

Reviews

Lessons from the real Che

■ BY NEIL FORDE

THIRTY YEARS of economic sanctions, political destabilisation, the economic collapse of your allies and former trading partners is a recipe for disaster. A consensus is forming that time is running out for Cuba. This is based on the belief that Cuba like the former Soviet Union and other centrally planned East European economies has no option but to eventually succumb to market capitalism.

Believing that it is 'only a matter of time' ignores the ongoing struggle within Cuba to ensure its long-term economic survival. A revolution is still ongoing in Cuba, its objective is to ensure the successful transition from capitalism to socialism. Over the last six years there has been within Cuba a concerted attempt to re-examine the economic and political theory which guides the implementation of policy.

There is no blueprint for a people's revolution. However the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship in Cuba in 1959 has become a much studied and idealised revolution. The subsequent attempts at transforming a capitalist economy run in the interests of a few families, bankers and capitalists to that of a people's economy has been a difficult and largely ignored process.

Che Guevara's *Guerilla Warfare* is a widely publicised text and his subsequent assassination in 1967 by US trained troops in Bolivia created a legend. However the narrow focus on Guevara as a rebel army commander and military tacti-

cian has prevented study of his contribution to the economic and social development of Cuba in the aftermath of liberation from the Batista regime.

Che Guevara and the Fight for Socialism Today is the title of a Pathfinder pamphlet which discusses the ideas of Che Guevara on how to organise workers and farmers to make the transition to socialism. Written by Mary-Alice Walker, the pamphlet examines the years since December 1986 when Fidel Castro called for an examination of failure of the soviet model of economic planning to deliver economic security and prosperity to the Cuban people. Castro called for the reaffirming of "the essential concepts about what socialism is and how it can be built".

"A system worse than capitalism" was how Castro described the possibility of the failure of the Cuban revolution. In 1987, on the 20th anniversary of Guevara's death Castro called for a renewed emphasis on the economic thought of Che Guevara.

Waters introduces the elements of Che Guevara's eco-

nomc and political work while discussing the attempts since 1987 to implement an economic and social policy that would "expand political participation and revolutionary consciousness". "The door is opened for working people to cease being the objects of blind economic laws that determine their living and working conditions and instead to begin placing society's productive forces under their own conscious control."

The open door involved for Guevara a rejection of the market, the price mechanism and competition. He rejected the "capitalist categories of "profitability" in judging social costs and benefits. He envisaged a changing function for money banking and prices. The banking system would be nationalised. The workers would participate in the management of their economy.

The years since 1986 have seen the dismantling of the economic policies borrowed from the Soviet Union. The reliance on bonuses and individual material incentives in place of housing, health, education and day-care facilities was abandoned and replaced with a resurgent scheme of voluntary labour projects. Workers built the much needed social resources in their own areas.

The planning of industry and the economic performance of state enterprises is now measured by their social usefulness rather than pure profitability and cost accounting techniques. Cuba has returned to Che Guevara's objective of self-sufficiency in food production. This has been hastened by the ongoing US orchestrated economic isolation of Cuba.

Waters' pamphlet is a good introduction to the eco-

CUBA CONFRONTS THE WORLD CRISIS OF THE '90s

Che Guevara and the Fight for Socialism Today

MARY ALICE WATERS



nomc thought and work of Che Guevara and its implication for Cuba today. The Left in Europe is engaged in endless navel gazing and

soul searching over its tacit acceptance of so-called market realities. It could do no better than to look up and examine Guevara's econom-

ic theory rather than wallowing in his myth.

● *Che Guevara and the Fight for Socialism Today* is published by Pathfinder Press at \$3.50/£2.00.