2000

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The Use and Manipulation of Che Guevara's Public Image and Ideas by Fidel Castro and the Cuban Government

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Honors Thesis
Department of History
Project Title:
The Use and Manipulation of Che Guevara's Image and Ideas by Fidel Castro and the Cuban Government

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Ernesto “Che” Guevara (1928-1967) is one of the most fascinating and compelling figures of the twentieth century. Born to an aristocratic family in Argentina, Ernesto lived a relatively carefree youth that could have spawned a very ordinary and uninteresting individual. Instead, Ernesto became Che, a revolutionary figure recognizable worldwide as a result of his involvement in the Cuban Revolution. While alive he appeared in countless public ways including the cover of Time magazine and the news program “Face the Nation”, and since his death his image has been popularized through the use of posters, billboards, and T-shirts. Many of the ideas he proposed while alive, including the export of revolution and the use of moral incentives and voluntary labor to increase economic production, have continued to be hotly debated issues within Cuba. In this paper I will identify the ways in which Fidel Castro and the Cuban government have used both Che’s public image within Cuba and his ideas to rally support for the regime and its political policies.

In the paper I will focus on four distinct periods in which Fidel Castro and the Cuban government’s usage of Che’s image and ideas have changed. The first section will look at 1955 through 1961, starting with Fidel and Che’s meeting and ending just before the revolution declared itself to be socialist. In this early period significant factors influenced the way Che’s image and ideas were used by Fidel in order to rally support for the war and later against the threat of United States intervention. The second section will cover 1962 through 1967, starting with Cuba’s shift to socialism and ending with Che’s death. In this section the increasing role the Soviet Union played in Cuban affairs as well as Che’s
untimely death were the biggest factors in changing the use of his image and ideas. The third section will cover from 1968 to 1987 the twentieth anniversary of Che’s death in 1987. In this section I focused on four issues where change occurred in the usage of Che’s image and ideas: Cuba’s retreat from fomenting revolution and providing of military assistance, binding of Che’s image with internationalist policies, the use of Che’s image in teaching of Cuban children, and the renewal of Che’s economic ideas of voluntary labor and moral incentives. The fourth section covers 1988 through the 1990s when the collapse of the Soviet Union and the severe economic strains that accompanied that collapse again changed the way Che was used. These events caused Fidel and the Cuban government to push Che’s economic ideas even more, while simultaneously presenting Che as an image of perseverance in the face of adversity.

In the course of my research I have relied for the most part on the speeches and writings of Ernesto Guevara and Fidel Castro, as well as works published with the consent of the Cuban government. It is important to note that for scholarly works to be published in Cuba they must have at least the tacit approval of the Cuban government. Thus works emanating from Cuba can be taken to represent the Cuban government’s views on the issues contained therein. A prime example of this would be the work by the Cuban economist, Carlos Tablada, Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism. One possible difficulty in using these sources is the fact that they have been translated from Spanish into English. However, for the most part they
Kunzle p. 21  (Market Stall Havana, 1996)
have seemed quite reliable. Perhaps a greater problem lies in the fact that not all the relevant material that could be used for a comprehensive study of this subject has been translated into English or is readily available in the United States. While this may be the case, there is a large body of information available, and in my estimation there is enough to do a thorough study of the subject.

In looking at how Che’s image has changed and been used over the years by Fidel and the Cuban government I will also at times use and analyze visual images to document these changes. An example can be seen in this picture of trinkets and posters with quotes from Che and his image on them from 1996. (See Visual 1) These wares were made for foreign tourists, coinciding with the tourism boom in the late 1990s. Such images can evoke a great many emotions for Cubans and for foreign visitors alike. For instance Fidel Castro has said “Within the revolution, everything, without it, nothing”, which can be seen as a statement supporting the use of Che’s image in this way as long as it benefits the Cuban Revolution, which it does by bringing in much needed foreign currency.¹ Conversely, Gerardo Mosquera, a leading Cuban art critic, has stated that “The official rhetoric belies the desperation of a country that is forced to sell its symbols.”² This view portrays Cuba as being weak in that it must sell its cherished symbols just to survive. The main thing to keep in mind when looking at these images is that by being produced in Cuba, they have at least the tacit approval of Fidel Castro and the Cuban government. And in many cases the


government has commissioned the images for a specific purpose. So by analyzing the changes of Che’s visual image in Cuba, it will help us understand the changes in his overall public image as presented by Fidel Castro and the Cuban government.

Fidel Castro and the Cuban government’s use of Che Guevara’s public image and ideas have changed a great deal over the past forty years. The most important examples of his ideas include the fields of economics, such as the importance placed on volunteer labor and the use of moral incentives, and politics, especially dealing with armed revolution and internationalism. Included fundamentally in this has been the way in which both Che’s visual image and the use of his name have been tied to various issues to give them credence and support from the Cuban people. Fidel Castro and the government have not only used, but have also helped to create Che Guevara’s public image within Cuba. Fidel Castro and the Cuban government have used Che’s image and his ideas to gain support for their various economic and political initiatives within Cuba, and have also adapted their usage of his image and ideas to changes in outside political and economic factors.

1955 through 1961

In this section I will first present a short narrative of the events that took place from 1955 to 1961, covering the meeting between Che and Fidel, the fighting and eventual victory of the revolutionary war, and finally the years leading up to the adoption of socialism by the Cuban Revolution. By providing a

\footnote{Gerardo Mosquera qt. in Kunzie, 22.}
narrative of the events that took place during this period it will become more
evident why changes in Che's public image have taken place. Following the
narrative will be an analysis of the formation and change Che's public image
went through within Cuba during the period, and the ways Fidel and the Cuban
government used Che's public image to their advantage. Owing to the general
lack of visual sources from this period, I will rely heavily on the words of Che and
Fidel to show the development of Che's public image. In later sections the
greater availability of visual sources will allow a more thorough analysis of Che's
public image as it was presented through posters, billboards, and murals within
Cuba.

In June of 1955 the twenty-seven year old Ernesto Guevara had just seen
the overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala by a CIA led coup.
Forced to flee the country because he was seen as a communist sympathizer,
Ernesto traveled across the border into Mexico and made his way to Mexico City.
In July of that year Ernesto met Fidel Castro for the first time, and it proved to be
a seminal event for both men. Fidel had been imprisoned for attempting to
overthrow the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, but had been released from
prison in Cuba due to a general amnesty. From their first meeting Ernesto and
Fidel developed a mutual respect for one another, and Ernesto decided to join
Fidel's group, the 26th of July Movement, in its plan to bring armed revolution to
Cuba. For over a year Ernesto and the other revolutionaries in training prepared
for the war to come by going on long marches, honing their marksmanship, and
learning the guerrilla tactics that would prove so successful in the years to come.
The wheels of revolution were set in motion on November 25, 1956, when the small motor yacht Granma pulled out of the Mexican port of Tuxpan with 82 men and a great deal of ammunition and supplies. However, almost immediately things went wrong with the expedition. Navigational errors and slow travel caused the Granma and its crew to miss those in Cuba who were supposed to meet them. Instead they disembarked in a swampy area and were immediately attacked by planes from Batista’s army who had been informed by a coast guard boat of their arrival. Many of the men brought over on the Granma were killed or separated during this initial phase of the conflict. Luckily for the revolution, Fidel and Che, along with most of the revolutionaries, were able to escape into the surrounding countryside and meet up within a few days.

Following the debacle of the Granma landing, the remaining revolutionaries, including Fidel and Che, made their way to the Sierra Maestra mountains where they began to carry out a guerrilla war against Batista’s forces. Attacking out from the Sierra Maestra the revolutionaries disrupted communications and traffic in the far-eastern portion of the island. By July of 1957 the July 26th Movement leadership had issued a statement saying “the Sierra Maestra is already an indestructible bulwark of freedom, which has taken root in the hearts of our countrymen, and it is here that we will know how to do justice to the faith and the confidence of our people.” Slowly the revolutionaries were able to win to their side the local peasants, who swelled their ranks and

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allowed the revolutionaries to begin operating outside the safety of the Sierra Maestra.

As the revolution continued into 1958 Che was given a greater role in the struggle. It can’t be emphasized enough the degree to which Fidel trusted Che. This can be seen in the fact that he gave him control of his own column, and the task of taking the war into the province of Las Villas, outside the safety of the Sierra Maestra. Che lead his column over the flat and unknown terrain of Las Villas and effectively brought the revolution to the area. The event, which truly solidified his place among the heroes of the revolution, was the “audacious attack on the city of Santa Clara, entering - with a column of barely 300 men - a city defended by tanks, artillery, and several thousand infantry soldiers”. The taking of Santa Clara toppled the last major obstacle between the guerrilla forces and Havana. With nothing left between Havana and the revolutionary forces, the Dictator Fulgencio Batista was forced to flee the island. On New Years Day, 1959, revolutionary forces entered Havana to the cheers of its citizens, happy to be rid of the corrupt Batista regime, and eager to catch a glimpse of the triumphant revolutionaries.

As the July 26th Movement consolidated power, it became increasingly clear that the Cuban economy needed restructuring. Therefore, Fidel and the revolutionary leadership adopted policies lowering rents and utility rates, as well as confiscating large land holdings while distributing the land to the peasants. Due to these policies the United States became increasingly upset with the Cuban

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6Guevara, Cuban Revolution, 22.
Revolution and took steps to isolate Cuba both politically and economically. During 1959 and 1960 Che pushed for the revolution to become socialist in nature, and build upon the reforms that had already been adopted. Though Fidel tacitly agreed with Che, he could not say so openly for fear of reprisals by the United States. The idea of a socialist nation in the western hemisphere and only ninety miles from Florida would undoubtedly cause concern in Washington, and possibly draw a military action.

Cuba was at that time, and has continued to be, largely dependent on one cash crop, sugar, which has left it vulnerable to price fluctuations. Harvesting sugar is a very labor-intensive process, requiring large numbers of workers to cut down the sugarcane by hand. This however, was only for a three-month period, thereby leaving a large portion of the Cuban population out of work for the remainder of the year. Fidel Castro noted in a speech to the United Nations that at the time of the revolution “600,000 Cubans, able and ready to work, were unemployed - as many, proportionally, as were jobless in the United States during the Great Depression.” As in Guatemala, large U.S. corporations such as United Fruit and King Ranch controlled huge tracts of land devoted to sugarcane production. Che was a major proponent of agrarian reform which would convert the large sugarcane fields into “state farms and cooperatives of considerable size”. Che’s belief in land reform can be traced back to his time in Guatemala and the steps that had been taken by the Arbenz government.

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Such actions threatened American interests in Cuba, as it had in Guatemala, and was perceived by some in the United States as being communist. In 1960 President Eisenhower ordered a reduction of 700,000 tons in the sugar quota the United States would buy from Cuba, thus hoping to strong-arm them into curtailing their land reforms. Instead this caused the Cuban government to search for other markets in which to sell their sugar. Within a few days the Soviet Union and other socialist countries announced that they would buy up any sugar the United States refused to purchase “at a preferential price of four cents” a pound.\textsuperscript{11} Cuba’s shift to the socialist camp would accelerate through 1960 and become complete by the end of 1961.

On April 17th of 1961, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, otherwise known as Playa Giron within Cuba, took place with the help of the CIA and the consent of President John F. Kennedy. Only the day before Fidel Castro had proclaimed the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution. The counterrevolutionary forces that were made up of Cuban exiles that had been trained in the United States faiured badly and were forced to surrender shortly after they landed. Later that year Che stated that “Our entire people, united and on a war footing, once more demonstrated that there are forces stronger than widespread propaganda, that there are forces stronger than the brutal force of arms, that there are higher values than the value of money.”\textsuperscript{12} This overt act of aggression on the part of the United States, for President Kennedy assumed responsibility for the action, helped to push Cuba further into the socialist camp. In August of 1961, at a

\textsuperscript{11}Guevara, \textit{Cuban Revolution}, 271.
\textsuperscript{12}Guevara, \textit{Cuban Revolution}, 272.
meeting of the Organization of American States in Uruguay, Che stated that the Cuban Revolution was "an agrarian, anti-feudal, anti-imperialist revolution that . . . became transformed into a socialist revolution, and that declares itself as such before all the Americas: a socialist revolution." Che's goal of bringing socialism to Cuba had been realized, and as we shall see his public image within Cuba grew to near mythic proportions.

The creation of Che's public image within Cuba from 1955 to 1961 came about through Che's words and deeds, as well as through the efforts of Fidel Castro. Che's very nature as a bold, ideological, self-sacrificing and often impulsive character must be taken into account when trying to understand how Fidel and the Cuban government used Che's public image during this period. These traits, along with the deeds that he performed, led Che to be viewed as a romantic revolutionary figure and had Fidel speaking of him as a hero of the revolution. As Che's popularity developed among the Cuban people it led Fidel to protect him when he came under fire for his belief in socialism from both outside and from within the island.

Another facet of Che's public image that was given a great deal of importance within Cuba is his sense of self-sacrifice. In a letter to his parents in 1956 Che wrote: "I'll be linked to Cuba's liberation. I'll either triumph with it or die there . . ." This theme of self-sacrifice is one that has been identified with Che's public image by Fidel and the Cuban government throughout the course of the revolution. Che's self-sacrifice could be see in the way he pushed himself to

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the limits of his physical endurance both in Mexico, on the long training marches he endured despite the chronic asthma, and during the war itself when he often attacked the enemy with no regard for his personal safety. In 1959, on Cuban television, Fidel said of Che, “From the first to the last day of the war, he was always ready to die, to sacrifice his life for the cause - this comrade who always had to carry medication for asthma, a vaporizer.”  

From this quotation we can see that Fidel held Che in high regard, and by proclaiming this on television Fidel was holding up Che as an example to be honored and emulated by the Cuban populace.

An example of Che creating his public image can be seen when in 1961 he wrote of an event that had taken place when he and the other revolutionaries had first landed in Cuba in 1956. After a few days on the island, Batista’s forces set upon Che and a group of revolutionaries in an ambush. Che recalled that, “A companero dropped a box of ammunition at my feet. I pointed to it, and he answered me with an anguished expression, which I remembered perfectly, that seemed to say ‘It’s too late for ammunition boxes,’ and immediately went toward the canefield.”  

Che was therefore faced with a dilemma, seeing as he was already carrying the group’s medical supplies: choosing between my devotion to medicine and my duty as a revolutionary soldier. There at my feet, were a knapsack full of medicine and a box of ammunition. I couldn’t possibly carry both of them; they were too heavy. I picked up the box of ammunition,
leaving the medicine, and started to cross the clearing, heading for
the canefield.\textsuperscript{17}

Here we can see Che portraying himself first and foremost as a revolutionary
soldier, while de-emphasizing his role as a doctor. In this case Che was actively
influencing how his public image would be viewed. It was this type of action that
aided in the formation of Che’s publicly held image as the heroic revolutionary,
which Fidel Castro and the Cuban government would stress in later years.

By the end of 1959, Che’s public image within Cuba as a heroic and self-
sacrificing guerrilla was well known throughout Cuba both through his writings
and speeches as well as through Fidel’s. In a speech in September of 1959 to a
national audience, Fidel stated, “there is one comrade who can genuinely be
called a hero, it is comrade Guevara.”\textsuperscript{18} He also went on to say, “we never had
to search for a volunteer, because he would always step forward first. How he
showed extraordinary bravery. He was a comrade who never pursued personal
objectives.”\textsuperscript{19} Through such efforts as these the image of Che as the “Heroic
Guerrilla” that had been familiar to his fellow revolutionaries throughout their
training in Mexico and subsequent fighting in Cuba, was presented to the Cuban
public as a whole. The importance given to Che by Fidel and the Cuban
government can also be seen in the fact they made a special government decree
in February, 1959, awarding Che Cuban citizenship due to his heroic and
selfless service during the revolutionary war.\textsuperscript{20} Che’s public image as the heroic

\textsuperscript{17}Guevara, Cuban Revolution, 39.
\textsuperscript{18}Castro, Che, 27.
\textsuperscript{19}Castro, Che, 23.
\textsuperscript{20}Castro, Che, 22.
Kunzle p. 27 (Cover of Time Magazine 8 August 1960)
revolutionary had therefore been validated by Fidel and the Cuban government, and had become widely disseminated throughout Cuba.

A large amount of focus was placed on Che's political beliefs from 1959 through 1960. Foreign governments and media saw him as the main proponent of socialism in the Cuban government, which he was, though he was not alone for Fidel also saw the merits of socialism. In August of 1960, Che was pictured on the cover of *Time Magazine*, placed between Nikita Khrushchev and Mao Tse-Tung, with a banner on the top suggesting "Communism's Western Beachhead."²¹ (See Visual 2) Along with *Time, U.S. News and World Report* also felt Che was a communist calling him “the ‘brains’ of Castro Cuban government” and “a cool, calculating Communist.”²² While both of these sources originated in the United States and were not available to the masses of Cuba, they would have been available to the middle class bourgeoisie which was worried about the revolution becoming a socialist one, and began a campaign against Che within Cuba. Fidel came to Che's defense in December of 1959, and to the defense of his decision to name Che as president of the National Bank:

Who began to worry when Che was named president of the National Bank? It certainly wasn't the peasants, the sugar workers, the poor. Those who were upset began to wage campaigns against Che. They began to slander him, to distort his ideas, to call into question the extraordinary merits he possesses, to make him into a

²¹Kuznie, 27.
bogeyman. But after making him a bogeyman, it turned out the
people didn't see him that way.\textsuperscript{23}

From this quotation by Fidel we can see that he was very interested in protecting
Che's public image from those who sought to soil it. In this case it was Cuban
moderates who viewed Che as the main socialist in Cuba, and in many ways
they were correct. By defending Che in the face of these attacks, Fidel was able
to give credence to what Che had been saying regarding socialism, while he
himself did not have to openly come out on the issue until he was ready, which
wasn't until April of 1961.

Che Guevara was not only valuable to Fidel Castro and the Cuban
Revolution because of his abilities as a military commander, but also as an
organizer and a political activist. The public image which developed around Che,
both through his own efforts and the efforts of Fidel Castro, was a valuable tool
in rallying support for Cuban governmental policies and for pushing the Cuban
people to persevere in the face of adversity from elements within Cuba and from
without, such as the United States. While the basic public image of Che as the
heroic revolutionary would continue to be presented into the 1990s, as we shall
see changes in the political and economic climate within Cuba changed the way
in which Che's public image and his ideas were later used.

\textbf{1962 through 1967}

The period from 1962 through 1967 was a period of great change within
Cuba, and Che and his ideas regarding economics and the export of revolution
were hotly debated during this time. Also, by proclaiming the Cuban Revolution
to be socialist in nature, Fidel and the Cuban government had effectively severed ties with the United States and most of Cuba’s Latin American neighbors. Therefore, Cuba was forced to rely on the Soviet Union and other socialist countries for not only economic assistance, but also military assistance as well. At the same time Fidel and the Cuban government hoped to stay at least somewhat independent of the Soviet Union, much like the non-aligned countries of Egypt and India had done. All these factors came into play in affecting the way both Che’s ideas and publicly held image were used within Cuba. In this section I will first use a narrative to put forth Che’s economic and political ideas, and the events that led up to his death. I will then follow with an analysis of the changes in his public image within Cuba, both through what Fidel and others said and how he was visually presented to the Cuban public.

The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis had a profound impact on Fidel and Che’s opinion of the Soviet Union. As I said, Cuba had to accept both Soviet economic and military assistance for fear of another United States backed invasion. Khrushchev wished to place intermediate ballistic missiles armed with nuclear warheads in Cuba, which would counteract the United States earlier placement of missiles in Turkey. Fidel and the Cuban government eventually agreed, and the missiles were installed. However, in October of 1962 United States intelligence and the U-2 spy plane discovered the missiles. Tensions rose to the boiling point, but after much posturing, cooler heads prevailed and the Soviets agreed to remove their missiles if the United States would promise to remove its missiles from Turkey and agree not to invade Cuba. Fidel and Che, however,
were indignant about the compromise believing that the Soviets had sold them out in favor of their own interests. The missile crisis can be seen as a contributing factor in Che’s split with the Soviets on later issues.

An example of this split can be seen after 1962 in regards to economics, and the type of socialist system Cuba would adopt. Fidel had given Che a great deal of economic control through his appointments as Minister of Industry and president of the National Bank. Che wished to adopt “the budgetary finance system”, a system contrary to the Soviet model which used “the economic accounting system” to regulate the economy. Che, however, did not agree with some of the basic principles behind the economic accounting system. His main contention with the economic accounting system was its failure to develop a communist consciousness throughout society, and he felt that the budgetary finance system would be able to accomplish it. In Che’s view two ways most readily presented themselves to building socialist consciousness within Cuba: the use of moral rather than material incentives, and the need for volunteer labor.

The use of moral as opposed to material incentives was very important to Che for he felt the reliance on material incentives such as money and consumer goods would eventually lead to capitalism. In 1963 Che said that “. . . communism is a phenomenon of consciousness and not solely of production. We cannot arrive at communism through the simple mechanical accumulation of

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quantities of goods.\textsuperscript{25} To counteract this consumerism, Che felt that society must be educated in the doctrines of socialism to allow them to forgo nonessential material goods. Thus moral incentives can be seen as the intrinsic or psychological reward individuals receive from the bettering of society through their actions. Che felt that the economic accounting system was flawed because it did not rely on moral incentives, but instead on "consumer goods, that is the watch word, and great molder, in the end, of consciousness, according to the defenders of the other system. We believe that direct material incentives and consciousness are contradictory terms."\textsuperscript{26} Che felt it was of the utmost importance to create a socialist consciousness among the people, and that moral incentives were an effective way of accomplishing that end. While skeptics such as Carlos Rafael Rodriguez pointed to a quotation by V.I. Lenin that "relying on firmness of convictions, loyalty, and other splendid moral qualities is anything but a serious attitude in politics".\textsuperscript{27} Che had a more idyllic view of humanity, and he felt that through education and understanding people could be motivated through moral as opposed to material means.

Another way in which Che hoped to build and create a socialist consciousness within Cuba was through the use of volunteer labor. Because the economic accounting system by its very nature relied on material incentives such as money to motivate workers, the use of volunteer labor was not a high priority. Che and other proponents of the budgetary finance system felt, on the contrary, that volunteer labor was extremely important. Voluntary labor would not only

create benefits to society through the labor given and the projects accomplished, but would also aid the development of socialist consciousness which Che felt was so vital. Under Che mini-brigades were formed which were "composed of workers from a particular workplace who volunteered to be relieved of their normal responsibilities for a period of time in order to build housing, schools, and day-care centers." In 1964 Che stated "... socialism, is not being built simply to have wonderful factories. It is being built for the sake of the whole man... We will not do an adequate job if we become simply producers of goods, of raw materials, without becoming at the same time producers of men." Thus through the use of voluntary labor the development of socialist consciousness would follow, accomplished, Che hoped, through the budgetary finance system. After Che's departure voluntary labor increasingly fell into disuse and by the early 1970s the use of voluntary labor had been largely abandoned.

The debate over what type of socialist economic system Cuba should have went on for much of the 1960s. However, after Che's departure from Cuba in 1965 the economic accounting system increasingly gained favor and by the end of the decade was firmly in place. For Che the economic accounting system was flawed in that it failed to recognize the importance of developing a socialist consciousness among the people. The fact that it was the system in use in the Soviet Union also made it unsavory to Che after his experiences with the Soviets.

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26Guevara, Selected Works, 121.
27Lenin q.t. in Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, "Che's Contribution to the Cuban Economy," New International no. 8 (1991): 43.
28Tablada, 233.
29Ernesto Guevara q.t. in Tablada, 170.
30Julie Marie Bunch, Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 12.
during the missile crisis. Because the economic accounting system won out over Che’s budgetary finance system his ideas regarding moral incentives and voluntary labor were largely ignored, and fell into disuse after he left Cuba in 1965 to pursue other revolutionary movements abroad.

Che’s views also went against Soviet policy on the creation of revolutions abroad. Soviet policy during the 1960s focused more on furthering diplomatic and commercial ties with all countries, while supporting communist parties that were peacefully trying to bring about political change.\(^{31}\) This difference could be seen in Che’s first revolutionary mission abroad to the Congo in 1965. In 1961 Patrice Lumumba, the democratically elected president of the Congo had been assassinated, apparently under orders from CIA director Allen Dulles.\(^{32}\) After the assassination, an ongoing battle had taken place for control of the country between forces sympathetic to Lumumba’s cause and those who backed neo-colonial and United States interests. Che left Cuba, giving up his government positions and his aforementioned Cuban citizenship to prove to himself and the world that guerrilla warfare and the creation of revolution outside of Cuba was possible.

Fidel backed Che’s mission to the Congo both out of a sense of loyalty to Che, and, more importantly, to validate the Cuban model of revolution. Africa was seen as an area where inroads could be made to attain trading partners and political allies that would ease Cuba’s dependence on the Soviet Union. In the

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\(^{32}\) Anderson, 497-498.
Congo, however, Che found a much different situation than had been the case in Cuba. Che’s allies in the Congo were extremely unorganized and often refused to fight. These forces were led by a follower of Lumumba, Laurent Kabila, who has since assumed control of the Congo in the late 1990s. At the time, however, a lack of organization among the Congolese forces, the general apathy of the Congolese people towards the revolutionary movement, and the superior numbers opposing him, caused Che’s Congo adventure to be a complete failure.

After returning to Cuba for a short time to recuperate in 1966, Che once again sought a country in which to initiate revolution. This time he decided on Bolivia. Che traveled in disguise to Bolivia in November 1966, where according to Harry Villegas, one of his trusted followers, “his decision to come to Bolivia was because it was the country with the best conditions for a guerrilla base in the Continent.”33 Once Che arrived in Bolivia, however, the leader of the Bolivian communist party, Mario Monje, withdrew his and the party’s support for Che’s revolution. Monje had been in regular contact with the Soviet Union in the months leading up to Che’s arrival, and had the impression that the Soviets were disturbed by Che’s efforts to create revolutions.34 The Soviet Union’s disapproval undoubtedly influenced Monje’s decision not to support Che in his efforts. Even without ideal conditions Che still went forward with his plans in Bolivia, perhaps believing his mere presence could overcome the inherent difficulties in operating there.

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33 Harry Villegas qt. in Anderson, 702.
34 Anderson, 694.
To create a revolution in Bolivia, Che hoped to use guerrilla tactics he had learned and employed in the Cuban Revolution to great effect. In Bolivia, however, Che found a different set of circumstances. For one, there was an overall lack of support from the Bolivian peasants towards Che and his guerrilla fighters. For the most part the local populace saw them as outsiders. Also, in Bolivia, Che ran up against a determined government that was actively supported by the United States. Che also neglected to take into account the importance Fidel had played in the revolution in Cuba, especially as an overseer of operations. Che was much more adept at tactical level operations rather than the more strategic demands placed on him in Bolivia. Almost from the outset Che ran into troubles: he asked too much of his men, he led them on long winding marches, and their base of operations was discovered by the Bolivian military. After the base was discovered Che was forced to lead a group of men, some two dozen in all, on a exhausting journey through southern Bolivia. Eventually, after months of wandering, Che’s tattered group of guerrillas was trapped in a ravine near La Higuera, in southeast Bolivia in October of 1967. Che was captured by the Bolivian forces, interrogated, and summarily executed without a trial by an officer under the direct orders of Bolivian President Barrientos. At first, upon receiving word of Che’s demise, Fidel and others in Cuba held out hope that the news coming from Bolivia was just imperialist propaganda. On October 15th, six days after Che’s death, Fidel was able to

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35 Castro, Che, 67-68.
36 Anderson, 705-710.
37 Anderson, 737.
confirm the news of Che’s passing and declared three days of official mourning in Cuba and designated October 8th as the Day of the Heroic Guerrilla.\textsuperscript{38}

Che’s public image within Cuba had been undergoing changes throughout the years from 1962 to 1967. While those facets of his image from the early years of the revolution such as self-sacrifice, devotion to socialism, and Che as a heroic revolutionary were all still valid, new assertions and criticisms were made to add to Che’s public image. To analyze these changes I will use as my main source Fidel Castro’s memorial speech devoted to Che made on October 16, 1967, in Havana’s Plaza of Revolution. The speech was heard by a crowd of “several hundred thousand” in the Plaza itself, and was printed the very next day in, \textit{Granma}, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Cuba.\textsuperscript{39} In Fidel’s 1967 speech I focused on four issues in which he tried to influence the way Che’s public image and ideas would be viewed within Cuba: he described Che as being excessively aggressive, he spoke of Che’s economic ideas very briefly, he proclaimed Che the model revolutionary for all Cubans to emulate, and made Che out to be the prototype proletarian internationalist. Besides analyzing Fidel’s speech I will look at some visual images from around Che’s death to give a clearer picture of Che’s public image at the time of his death.

At the news of Che’s death the whole of Cuba went into at first a state of shock and then mourning after Fidel Castro confirmed the fact that Che had been killed in Bolivia while attempting to foment revolution there. After Fidel’s declaration, efforts were immediately made to prepare the Plaza of Revolution

\textsuperscript{38}Guevara, \textit{Cuban Revolution}, 18.
\textsuperscript{39}Guevara, \textit{Cuban Revolution}, 19.
Anderson p. 625  (A Billboard in Havana's Plaza of Revolution 1967)
Kunzle p. 58  (Poster made for Che's death October 1967)
for a memorial ceremony in honor of Che. On the side of the Ministry of the Interior building a huge seven story mural of Che was erected based on a photo of him taken in 1960. (See Visual 3) This picture of Che, which is perhaps the most famous of him, shows him gazing off into the distance with his long locks and beret making him look every bit the revolutionary. Also produced for the memorial were posters using the same 1960 picture of Che, although on the poster the image is fading out of view, perhaps signifying Che's death.40 (See Visual 4) The poster, however, also has the revolutionary slogan “Hasta La Victoria Siempre” or Ever Onward Unto Victory with Che’s signature showing that just because he was dead the revolution would not falter but would eventually be victorious. Both of these examples used earlier representations of Che, as opposed to ones nearer the time of his death, undoubtedly to capitalize on his more youthful and idyllic appearance and to bring out the image of the heroic revolutionary that was formed during the time the photo was taken.

After the three days of official mourning, Fidel Castro made an emotional speech in memory of Che, and touched on many topics including Che’s use of guerrilla warfare. Fidel spent a good deal of time retelling many of Che’s exploits during the Cuban revolutionary war, and went on to call him an “incomparable soldier” and an “incomparable leader.”41 Along with these complimentary comments, Fidel also pointed out a weakness of Che’s when it came to guerrilla warfare. Fidel said that he was “extraordinarily aggressive”, and that “his Achille’s heel, was this excessively aggressive quality, his absolute contempt for

40Kunzle, 58.
41Fidel Castro qt. in Guevara, Cuban Revolution, 21.
danger." While this could be seen to be Fidel expressing anger at Che’s lack of care for his personal safety, I see another motive behind these remarks. While Che was alive Cuba had been active in supporting his revolutionary movements abroad in both the Congo and Bolivia despite the Soviet Union’s dislike for such movements. Fidel and the Cuban government had felt obligated to aid Che in his attempts at creating revolutions out of a sense of loyalty for all Che had done for Cuba. However, with Che no longer alive to push for the creation of these revolutionary movements, it was much easier for Fidel and the Cuban government to fall into line behind the Soviets. This is not to say that Fidel and the Cuban government agreed with all Soviet policies, for they did not. But, by labeling Che as “excessively aggressive” regarding guerrilla warfare, Fidel could moderate Cuba’s position regarding the creation of revolutions without overtly betraying Che’s legacy.

It is interesting to note that Fidel’s speech skimmed over very briefly Che’s economic ideas regarding voluntary labor and moral incentives. The fact that Fidel mentioned Che’s ideas regarding economics might lead one to believe that Fidel and the Cuban government had given their full backing to his ideas. However, Fidel devotes only two short paragraphs totaling five sentences in a speech that ran ten pages to ideas Che wrote on extensively. Fidel notes that Che “devoted his scheduled days off to voluntary work,” and that “he stimulated that activity in which our people are making greater and greater efforts.” But as was noted earlier, voluntary labor was already on the decline in Cuba during

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42 Fidel Castro qt. in Guevara, Cuban Revolution, 22.
43 Fidel Castro qt. in Guevara, Cuban Revolution, 26.
1967, and had been since Che left in 1965. Fidel also noted Che’s belief in “moral values,” and that they were “the fundamental lever in the construction of communism in human society.”  

While Fidel brought attention to Che’s ideas in this speech, the fact was that Cuba by 1967 was firmly under the economic accounting system that roundly ignored moral incentives and the importance of building socialist consciousness. So, while Fidel may have given lip service to Che’s economic ideas, the public image Fidel and the Cuban government were creating for Che in 1967 did not bring focus to his economic ideas.

In David Kunzle’s book, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*, there is an interesting example of a visual image embodying the general lack of knowledge about Che’s economic ideas within Cuba at this time. (See Visual 5) Kunzle describes this mural from the presidential offices of the national bank as “one of Havana’s least known murals, hidden from the general public.”  

It was done in 1968 to commemorate Che’s presidency over the Cuban national bank from 1959 to 1961. The mural itself is quite powerful in presenting an image of Che as leading Cuban industry and the economy in a new direction, with arrows representing different Cuban industries flowing out from Che’s beard across the entire island. The mural also uses words like hero and Commandante to describe Che, drawing upon the previously established image of Che as the heroic revolutionary, except now his talents have been focused on the economic rather than the military realm. However, the fact that this mural is largely

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45 Kunzle, 39.
unknown to the Cuban public parallels the general lack of knowledge regarding Che's economic ideas.

Fidel also set Che up as the model citizen for all Cubans to emulate; whether they were men, women, or children they should be like Che. Fidel stated in his speech memorializing Che:

If we wish to express what we want the men of the future
generations to be, we must say: Let them be like Che! If we wish
to say how we want our children to be educated, we must say
without hesitation: We want them to be educated in Che's spirit! . . .
If we want to express what we want our children to be, we must say
from our very hearts as ardent revolutionaries: We want them to be
like Che! 46

From this quotation there is a clear indication that Fidel wanted Cubans to identify with Che in certain ways, and later in the speech he defined exactly how they should emulate him. He calls on Cubans to "be like Che" in their revolutionary self-sacrifice, and their spirit of work. 47 Both of these concepts, self-sacrifice and spirit of work, were ideas that had been tied into Che's public image during the early years of the Cuban Revolution. But now Fidel was actively emphasizing that Cubans should not only venerate Che as a great man who worked hard and sacrificed himself for the revolution, but that they should emulate him in these deeds and strive to become like Che themselves.

47 Fidel Castro qt. in Guevara, Cuban Revolution, 28.
An important point that Fidel made regarding Che’s public image that had not been stressed before this time had to do with the concept of proletarian internationalism. Fidel said in his speech “when one speaks of a proletarian internationalist, and when an example of a proletarian internationalist is sought, that example, high above any other, will be the example of Che.”\footnote{Fidel Castro qt. in Guevara, \textit{Cuban Revolution}, 28.}\footnote{Fidel Castro qt. in Guevara, \textit{Cuban Revolution}, 28-29.} Up to 1967 the main area of proletarian internationalism, or the aiding of socialist peoples throughout the world, performed by Cuba had been through Che’s efforts to create revolutions abroad. Che’s efforts in the Congo and Bolivia had not gained a great deal of public attention within Cuba because they were kept quiet to protect Che and his guerrilla fighters from detection. With Che’s death Fidel and the Cuban government lost its biggest initiator of internationalist movements. However, Che’s death gave the Cuban leadership the opportunity to use him as a symbol for their subsequent internationalist policies without the need to gain his approval. Fidel said that Che “was ready to shed his generous blood spontaneously and immediately, on behalf of any people, for the cause of any people!”\footnote{Fidel Castro qt. in Guevara, \textit{Cuban Revolution}, 28.} For the most part this statement was probably true. In most any situation Che would have fought for people in need, but the fact that he would no longer be around to possibly voice dissent allowed Fidel and the Cuban government to use Che’s image to generate popular support for whatever international policy they preferred.

The unifying of Che with the concept of proletarian internationalism was also done through visual images. An example can be seen in this poster for the
Kunzle p. 38
(Poster made for day of the Heroic Guerrilla
October 1968)
Day of the Heroic Guerrilla, October 8th, 1968, using again the picture of Che from 1960, the prototypical visual image as Che the guerrilla fighter and revolutionary soldier.\textsuperscript{50} (See Visual 6) His picture is placed at the center of South America and it is radiating in waves outward towards the edges of the continent. This image conveys the sense that Che’s influence on South American was far from over and that in the words of Fidel “we must face the future with optimism” regarding Che’s continued role in internationalist movements.\textsuperscript{51}

Through analyzing Fidel’s speech from October 16th, 1967, and through the use of visual images from the period, I have identified the ways Che’s public image was altered from the earlier image of Che as the heroic and selfless revolutionary. First, the fact that Fidel called Che overly aggressive in guerrilla warfare can be seen as a means to moderate Cuba’s position on the creation of revolutionary movements abroad. Secondly the brief mention of Che’s economic ideas coupled with the fact that they were being removed from the Cuban economy shows that Che’s economic ideas were not an integral part of his public image in 1967. Thirdly Fidel attempted to change the Cuban people’s outlook on Che from someone to be revered, to someone who was to be emulated in daily life. And lastly Che became the symbol of proletarian internationalism within Cuba. All these changes came about through Fidel and the Cuban government’s adaptation to the changing political and economic climate, with the greatest

\textsuperscript{50} Kunzle, 38.
\textsuperscript{51} Fidel Castro q.t. in Guevara, Cuban Revolution, 29.
contributing force being the Soviet Union and its increasing influence on Cuban affairs.

1968 through 1987

The period from 1968 to 1987, encompassing the twenty years after Che’s death, saw a great deal of political and economic change occur within Cuba. The main impetus for this change was the rise and later fall of Soviet assistance for Cuba. Throughout the late-1960s and 1970s the Soviet Union gave a great deal of economic aid to Cuba, which in turn caused Fidel and the Cuban government’s support of Soviet policies. In the 1980s a worsening Soviet economy led to reductions in the amount of aid given to Cuba. With Mikhail Gorbachev’s rise to power in 1985, the Soviet Union embarked on perestroika, or “restructuring”, and glasnost, or “open”, policies, which shifted focus from Cold War tensions and expensive Third World revolutionary commitments.⁵² Such efforts as these ran counter to what Fidel and the Cuban government were trying to accomplish, and this, coupled with the reduction in aid, lead Cuba to differ with the Soviet Union on certain issues. In this section I will take the four issues that were examined in Fidel’s 1967 speech about Che and give a short narrative of how they were implemented and in some cases changed throughout the 1970s and 1980s. After an example of each issue is given I will analyze how Fidel Castro and the Cuban government utilized Che’s public image and ideas to support their policies.

The first issue to be studied deals with Fidel’s contention that Che was overly aggressive in guerrilla warfare, and that this assertion coupled with Che’s
death, allowed Cuba to moderate its position regarding the creation and support of revolutionary movements abroad. An example of this can be seen in the way Cuba dealt with Nicaragua and the FSLN or Sandinista revolutionary movement from 1968 to its victory in 1979. Cuban motivation to support the Sandinista movement was especially strong for the Somoza regime of Nicaragua was viewed as corrupt and a key supporter of the United States within Central America. An example of Somoza's support for the United States can be seen in the fact that the CIA backed force in the Bay of Pigs invasion trained and embarked for Cuba from Nicaragua.

Thus while there was a great deal of incentive to aid the Sandinista movement in attempting to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship, no direct military assistance in the form of Cuban soldiers was given to the FSLN. One possible reason might be that, as Che's attempt at creating a revolutionary movement in Bolivia had shown, the United States would become involved in repressing those movements in Latin America, and that in Fidel's estimation only direct Cuban involvement in Nicaragua would give the United States reason enough to enter the conflict.\textsuperscript{53} Also, the aforementioned pressure by the Soviet Union to curb Cuban guerrilla warfare efforts and follow a more moderate course can be seen in this 1976 quotation by Fidel:

\begin{quote}
It is our deepest conviction that each people must be free to build their own destiny; that each people and only the people of each country will make their own revolution. The government of Cuba
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{53}Bunck, 14-15.
has never thought of taking revolution to any nation of this
hemisphere with the arms of its military units. Such an idea would
be absurd and ridiculous.\textsuperscript{54}

In this quotation Fidel seems to ignore the support of Che’s Bolivian campaign by
the Cuban government. For instance, members of the Cuban intelligence
service were operating in Bolivia in support of Che’s operations, thus giving
Fidel’s claims of not exporting revolution little credibility.

The Cuban government did aid the Sandinistas throughout the 1970s and
into the 1980s with civilian assistance. The majority of the aid coming from Cuba
was in the form of teachers and medical personnel. In July of 1980, Fidel spoke
of “108,000 Nicaraguans who have just learned how to read and write saluted
the revolution today. And half a million more Nicaraguans will be able to receive
their literacy certificates in the next few weeks,” because of the help of Cuban
volunteer teachers who had gone to Nicaragua.\textsuperscript{55} Fidel also spoke of “more than
1500 Cuban doctors have worked in Nicaragua, performing 65,000 operations,
assisting at 30,000 births, and providing more than 5 million consultations with
individual patients.”\textsuperscript{56} While the efforts by Cuba to send civilian technicians to
Nicaragua are good examples of proletarian internationalism, the fact that Cuba
did not actively aid the Sandinistas militarily goes against Che’s ideas regarding
guerrilla warfare.

\textsuperscript{55} Gary Prevost, “Cuban Foreign Policy in the 1980s: Retreat from Revolutionary Perspectives or Maturation” in Wilber A
164.
\textsuperscript{54}Fidel Castro qt. in ed. Michael Tabor, Cuba’s International Foreign Policy 1975-80:Fidel Castro Speeches (New York:
\textsuperscript{55}Fidel Castro qt. in Tabor, 313.
\textsuperscript{56}Prevost, 164-165.
The change in political climate following Che’s death, exemplified by a strong dependency on Soviet economic aid and the proven willingness of the United States to become involved in the suppression of revolutionary movements in the Western Hemisphere, led Cuba to refrain from taking military action in Nicaragua. As seen by this quotation from Fidel in 1976, Cuba wanted to erase the fact that it had ever tried to create revolutions in Latin America. For that reason Fidel and the Cuban government at that time did not emphasize Che’s public image and ideas regarding guerrilla warfare. From the speeches I read throughout the 1970s regarding Nicaragua, there was no mention of Che by Fidel. Also, I was unable to find any visual images from within Cuba of Che that were used in conjunction with Cuba’s support of the Sandinista movement, though I did find instances of Che being used in murals and posters within Nicaragua that drew heavily upon Che’s guerrilla warrior image and ideas.\footnote{Kunze, 26, 73, and 116.}

In 1987, for the twentieth anniversary of Che’s death, Fidel gave a speech remembering Che, and uncharacteristically mentioned Cuba’s involvement in Nicaragua. In the speech Fidel was commenting on how Che would be proud “of our teachers who went to Nicaragua and the 100,000 who offered to go. He’d be proud of our doctors willing to go anywhere in the world, of our technicians, of our hundreds of thousands of compatriots who have been on internationalist missions!”\footnote{Fidel Castro qt. in Tablada, 54.} In this case Fidel was trying to give support for Cuba’s internationalist efforts in Nicaragua by showing that Che would approve of the efforts. The fact that Che was not invoked by Fidel at the time the Sandinistas
were fighting, during the 1970s, and that there was a lack of visual representations of Che in Cuba in support of Nicaragua shows that Che’s publicly held image did not fit with what was going on there. It follows that since Che had already been deemed to be the symbol of proletarian internationalism in Cuba, it must have been the more inflammatory portion of his public image, that of the guerrilla warrior and heroic revolutionary, that kept his image from being tied to Cuban efforts in Nicaragua.

The second issue to be dealt with was the lack of support by Fidel and the Cuban government for Che’s ideas on economics, especially regarding voluntary labor and moral incentives. Instead, the earlier emphasis on voluntary labor and moral incentives was replaced with a greater reliance on material incentives and administrative methods, as held by the economic accounting system. This system was to hold true throughout the 1970s and on into the early 1980s before corruption in the Cuban economy and the lessening of Soviet economic aid forced Fidel and the Cuban government to revisit Che’s economic ideas. Thus, for the better part of the period in question running roughly from 1968 on through 1986, Che’s economic ideas were neglected and his public image was not emphasized in that area. However, the 1987 publishing of Carlos Tablada’s book, then titled *The Economic Thought of Ernesto Che Guevara*, along with Fidel’s speech in October of that year, brought Che’s economic ideas back to the forefront in Cuba.

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Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the capitalist forces that are inherent in the economic accounting system reared their ugly head within Cuban society, as Che had warned they would. In many ways the words of Che were prophetic in their deduction of what would happen when the building of socialism was allowed to ride on capitalist mechanisms of production. As Soviet economic assistance continued to decline during the 1980s, Cuba began to search for ways to increase production while at the same time eliminating the corruption and low morale that had become endemic in Cuba. Out of these needs came a movement within the Cuban government called the rectification process, designed to rectify past errors such as the withdrawal of support for Che’s economic ideas. The change that took place was made obvious by the space devoted to Che’s economic ideas: the two short paragraphs of 1967 had become ten of twenty pages of the 1987 text.

Therefore, not only were Che’s economic ideas talked about within Cuba, but his public image began to be associated with economics as well. In Fidel’s words, “We’re rectifying all the shoddiness and mediocrity that is precisely the negation of Che’s ideas, his revolutionary thought, his style, his spirit, and his example.”\(^{60}\) Thus, a return to some of Che’s ideas on economics began to percolate through the Cuban economy. Che’s emphasis on voluntary labor was emphasized and Fidel expounded upon its importance,

Voluntary work, the brainchild of Che and one of the best things he left us during his stay in our country and his part in the revolution, was steadily on the decline . . . The bureaucrat’s view, the
Kunzle p. 71 (A billboard in Havana in the late 1980s, the text in the billboard reads "Voluntary Labor is the Cornerstone of our Communist Education")
technocrat's view that volunteer work was neither basic nor essential gained more and more ground.\footnote{Fidel Castro, qt. in Tablada, 34.}

Following the introduction of the rectification process, voluntary labor in Cuba rebounded to a level comparable to, and even beyond, what had been experienced earlier in the Cuban Revolution and even the Russian Revolution.\footnote{Fidel Castro, qt. in Waters, Che Guevara, 25.}

The use of visual images to get across the Cuban government's new stance on voluntary labor was also widespread. In this billboard from Havana in the late 1980s, based on a picture of Che performing voluntary labor, there is a saying on the bottom that reads "Voluntary labor is the cornerstone of our communist education."\footnote{Waters, Che Guevara, 27.} (See Visual 7) Such images as these were widely disseminated following 1986 and the beginning of the rectification process. While this facet of Che's legacy had largely been ignored for nearly twenty years after his death, Fidel and the Cuban government reemphasized this aspect of Che's ideas, and made it a part of his public image within Cuba.

The use of moral, rather than material incentives, also become increasingly important as the economic aid the Soviet Union gave Cuba continued to dwindle. In 1986 Fidel wrote that building socialism "can't be done by exacerbating and deifying material incentives."\footnote{Kunzle, 71.} He also stated that, "many years ago, one of the most intelligent and brightest revolutionaries, Che Guevara explained this with great emphasis. Many of the warnings given by Che on this

\footnote{Fidel Castro, In Defense of Socialism (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1989), 126.}
matter later became reality. The economic accounting system which had won out over the budgetary finance system which Che had been a proponent of, failed to take into account the necessity of moral incentives in building socialism towards the ultimate goal of communism.

Therefore, out of the necessity of the decreasing economic aid from the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro and the Cuban government were forced to go back to some of Che’s economic ideas. For much of this period Che’s public image within Cuba had not been identified at all with economic issues, but instead his image as a heroic and selfless revolutionary, and then as the symbol of proletarian internationalism were stressed. The rectification process, however, caused Che’s public image to take on aspects of his economic ideas regarding voluntary labor and moral incentives. The writings of the Cuban economist Carlos Tablada and the public visual representations of Che performing voluntary labor were also examples of Che’s economic ideas gaining support during the rectification.

The third issue raised in Fidel’s eulogy of Che had to do with the emphasis Fidel placed on Che as someone to be not only revered as a great man, but also someone to be emulated by all Cubans, and especially by children. To accomplish this, Fidel and the Cuban government initiated the teaching of some of Che’s values and ideas in Cuba’s school system. In explaining why Cuba followed these principles, Fidel said in 1971, “… we who knew Che, we who had that great privilege, understand why our people and our country have chosen this model for our children. And we believe it is an

65 Castro, Defense of Socialism, 126.
Kunzle p. 114  (These two pictures of a Steel sculpture of Che in the patio of the Palace of the Pioneers, Havana, 1983)
extraordinarily worthy one."\textsuperscript{66} Throughout the 1970s Fidel and the Cuban government placed a great deal of emphasis on Che's selflessness, his heroism, his altruism, and his support for internationalism.\textsuperscript{67} These basic ideas, with the notable exception of his economic ideas, were the basis for the type of people Fidel Castro and the Cuban government wanted future Cubans to be.

The most important facets of Che's public image that were taught to children during the 1970s were his selflessness and support of internationalism. In her research on Cuban schools in the mid-1970s, Karen Wald found that in "talking to children in any part of Cuba, the outstanding characteristics you learn about Che are his selflessness and his internationalism."\textsuperscript{68} Che was used as a powerful symbol in Cuba in terms of internationalism; one could say he was its patron saint. Wald has written that in speaking to Cuban children, "internationalism is the reason most often given for their love and admiration for Che Guevara: 'Because he fought not just for himself or his own country, but for all people...'."\textsuperscript{69} The reason for Wald's findings, namely that internationalism was the trait most often identified with Che, probably was due to the huge amount of emphasis that the Cuban government was placing on internationalist missions in the 1970s. They had utilized Che's public image within Cuba to garner support from the Cuban people for their policies regarding Angola.

A visual representation of the importance of Che's image to children in Cuba can be seen in a sculpture in the Palace of Pioneers, in Lenin Park, Havana. (See Visuals 8 and 9) The sculpture, which is entitled \textit{Che and the}...
Children, was completed in 1983 and consists of “nine concentric stars into the heart of which is cut a silhouette of Che.”70 The idea being embodied by the sculpture is that Cuban children should project themselves outward like stars, see themselves reflected in the polished steel of the sculpture, and feel a connection with Che and the motto “We will be like Che.”71 Numerous children would visit this sculpture from both Havana and from the rest of the country through field trips to visit the Palace of Pioneers. The Pioneros, or Pioneers, is the Cuban communist youth organization, and they use as their motto the aforementioned “We will be like Che.”

By 1987 the changing political and economic climate within Cuba necessitated a somewhat different outlook on what Che’s public image should mean to Cubans, and especially to children. In his speech in 1987 on the twentieth anniversary of Che’s death, Fidel emphasized that Che would volunteer for the most difficult tasks, he was self-sacrificing, he displayed true solidarity, and he was a simple man.72 Gone was the intense emphasis on Che as the symbol of proletarian internationalism which Fidel had pushed in the 1970s, and which Karen Wald had observed in children at the time. Instead, the changing of the Cuban political and economic face, namely the decreased role of internationalism due to lack of funding and the withdrawal of economic aid by the Soviet Union, led Fidel in the late 1980s to present Che’s image as a survivor.

69Wald, 377.
70Wald, 53.
71Kunzle, 53.
72Kunzle, 53, 114.
73Fidel Castro qt. in Tablada, 39.
The fourth issue raised by Fidel, the importance that was placed on proletarian internationalism after Che’s death and throughout the 1970s, has already been touched upon. However, there is one example of proletarian internationalism that surpassed all of Cuba’s other missions abroad, and that was to the African country of Angola. The Angolans had been waging a war of independence against Portugal, which had colonized it several centuries earlier. Portugal, unlike most of the other African colonizers, had refused to give up its colonies, which included Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea. By 1974 Portugal had agreed to pull out of Angola and allow elections to create a new government. In Angola, the (MPLA) or Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, was the group that received assistance from the Cuban government. Beginning in 1975 the Cuban government provided large scale military and civilian assistance to Angola. By the time Cuba officially ended its Angolan operations in the early 1990s, according to the Cuban communist party roughly “300,000 Cubans ‘fulfilled their internationalist duty with honor in that sister nation’.”\textsuperscript{73}

Cuba’s support of Angola and its revolutionary struggle began before Che’s death moderated Cuba’s stance on armed struggle abroad, and limited the creation of new revolutionary movements. While in the Congo, Che had met with many African revolutionaries who would later carry revolution to their own countries. Among those Che met was Agostinho Neto, the man who would later lead the MPLA in Angola. While Che’s mission to the Congo was not successful in its own right, in the words of Gabriel Garcia Marquez it “left behind a seed that

no one would be able to stamp out."74 By October 1966 Cuba had begun training MPLA recruits in Cuba, and after Neto’s visit to Cuba that same year a training base was set up for Angolans in the recently independent Congo-Brazzaville.75 Thus, while Cuban troops were not involved in Angola before 1975, Cuba’s early involvement in the struggle and the fact that the struggle was taking place in Africa rather than Latin America, allowed Cuba to give military support to Angola.

As has been mentioned, Fidel often invoked Che’s image to rally the Cuban people around his internationalist policies. An example can be seen in his speech in 1976 during the celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the Bay of Pigs:

> And in Africa, together with the blood of the heroic fighters of Angola, Cuban blood, that of the sons of Marti, Maceo and Agramonte, that of the heirs of the internationalist tradition set by . . . Che Guevara, [Prolonged Applause] also flowed.76

As we can see from this quotation Fidel not only identified Che with internationalism, but also the mere mention of his name received a jubilant response from the crowd. By connecting Che’s image with internationalism, in this case the struggle in Angola, the Cuban government could effectively gain support for their policies while receiving Che’s tacit approval.

A visual example of the way in which Fidel and the Cuban government bound Che’s image with proletarian internationalism can be seen in this billboard

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Kunzle p. 52 (A billboard in Havana from the mid-1970s, the flags are those of Cuba and international socialism)
Kunzle p. 30 (This poster was made for the Day of Solidarity with Angola 4 February 1971)
from the mid-1970s. (See Visual 10) In it the popular revolutionary picture of Che from 1960 is used along with the flags of Cuba and International Socialism to show a bond between the Cuban people and the proletariat throughout the world. From Che’s star on his beret radiates out a light that could represent the Cuban people who were being urged to go abroad and help other peoples in need. Che’s public image was used to exhort Cubans to fulfill their duty of proletarian internationalism and in the process to be like Che.

It is important to clarify that while Cuba did use military force in Angola and not in Nicaragua, the Soviet Union supported both of these policies. Che on the other hand had wanted to initiate revolutionary movements in countries in which they didn’t exist. This policy was greatly frowned upon by the Soviet Union, and because of the relative failure of the past revolutionary attempts and the economic assistance provided by the Soviet Union, Cuba drew back from Che’s more inflammatory idea of creating revolutions, and in the case of Nicaragua of giving military support. The difference with Angola was that Cuba supported the movement before Che’s death and continued to do so afterward, as can be seen in this poster from 1971 commemorating Cuba’s solidarity with Angola. (See Visual 11) Because Africa was seen as a political backwater, Cuba could operate militarily there with little fear of direct United States intervention, as was the case in Nicaragua.

The Cuban government’s use of Che’s image in relation to internationalism was effective at first in causing the Cuban people to back Fidel

75Ratliff, 34.
76Fidel Castro qt. in Tabor, 90.
Castro's initiatives in Angola. According to Mary-Alice Waters, "some 300,000 Cubans went to Angola as internationalist volunteers between 1975 and 1988", many more than went to any other country. With the Cuban aid the MPLA found initial success in 1975 in subduing the other two revolutionary groups, the FNLA and UNITA. However, these movements began receiving aid from neighboring African countries, especially South Africa, which allowed them to continue operating. Casualties began to mount for the Cuban government as the struggle dragged on into the 1980s. By 1987 roughly 10,000 Cubans had died in the struggle to support the MPLA, and one can see why Fidel and the Cuban leadership sought an end to the conflict after nearly thirteen years of involvement.

The struggle in Angola, instead of ending in 1975, dragged on for most of the 1980s, with ever-larger contingents of Cuban soldiers and support staff needed to maintain control of the country for the MPLA. Even with the use of Che's image to back the struggle in Angola the Cuban people eventually began to frown on continued involvement in Angola. In 1987 Fidel invoked Che's image regarding Angola and internationalism saying that, "he became a symbol for all the oppressed, for all the exploited, for all patriotic and democratic forces, for all revolutionaries. He became a permanent and invincible symbol." An end to the struggle presented itself after the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1988, in which the Cuban/MPLA forces defeated those of UNITA and their South African

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77Kunzle, 52.
76Kunzle, 30.
76Waters, Che Guevara, 20.
backers. The battle was a huge success for Cuba, giving them an opportunity to extricate them from Angola while claiming victory, and at the same time dealing a great political blow to the apartheid regime in South Africa. That Cuban involvement in Angola was an expression of internationalist sentiments, of which Che was the most important symbol, is supported through both Fidel’s speeches and visual images. And it must be remembered that the Soviet Union for the aforementioned reasons approved of Cuba’s military involvement in Angola, whereas it would not have been condoned in Nicaragua.

Through these four issues taken from Fidel’s speech in 1967 I have traced some of the ways in which Che’s public image and his ideas were used in Cuba from 1968 to 1987. The influence of the Soviet Union was the greatest single outside factor that caused changes to occur in the use of Che’s image and ideas by Fidel and the Cuban government. In regards to foreign policy, its presence can be felt through the moderation of Cuba’s use of armed force and lack of drive to create new revolutions, and to the adoption of Che as the symbol of proletarian internationalism. In terms of education, Che went from being a man to be revered for what he had accomplished in his life, to someone who was to be emulated by all Cubans, and whose example was to be taught in the schools. And finally in the area of Che’s ideas on economics, which had not been utilized by Fidel and the Cuban government during the 1970s and early 1980s, we saw a return to Che’s ideas and the addition of some of Che’s views on economics being woven into his public image within Cuba.

81 Nazario, 122.
82 Fidel Castro qt. in Tablada, 37.
1988 through the 1990s

The late 1980s and 1990s in Cuba have been marked by many trials and tribulations, but also triumphs. There have included the fall of the Soviet Union, diminished international operations, and in 1997 the retrieval of Che Guevara’s mortal remains. Throughout this period the way in which Fidel Castro and the Cuban government have used Che Guevara’s image and ideas has changed as new and varied challenges have arisen. Whereas the rectification process reinstated such Guevara ideas as moral incentives and volunteer labor, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with it the loss of billions of dollars in annual subsidies, forced the Cuban government to allow limited foreign investments and other market reforms. To combat this, the Cuban government has used Che, and his great popularity among the Cuban people, as a rallying point as well as an embodiment of self-sacrifice and perseverance in the face of difficult economic times. Another development during this period has been the drastic reduction in internationalist missions, especially those involving military aid. There were also changes that occurred in 1997 when Che’s mortal remains were recovered. The ways in which Fidel and the Cuban government use Che’s image and ideas have in some instances stayed the same and in other ways continued to change.

While the economic assistance the Soviet Union had been giving Cuba had been steadily declining throughout the 1980s, its collapse in 1991 sent shock waves through the Cuban economy. It also caused Fidel to acknowledge Che’s prediction of the difficulties in building socialism while using the Soviet
style economic accounting system. Fidel said of Che in 1992, "my admiration and fellow feeling have grown for Che as I have seen what has happened in the socialist camp, because he was categorically opposed to the use of capitalist methods for the construction of socialism." 83 At first, Che’s ideas, especially volunteer labor and moral incentives, were brought even more to the forefront by the Cuban leadership trying to increase production, and political and social consciousness. 84 For instance mini-brigades, or groups of volunteer workers, who were commissioned to carry out projects by the government, regained popularity they had not had since the early-1960s under Che’s leadership. 85 While the mini-brigades and the greater emphasis on moral incentives somewhat aided the economic situation in Cuba, the effects of the withdrawal of Soviet aid could not be overcome by these measures alone. For instance Fidel said during the difficult years of the early 1990s that:

Socialism means not only material enrichment but also the opportunity to create an extraordinary cultural and spiritual wealth among the people and to create an individual with deep feelings of human solidarity, free from the selfishness and meanness that degrade and oppress the individual under capitalism. 86

This loss of Soviet aid required the Cuban leadership to draw on Che’s ideas of moral incentives, this time because material incentives were for the most part unavailable. The motive behind utilizing Che’s ideas was to create a greater

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83 Castro, Che, 159-60.
84 Tablada, 16.
85 Waters, Che Guevara, 28.
86 Fidel Castro qtl. in Tablada, 186.
socialist consciousness among the Cuban people, and to band them together to get through the difficult years ahead.

Even with Fidel’s exhortations for Cubans to live and work like Che, words alone could not overcome the fact that many Cubans were now forced to live at near-subsistence levels. With gross domestic product down nearly thirty-five percent from 1990 to 1993, the Cuban government was forced to take drastic actions.87 Limited areas of the Cuban economy were opened up to foreign investment, especially the tourist industry, which has grown to become Cuba’s biggest source of foreign currency. In 1998 Cuba took in almost 2 billion dollars in gross revenue from tourism, while almost 2 million foreign vacationers visited the island.88 Though Fidel and the Cuban government have attempted to use both Che’s economic ideas of voluntary labor and moral incentives along with capitalist initiatives to try and rejuvenate the Cuban economy, from Che’s writings it becomes clear that he would not have agreed with this course of action. Che felt that when the economic accounting system, which utilized capitalist methods to increase production,

\[ \ldots \text{comes, as it must, to a dead end it is led by its own logic to try to overcome this by again resorting to the same system - that is, to increase material incentives and to increasingly focus people's} \]

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87 John J. Putman, "Cuba," National Geographic no. 6 vol. 195 (June, 1999), 30.
attention on their own material interests. This leads . . . to the resurgence in a certain sense, of strictly capitalist categories. So in this instance we can see that Fidel and the Cuban government used Che's ideas in a way that would not have been approved of by Che. In this case, the motivating force to manipulate Che's ideas was the desperate situation of the Cuban economy. Foreign companies, and the hard currency and direct investment that they can bring with them, can also be seen as factors in motivating Fidel and the Cuban government to go against a strict utilization of Che's economic ideas.

While Che's ideas have been pushed to the side in the last years of the 1990s, the Cuban government's capitalist measures have begun to create positive growth, though still at levels below 1990. While the Cuban people have been very adept at making do with what is at hand, the opening of the tourist industry has created a division within Cuban society "between those who live on the dollar economy and those who live on the peso economy." This type of a divide between the have's and the have-not's is exactly the type of occurrence Che was afraid of when introducing capitalist measures into the economy.

Although there was a push in the late 1980s and early 1990s to reintroduce into the Cuban economy portions of Che's economic thought, such as voluntary labor and moral incentives, increasingly capitalist methods have gained a greater foothold in Cuba. Former dissenters of Che such as Carlos Rafael Rodriguez have called him "far ahead of his time," and pointed out the

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necessity of using voluntary labor and moral incentives.\textsuperscript{91} Carlos Tablada, who wrote about Che’s economic ideas, has asked his readers to reacquaint themselves with those ideas, and has drawn connections between Che’s early ideas and Fidel’s “that have today developed into his proposals to cancel the foreign debt and establish a new international economic order.”\textsuperscript{92} These efforts have had little effect in changing the direction Fidel and the Cuban government have taken in running the economy, however, for it has continued to be run under the economic accounting system. As we have seen in the case of economics, Che’s usage as both an image and a purveyor of ideas for the Cuban government has changed with the situation. During some periods the ideas of Che and the policies of the Cuban government have coincided as was the case during the difficult years of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and as times change they may diverge as has been the case during the later 1990s.

Cuba’s role in international missions abroad has been drastically reduced since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but Che continues to be the symbol of internationalism within Cuba. The focus in the late 1980s and on through the 1990s has shifted entirely to civilian internationalist missions rather than military ones. The loss of Soviet funding can be seen as the largest contributing factor for this total shift away from military aid. Cuba lost the ability to effectively operate militarily abroad. Cuba’s earlier military aid to Angola for instance required the Soviets to supply both weapons and transportation for the Cuban troops stationed there, and without this assistance Cuba could not have carried


\textsuperscript{92} Rodriguez, 35.
out its revolutionary mission. That being the case, Fidel and the Cuban government have completed the shift from a near total focus on military missions, as was the case when Che was alive, to civilian internationalism in the form of doctors and teachers. The creation of the Latin American Medical College is another example of Cuban internationalism, as it allows men and women from all over Latin America to come to Cuba and study medicine. So much has been made of the importance of internationalism within Cuba, as seen by the fact it is taught in the schools and by the large numbers of Cubans taking part, that to completely withdraw from the world scene would be detrimental to the Cuban government.

Fidel still places a great deal of emphasis on internationalism and the role Cuba has played on the international scene. In a speech from 1999 Fidel said, “We have accomplished honorable internationalist missions. Over 500,000 Cubans have taken part in such hard and difficult missions... they shed their sweat, and even their blood, for other peoples; in short, for any people in the world.”\(^3\) However, as has been mentioned the role of Cuban internationalism has become civilian in nature, and in another speech from 1999 Fidel stated that in “Nicaragua, where... it may well be that between 8,000 and 10,000 teachers passed through there, living in unimaginable conditions.”\(^4\) So, while in 1999 Fidel makes mention of the shedding of blood in internationalist missions in the past, the focus is on the civilian missions that Cuba continues to undertake.

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\(^3\)Tablada, 219.
\(^3\)Fidel Castro, *If There is Faith in Man, Any Dream or Utopia can Come True* (Havana: Printing Office of the Cuban State Council, 1999), 34.
The fact that Fidel has continued to use Che's image, and has presented him as the symbol of internationalism, despite the changing of those missions, gives another example of how the image presented by Fidel and the Cuban government did not mesh exactly with how Che portrayed himself. Although Che was a proponent of sending doctors and other civilians abroad, he was also firmly rooted in the belief that:

[to be a revolutionary doctor, or to be a revolutionary, there must first be a revolution. The isolated effort, the individual effort, the purity of ideals, the desire to sacrifice an entire lifetime to the noblest of ideals - all that is for naught if the effort is made alone, solitary, in some corner of Latin America . . . A revolution needs people who are mobilized, who have learned the use of arms and the practice of unity in combat, who know what a weapon is worth . . . 95]

Che believed in the importance of proletarian internationalism, but, as this quotation shows, armed revolution was required before anything lasting and worthwhile could be accomplished through civilian means. However, the changes that have taken place in the world, especially the isolation Cuba is now faced with after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has, at least for the time being, shifted Cuba's internationalist focus from military to civilian forms.

Once again outside forces have caused Fidel and the Cuban government to take a different approach to dealing with issues that are facing them, and as

has so often occurred since his death, Che and his image have tacitly come along for the ride, so to speak. In a speech by Fidel from 1999 he said,

   it would not occur to us today to tell anyone: 'Make a revolution like ours.' Because under the circumstances that we think we know quite well, we would not be able to suggest: 'Do what we did.' But in those times the world was different and the experience was different. Now we are more knowledgeable, more aware of the problems and, of course, respect and concern for others should come first and foremost.\(^{96}\)

In this quotation we see a much more conservative and less inflammatory Fidel Castro. He seems resigned to the fact that the world has changed and that the time for the creation of armed revolutions, as things now stand, has passed. This type of stance is in direct opposition to what Che Guevara stood for during his life; his very nature and drive was to make the impossible, possible. It is interesting to note that later in Fidel’s speech, the crowd began to chant “Che!, Che!, Che!,” to which Fidel responded “Che? Che has been present here every second, in my words speaking from here.”\(^{97}\) Here is a clear example of Fidel using Che and his image to validate what he said regarding the creation of revolutions, never mind that what he said was contradictory to that what Che believed in and wrote about while he was alive. Since his death in 1967 Che has been unable to change his opinions on issues such as the creation of revolution, and the use of armed force. If he were alive today and given the current political

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\(^{96}\text{Castro, Culture and Ideas, 102.}\)

\(^{97}\text{Castro, Culture and Ideas, 111.}\)
conditions perhaps he would agree with Fidel. But because Che is dead, Fidel and the Cuban government have had free reign to manipulate Che’s image and ideas, and adapt them to the changing political environment.

While Che was mourned in 1967, after word of his death reached Cuba, the only physical attachment the Cuban people had to him were his hands which had been cut off so as to positively identify him. After 1967, October 8 became known as “The Day of the Heroic Guerrilla” in Cuba, but the absence of a body made the grieving process more difficult and failed to provide a place of pilgrimage for those who had adored and admired Che. At first, word came from Bolivia that Che’s body had been cremated and that nothing but ashes remained of the once proud warrior. However, as time went by it was learned from a Colonel in the Bolivian Army, Andres Selich, that Che had not been cremated, but had actually been buried near an airstrip where he had been killed. After a concerted effort by Cuban and Argentine forensic scientists, Che’s remains were discovered in July of 1997, and they were returned to Cuba in October of the same year, thirty years after his death.

The highest-ranking members of the Cuban government, including Fidel and Raul Castro met Che’s body at the airport. Later, Che’s remains were interred in a specially built mausoleum on the outskirts of Santa Clara, the place of his most prominent victory. Fidel’s speech on the day of Che’s burial indicated ways Che’s image and ideas would continue to be used, and might change now that his body had been found. Fidel stated, “I view Che, furthermore, as a moral giant who grows day by day, whose image, whose strength, whose influence has
Multiracial rainbow of children from one of Old Havana's many schools make a pledge: "Seremos como de Che-Guevara," a legendary leader of the Cuban Revolution.
multiplied throughout the world." It is interesting that Fidel calls Che a "moral giant." This seems to draw upon the use of his image in teaching Cuban children about such values as self-sacrifice and perseverance in the face of adversity. Both self-sacrifice and perseverance were qualities in high demand in Cuba during the difficult economic situation of the late 1980s and 1990s.

Cuban children are still called upon by Fidel and the Cuban government to follow Che's example in life, and to emulate his beliefs so as to be a true revolutionaries, and true socialists as he was. In the June 1999 issue of National Geographic, a group of elementary aged children hold up a portrait of Che, similar to one that would be found in any classroom across Cuba. (See Visual 12) It shows the Che from 1960 with his beret and beard, looking every bit the heroic revolutionary. The portrait is done in softer colors like green and yellow as opposed to the more militant and socialist reds that it was often portrayed in the 1970s and 1980s. This being done to undoubtedly promote the more tame and less militant representation of Che that has increasingly come into use, especially with the education of children. The pledge of "Seremos como el Che" or "We will be like Che" is still an integral part of the education process in Cuba, as is the importance placed on Che's image.

Another facet of the image which Fidel tries to present is the continuation of Che's ideas, though the methods used to reach them might change, perhaps as a way to justify his withdrawal of support for armed revolutions. Fidel states that "different epochs and different circumstances do not require identical

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\(^{99}\) Anderson, 740.

\(^{100}\) Fidel Castro qtd. in Waters, \textit{Che Talks}, 134.
methods and identical tactics . . . Often humanity's great revolutionaries, those responsible for great transformations, did not have the privilege of seeing their dreams realized."102 So, although Che did not succeed in creating the revolutionary movements he hoped to, they may still come to pass. From Fidel's speeches one gets the sense that he does not see revolutionary movements as Che would have done, through armed revolution, coming to pass in the near future.

Perhaps the most interesting point Fidel made in his speech was at the end when he called Che a reinforcement sent to "reinforce us in this struggle we are waging today to save the ideas you fought so hard for, to save the revolution, the homeland, and the conquests of socialism, which is a realization of part of the great dreams you held so dear!"103 By Fidel placing at least part of the responsibility of the Cuban Revolution in Che's hands he hoped to gain the support of Cubans who for the most part hold Che in such high regard. One facet of Che's early death meant that he was not around through the difficult and lean years that Cubans have been forced to go through with Fidel at their head. Che's image has been virtually untouched and holds a nostalgic appeal to the early days of the Cuban Revolution when there was greater hope in the future, and the benefits that might be gleaned from socialism. So, while those gains for the most part have not been realized, Che is above reproach, for he was not around to be held responsible for the failures. Fidel can call on the memory of Che saying that, "We are counting on you to help us carry out this enormous

102Fidel Castro qt. in Waters, Che Talks, 135.
feat, to defeat the imperialist plans against Cuba, to resist the blockade, to achieve victory. After which there was a great amount of applause from the assembled audience.

Che’s public image has also been used within Cuba in the year 2000 during the struggle to return Elian Gonzalez to his father in Cuba. The young Elian has been compared with Che as an “anti-imperialist” icon, and both of their pictures have been carried by protestors in mass rallies in Cuba promoting the return of Elian. Fidel Castro has also invoked Che’s image in the Elian struggle, though not by comparing Elian to Che. In an address to the Seventh Cuban Journalists Conference held outside of Che’s tomb, Fidel stated that Che “would feel very happy to have a place in this fight, in this battle” [referring to the ongoing media war over Elian]. He also called on Cuba’s journalists to be like Che’s troops in their fight against foreign media in the struggle to return Elian to his homeland. So, as we can see, the use of Che’s image by Fidel Castro and the Cuban government continues to evolve in new and different ways the political and economic environment have changed.

In the future, Che’s public image and ideas will continue to be used by Fidel Castro and the Cuban government to help gain acceptance from the Cuban people for their policy initiatives. Where and how they will be used will depend a great deal upon what types of problems or needs the Cuban Revolution is faced

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104Fidel Castro qt. in Waters, Che Talks, 136.
105Fidel Castro qt. in Waters, Che Talks, 136.
106Fidel Castro qt. in Waters, Che Talks, 137.
Waters, *Che Talks* p. 132  (This is a picture of Fidel Castro giving a speech at Che's burial in October 1997)
with in the future. Obviously, with the advancing age of the old revolutionary guard such as Fidel and Raul Castro, the question of succession and the continuation of socialism in Cuba will become of central importance. Che’s immense popularity, among the Cuban people as shown by the huge crowds that attended his burial in 1997, will undoubtedly play a role in continuing the march of socialism in Cuba towards the eventual goal of communism which he sought to fulfill.108 (See Visual 13) Whatever form of government may come about in the future, I feel that Che will be held in the same high regard as earlier revolutionaries such as Jose Marti and Antonio Maceo, for Che has become a part of Cuban lore. The efforts to indoctrinate Cuban children with his values and his life story will be carried on throughout future generations whether or not it is continued to be taught in the schools.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Fidel Castro and the Cuban government have used Che Guevara’s public image and ideas in a variety of ways to gain support for their policy initiatives. The ways in which Fidel and the Cuban government have used Che’s image and ideas has depended a great deal on outside influences that affected Cuba at different times. While Che’s image as a heroic revolutionary has seemed to hold true throughout the forty years of the Cuban Revolution, different pieces have been added and subtracted from this image by Fidel and the Cuban government depending on the political and economic climate.

During the early period of the Cuban Revolution from 1955 to 1961, Che held a great deal of influence in Cuba and was one of Fidel's most trusted subordinates. Che's abilities as a revolutionary and his disregard for his own safety lead him to be viewed as a heroic individual by many within the revolution. His willingness to volunteer for the most dangerous missions and expose himself to bodily harm aided another facet of his image, that of self-sacrifice. Through the efforts of both Che and Fidel the image of the heroic revolutionary was disseminated throughout the Cuban populace. The main outside factor that was influenced the creation and usage of Che's image was the threat of the United States intervention in Cuba, and this necessitated the use of Che's image as the heroic revolutionary who would defend the revolution to the end. This image of Che was used as a base for later additions that would be made both through Che's words and deeds, and by the manipulation of his image by Fidel and the Cuban government.

From the years 1962 to 1967, Che played an important role in the consolidation of the revolution and influenced government policies through his positions as president of the Cuban National Bank and as Minister of Industry. His economic ideas such as a volunteer labor and the use of moral, as opposed to material incentives, to increase production were utilized in the vast majority of Cuban industry. Che's ideas regarding the creation of armed revolutions abroad were also utilized during these years, as seen in Che's missions to the Congo and Bolivia. However, once Che was killed in 1967, the use of Che's ideas regarding economics and the creation of armed revolution lost out in Cuba. The

108Waters, Che Talks, 132.
increasing influence the Soviet Union had on Cuban affairs aided the reduction of Che's influence, for his ideas ran counter to those being then proposed by Soviets.

Fidel's 1967 speech following Che's death produced four issues, which were then examined further in the section covering 1968 to 1987. They included the fact that Che had been too aggressive in his guerrilla war efforts, and thus Cuba should moderate its use of armed revolution and end its attempts at creating new revolutions. The next issue dealt with the neglect of Che's economic ideas throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, and their reemergence following the reduction of Soviet economic aid, when Che's ideas of voluntary labor and moral incentives were reintroduced into Cuban society. The next issue dealt with Che becoming a figure to not only be revered as a great individual, but also as someone who should be emulated in daily life. This move caused Che's image to be used in the teaching and indoctrination of Cuban children. The last issue dealt with was the use of Che's image as the symbol of internationalism in Cuba. Fidel and the Cuban government used Che's image to validate their various internationalist policies including the provision of military assistance to the MPLA revolutionary movement in Angola. The main outside force on the use of Che's image during this period was the Soviet Union, with its increasing and then decreasing influence on Cuban affairs.

The period from 1988 through the 1990s was a time marked by a great deal of economic and political adversity within Cuba, as the collapse of the Soviet Union caused Cuba to lose its main trading partner, and essential
economic subsidies. During the early years of the period the use of Che’s image in regard to his economic ideas gained a greater foothold in Cuba. However, in the latter half of the 1990s market reforms and capitalist measures have pushed to the side Che’s ideas of voluntary labor and moral incentives. The return of his remains in 1997 furthered Che’s prominence by creating a site for public veneration of the “Heroic Guerrilla” within Cuba. Fidel Castro’s use of Che’s image has shown no signs of slowing down as we move into the twenty-first century, as shown by the use of Che’s image in the political battles fought over the young Elian Gonzalez. In the future Che’s image will continue to play an important role in Cuban affairs no matter what government might be in place. Over the last forty years in Cuba, Che has grown from a man, to an image, to an icon that will stand the test of time.
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