

Revolutionary Helped Eradicate Racist Discrimination In Cuba

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Pathfinder Press has announced the publication of "From the Escambray to the Congo: In the Whirlwind of the Cuban Revolution." The [book](#) consists of an interview with Cuban revolutionary leader Victor Dreke, a participant in the revolutionary struggle there for half a century.

"When I was young," Dreke recalls, "father used to tell me, 'Don't get involved in anything.... Things will always stay the same. One side wins now, the other side wins later, and the ones with money will always be in power. Study and get an education and don't mess with strikes or any of that.... Besides, that stuff's not for blacks.' Fortunately, I didn't listen."

Serving as second in command under Che Guevara of the Cuban internationalist mission in the Congo in 1965, Dreke had joined the revolutionary movement more than a dozen years earlier in 1952, at age 15. A determined opponent of the brutal U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, Dreke in 1958 [enrolled](#) in the revolutionary war led by Fidel Castro. He saw combat in many battles, including the decisive battle of Santa Clara in December 1958.

Since the 1959 victory, Dreke has held numerous responsibilities in the new Cuba, and currently helps coordinate efforts to build housing, roads, and other development projects in central Africa.

Readers in the United States will be especially interested in Dreke's account of the successful efforts by the revolutionary government to eradicate institutionalized racist discrimination in Cuba patterned on the Jim Crow segregation of its former Yankee overlords.

In the town of Cruces in central Cuba, for example, a rope had traditionally been put up to separate whites from blacks at dances and other public events -- a practice common across the island. One night in 1959, Dreke says, the Rebel Army took down the rope. In face of the

resulting uproar, Dreke was made squadron chief in Cruces. He comments: "If they treat blacks that way,' I said to myself, 'why are they sending me?'" But he never had any trouble there, he says, and the revolution went on to transform social relations across Cuba.

"From the Escambray to the Congo" opens a [window](#) on a chapter of the revolution little known outside Cuba: the more than six-year-long battle to eliminate nearly 300 counterrevolutionary bands armed, trained, supported, and financed by the U.S. government. These "bandits," as Cubans came to call them, were instruments of an imperialist policy of terror designed to drain resources and demoralize supporters of the revolution. Victor Dreke was commander in the Escambray region, and second in command overall, of the special Lucha Contra Bandidos (LCB) -- struggle against bandits -- battalions of workers and peasants in Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces.

"From the Escambray to the Congo" also opens a window on the 1965 internationalist mission of 128 Cuban volunteers, headed by Argentineborn Cuban revolutionary leader Ernesto Che Guevara, to aid the national liberation struggle in the Congo.

As second in command, Dreke is in a unique [position](#) to recount the origin of that mission, aimed at assisting supporters of slain Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba. While the operation itself didn't succeed, Dreke concludes "that today, 34 years later, we see the positive results of that action.... The Congo operation was multiplied in other actions in Africa. The experience we gained made it possible for us to do what we did to aid the liberation struggles in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and other places."

Nelson Mandela pointed to this historic contribution in July 1991, when he said that Cuba's defeat of apartheid South Africa's invasion of Angola marked "a turning point in the struggle to free the continent and our country from the scourge of apartheid!"

Through the rich detail of Dreke's firsthand account, the whirlwind events of the early years of the Cuban Revolution, along with men and women whose actions changed the course of history, come alive, providing evidence that "si se puede." Things need not "always stay the same." Readers come to understand how [millions](#) like Dreke were transformed from inexperienced if unflinchingly courageous revolutionary youth into seasoned working-class leaders of a people who've proven themselves capable of standing up to the arrogant demands and violent aggressions of the Yankee rulers for nearly half a century.

Piero Gleijeses, author of "Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa," 1959-1976, writes the following about this new book:

"Che Guevara paid Victor Dreke, his lieutenant in Zaire, a handsome compliment: 'He was, throughout our stay, one of the pillars on which I relied. The only reason I am not recommending that he be promoted is that he already holds the highest rank.' 'From the Escambray to the Congo' is Dreke's story. With his characteristic honesty and intelligence, he offers a fascinating glimpse of years full of hope and pain, and of the Cubans who fought to create a better future -- for Cuba and for the world."

"From the Escambray to the Congo: In the Whirlwind of the Cuban Revolution" is available for \$17 from **Pathfinder Press**, 410 West St., New York, NY 10014. Its website is www.pathfinderpress.com.

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