

Che Guevara and the FBI: The U.S. Political Police Dossier on the Latin American Revolutionary. Edited by MICHAEL RATNER and MICHAEL STEVEN SMITH. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997. Photographs. Plates. xxii, 213 pp. Paper, \$18.95.

Che Guevara Reader: Writings by Ernesto Che Guevara on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics, and Revolution. By ERNESTO GUEVARA. Edited by DAVID DEUTSCHMANN. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997. Plates. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. x, 400 pp. Paper, \$21.95.

The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats.

By HENRY BUTTERFIELD RYAN. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Photographs. Maps. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xv, 224 pp. Cloth, \$27.50.

In the deluge of books and articles that appeared on the thirtieth anniversary of Che Guevara's death, there were only a few refreshing drops of new evidence or interpretation. The life and thought of the legendary comandante had been analyzed and debated for years, and the discussion has not ended with the publication of three new biographies. Oral histories were used most effectively by Jon Lee Anderson in *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York, 1997), but important questions about Guevara remain and research will undoubtedly continue.

The place for any researcher to begin is the nine-volume collection, *Ernesto Che Guevara: escritos y discursos* (Havana, 1977). Because few people are willing or able to plow through Guevara's often repetitive discourses, there has always been a need to select, edit, and translate representative samples of his thought. The published works of Che Guevara have generally been limited to various editions of *Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War, 1956–58*; *Guerrilla Warfare*; and the *Bolivian Diary of Che Guevara*. Unfortunately, these works do not reflect the depth and significance of Guevara's intellectual contributions. To make Guevara's political philosophy accessible to a larger English-reading audience, David Deutschmann compiled the *Che Guevara Reader*, a welcome addition to the growing body of literature by or about Che Guevara.

The articles or speeches in this collection have appeared in print before, including an earlier edition by Deutschmann called *Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution* (Sydney, 1987). The value of the *Che Guevara Reader* is simply that a representative sample of Guevara's thought has been published again. The *Che Guevara Reader* includes excerpts from Guevara's account of the Cuban insurrection (1956–58), important speeches and articles during his years in Cuba (1956–65), and an extensive collection of personal letters. Only the first chapter of Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare* is included, and "Guerrilla Warfare: A Method," an important revision of Guevara's original strategy, is omitted altogether. Nevertheless, the focus on Guevara's political economic philosophy is well-deserved, for he devoted most of his articles and speeches to political, economic, and philosophical issues, not military affairs. One could argue that "Socialism and Man in Cuba," is a much more revealing and important example of Guevara's thought than his Bolivian diary. Deutschmann wisely includes this and other lesser-known pieces in this

collection, making his *Che Guevara Reader* the best available collection of Guevara's work in English.

A collection of United States government documents on Guevara would also be a valuable addition to the literature, but the documents assembled by Michael Ratner and Michael Steven Smith will generally disappoint researchers. Through the Freedom of Information Act, Ratner and Smith obtained over one hundred documents from the FBI. The documents included secret files of the CIA and revealed that the FBI and the CIA kept tabs on Che Guevara from the time he first entered the United States in 1952 until his capture and execution in 1967. That should not come as a surprise to anybody, but the collection of documents published in *Che Guevara and the FBI* is put forth as a revealing glimpse into the illegal practices of the "spy agencies" and "political police" of the United States.

Readers looking for evidence of complicated CIA conspiracies and assassination plots will find no "smoking gun" in this collection. There are some valuable documents, including Richard Goodwin's memoranda to President Kennedy on his secret meeting with Che Guevara at the Punta del Este Conference in August 1961. However, the 109 documents in *Che Guevara and the FBI* reveal remarkably little about the activities of either Guevara or the CIA. They are most significant for revealing just how ineffective the CIA was.

The ten CIA documents in chapter 1, covering Guevara's activities in the Sierra Maestra, are valuable simply because they demonstrate that the CIA had an informant in Guevara's camp. This informant, however, was either ignorant or deliberately deceptive. In document 6, for example, the CIA informant describes Che as a stocky man with reddish hair, a brown beard, and bad teeth. "He bears a rather remarkable resemblance to the Mexican artist *Cantinflas* and sometimes laughingly refers to himself as 'Cantinflas'" (p. 21). Although Guevara admired Cantinflas, the description of Che and his behavior are certainly not accurate. On more important matters, such as Guevara's ideological convictions, the CIA's informants were equally unenlightening. In document 7 the CIA is informed that "although he [Guevara] does not have deep Communist convictions, he is a Communist-sympathizer" (p. 27).

This collection of documents represents only a small fraction of the CIA documents that a researcher needs. Nearly one-half of the documents are transcripts of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), rather than CIA documents. Ratner and Smith obtained their documents from the FBI, not the CIA, with the result that they obtained only those CIA documents that had been distributed to the FBI. Documents produced and held by the CIA were not obtained. Many of those documents were already available at the Kennedy and Johnson presidential libraries.

These documents have been used effectively by Henry Butterfield Ryan, a retired United States Foreign Service officer and a professional historian who has made a substantial contribution to the understanding of Guevara's Bolivian campaign in *The Fall of Che Guevara*. Ryan tells the story of Guevara's guerrilla foco from the perspective of the

United States and Bolivian soldiers who captured him. Based on interviews and documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act from the CIA, State Department, Pentagon, and the National Security Council, Ryan frames his analysis from a unique perspective. Rather than trying to answer the question of why Guevara lost the campaign, Ryan asks why the Green Berets and the Bolivian Rangers won it.

Beginning from a different starting point, he finishes with a conclusion quite different from standard accounts of Guevara in Bolivia. The failure of Guevara's Bolivian campaign is usually attributed to strategic or tactical errors committed by Guevara, the betrayal of the Bolivian Communists, or Castro's abandonment of the guerrillas. Ryan concedes the relevance of all these factors, but he forces us to consider the possibility that Bolivia, with United States assistance, applied a successful counterinsurgency strategy to meet Guevara's challenge. Castro and Guevara also committed strategic and tactical errors in the Sierra Maestra, but the army of Fulgencio Batista did not know how to combat the insurgency. By 1967, however, the United States had developed enormous counterinsurgency resources and put them all into play in Bolivia, including economic assistance, military aid, counterinsurgency training, and an effective intelligence and communication network. The result was the most successful counterinsurgency operation in the history of the Western Hemisphere.

In some respects, Ryan's conclusions simply echo the analysis of Captain Gary Prado Salmón, the captain of the Bolivian company that captured Guevara. In *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia* (New York, 1990), Salmón detailed the military aspects of the counterinsurgency campaign, illustrating the means by which the Bolivian rangers encircled Guevara's guerrillas in Yuro Ravine. In Ryan's account, the focus is on the United States role in the counterinsurgency campaign. Surprisingly, Ryan argues that the CIA and the Green Berets demonstrated remarkable restraint in dealing with Guevara. The record shows that all American personnel were barred from the area of conflict and definitely did not participate in combat. When the Bolivian government asked for more sophisticated hardware to conduct a more aggressive campaign, the American advisers kept them focused on implementing a well-coordinated effort to encircle and destroy the enemy column. Ryan also buries the myth that the CIA ordered the execution of Guevara. The record clearly shows that the American agents would have preferred to keep Guevara alive, even though they wasted little effort to save the comandante's life.

As depicted by Ryan, the Bolivian campaign was a case study of effective counterinsurgency techniques. He is less persuasive when explaining events from the Cuban perspective, but his explanation of the policies and performance of the CIA and the Pentagon is compelling. As an analysis of the United States response to Guevara's Bolivian campaign, it is reasonable, balanced, and well documented. *The Fall of Che Guevara* is an indispensable account of Guevara's last campaign.

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