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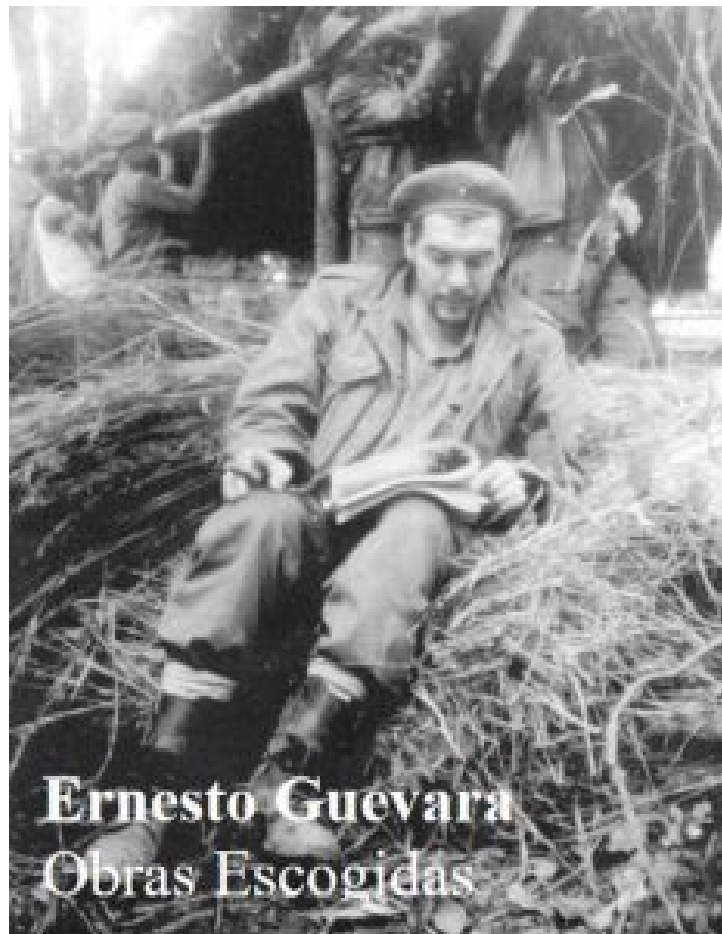
Ernesto Guevara: Morality and discipline of revolutionary fighters

Ernesto Guevara, [Verde Olivo, March 17, 1960.]



Everyone knows what our Ejército Rebelde was. A family p or family, almost despised the feat of our emancipation, achieved on the blood of twenty thousand martyrs and the multitudinous thrust of the people. There are, however, profound reasons that made this triumph a reality. The dictatorship created the necessary ferments with its policy of oppression of the popular masses to maintain the regime of privileges. Privileges of paniaguados, privileges of landowners and businessmen parásitos, privileges of the foreign monopolies initiated the war, the repression and brutality of the régime increased the popular resistance far from diminishing it; the Demoralized and shameless the military caste facilitated the task; the rugged mountains of the East and the

technical incompetence of our enemies did their thing. But this war was won by the people by the access of their armed combatant vanguard, the Ejército Rebelde; and the fundamental weapons of this Ejército were their morals. and discipline.



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Discipline and morale are the foundations on which the strength of an army, whatever its composition, is based. Let's examine both terms: the morale of an army has two phases that complement each other; there is a moral one in terms of the ethical sense of the word and another in its heroic sense; every armed grouping, to be perfect, has to bring both together.

Morality in terms of ethics has changed over time and according to the prevailing ideas in a given society. Looting houses and taking all valuables was the right thing to do in feudal society, but whoever took women as a pledge would have failed in his moral duties, and an army that did so as the norm would be living on the margins of the time. However, long before this was the right thing to do and the women of the vanquished became part of the victor's patrimony.

All armies must jealously care for their ethical morale, as a substantial part of their structure, as a factor of struggle, as a factor of hardening of the soldier.

Morality in a heroic sense is that combative force, that faith in the final triumph and in the justice of the cause that leads soldiers to perform the most extraordinary deeds of courage.

Moral struggle had the French "maquis" who undertook the struggle in difficult conditions, apparently without hope, overwhelmingly adverse and, nevertheless, by the conviction that they were fighting for a just cause, by the indignation provoked in them by the crimes and bestiality of the Nazis, they knew how to maintain the action until they won.

Fighting morals have the defenders of Stalingrad who with forces several times lower, with the river on their backs, resist the overwhelming and long offensive, defend every hill and every ditch, every house and every room of the houses, every street and every sidewalk of their city until the Soviet army can mount the counteroffensive, lay the gigantic siege and destroy, surrender and take prisoners to the attackers.

Fighting morale, if you want a distant example, is that of the defenders of Verdun, who repel one offensive after another and stop an army many times superior in number and armaments.

Combat morale that the Rebel Army had in the mountains and plains of our battlefields. And that is what the mercenary army lacked to be able to face the guerrilla barrage. We felt the vigorous verse of our national anthem: "To die for the homeland is to live"; they knew him from singing it, but they didn't feel it inside. The feeling of justice in one cause and the feeling of not knowing why one fights in the other, established the great differences between the two soldiers.

Between the two types of morality, ethical morality and fighting morality, there is a nexus of union that makes them a harmonious whole: discipline. There are different forms of discipline but fundamentally, there is a discipline external to the individual and another internal to him. Militaristic regimes are constantly working on the outside. Here too, the enormous difference between two types of armies was noticeable; that of the dictatorship, practicing its morals, its barracks discipline, external, mechanical and cold and the guerrilla, with its remarkable large external discipline and a large interior; this automatically lowers their fighting morale. Fight for what and for what? Fight to keep certain intimate-level perks in the soldier? The right to plunder, to charge for the ball, to

have some shares in the fence, the right to make the uniformed thief? but for that right people do not fight until a certain moment; until the sacrifice of life is demanded of him...



Che Guevara: the years pass but his figure transcends time and is renewed. Photo: AFP

On the other side an army with enormous ethical morals, a non-existent external discipline and a rigid inner discipline, born of conviction. The rebellious soldier did not drink, not because his superior was going to punish him, but because he should not drink, because his morals imposed on him not to drink and his inner discipline reaffirmed the imposition of the morale of that army, which was simply going to fight because it understood that it was its duty to give its life for a cause.

Morale was polished and discipline was cemented until our army became invincible, but peace came, the product of triumph, and the great clash between two concepts and two organizations began: the old, of external discipline, mechanical, subject to rigid molds and the new, of inner discipline, without pre-established molds. From that clash arose the difficulties of all known in terms of the final structuring of our Army. Today the problem has been overcome, after analyzing and understanding. We are trying to give our rebellious armed forces the minimum of mechanical discipline necessary for the harmonious functioning of large units with the maximum of inner discipline, coming from the study and understanding of our revolutionary duties. Today as yesterday, although there is an apparatus that is specifically dedicated to punishing faults, discipline cannot be given completely by an external mechanism, but achieved by the internal desire to overcome all the mistakes committed. How to achieve this? It is the patient task of the revolutionary indoctrinators to sow in the mass of our Army the great national slogans.

Like all the armies of the world, this one, our Army, must respect its superiors, obey orders immediately, serve tirelessly in the place where it is placed - but it must also be a judge and an investigator of society. Investigator in that through his contact with the people he can find out all the feelings of the latter, to communicate it to the superiority with a constructive sense, judge in that he has the obligation to denounce all kinds of abuses committed outside or inside the army, to try to eliminate them. In this different task of the Rebel Army is where the virtues of inner discipline that aims at the total perfection of the individual are tested. As in the Sierra, the Rebel should not drink, not because of the punishment that the body in charge of doing so may apply to him, but simply because the cause we defend, which is the cause of the humble and the people, requires us not to drink, to keep the mind awake, the muscle fast and the morale of each soldier high, and it should be remembered that today, as yesterday, the Rebel is the center of the population's gaze and is an example for them. There is not and cannot be a great Army, if the bulk of the population is not convinced of the immense virtues of which we have today. Our armed grouping does not end at the precise limits in which a man leaves the uniform; we have the whole people with us and we must dispose of it, we must make it an honor for that people, worker, peasant, student, professional, to wield the weapon that allows them to fight in some case alongside those who are uniformed in the Armed Forces. We must therefore be the guide of the civilian population. Much more difficult than fighting, much more difficult still than working in the peaceful construction areas of the country, is to maintain the necessary line without deviating an inch from it during all the hours of each of the days. When sufficient cohesion is achieved in all our Armed Forces and a high ethical morality is added to our morale of struggle with the necessary complement of the internal and external disciplines, the firm and lasting basis of the great army of the future, which is the entire people of Cuba, will have been achieved.

Ernesto Guevara, [Verde Olivo, March 17, 1960.]

(Taken from Writings and Speeches, Volume

1, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, Havana 1972, pages 233-239)

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