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Dear Friends,

Hope you are all well. I
am sending you a chronicle on
the Che Guevara Anniversary Concert October
8th.You may ^{find} it interesting. Feel
free to use it if you wish.I'm sorry if it is a bit long
all the bestI'll be in IRELAND over the few
weeks so I may send you something
I think.

CHE GUEVARA - CELEBRATING THE MYTH

It was exhilarating to have been at the international tribute to Che Guevara commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of his death in Ferrocarril Oeste Football Stadium. The atmosphere was unique as the low old-fashioned tiers of timber seating surrounding the immense playing field permitted the covering sky to be visible on all sides creating an ambience in symphony with the occasion with nostalgic rolling clouds orchestrated by the music and the giant video screens.

Young people largely in their late teens had swarmed unabashingly to crowd the grounds and celebrate that mysterious figure whom they find so attractive. I instantly had the feeling of being almost an outsider with a few others of my generation accompanying masses of kids who have adopted Guevara as their hero for the new millennium..

The festival began as a night for reminiscences, recalling the many facets of a man who during his life was the symbol of what perhaps humanity has been about in the post World War II period. Che called the oppressed of the Third World to rise up for freedom and justice and appealed to the youth of the sixties to enrol as guerrilleros "creating many Vietnams" in Latin America and Africa. But the Cuban experience was not to be repeated and the movement was hounded with great cruelty and terror. In fact his own death - an act of cold blooded murder as he lay injured in a Bolivian rural school with the subsequent disappearance of his body - heralded the type of policies which the US trained military were to adopt towards anyone suspected of following his example. He became the unmentionable and most feared enemy of Western civilization. And finally during the eighties, society was left to pick up the pieces with fledging democracies inheriting the aftermath of "dirty war" methods, the "desaparecidos" and a military establishment, from the Pentagon down, which has criminalised itself in illegal repression. Now as we near the end of the nineties passions have abated, sanity at last seems to be in the air and not surprisingly we find that Che Guevara is with us again.

It was the austere Uruguayan protest singer Daniel Viglietti who first said to the kids. "Yes, go ahead, the Che is yours". Despite an unmistakable "leftie" look, cap and open shirt, he set out to interpret Che for a new generation. He sang a theme written 30 years ago in Havana and another he had recently composed. Che became a man of powerful human feelings, compassion, freedom and courage, who opened up frontiers. He ended with one of his old favourites - "A Desalambrar" (take down the fences)- but gave it the interpretation of breaking down barriers to open up for a caring and solidarity world. Many years ago it literally meant campesinos were going to get the land back from the "estancieros" (big landowners). Viglietti was not reneging of his call to end injustice in land tenure but was now pointing at other challenges. That message coming from such an established revolutionary singer was important. Already in 1978 during a recital in New York I heard him refuse to sing certain popular songs that ennobled the Tupamaros revolutionary movement. Painful defeat had made him into a singer searching for a new song.

He may have not found that new song yet but was now moving ahead and exploring other issues. The crowd ~~people~~ felt themselves interpreted by his message and could let themselves go with someone nearer to home - Victor Heredia. Singing, hoping, celebrating in spite of all, cursing at Menem and his treatment of old-age pensioners and teachers, and finding Che in the verses of Atahualpa Yupanqui. Heredia and the audience interacted and chorused "We are still singing" (Todavía Cantamos) in honour of the "desaparecidos".

By this stage the festival had made its political statement but was not ready to go any further. At least that is the reading I've made of the incident with Argentine Communist Party Secretary Patricio Etchegaray. He was announced to address the public in name of delegates from all major Latin American revolutionary movements who had attended a Seminar on Che Guevara in Rosario. In fact the festival itself was officially billed as the closing event of that Seminar. Booing and heckling already started as Etchegaray approached the microphone and although he bravely insisted on reading, he finally had to retreat leaving the stage to the Brazilian priest Frei Betto. The Dominican theologian calmed the scene and gave an evangelical touch to the evening which the crowd enthusiastically endorsed as he led in a charismatic-style prayer to Che Guevara. Young people celebrating Che today may not be able to articulate what they want but they certainly know what they do not want and that is old style left-wing politics.

The Spanish crooner *Aute* performed showing us that Che also meant romanticism and sensuality. Couples swayed, kids pulled on marihuana cigarettes and a state of mass ecstasy posed itself over the upraised arms swaying to a ~~George~~ *SEXY* ~~Michael~~ voice cooing into the microphone. Then it was the turn of Chico Buarque that well-known Brazilian troubadour who led us through Brazil, the movement of landless peasants and Carnival. He was finally joined by Cuban Syvio Rodríguez, the star of the show, who sang to the integrity of Che Guevara and his personality as a dedicated and anti-bureaucratic revolutionary. When as a gran finale he led the anthem of his own composition, hailing Che as Commandant to thousands of saluting arms swearing allegiance to their hero reality, I felt, was finally ceding way to the myth. Syvio's hasty departure at the end after just one or two encores gave a sense that the situation was even too much for him. After all Che was the leader who with Fidel Castro led their revolution and here people were celebrating someone much more than that, someone mythical. It was indeed a moving and historic moment. Che Guevara is alive and remarkably well in his home country Argentina.

As we pushed and heaved our way out on to Rivadavia street. I found myself thinking again about a leaflet which a smart young lady had given me on entrance. She was promoting a Che Guevara Boutique for Urban Clothes. I had smiled condescendingly when I received it. But by now I had no doubts. The myth exists and is a powerful one among Latin American youth. Let's hope that the establishment will not react as in the past ~~but~~ face the unfinished agenda of making the continent a land of justice and hope.

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