REVOLUTION IN THE REVOLUTION?

Armed Struggle and Political Struggle In Latin America

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Contents

Armed self-defense

Today, self-defense as a system and as a reality has been liquidated by the march of events.

Colombia with its zones of peasant self-defense, and Bolivia with its zones of worker self-defense, constituted the two countries in which this conception acquired the strength of a line. These two "nuclei of subversion" were, within a few months of each other, liquidated by the army: Marquetalia, in southern Colombia, occupied in May of 1964, and the Bolivian mines invaded in May and September of 1965, after tragic battles. This double defeat signifies the end of an epoch and attests to the death of a certain ideology. It is necessary that the revolutionary movement should once and for all accept this demise.

The end of an epoch, the epoch of relative class equilibrium. The beginning of another, that of total class warfare, excluding compromise solutions and shared power.

In view of the present polarization of exploited and exploiters in a neocolonial country, the fact that a portion of territory can exist in which the army and the state cannot proceed "to the normal exercise of their functions," is more than the new imperialist legality can tolerate but at the same time not enough to endanger it. The failure of armed self-defense of the masses corresponds on the military level to the failure of

reformism on the political level. In the new context of struggle to the death, there is no place for spurious solutions, no place for the pursuit of an equilibrium between oligarchic and popular forces through tacit non-aggression pacts. Oligarchical dictatorships pose the alternative of beginning to destroy them *en bloc* or of accepting them *en bloc*: there is no middle way. Besides, self-defense is discredited today; its own former supporters have made of it the beginning of higher forms of struggle. But beware! It tends to appear again in more seductive forms, though naturally without revealing its name. It tends to reappear because it is rooted in an ideology with as many shapes as Proteus. At the time self-defense was foundering, Trotskyism came along to extend a hand to it and attempt to revive it. It is this rebirth that concerns us here.

In the ideological background of self-defense there are to be found ideologies which Lenin repeatedly described as indigenous to the working class and which he said would again and again come to the fore whenever Marxists and Communists lowered their guard: "economism" and "spontaneity." Economism is the exclusive defense by trade unions of the workers' job interests against encroachments by the power of management. Since an *attack* on the bosses' political power—the bourgeois state—is excluded, such a defense in effect accepts and guarantees that which it claims to combat. It is not by mere chance that it is in Bolivia, where the oldest anarcho-syndicalist tradition among the workers exists, that the struggle has, since the 1952 revolution, taken the form of a workers' self-defense militia.

The term self-defense is not the most apt. It suggests a passive, timorous, withdrawn approach, but this is not always correct. In fact, it is rarely the case. Who would question the fighting heroism of the European proletarians before the "importation of Marxism to the working class," according to Lenin's formula? And the courage and prowess in battle of the Colombian peasants, who were the principal victims of that terrible ten-year civil war in which more than 100,000 of them fell? Who would deny that the sacrifice and solidarity of the Paris workers during the "June days" and the Commune are

met again in 1952 in the 40,000 miners and industrial workers of La Paz, the heroes of the first American workers' revolution?

Self-defense does not suffer from a lack of boldness among its promoters. Quite to the contrary, it frequently suffers from a profusion of admirable sacrifices, of wasted heroism leading nowhere—that is, leading anywhere except to the conquest of political power. It is therefore better to speak of armed spontaneity. Its very ideological origin reveals to us the epoch in which it was born: prior to Marx. The Indian uprising led by Túpac Amaru II in Peru at the end of the eighteenth century could well have been called self-defense. The Indians rose up, by the tens of thousands, drove out the *criollo* landowners, killed the Spaniards on the spot, and recovered the land stolen from them by the *encomienda* system. The movement, however, was quickly dissipated in local victories; the Indians, as they approached the coast, occupied the lands and remained in the mountains: no more or less regular army, no independent shock troops. The insurgents, masters of the countryside, disdained to march on Lima, seat of the Vice Royalty. This gave Lima time to regroup an army; and reconquest was achieved without difficulty, under what conditions one can well imagine. The uprising of the *Comuneros* of Colombia, led by the famous Manuela Beltrán, in roughly the same epoch, could also be called self-defense.

In short, there were workers' insurrections before the advent of scientific socialism, as there were peasant wars before there were revolutionary guerrilla wars. But neither in the one case nor in the other is there an interrelation. Guerrilla warfare is to peasant uprisings what Marx is to Sorel.

Just as economism denies the vanguard role of the party, self-defense denies the role of the armed unit, which is organically separate from the civilian population. Just as reformism aims to constitute a mass party without selection of its militants or disciplined organization, self-defense aspires to integrate everyone into the armed struggle, to create a mass guerrilla force, with women, children, and domestic animals in the midst of the guerrilla column.

Just as spontaneity does not aspire to political power for

the exploited and consequently does not organize itself into a political party, self-defense does not aim at military supremacy for the exploited and consequently does not aspire to organize itself as a popular regular army with its own mobility and initiative. It may be said that there is self-defense wherever a strategic mobile force is not the number one objective of the armed struggle, wherever the conquest of political power is not the conscious and visible goal. Self-defense does not exclude insurrection, but such an insurrection will always be local and will not seek to extend its action to the entire country. Self-defense is partial; revolutionary guerrilla warfare aims at total war by combining under its hegemony all forms of struggle at all points within the territory. Local, therefore localized from the beginning, the community practising self-defense is denied any initiative. There is no choice of the site of combat, no benefits of mobility, maneuver, or surprise. Since the zone of self-defense is already exposed, it will be the object of an encircling action and a carefully prepared attack by the enemy at the moment of his own choosing. The zone or city defended by the population itself can only passively await the enemy's attack and is dependent on its goodwill. Nor does self-defense oblige the enemy to "see to it that the situation does not worsen." (Che Guevara) It does not force either representative democracies or oligarchic regimes to reveal their class content openly. Self-defense permits the ruling class to conceal its true character as a dictatorship of violence; it maintains the "equilibrium between oligarchic dictatorship and popular pressure" rather than "rupturing" it. (Che) It enters into and plays the game of the ruling class, promoting divisions in the dominated classes, disguising compromise solutions as victories.

In Vietnam above all, and also in China, armed self-defense of the peasants, organized in militias, has played an important role as the foundation stone of the structure of the armed forces of liberation—but self-defense extended to zones already militarily liberated or semi-liberated; in no way did it bring autonomous zones into being. These territories of self-defense were viable only because total war was being carried out on other fronts, with the regular and mobile forces of the

Vietminh. They permitted the integration of the entire population into the war without resting the principal weight of the struggle upon it. By dispersing the French expeditionary force, these zones lightened the task of the regular and semi-regular forces and permitted them to concentrate a maximum of troops on battle fronts chosen in accordance with the strategic plans of the General Staff. Even less than in Vietnam can self-defense be self-sufficing in Latin America—at least not if one aims to avoid the elimination of the civilian population.

Che Guevara writes, in his preface to Giap's *Guerre du peuple, armée du peuple*:

> Self-defense is nothing more than a small part of a whole, with special characteristics. It is never possible to conceive of a self-defense zone as complete in itself, i.e. as a region where the popular forces attempt to defend themselves against enemy attack, while the entire zone beyond remains free of disturbances. In such a case, the *foco* would be localized, cornered, and defeated, unless there occurred an immediate passage to the first phase of the people's war, in other words, to guerrilla warfare.

Some time after Che wrote this, "the peasant zone of self-defense" of Marquetalia [Colombia] and the other "independent republics" were occupied and dissolved by the enemy, and Marulanda had to return to mobile guerrilla warfare. A self-defense zone when it is neither the result of a total or partial military defeat of enemy forces, nor protected by a guerrilla front constantly on the offensive, is no more than a colossus with feet of clay. Its collapse deals a blow to the morale of the popular forces all the more serious and unexpected because this type of status quo appears to be unalterable; a euphoric mythology develops and envelops the reality of these zones. Since they may last for years, it is forgotten that they are the fruit of a tacit compromise, not of a real victory; and they come to be considered impregnable. Vigilance is lulled; more and more it is forgotten to put the militias to the test, to supervise training and armament; discipline is relaxed. On the revolutionary side these territories, presumably liberated, are converted into a simple object of political propaganda—alibis for inaction rather

than incitations to greater action. On the side of reaction, they provide ready-made justification for posing as guardians of national unity and territorial integrity threatened by this cancerous growth, and for attacking the communist "separatists." For propaganda reasons, the bourgeoisie little by little inflates the real danger and the fear it feels, an inflation which can deceive the revolutionaries themselves, eventually persuading them that the guerrilla force is really a cancer, and that time alone will finish off the patient. Thus, the "subsiding of the swelling," when the army passes over to the attack after long preparations made at its leisure, will have a major effect: a great victory for the bourgeoisie, a great defeat for the "Castro-Communist revolution."

What is the reality?

If one judges by the history of Cuba and certain other Latin American countries, guerrilla warfare seems to pass through the following stages: first, the stage of establishment; second, the stage of development, marked by the enemy offensive carried out with all available means (operational and tactical encirclements, airborne troops, bombardments, etc.); finally, the stage of revolutionary offensive, at once political and military. During the first stage, clearly the hardest to surmount and the most exposed to all sorts of accidents, the initial group experiences at the outset a period of absolute nomadism; later, a longer period of hardening or seasoning by the combatants, the organization of a regular mail service, of supply lines, of relief forces, of arms depots, arriving at the final phase of the true establishment or minimal constitution of a zone of operations. This progression witnesses a growth in absolute numbers of fighters but also a relative diminution since services, small-scale industry, and officer-cadres are developing: in other words, the technical side grows (armament, communications, production, explosives, training schools for recruits, etc.) in response to the development of guerrilla fire power and its offensive strength.

As it happens, a self-defense zone such as Marquetalia may give the impression of having reached the end of the first stage (consolidation of a zone of operations) and of being able to pass over immediately to the second: to face an enemy

offensive, to take the tactical initiative, to detach units of the mother column in order to set up other guerrilla fronts. Not so. Since the territories of peasant self-defense were not the culmination of an armed revolutionary struggle, but of a civil war between conservatives and liberals—without a clear outcome, without effect on the enemy's military potential—the guerrilla bands, beginning with the Marquetalia group, had to return to the first phase, the nomadic phase, without ceasing to be burdened by the families of the combatants, the tasks of evacuating the population, care of cattle and farm implements, etc.

Bolivia: an analogous situation in a workers' milieu, takes on the aspects of tragedy. Twenty-six thousand miners in the big nationalized tin mines are spread over the entire *altiplano,* but the principal mining stronghold is concentrated in a belt of land some 9½ miles long by 6 wide, where the "Siglo Veinte," "Huanuni," and "Catavi" mines are located. In 1952 the miners destroyed the oligarchy's army, established a liberal government, received arms and a semblance of power. The revolution turned bourgeois; the miners gradually severed connections. They had arms, militias, radios, a strong union, dynamite and detonators—their everyday work tools—plus control of the country's basic wealth, tin—"the devil's metal." In retreat, semi-impotent, apathetic, they allowed the national bourgeoisie to reconstitute an army, and they interrupted their reign of strikes, skirmishes, and battles: in short, they were surviving. Then, as is natural, the army swallowed up the national bourgeoisie which had created it; and the order arrived from the United States to crush the workers' movement. The military junta provoked the workers in cold blood, arresting their old union leader Lechín. The unlimited general strike proposed by the Trotskyists was decreed in May, 1965. The army's élite corps, the Rangers, special parachute troops, and the classic infantry surrounded the mines and unleashed a frontal attack against the miners' militia. Its aviation bombed a mine near La Paz and machine-gunned another. Result: hundreds of dead on the miners' side and dozens among the soldiers; occupation of the mines by the army; doors broken down by soldiers, and families machine-gunned indiscriminately; union leaders and the more

militant miners outlawed, jailed, killed. Objective achieved. Everything in order, even the hatred and the tears of rage. Until the next time.

If there were a combined general insurrection at several mines, plus La Paz and certain rural areas, and if this insurrection brought to completion a long war of attrition carried on elsewhere by other means, miners organized in revolutionary unions could play a decisive role. But one thing appears to be impossible: that a spontaneous insurrection should be able, in a few days, to defeat a modern army, trained and reinforced by a well-equipped North American military mission, equipped with shock troops, few in number but aggressive. In short, times have changed; it would be difficult to repeat 1952 in 1966.

What possibility of defense and of victorious attack have the miners today?

The *milicianos* are workers in the nationalized mines. In the case of a strike or insurrection, the government cuts off the roads and intercepts the food supply, which normally reaches the mining communities from La Paz by train and truck. In the mining district itself, at an altitude of over 12,000 feet, the rocky soil produces little. A few communities of Aymará Indians grow potatoes and cinchona, and they dry llama meat. From this subsistence economy comes nothing substantial. Therefore the comrades need a quick victory, since their food supply would be sufficient for only about ten days; after that, no milk for the children, no medical supplies in the hospitals, no meat at the butcher's. On the other hand, the miners can stop the shipping of ore by blocking the trains at the mine entrance. But it is an unequal fight and they are defeated at the outset. The government has money in the bank, North American loans at its disposal, commercial warehouses, access to a Chilean port; and they can hold out for a long time without the ore. The miner in arms is, with every day that passes, jeopardizing his family's food supply; the fate of one is the fate of the other. He sees his children waste away under his very eyes, his fellow workers stricken by silicosis, gasping and dying for lack of medicines —a mere few cough syrups. If they were alone, independent, in restricted units, a raid on the warehouses of neighboring towns

would suffice to supply them for several weeks. But as things are, hunger attacks both them and their families.

The mines are also cities, immense grey windowless barracks, located at some distance from the pits, where the families live. On a freezing highland plateau, with not a tree or a shrub, an expanse of red earth as far as the eye can see, an intense glare. The houses are laid out in rows, an easy and conspicuous target for the bombers. Bombardments threaten not production but population, since the mines are underground and surface installations few. The smelters are in England and the United States. Another weakness: the mines are ten or twenty or more miles apart. It is easy for the army to isolate them one by one, and difficult for the miners to get together to coordinate resistance: without a plan, without a centralized military command, without military training, without means of transport. Furthermore, the militia units can only move at night. At best, a few commandos can move by day against limited objectives, in the enemy's rearguard, toward the cities. But that kind of action goes beyond self-defense and beyond the concrete conditions of life of the *milicianos* who barely have time to eat—badly—and to sleep so as to continue working for an average wage of $30-$40 per month. Hence the impatience, the desperation; something must be done to break the blockade. But what? Without preparation, action is suicidal; dynamite thrown by hand is useless against a machine gun, and the rifles are Chaco War vintage. Bullets are expensive and scarce. And what can be done against planes? In order to destroy one army, another army is necessary, and this implies training, discipline, and arms. Fraternity and bravery do not make an army. Witness Spain, and the Paris Commune.

Bound to their place of work, together with the women who fight and the children; exposed to all kinds of reprisals against themselves and their kin; unable to maneuver or even to detach troops from their base in organized units; without military organization; without leadership or funds; in short, without the material possibility of turning themselves into a mobile force, the miners are simply condemned to slaughter. The army decides the day and hour of the massacre, where to begin the action, by

what routes the columns of soldiers will move, where the paratroopers will land. The initiative and the secrecy of the preparations are left to the army; for the miners, nothing more than troop muster, with their own resources, in the full light of day. If their home base, already known, is attacked, it is easily liquidated. Their counter-attack, on the other hand, cannot go very far, since the nature of the terrain is such that it holds them and pulls them back like an elastic band.

Whether or not to provide the popular forces with an armed detachment, organically independent of the civilian population, freed from the tasks of civil defense, and with the goal of winning political power—such is the decisive criterion for distinguishing revolutionary phraseology from revolutionary theory. We know that Trotskyism flies in the face of common sense, in that its strength lies in its division. It is everywhere and nowhere. It exposes itself by hiding itself. It is never what it is, Trotskyist. The Trotskyist ideology has reappeared today from several directions, taking as its pretext several transitory defeats suffered by revolutionary action, but always proposing the same "strategy for taking power." Let us summarize it:

The worker and peasant masses everywhere crave socialism, but they don't yet know it because they are still in the power of the Stalinist bureaucracies. Hence the latent spontaneity of the workers must be awakened. For the attainment of this goal, the guerrilla movement is not the highest form of revolutionary struggle; "dual power" must be instituted at the base, that is, a call must be made for the formation of factory and peasant committees, the proliferation of which will ultimately permit the establishment of a single United Confederation of Workers; this confederation, by means of instantaneous and generalized risings in the mountains and the cities, will be the instrument for taking power. From now on the work of agitation must aim at unleashing strikes and workers' demonstrations. In the countryside the aim should be the organization of peasant unions; occupation of the land; organization of localized insurrections, which will gradually spread to the cities, with the rallying cry of Socialist Revolution. The workers must, step by step, take control of the means of production. Then they must

rise up immediately and directly against the state power, without intermediaries or specialized detachments. The Revolution will arise from existing or latent economic struggles, which will be sharpened to the point of becoming a mass insurrection—a direct passage from union action to insurrection.

Peru, Guatemala, and Brazil (São Paulo and the Northeast) were the three countries chosen by the Latin American Bureau of Buenos Aires, section of the Fourth International. This was the way Hugo Blanco operated, on arrival from Argentina, with the peasants of Convención Valley; Julião's peasant leagues were to be manipulated in the same way; and such until recently was the line imposed on Yon Sosa and the 13th of November Movement (MR-13) in Guatemala by Posadas's International which took advantage of MR-13's abandonment by and lack of assistance from other political organizations. *Revolución Socialista,* at one time the organ of MR-13, said in its first number (July, 1964): "The principle of organizing armed insurrection in stages, by way of a 'people's war,' is formal, bureaucratic, and militarist. It is based on the underestimation and using of the masses and the postponement of their direct intervention."

Trotskyism attributes great importance to the socialist character of the revolution, to its future program, and would like it to be judged by this purely phraseological question, as if declaring a thousand times that the revolution should be socialist would help call it into existence. But the nub of the question is not theoretical, it lies in the forms of organization through which the "Socialist Revolution" will be realized. It is here that we discover not only that the revolution which they speak of is utopian, but that the means employed lead not to the revolution but to the scarcely utopian liquidation of existing popular movements. On this point, let us hear from the "Edgar Ibarra" guerrilla front, a unit of the FAR (*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*) of Guatemala, which, having demonstrated the inanity of a "national democratic" program for the Guatemalan revolution and the "non-existence of the national bourgeoisie," addresses itself to the Trotskyist movement as follows:

This entire [Trotskyist] position leads, by means of a clever maneuver to the removal of revolutionary content from the guerrilla movement; to the denial that it can become the army of the people; to the denial of the role of the peasantry in our countries' revolutionary wars; to the denial of the need for the military defeat of imperialism and its lackeys as a precondition to seizing power from them; to the concealment of the prolonged duration of the armed struggle; to the deceptive presentation of the insurrectional outlook as a short-term matter; to the splitting of the people's forces and the diversion of revolutionary efforts into the peaceful organization of unions and mass organizations.*

Let us for the moment decide to take the Trotskyist conception seriously, and not as the pure and simple provocation that it is in practice. We will observe a certain amount of confusion. First, the imposition of the working-class model of factory cells and proletarian trade unions on the peasant reality (what is valid for a factory or capitalist metropolis is valid for the Indian community, which dates back to Mayan or Inca society); the underestimation, paradoxical after such an imposition, of the role of the working class as the leading force of the revolution; the confusing of armed struggle—as a long process of building up a popular army in the field—with a direct assault on power or a Bolshevik-type insurrection in the city; a total incomprehension of the relation of forces between the peasantry and the ruling class. Whatever the theoretical confusions, and there are many, one thing is certain: this beautiful verbal apparatus operates in reality like a trap, and the trap shuts on the agricultural workers and sometimes on the organizers as well. To promote public assemblies of the people in an Indian village, or open union meetings, is simply to denounce the inhabitants to the forces of repression and the political cadres to the police: it is to send them to prison or to their graves.

In the document from which we have already quoted, the Guatemalan comrades write:

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*Summary of a letter sent by the "Edgar Ibarra" guerrilla front to the Central Committee of the PGT (Communist Party) and the national leadership of MR-13 in October, 1964, apropos the conflicts that had arisen in the Guatemalan revolutionary movement.

The slogan calling for occupation of the land and factories, which could be helpful at certain stages of the struggle, provokes, when used anarchically, massacres and tremendous setbacks for the peasants and workers who do not yet have the strength to sustain these invasions. The famous "dispute" with the bourgeoisie over the ownership of the means of production is inconceivable so long as the ruling classes control the whole apparatus of repression. This tactic could be applied in zones where the development of guerrilla forces, or of the popular army, had proceeded to the point of being able to hold the wave of repression in check. Under other circumstances, it exposes the people's most vulnerable targets to the enemy's blows. Such actions can acquire the character of real provocations, causing defeats that oblige the people to retreat politically as the only way of protecting themselves against repression.

At bottom Trotskyism is a metaphysic paved with good intentions.* It is based on a belief in the natural goodness of the workers, which is always perverted by evil bureaucracies but never destroyed. There is a proletarian essence within peasants and workers alike which cannot be altered by circumstances. For them to become aware of it themselves, it is only necessary that they be given the word, that objectives be set for them which they see without seeing and which they know without knowing. Result: socialism becomes a reality, all at once, without delay, neat and tidy.

Because Trotskyism, in its final state of degeneration, is a medieval metaphysic, it is subject to the monotonies of its function. In space—everywhere the same: the same analyses and perspectives serve equally well for Peru and Belgium. In time—immutable: Trotskyism has nothing to learn from history. It already has the key to it: the proletariat, essentially wholesome and unfailingly socialist—eternally at odds, in its union activity, with the perverse formalism of the Stalinist bureaucracies. Prometheus struggling ceaselessly against a Zeus of a thousand disguises in order to steal from him the fire of liberation and keep it burning. Has anyone ever seen a concrete analysis of a concrete situation from the pen of a Trotskyist?

Condemned to exist in the present within the categories of

*For a good description of the Trotskyist position, see Sartre: "Les communistes et la paix."

the past, Trotskyism withers on the vine. Has it ever met with anything but defeat? The saboteurs of the revolution are everywhere. The contradiction lies in the fact that these guardians of the spontaneity of the masses—advocates of abandoning the rural proletariat to its fierce animosities, freed from that "militarist" caste (the guerrillas descending on it from the cities) and finally left to its own devices—are frequently militants from neighboring countries or from abroad. And they come not to participate in a liberation movement nor to serve it, but to lead and control it by using its weaknesses, which is a different matter. Strange spontaneity: it is not born on the spot, it is imported. But why be surprised? An abstract metaphysic, a concept with no grasp of history—general or specific—the Trotskyist ideology can only be applied from outside. Since it is not appropriate anywhere, it must be applied by force everywhere.*

Thus we see that in reality guerrilla warfare is, paradoxically, interpreted both by the proponents of reformist self-defense and by ultra-revolutionary Trotskyism as a militarist tendency toward isolation from the masses. The Trotskyist conception of insurrection resembles self-defense: both provocative, both acting in the name of the masses against the apparatuses, in the name of the action of the masses against the action of a "handful of adventurers." The masses are the scapegoats. These fine theoreticians lead them to suicide, singing hymns to their glory.

The proponents of self defense (in practice) and the Trotskyists (in practice and theory) consider the trade union to be the organizational base and the motive force of the class struggle. Herein lies the explanation of a surprising coincidence. We have been told that Trotskyists are ultra-leftists. Nothing is further from the truth. Trotskyism and reformism join in con-

*All of which does not justify either the decrees or the tabu that still conceal from some people the works of Trotsky, of whom Lenin said, shortly before he died, that he was "distinguished not only by his exceptional abilities—personally he is, to be sure, the most able man in the present Central Committee—but also by his too far-reaching self-confidence and a disposition to be too much attracted by the purely administrative side of affairs." (The quotation is from Lenin's so-called "testament" which is reproduced in full in E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia: The Interregnum, 1923-1924,* New York and London, 1954, pp. 258-259, 263.—*Ed.*)

demning guerrilla warfare, in hampering or sabotaging it.* It is no mere accident that these two movements have taken the Cuban Revolution as a target for their attacks in Latin America as well as in the rest of the world. This also explains why the new guerrilla movements that are asserting themselves so forcefully, such as the FALN in Venezuela under the command of Douglas Bravo, and the FAR in Guatemala, have had to fight on two fronts. The programmatic letter of the FAR, which we have cited above, is addressed to both the *Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo* (Communist), before its transformation, and to Yon Sosa's MR-13, dominated at that time by the Trotskyists. It was on the basis of this remarkable formulation of the form and content of the Guatemalan Revolution that the new *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* were organized, late in 1965, by agreement with the renewed and rejuvenated *Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo.*

What does experience up to now teach us?

The revolutionary guerrilla force is clandestine. It is born and develops secretly. The fighters themselves use pseudonyms. At the beginning they keep out of sight, and when they allow themselves to be seen it is at a time and place chosen by their chief. The guerrilla force is independent of the civilian population, in action as well as in military organization; consequently it need not assume the direct defense of the peasant population. The protection of the population depends on the progressive destruction of the enemy's military potential. It is relative to the overall balance of forces: the populace will be completely safe when the opposing forces are completely defeated. If the principal objective of a revolutionary guerrilla force is the destruc-

*It is useful to compare Henri Edmé's article in *Les Temps Modernes* (April, 1966) with the one by Pumaruna [*Cuadernos de Ruedo Ibérico,* Paris, April-May, 1966—*Tr.*], leader of *Vanguardia Revolucionaria,* a Peruvian organization, romately Trotskyist in origin. Edmé, whose premises are stated with considerable acuity, expresses the point of view of the more traditional Communist Parties. (See Osvaldo Barreto's answer in a forthcoming issue of *Casa de las Américas.*) The two authors reach analogous conclusions, vague as they are: localized peasant self-defense in the countryside, the organization of cadres and "advanced" political struggles in the city.

tion of the enemy's military potential, it cannot wait for the enemy to approach before taking the initiative and going over to the attack. In every case this objective requires that the guerrilla *foco* be independent of the families residing within the zone of operations.

First, to protect the population against the repressive army. Faced with elusive *guerrilleros*, the army takes vengeance on the peasants whom it suspects of being in contact with them. If it finds one among them who has withheld information it will kill him, declaring in its report to headquarters that he was a *guerrillero,* in this way giving evidence of its own heroism. Mobility, the special advantage of guerrilla forces over the civilian population, imposes a special responsibility on them with respect to the peasants, who are exposed day and night to repressive measures—eternal victims-by-substitution. The guerrilla force is thus clandestine for two reasons; it is concerned as much with the peasants' safety as with that of its own fighters. After all, the safety of the one is the safety of the other.

The *guerrilleros* avoid going to the villages and openly staying in a given house or on the land of a given family. If they do enter a village they may stop at all houses, so as to compromise all equally and not point a finger at a particular one who is helping them; or they will not stop at any. If they must hold a meeting, they pretend to assemble the population by force, so that if threatened with repression the people can claim they were coerced. Contacts are made out of town, secretly, and of course at a distance from the guerrilla encampment, utilizing intermediaries (persons or objects) if necessary. Informants and collaborators are not known to each other. In the guerrilla group itself, only a few leaders know the network of contacts. A "hot" collaborator of the region who asks to be integrated into the guerrilla force is admitted without question, even if he arrives without a weapon, etc.

Second, to protect the safety of the guerrilla force itself: "Constant vigilance, constant mistrust, constant mobility"—the three golden rules. All three are concerned with security. Various considerations of common sense necessitate wariness toward the civilian population and the maintenance of a certain aloofness.

By their very situation civilians are exposed to repression and the constant presence and pressure of the enemy, who will attempt to buy them, corrupt them, or to extort from them by violence what cannot be bought. Not having undergone a process of selection or technical training, as have the guerrilla fighters, the civilians in a given zone of operations are more vulnerable to infiltration or moral corruption by the enemy. Therefore peasants, even those who collaborate with the guerrillas, are generally not permitted to go to the encampments, nor are they informed of the whereabouts of arms dumps, or of the destination or real objectives of the guerrilla patrols whose passage they may observe. "We hid our intentions from the peasants," Che relates, "and if one of them passed near the scene of an ambush, we held him until the operation was completed."* This vigilance does not necessarily imply mistrust: a peasant may easily commit an indiscretion and, even more easily, be subjected to torture. It is known that this vigilance is exercised vis-à-vis guides especially, all of whom are carefully misinformed concerning where the *guerrilleros* came from, where they are eventually going, etc.**

Hence the necessity for moving the encampment immediately after anyone leaves it. If it is a *guerrillero* carrying a message, he will know the terrain thoroughly and will thus be able, on his return, to rejoin the moving column or to find the new camp site. It has been observed more than once that the man —*guerrillero* or peasant—who by virtue of his functions must go back and forth between the mountains and the city, to carry messages or to gather information or make contacts, is especially exposed to enemy action. It is through him that attempts are made to infiltrate the guerrilla unit, willingly or by

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**Souvenirs de la guerre révolutionnaire.*

***Eutimio Guerra, a simple peasant and the first guide of the rebels in the Sierra, who enjoyed their complete confidence, had received 10,000 pesos from Casillas to kill Fidel. By chance and, according to Fidel, "a sixth sense," he was discovered and executed in time. What should one expect today, when the enemy knows the irreplaceable value of a leader, especially in the first stage? It was the treachery of a guide that led to the assassination of Luis de la Puente in Peru.

force; it is thanks to him that it is possible to discover the whereabouts of the fighters of a given *foco*.*

According to Fidel, the danger represented by this function of liaison between the guerrilla unit and the plains is of a psychological order. At the outset the young combatant, still uncertain of the possibilities of a guerrilla victory, leaves the camp to fulfill his mission. There below, he discovers the strength and ostentation of the encircling army, its equipment and manpower. Then he remembers the hungry band he has just left. The contrast is too great, the task seems unrealizable, and he loses faith in victory. He thinks it ridiculous or unreasonable to attempt to defeat so many soldiers, with so many trucks and helicopters, with all manner of arms and supplies. Skeptical, from then on he is at the mercy of the enemy. This is how it is with novices. The plain demoralizes and disorganizes the weak ones.

To sum up, the advantages a guerrilla force has over the repressive army can be utilized only if it can maintain and preserve its mobility and its flexibility. The carrying out of any operation, the secrecy surrounding preparations, the rapidity of execution, the element of surprise, all require extreme care. Only at the risk of losing initiative, speed of movement, and maneuverability, can a guerrilla unit take with it women, children, and household belongings from one village to another. To combine the exodus of civilians with guerrilla marches, frequently forced, is to deprive the guerrilla force of all offensive potential; it cannot even effectively defend the civilian population for which it has assumed responsibility. By restricting itself to the task of protecting civilians or passive self-defense, the guerrilla unit ceases to be the vanguard of the people as a whole and

*In July, 1963, an entire guerrilla *foco*—21 men—in the Izabal zone of Guatemala was liquidated due to lack of vigilance. A guerrilla messenger was picked up in the city and forced, at the point of a machine-gun, to lead a detachment of the Central American army to the camp. The messenger leading the column took the most difficult path, thinking it to be guarded by a sentry. He revealed his presence by a shout before reaching the place where he expected to find the sentry. No one answered. The messenger was killed, and the detachment entered the encampment in the dead of night. The sentry had been relieved earlier in the evening, because this access was considered to be impenetrable.

deprives itself of a national perspective. By going over to the counter-attack, on the other hand, it catalyzes the people's energy and transforms the *foco* into a pole of attraction for the whole country.

Thus, self-defense reduces the guerrilla force to an exclusively tactical role and deprives it of the possibility of making even the slightest strategic revolutionary contribution. By choosing to operate at this level, it may be able to provide protection for the population for a limited time. But in the long run, the opposite is true: self-defense undermines the security of the civilian population.

Allowing oneself to be attacked or limiting oneself to passive defense is to place oneself in the position of being unable to protect the population and to expose one's own forces to attrition. On the other hand, to seek for ways to attack the enemy is to put him on the permanent defensive, to exhaust him and prevent him from expanding his activities, to wrest the initiative from him, and to impede his search operations. Here we have the best way to fulfill our glorious mission of protecting the population.

These directives were addressed to the Vietminh fighters in their war of liberation against the French colonialists. They are even more valid for many Latin American countries today.