C R E T
NO FOREIGN DISSEM Ernesto "Che" GUEVARA de la Serna (cont)
Appointed a member of the executive committee of JUCEPLAN in August 1961, Guevara, by July 1962, was reportedly already engaged in a power struggle with Regino Boti (the board's technical secretary) for control of the organization. Guevara was appointed a JUCEPLAN secretary at the time.

Although he still wears an army uniform, Guevara has no official military position. However, according to one source of undetermined reliability, as of December 1963 Guevara was to command the forces in Pinar del Rio Province in case of an invasion. In March 1964 he was identified as a member of the General Staff. A dry, calculating man who affects an old world hauteur, Guevara has more than a passing acquaintance with Western culture. During the Sierra Maestra days he reportedly read to his troops from the works of Charles Dickens, French author Alphonse Daudet, Cuban poet and revolutionary Jose Marti, and Chilean Communist poet Pablo Neruda. He fancies himself something of a bon vivant with a connoisseur's appreciation for fine foods, brandies and cigars. He frequently displays a cultivated, soft-spoken manner. Despite this aura of culture, however, Guevara has an acute aversion to bathing and presents an unkempt and neglected appearance. Guevara's first marriage to a Peruvian, Hilda Gadea Acosta, ended in divorce. One child of that marriage remains with the mother, who is

employed by INRA. On 3 June 1959 Guevara married Aleida March de la Torre after the two had apparently been living together for some time. She spent a considerable amount of time in the Sierra Maestra during the revolution and in September 1959 became a member of the sponsoring committee for the Communist-dominated Latin American Women's Congress. She has lent her name to other leftist organizations as well. A daughter was born of this marriage in 1960. Guevara speaks French and some English. August 1964 [document ends]