

REGIS DEBRAY AND REVOLUTION IN LATIN AMERICA

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy

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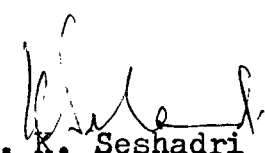
1981

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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled ' Regis Debray and Revolution in Latin America ' submitted by Baldev Krishna for the degree of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other degree at this or any other University. We recommend that this dissertation should be placed before the examiners for their consideration for the award of the M.Phil degree.


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor Prof. K.Seshadri, Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, for his consistent and valuable guidance in the completion of this study.

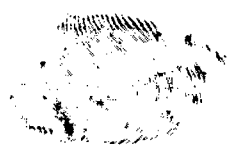
Thanks are also due to Sri. S. Kaviraj, Assistant Professor, Centre for Political Studies, SSS, for his encouragement and guidance in the present work.

I also thank Dr. C.P. Bhambri, Chairman, CPS/SSS, for providing facilities for my research work.

This dissertation would be incomplete without mentioning the library staff of JNU, for their immense help in my present study.

As a blind student, I had to face many difficulties in completing this dissertation. It would have been impossible to complete this work without the timely help and co-operation of my friends. I am deeply indebted to all of them.

July, 1981.



BALDEV KRISHNA

C O N T E N T S

1. INTRODUCTION	I
2. THE TRADITIONAL MARXIST VIEW OF REVOLUTION	6
3. REGIS DEBRAY ON REVOLUTION	23
4. REVOLUTION : THE ARMED ROAD	46
5. REVOLUTION IN LATIN AMERICAN STATES: BIRD'S EYE VIEW	57
6. CONCLUSION : THEORIES OF REVOLUTION AND REGIS DEBRAY	82
7. BIBLIOGRAPHY	87

I N T R O D U C T I O N

INTRODUCTION

This century has been a century of revolutionary upheavals and radical transformations of societies in different parts of the globe. Beginning with the October Revolution that took place in Russia in 1917 the world has witnessed the revolution in China (1949), the Cuban revolution (1959), the Vietnamese revolution (1968). Together with this revolutionary trend we have also witnessed the demise of the colonialism, fascism and to some extent the defeat of imperialism. These changes have ushered in a qualitatively new world order in which socialism has marched on victoriously.

Revolutionary movements have largely adopted the principles and programme of Marxism in their bid to bring about radical social changes in their countries. Invariably these movements have been led by communist parties based on the model of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Not only were these parties similar in form to the CPSU, but their revolutionary programme also followed the line of the CPSU. Further most of these parties owed their political allegiance to the Communist International headed by the Soviet Union. They were largely dependent on Soviet assistance for their material and military needs. As a result of their staunch and unquestioning allegiance they enforced whatever decisions were made by Moscow.

In 1960, the first major split in the world communist movement took place as a result of ideological differences between the CPSU and Communist party of China. This ideological war continue today and has gained in intensity as a result of American and Chinese collaboration. China accused Russia of revisionism and of distorting fundamental Marxist principles. This split has had international consequences and has divided communist parties between pro-Moscow and pro-Peking factions. In India itself the split had its impact on the Communist Party of India when a section of the party broke away in 1963 to form the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

But it was not only China that was disillusioned with the leadership of the Soviet Union in the world communist movement. In Cuba Fidel Castro had succeeded in overthrowing Batista in 1959 and proceeded to build a socialistic society without the assistance of the communists. This was the first such revolution in which the communists did not play a significant role. At the time, Castro was accused of heresy in working without the communists. Today however, the position is different and Castro has united with the communists and has showed signs of supporting Moscow.

In other parts of the world, notably in Western Europe and America there has developed strong antipathy towards the Soviet Union. In Western Europe the communist parties of Italy and Spain have both come out openly against certain actions of the Soviet Union as for example, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and that of Afghanistan in 1979. What has emerged in Western Europe is a communist movement strongly opposed to both the foreign policies as well as the internal policies of the Soviet Union. This movement has come to be known as the Euro-Communism. This is by no means a clearly defined political programme. It is only the communist party of France which still adheres strongly to the Moscow line but even this strong ally of Moscow has recently shown signs of dissension. In its electoral agreement with the Socialist Party of France the party condemned the Russian intervention of Afghanistan. In Britain and America another movement under the name of the New Left emerged in the sixties. The New Left has been outspoken on a whole number of theoretical and practical issues connected with Soviet styled Marxism. But it will be a mistake to consider the New Left as a revolutionary movement, for it represents nothing more than a group of intellectuals highly critical of all movements.

Underlying all these divisions in the world communist movement are serious theoretical differences. With the increasing number of divisions and splits taking place there

has grown a body of thoughts giving new interpretations and dimensions to Marxist theory. It is necessary that Marxism be interpreted and developed in the course of time. Marx during his time posed some vital political and economic questions underlying the capitalist system of exploitation and was able to provide explanations to some of these questions. It was not possible for him to provide a complete blueprint of socialist society nor was it possible for him to transcend his time and predict accurately future developments. Marx, for example could not have foreseen the emergence of the Third World and the problems that beset developing and underdeveloped countries. Therefore Marxism must be considered not as a ~~complete~~ complete political programme but as a guide to political understanding and action.

There have been many prominent Marxists that have given varying interpretations of the theory and practice of Marxism in the present age. Among these must be noted Regis Debray, Frantz Fanon and Ernest Mandel. These individuals have contributed a great deal towards the progressive evolution of Marxist theory through their numerous writings and they have inspired many movements that have long lost faith in the Soviet Union. While Mandel has largely been concerned with analysing the development of capitalism and the crisis through which it is going, Debray and Fanon have focussed specifically on the problem of Africa and Latin America. Just as Fanon's "Wretched of the Earth" caused a great stir within African revolutionary

movements, so did Debray's "Revolution in Revolution" create a significant impact on the Latin American guerrilla movements. Fanon and Debray share many views on revolution in particular they strongly resent urban based political leadership instead of a rural one. Both these writers have also strongly criticised the orthodox communist parties and have rejected their role as revolutionary vanguards.

In this study we are concerned only with the theories propounded by Debray. These theories have emerged as a result of Debray's experiences in Cuba and other Latin American countries. Debray has been strongly influenced by Castro and Che Guevara in his approach and understanding of revolution. In the first chapter we will consider the classical Marxist theory of revolution with reference to the writings of Marx and Lenin. In the second chapter we will examine Debray's theory of revolution as it evolved through his writings. The third chapter is devoted to examining Debray's understanding of the armed struggles being waged in Latin America. In the final chapter we take a look at the revolutionary experience of the sixties in four Latin American countries namely Venezuela, Uruguay, Guatemala and Chile.

C H A P T E R - I

THE TRADITIONAL MARXIST VIEW
OF REVOLUTION

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CHAPTER - ITHE TRADITIONAL MARXIST VIEW OF
REVOLUTION

Revolution is a very striking and equally controversial concept in the twentieth century. The term 'revolution' for the first time was used in natural sciences by Copernicus. Copernicus meant by revolution the complete reversal in the traditional scientific theory. But as far as social sciences and particularly 'political' science' is concerned, Aristotle used this term for the first time. He concluded that the notion is still important in the present day. Aristotle said that the middle class maintains social stability. In other words, if there is extreme economic inequality the chances of the occurrence of revolution are bright.

In the present century, there are two major views regarding the process of revolution. These are first that revolution is a sudden change and second, revolution is a radical change. As far as the second characteristic is concerned, we fully agree with it. Regarding the first one we would like to suggest that only the effect of revolution is quick and sudden but the success of revolution largely depends upon the revolutionary process. Machiavelli's ideas are to some extent like those of Aristotle. Machiavelli also thinks that some amount of economic balance is necessary to check revolution but both Machiavelli and Aristotle are not obvious on this point because on the one hand they want the private property and on the other hand they still want economic balance in the society. These two can not go hand in hand.

Undoubtedly Marx is regarded as the father of socialist revolution. In the Communist Manifesto Marx explains why revolution is the only method of basic social transformation. When technological knowhow begins to outstrip the existing social, legal and political institutions, the owners of the means of production do not politely step aside to allow history to run its inevitable course. Marx penetratingly denies that the individual feudal land owner or industrial capitalist obstructs social change out of selfish greed, the resistance of the ruling class to change is so obstinate making revolution finally inevitable precisely because it identifies its own values with universally valid ones. Marx could find no instance in history in which a major social and economic system freely abdicated to its successor. On the assumption that the future will resemble the past, the communists openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. This is the crucial tenet of Marxism - Leninism and is the one that most clearly distinguishes it from democracy.

This revolutionary violence creates further conditions for revolutionary struggle. But at the same time he was doubtful whether the same violent struggle was required for the proletariat to have an access to political power. In 1872, Marx hoped that the proletariat might come to power through peaceful means within the democratic systems like America, France. Later on Marx said that the modern capitalistic society is organised politically, environmentally, militarily and

administratively in such a way that worker 'parties' even coming to power by peaceful means would be unable to implement their socialist politics. For instance, in 1945 in Britain, Labour party came to power though the democratic election but would not avoid the policies of the previous government. It is a different question whether the British Labour party is a working class party or not.

Another important question regarding the revolution is whether subjective or objective factors are more influential for the success of revolution. In my opinion both the factors are equally important.

MARXIST CONCEPT OF REVOLUTION

Before we enter into discussion about the marxist concept of revolution, firstly we will have to assess the concept of state. For this the nature of state, its social origin are to be considered. This followed from the historical development of the society from which partly transformation came. It leads us to the definition of state on the Marxist line. Frederick Engels in his book "Origin of the Family, Private property and State, said "The state is by no means power forced on society from without. It is a product of society at a certain stage of development. It is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, it has split in to irreconcilable opposites for which it is powerless to conjure away. But in order that these opposites, classes with conflicting economic interest,

might not consume themselves and society. In a fruitless struggle, it becomes necessary to have a power seemingly standing above the society that would moderate the conflict and keep it in the bounds of his order. And this power, arising out of society but placing itself above it, alienating itself above it more and more from it, is the state". Here the point expressed is that the state is the product and manifestation of irreconcilability of the class contradictions. That is the fundamental point of Marxism. In 'Communist Manifesto', which was written by Marx and Engels, state is an instrument of class contradictions for the exploitation of other classes. The Manifesto in the first place deals with the class struggle coming out of historical assumptions. On the basis of these ideas Marxism divided the development of the society into four stages. First the primitive communist society where there was no class antagonism and thus there was no exploitation during that period. Second, the slave society where the feudal lords became the exploiters and the mode of production was agrarian in nature. Third the capitalist society where a new class that is the capitalists class came into existence which was equipped with new scientific and technological knowledge. The mode of production in this society is the capitalist mode of production. Finally the communistic society, the society which is yet to be achieved. In this society there will be no class and state.

Marx expressed that it was the bourgeois who possessed distinctive features. It has signified the class antagonism.

The society has split into two big camps viz bourgeois and proletariat. Marx further underlined the interaction of both the camps and also put forward the notion about the nature of this class organisation, nature of struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor.⁽¹⁾ Marx said in Communist Manifesto that the oppressor and the oppressed in a world stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted now hidden, nor open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common rousing of the contending classes. The exploiters are the bourgeois class who control the means of production of the society on whose management the workers work and depend. The worker sell their manpower for the profit of the bourgeoisie. They can also determine the labours power, its utilisation for their benefits. In real sense of the term, " Capital dominates the labour"(2). Here labour~~is~~ becomes a commodity. Profit goes to the bourgeoisie at the expense of labour. Marx in his 'Das Capital' was revealing in examples of exploitation.

The main concept of Marxist notions on revolution is connected with these aspects, first the analysis of the social development in the society, and second nature of the state,

(1) Marx and Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party;

Progress Publishers, 1977, p.p. 40-60

2. V.I. Lenin, State and Revolution, Peking, Foreign Language press, 1976 p.p. 19-27,

third social transformation (social revolution). Marxist view of revolution is concerned primarily with the contradiction between capital and labour. He further assumed that the existence of classes are tied up with the history, Secondly, class struggle ultimately leads to the victory of the proletariats. It will lead to the establishment of the classless society. When social transformation occurs, the system changes and the means of production too. Then it ultimately will lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

If one may say so about the conception of the "Withering away of the state" undoubtedly it means slurring over if not repudiating revolutions. It undoubtedly distorts the Marxist line and only helps the assumption for bourgeoisie. In the first instance, at the very outset Engels says that increasing state power, the proletariat puts an end to the state as a state (Paris commune 1871). The Bourgeois state does not wither away but the proletariat puts an end to it. This would come in the course of a revolution.

Secondly, the state is a special repressive force. It has the power for suppressing the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Thirdly, after formulating the proposition that the state wither away, Engels specifically said that this proposition is directed against both the 'opportunists' and 'anarchists'. Fourthly, the very same work of Engels from which everyone argues about withering away of state contains the historical

analysis of its role becomes a verifiable panegyric on violent revolution. No one in the modern times thinks about the significance of this idea and plays no part whatsoever in daily propaganda and agitation among the masses and it is inseparably bound up with the withering away of the state into one harmonious whole.

Lenin in his book "What isto be done" has dealt with the problem of spontaneity and consciousness of the masses. When he wrote during the twentieth century, he was aware of the mass movement and the functioning of the revolutionary leaders. He pointed out two things, first the positive side that is connected with the awareness of the masses. Secondly awakening of the consciousness in the revolutionary leaders. In the I7th Century there were such movements when the worker simply struck work spontaneously and this led to the spontaneous destruction of machinery. This sort of spontaneous movements were, results of the people who were rather organised. Here Lenin is not denying the fact that spontaneity is not a sign of consciousness or real movement, but it is certainly in an embryonic form. It is a from which can be seen directly organised earlier. Later on this spontaneous movements became collectivised and the leaders of the strikes felt the necessity of collective resistance. Then onward the strikes or movements assumed the character of spontaneity, but it is not a struggle, it is just a relation taken by the masses asthe spontaneous reactions against the state. Here the organised struggle, aimed at the

common benefit of all.

But if it was a trade union's struggle, but onto a whole scale struggle then how to increase the level of consciousness in the masses is a perennial question.⁽³⁾

The history of all revolutions show that the working class exclusively by its own efforts is only able to develop trade union consciousness, the condition that is necessary to continue in unions, isto fight passing of necessary labour legislations.

But the theory of social origin comes out of historical, economic and physiological theories elaborated by educated representatives of the proletariat class, that isthe intellectuals.

Hence the doctrine of social democratic movement arose independently of spontaneous goals of the working class movement. Working classes are unaware of the fact that the system requires a change. The intelligentsia will educate the working masses. All the social democratic theories are tilting towards the working classes. The old social democrats suggested that there isthe need for theintellectuals to combat consciousness among the working classes. This consciousness will come up in to the masses naturally.

3. Lenin, What is to be done (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969) p.p. 29-44 (especially pp.30-34)

Lenin said that the main task of the social democrats is to combat spontaneity to divert the working class movement. He said that many of our revisionist critics believed that Marx asserted economic development of the class struggle creates not only the conditions of the socialist production but also the need for consciousness. There are two elements in the Marxist view point, objective and subjective. In the objective conditions which are made up of historical premises, economic development and class struggle. But for doing so there is a need of a party or organisation to enhance the struggle. Secondly, the subjective conditions for the balancing processes, so that revolution can be achieved. The balance between the subjective and the objective mind of the people is necessary for making revolution.

Lenin in subsequent chapters regarding trade union politics and the social democratic politics observes that the deference between propaganda of economic elite and their attempts restricts political agitation. Secondly, he shows the links between the economic struggle and political struggle. What are the stages? How the working class will come over from colonisation and exploitation and how to impart political consciousness. How it will protect itself from barring the spontaneous movements.

Lenin cited instances of Russian workers when economic struggle and subsequent developments were taking place. Consolidation, reproduction, and other such conditions. He mentioned about detonation of factory systems and other

unfacilitating condition. The main point that Lenin wants to emphasise is the class consciousness which is found in the beginning of trade unionism.

" Economic struggle is a collective struggle by the workers against their employers for better term for their labour and for better living and working conditions. This struggle is necessarily a trade union struggle.⁽⁴⁾

According to Lenin revolutionary social democrats always reunited for the struggle for reforms also put forward economic demands which clearly work for political agitation.

Necessary conditions for the expansion of the political agitation is the organisation of the comprehensive political forces. In no way by such expansion can the masses be trained with political consciousness and revolutionary activities. Then the need is to evoke political consciousness among the masses besides economic apprehension because it is not the means to educate masses to gain political consciousness as for them political rights and duties would not actually help them to become social democrats. They would require the organisation, agitation and comprehensiveness.

In case of China the situation is very much different because Mao-Tse-Tung has done certain modifications on revolutionary aspects. In 'Guerrilla Warfare', Mao emphatically points out the mobile warfare inspite of the fact points out the mobile warfare, inspite of the fact that Russian guerrilla

4. Ibid, pp-61-62.

warfare is based on positional warfare and speedy warfare. The science of strategy, the science of tactics and the science of campaign are the components of Chinese military science. The science of strategy deals with the laws which govern the war situations as a whole. The science of campaign deals with laws which governs the campaign and it applies to directing campaigns. The science of tactics deals with the law of common battles and applies to direct battles.

According to Mao, "When you are going to have a war, that time you must study the law of war in general, at the same time, you will have to see besides the general law of war, it has specific laws of its own. And for these you have to understand this, you will not be able to direct a revolutionary war."

After judging the Chinese socio-economic conditions Mao says "It is a semi-colonial and semi-feudal systems. That is why the form of war should be different from that of Russian War". Russian war is not based on protracted war, but it is little bit speedy, hasty which means positional war. But in China the wars should be protracted (Mao calls it mobile war). Mao says we lack a large army, reserve ammunitions and there is a single Red Army to do fighting. In a base area positional war is generally useless. For China positional war is inapplicable as well as indefensible. Therefore, the mobile war is primary. Though Mao never rejects the positional war, he observes, "The positional war should be employed for the tenacious defence of particular key points in containing

action giving strategic offensive is encountered with enemy forces which are isolated and cut off from the rest."

Now a few questions generally arise, what is strategic defensive, strategic offensive and base area, strategic defence is to prevent enemy from demolition and destruction of the base area. Therefore the guerrillas in order to smash the enemy offensive, should cut off the follow up and supply routes of advance of the enemy offensive. So the enemy offensive cannot be sustained. The enemy while on offensive converges through extension lines when you are defensive, operating on the exterior lines. The war to maintain the base is therefore, a positional war. To do that, we are on defensive and shall counter the enemy's attack by counter attack.

In the strategic defence we shall come out of the garrison and expand on area ultimately encircling the important cities and other strategic points of the enemy as long as they are starved of food and supplies. The purpose of strategic offensive is therefore, to attack vigorously and speedily the enemy while it is in the defensive so that it can not build up its forces for an offensive. Mao divides the problems of guerilla warfare in four terms. First the relationship between defensive and protectiveness and quick decision, between an exterior and interior lines. Second, initiative in all operations.

Third, flexible employment of forces, and fourth planning in all operations.

Offensive generally takes surprise form of attacks, the quick decision is very important in this connection. He distinguished the guerilla warfare as it involved not only strategy, but also tactical defensive too. In the actual operation guerilla units have to concentrate the maximum forces and secretly attack the enemy by surprise and achieve the quick results. After winning battles quickly, the guerilla units must have to go to a defensive and repulse the enemy, so it is tactical defensive too.

Mao says "The basic principle of the guerrilla warfare must be offensive, and the guerilla war is more offensive in its character than the regular warfare. It is more so because of its peculiar character. Guerilla warfare can be staged everywhere in disposing and resulting in a tactical gain. In Marxist view the principle is dispersal of forces, but a guerilla organisation must contain immense forces, in order to destroy the enemy. To destroy fully the immense force is really the smashing away of the enemy forces. So the main thing containing in the weak force for striking the small section of the enemy forces, remains a field operation in a guerilla warfare. And now the question of initiative comes. The initiative is immensely important. If the initiative is hard and stern, it is easy to diffuse the enemy. The question of initiative is more vital in guerilla warfare, because to hold the big forces

and to launch a primary strategic lines, guerilla can give scope for reducing the grievances of masses. So initiative is a basic factor for marking out the strategies, formation of political and military disposition. Initiative is again important for planning intellectual base and development of the masses. Then comes flexibility. The flexibility is a concrete expression of the initiative. It is the flexible employment of the forces. This is more essential for the guerilla warfare than the regular warfare. It is more so for regaining or gaining initiative. At last comes planning. Through planning, necessary warfare can be conducted. It is necessary for the grasping of the situation, stating the taste, disposing of socialism, giving a military and political training, maintaining supply etc. Planning is a must for initial coordination.

Mao also analysed the strategy for a guerilla warfare. It is real coordination with the regular warfare. There are few coordinating points between regular and guerilla warfare. First, coordination in strategy, second coordination strategy in campaigns and strategy for the enemy. Another important aspect is the establishment of the base area, it is more important because of ruthlessness of the war. Base area is essential for destroying the enemy, without it any operation is futile. Therefore, there are two aspects of guerillism. Firstly, irregularity, decentralisation, lack of uniformity, absence of strict discipline and simple methods of war. Second, aspect consists of mobile warfare, the guerilla character of strategic and tactical operation is

still necessary at present. The inevitable feudality of the base area, flexibility in planning the base area and posture of irregularity are also equally important aspects. Therefore, strategically protective war and battle of quick decision are the two aspects of the same thing. Secondly, there should be immense patience to indulge in the surprise attack.

In this connection the works of Ho Chi Minh should not also go unnoticed, whose revolutionary ideas, contribution to revolutionary theory, and ethics are of great significance today. In the process of his revolutionary activities he developed the theory of national liberation movement which is one of his main contributions. He compared imperialism with two suckers. One of which sucks the blood of proletariat and the other that of colonial people. Ho Chi Minh always gave stress on the close relation between national liberation movements and proletarian revolution. He regarded the struggle for independence of the eastern countries as one of the wings of proletarian revolution and national liberation revolution as an integral part of the proletarian revolution on a world scale. Thus he always emphasised the need for a national democratic revolution, "our revolution is people's national democratic revolution against aggressive imperialism and its main stay feudalism the key to the victory of resistance lies in consolidating and enlarging the national united front, consolidating the workers peasants alliance and the people's power, strengthening and

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developing the army, consolidating the party, and strengthening its leadership in all aspects.⁵

His concept of revolution is not very different from that of other Marxists but the difference lies in the emphasis. This was because of the peculiar conditions of Vietnam. Vietnam had to fight against U.S. imperialism for years and that made Ho Chi Minh to emphasize the need for national unity and united front.

Ho-Chi-Minh died on 3rd September, 1969 in Hanoi as the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Working people's party of Vietnam and above all as an outstanding figure in the world revolutionary movement.

In any case whether it is Marx or Lenin or Mao Tse Tung or Ho Chi Minh the causes of revolution is class exploitation and in this aspect Latin American countries were no exception and shall be discussed considering the theoretical foundations of one of the greatest practical revolutionary^{ok}/Latin America, Regis Debray.

5. Ho Chi Minh, Selected Writings and speeches (Chapter: Land Reforms) Communist Party Publications pp.18.

CHAPTER - II

REGIS DEBRAY ON REVOLUTION

CHAPTER - IIDEBRAY'S THEORY ON REVOLUTION

In the preceding chapter we have discussed some of the basic ideas behind classical Marxist theory. In this chapter we intend to look at Debray's understanding of the concept of revolution and his analysis of the situation in Latin America, contribution to revolutionary theory.

When Debray's "Revolution in the Revolution" appeared in 1967 it received a wide response both from revolutionary circles in Latin America and from writers concerned with the theory of revolution in general. It created what Huberman and Sweezy call "an international sensation!" The reasons for this kind of response is understandable if one were to study Debray's theory in the light of classical and orthodox Marxism.

It is important to undertake a serious study of Debray's theory because his contribution to the development of Marxist theory in general cannot be disputed. Not only does his writings give us an insight into the problems of Latin American countries and of the development of revolutionary movements in that continent but it also approaches the revolution in a way that is very different from the classical writings of Marx, Lenin, Mao and other revolutionaries.

Debray's writing is also important in order to understand him correctly and to offer criticism which are valid in the light of historical experience, since his writings have influenced an important section of the Latin American revolutionary movement.

During his stay in Latin American he spent much time studying the situation which gripped Latin America during the sixties. He had the unique experience of working and discussing with many leading figures of the movement including Castro and Guevara. He was, therefore, able to assess at first hand the developments taking place in the continent.

The above has been noted in order to show that Debray was not only intellectually involved but was engaged in the struggles of Latin America. Therefore, his writings reflect not only some understanding of the revolutionary process but also an understanding of the day-to-day difficulties experienced by the guerilla fighters. It is this fact which must be remembered if one were to fully appreciate the extent of what Woddis refers to his "sincere commitment" to the revolution. With these brief remarks we can now turn to his theory of revolution.

The lack of theoretical content in Debray's writings has been noted by many writers.^I It is true that in none of his writings does he give us a very clear analysis of

I. Huberman & Sweezy and Woddis, Jack, *New Theories of Revolution* (London, 1972).

'revolution'. It has been said with good reason that Debray offers us "a mere fragment of a theory of revolution!"² On the whole his writings do not seem to explain the revolutionary process in Latin America nor describe it but rather how to achieve it.

It is from this lack of theoretical analysis that is his major weaknesses which we will examine later arise while Debray considers it necessary "to study the problem (of revolution) scientifically" and that a ... "a study of this kind is a matter of life and death"³, he does not appear to do much justice to his study.

We must firstly understand what revolution Debray is referring to in his writings that is which stage of the revolutionary process is being discussed. Debray rejects outright the idea of a national democratic revolution and its relevance in Latin America. On the contrary he suggests that the situation in Latin America is ripe for a socialist revolution:

".... a bourgeoisie democratic revolution is no longer possible in Latin America, because it is no longer on the agenda of history, so to say; yet the socialist revolution which figures in heavy type on the agenda is not yet possible."⁴

This is in fact amounts to a rejection of the classical Marxist doctrine of the two stages revolutionary theory, firstly

2. Huberman & Sweezy, "Debray; The Strength & The Weakness" in Huberman & Sweezy, ed., p.I.

3. Debray, R. Critique of Arms Vol.I (Middlesex, 1977), pp.31-32.

4. Ibid, pp. 77-78.

that of the national democratic stage and secondly the socialist ~~stage~~ stage. This theory was originally put forward by Lenin in his analysis of the national question. Lenin called for the unity of all classes during the first stage to fight for national independence and the right to self determination. It is strange that Debray should use the Cuban example to bring out the distinction between the two stages of revolution. He recognised that the Cuban revolution did pass through these two stages although the period between the two stages was very short, so as to be hardly distinguishable;

"In Cuba it (revolution) meant the overthrow of a tyranny in change of the government, a return to the democratic constitution of 1940; in Latin America from 1960 onwards, it has meant the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, a change in the social mode of production, and the setting up of a radically new socialist legality." ⁵

On the one hand he rejects national democracy saying that it does not apply to the Latin American situation; on the other hand he sees evidence of the existence of such a revolution in Cuba. He goes on further to contradict himself:

5. Ibid, pp. 72-73.

"In the context of today any national democratic movement in Latin America which attacks the existing state system with the object of liquidating it is a part of the world struggle to establish socialism".⁶

The above implies that every revolutionary movement in Latin America must pass through the stage of national democracy, the Cuban revolution goes to prove this. Fidel's guerilla movement which adopted the method of armed struggle in 1953 when it attacked the Moncada Barracks did not openly subscribe to the aims of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP), the party of the Cuban communists. Instead it had its own programme based on the establishment of national democracy. Its programme included demands like right to national sovereignty, land reforms, working class and trade union democracy, an end to racial discrimination, nationalization of public services, industrialization etc.⁷ It is on the basis of this programme that Fidel won the support of all the sections of the population including the petty bourgeois and some elements of the bourgeoisie itself. United States imperialism did not perceive this movement as an immediate threat to its interests, but on the contrary thought that its interests could best be served by the overthrow of the dictator Batista. Accordingly it did not see

6. Ibid, p. 73

7. Woddis, Jack, n.I, p.203.

fit to act at the time to stop the advance of the movement. Only after the overthrow of Batista in 1959 did Fidel declared his socialist aims and defeated those elements in his movement that supported imperialism and were not prepared to carry the revolution forward to the end. After a sort of struggle with the anti-socialist elements Fidel was able to strengthen his movement by moving towards a united front with the PSP and establishing the present Communist Party of Cuba.

Debray's rejection of the possibility of an national democratic revolution in Latin America stems from his rejection of the concept of national liberation which has been a basic part of Marxist - Leninist Philosophy. It is Lenin who developed this concept in his writings on the national and colonial questions.⁸ In recent times this concept has been developed further by other writers, notably Ulyanovsky, in relation to the new Africa and Asian states.⁹ Unfortunately there has not been much reference to the situation in Latin America. Debray points to this striking absence of communist concern with Latin America. In fact, Latin America did not feature in the congress of the comintern until 1928. It is partly because of this that Debray suggested that Latin America is a unique situation that cannot be placed in any category thus far developed in Marxist theory.

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8. I.J.Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination", in collected Works (Moscow, 1977) p.567.
 9. Ulyanovsky, R. National Liberation(Moscow, 1978), and Present day Problems of Asia and Africa (Moscow, 1980).

It has its own "individual pigeon-hole" which yet needs to be defined. His reason for not accepting the concept of national liberation is that "the goal is not that of political independence of a given territory or the establishment of the national sovereign state"^{IO}. He also does not accept that the movements in Latin America are anti-capitalist i.e. the way in which the western workers' movements are opposed to capitalism. The only theme which he seems to find in Latin America is the anti-imperialist theme i.e. these movements share with the other revolutionary movements in the other parts of the world this common enemy. He asserts this without expanding much on the nature of this anti-imperialist policy:

" We are then left with the riddle of how to understand, accept and cope with a paradox of a movement in history whose dominant guideline is anti-imperialism, but which is nota movement of national liberation; a movement whose demand for national independence and sovereignty is profoundly linked with the socialist demand of politicised workers"^{II}.

What we have so far dealt with is Debray's understanding of the kind and nature of the Latin American revolution, which is contained in his "Critic of Arms". We still need to examine Debray's idea of the nature of revolutionary conflicts.

IO. Ibid, p. 51.

II. Ibid, p. 54.

Central to an understanding of Marxism is the correlation of class forces in any given situation. Political grouping and parties are no more than an expression of class interests. What does Debray tell us about the position and role of different classes of Latin America? We have seen in the first chapter the classical Marxists' understanding of the role of the working class in bringing about a socialist revolution. According to Marx and Engels,... "Of all the classes that stand face-to-face with the bourgeois today, the proletariat class is really the revolutionary class"^{I2}.

Debray believes, however, that the working class is irrelevant to the Latin American struggles. He does not accept that socialistic change will be brought about by the working class. He believes that the van-guard role has been assigned to intellectuals and students. Once again he does not provide us with an analysis of why these classes will play this role. He simply says that:

"The irony of history willed, by virtue of its social situation in latin American countries, the assignment of precisely this van-guard role to students and revolutionary intellectuals who have had to unleash or rather initiate a highest form of struggles!"^{I3}

I2. Marx and Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (Moscow, 1977) p.57.

I3. Debray R., Revolution in the Revolution (Middlesex, 1968) p. 21.

In the same breath he agrees with Fidel's criticism against intellectuals to the effect that there "intellectual attitudes" is partly to blame for the failures of guerillas. He comments:

....Aside from his physical weakness and lack of adjustment to rural life, the intellectual will try to grasp the present through pre-conceived ideological constructs and live it through books".^{I4}

What the "social situation" is in Latin America that leads him to believe in the leadership of students and intellectuals, Debray does not elaborate. Throughout all his writings he is highly critical of people in the city including the working class. The city he claims "bourgeoisifies the proletariat" ^{I4} He even goes further to suggest that "any man, even a comrade who spends his life in the city is unwillingly bourgeois in comparison with guerillas" ^{I5} This intense dislike for the city is a possible explanation for his anti-working class sentiments. But his emphasis on the rural-urban contrast extends beyond simply a criticism of the city and its negative influence on revolutionary fighters. The city is also symbolic of the political leadership that lays claim to be the vanguard in the national struggle. It is these political parties that take upon themselves the task of leading the revolution through legal methods, conferences, debates etc.

I4. Ibid, p. 75.

I5 Ibid, p. 68.

These parties are therefore not in a position to understand the nature and dynamics of guerilla struggle.

In particular Debray is highly critical of the role and ideology of the communist parties of Latin America. It will be remembered that the communist parties that participated in revolutions prior to that of Cuba have played a significant role in providing intellectual, political and organisational leadership. This was the case both with the Soviet Union i.e. the Bolsheviks as well as the Communist Party of China. The communist parties of the world have historically looked upon themselves as the monopoly holders over leadership of the revolutionary movements. Till today many communist parties hold jealously to this monopoly.

Debray not only rejects this historical monopoly but questions the very existence of the party as the only form of the revolutionary organization:

"There is no exclusive ownership of the revolution!"¹⁶

His attack on the Party is based both on an ideological as well as a practical rejection. Ideologically he sees the Party as being caught in "old political concepts, out worn, discredited, eroded by failure, but persisting tenaciously".¹⁷

Some of these concepts are:

(I) The alliance of the four classes including the national

16. Ibid, p. 125.

17. Ibid, p. 86.

bourgeoisie;

(2) The concept of national democracy;

(3) Contempt for and underestimation of the peasantry.¹⁸

Practically, he suggests communist parties in Latin America have not given the people the correct leadership. This is borne out by criticism against the city based fighters and their tendencies to become "bourgeoisified". He criticised the Party for its lack of understanding the need for armed struggle and the difficulties faced by the guerillas as a result of their dependency on the city for provisions, food etc.

He quotes Fidel in support of his argument that the party is not necessary under Latin American conditions. "Who will make the revolution in Latin America? Who? the people, the revolutionaries, with or without a Party".¹⁹

By saying this Fidel implies that the "vanguard" is not necessarily the Marxist-Leninist Party and that those who want to make the revolution have the right and duty to constitute themselves as "vanguard" independently of these parties."²⁰

He once again refers to the Cuban revolution to support this view. He suggests that the Cuban revolution has been successful although there was no party. The party he claims emerges from guerilla movements. In his words: "The guerilla

18. Ibid, p. 86.

19. Ibid, p. 96.

20. Ibid, p.96.

force is the party in embryo".²¹ Therefore, he is suggesting that the party will grow out of struggle and will not be established independently of that struggle. He is inverting the whole process of party organization. Whereas traditionally communist parties have been formed in response to existing conditions of oppression and exploitation, Debray's concept of a party suggests that the party emerges as a result of these conditions rather than in response to these conditions.

In effect what Debray is proposing is the removal of "revolutionary legitimacy" that the communist parties have claimed ever since the Russian revolution. This corresponds with the criticism made by both by Trotsky and Luxemburg. Luxemburg puts it in the following terms:

...."the party organization at first substitutes itself for the party as a whole, the central committee substitute itself to the organization; and, finally, a single "dictator" substitutes himself for the central committee".²²

This anti-party approach is, in fact, a total reassessment of the Leninist concept of organisation. This concept according to Mandel embodies three elements which are dialectically related:

- (i) A theory of the revolutionary process in the under-developed world,
- (ii) A theory of the development of Proletarian class consciousness and

21. Ibid, p. 105.

22. Huberman & Sweezy, Regis Debray and the Latin American Revolution (London, 1968) p.4.

23. Quoted in Debray's Critique of Arms. p. 166.

- (iii) A theory of the essence of Marxism and its relation to science and the Proletarian Struggle.²⁴

In his writings, Lenin developed the theory of organisation into a very broad net work. As the head of the organisation was the revolutionary vanguard party of the working class, which was entrusted with the task of mass mobilisation and leadership of the working class. As opposed to this concept, Debray favoured spontaneous action by the guerilla movement and the creation of a party from this movement. Debray doesn't reject the concept of party altogether. But he sees the party developing in a different way and serving different functions. For him, the party is essentially a mean to enhance the military struggle. It is not seen as a political instrument and as an organisation above the masses :

"The technical and military problem of discipline requires a political solution an organisation or a party"²⁵

Whereas Lenin has largely been concerned with the functions of the party, Debray is more concerned with its content. According to Mandel, Lenin's idea of a Party was:

"The building of the revolutionary class party is a process whereby the programme of the Socialist revolution is fused with the experience of the majority of advanced workers have acquired in struggle".²⁶

24. Mandel, E, "Leninist Concept of Organisation" In Revolution and Class Struggle by Blackburn, Robined. (Great Britain, 1977) p. 78.

25. Debray, R. Critique of arms, n.3, p. 202 .

26. Mandel op-cit. p. 102.

Debray on the other hand asserts:

"To cloud the issues with the discussion of form... is to miss the essence of any political action which must be judged by its class character on the one hand and its relevance to the situation on the other." ²⁷

We see that the Leninist concept seeks to organise the Party from outside the masses whereas Debray seeks to create the party from concrete conditions of struggle. The origins of Debray's concept of organisation arises from his belief in the superiority of the military or armed struggle as opposed to the needs to develop the strategies and tactics rather than in response to the political education and organisation of the masses. It is clear that he does not seek to abolish the party but rather sees the foco " as no more, no less than one particular expression of the party as defined in What Is To Be Done." ²⁸

We have not thus far dealt with Debray's concept of the foco and his ideas on armed struggle. This discussion will be taken up in the next chapter. But suffice to say that the armed struggle was Debray's prime concern. By and large, his writings are devoted to "creating the revolution" through armed struggle and to technical details in conducting a guerilla campaign. With Cuba as his classic example of a successful revolution, he draws the conclusion that "the Socialist revolution is a result of an armed struggle against the armed force of the bourgeois state!" ²⁹

27. Debray.R., Critique of Arms n.3., p.217.

28. Ibid, p. 169.

29. Debray.R., Revolution in the Revolution.p.19.

DEBRAY'S CRITICS:

It is no surprise that Debray's writings has evoked great interest by many communist, Marxist writers and others concerned with the history of revolutions in general. It has, in the words of Huberman and Sweezy, created 'an international sensation'. The reasons for this are; firstly, Debray has been directly concerned with revolutionary movements in Latin America. Secondly, he is the first writer to give an account of the situation in Latin America in such detail. Thirdly, many of his conclusions are radical in the sense that he challenges many of the accepted principles of revolutionary practice. Fourthly, Debray's views on the Communist Parties, while not new, supplements the views of the 'New Left' and of movements that have opposed the hierarchy in the world communist movement.

We will briefly examine some of the criticisms made by the 'Old Left' and the 'New Left! By the former, we refer to the group of communist parties that owe their allegiance to the Soviet Union. By the latter, we mean the broad left groupings who strongly resent Moscow's leadership.

The 'Old Left' have reacted very strongly to Debray's attack on the Communist Parties of Latin America. As mentioned earlier, Debray challenges the role of these parties and their leadership of the revolutionary movements in Latin America.

Woddis has been particularly critical of both the facts upon which Debray draws his conclusions as well as his ideological outlook.³⁰ In order to refute Debray's arguments, he attempts firstly to show Debray's lack of understanding of Latin American history. In particular, Woddis argues Debray has ignored a large part of Cuban history prior to 1953.

Debray gives the impression that the revolution in Cuba began with the attack by Fidel and his guerillas against the Moncada Barracks in 1953. But this, according to Woddis, is incorrect for a century long struggle preceded this 1953 attack, a struggle waged against Spanish colonialism, American imperialism and national dictatorship. By making reference to the resistance campaigns led during the 19th century by Bolivar, Marti and other leaders; the formation of and role played by the Popular Socialist Party (PSP); the history of peasant and workers' struggles particularly the mass strike by workers. Woddis shows that the revolution did not originate with Fidel. Fidel and his guerillas simply carried the struggle to another phase of the struggle, that is the phase of armed struggle. He places a great deal of emphasis on the role played by the PSP in the organisation of workers and also points to the mistakes committed by the party in its approach to armed struggle.

The thrust of Woddis's argument in tracing this background is to show that the Cuban revolution did not just happen spontaneously, but that both the objective and subjective factors played a crucial role in creating the necessary conditions for the revolution. He does not believe that

30. Woddis, Jack, pp. 179-274.

the revolution is a creation of the determined efforts made by Fidel and his guerillas although he accepts the important role played by this movement. In support of this he quotes Glezerman:

"Determined action of the revolutionary forces, supported by the masses, can merely be the impetus which speeds the maturing of the revolutionary forces, but only if sufficient combustible material has accumulated in a country, if there are objective conditions creating a revolutionary situation. The idea that the boldness and determination of the revolutionary vanguards are sufficient to rouse the masses to revolution, is a dangerous illusion".³¹

The second line of attack adopted by Woddis to refute Debray is to point to the latter's analytical deficiency. This has been noted by other writers as well, including Althusser, Gunterfrank and Shah,³³ Silva³⁴. Althusser in his letter to Debray says "One look in vain in your book for an analysis or the outline of an analysis, or an indication of the absolute need for an analysis that gets to the depth of things, that deals with the reality of which as Lenin said, politics is just a resume, namely economic conditions. You mention somewhere the necessity of analysing the specific combination of modes of production to be found in Latin America; but unfortunately you stop there. A pity, because that is the absolutely decisive

31. Ibid, p.195.

32. Debray, Critique of Arms, Appendix 2, pp.258-267.

33. Gunterfrank and Shah, "Class Politics and Debray" in Regis Debray and the Latin American Revolution (New York, 1968) p.13

34. Silva.c., "Errors of the Foco Theory" in Regis Debray and Latin American Revolution, Huberman and Sweezy ed. (New York, 1968)

point.³⁵

Woddis shows that it is precisely an analysis of both the prevailing economic conditions and the modes of production which gives one a better understanding of the revolutionary movements. It is also through such an analysis that the positions of different classes in societies are determined. This position are objectively defined and not subjectively. Had Debray. payed greater attention to understanding the economic contradictions within Latin American Society, he might have arrived at different conclusions.

The 'New Left' has also levelled similar criticisms against Debray. Sen has noted the opportunist way in which the 'New Left' has reacted to Debray. He describes Debray's work as "old, narodnik, nonsense which Marxism had encountered and vanquished six decades ago", and as "petty bourgeois frenzy".³⁶ He further describes the new left response as contradictory. Whereas earlier they had warmly received Debray's Revolution in the Revolution, it subsequently rejected him.³⁷

Huberman and Sweezy, commenting on Debray's lack of analysis state:

"Debray not only contributes nothing in this area, he doesn't even show an awareness of its importance".³⁸

A further criticism against Debra is his failure to

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35. Debray.R., Critique of Arms, p.264.
 36. Sen.M., "Debray-Narodnik Revival" in Communism and the New Left by Mohit Sen (New Delhi, 1975) p.15.
 37. Sen.M., "Debray Devastated" in Communism and the New
 38. Huberman.L. and Sweezy.P.M., n.33, p.6.

unite theory and practice. He is accused of divorcing theory from practice and reducing the role of theory to military necessity. On this account he said to ~~negate~~ the maxim that "there can be no revolutionary practice without a revolutionary theory".

Debray is rebuked for his overemphasis on the practical and military aspects of executing the revolution rather than the theoretical aspects which explains the causes and the development of the revolution. In this sense it is difficult to speak of a theory that presents a coherent frame-work within which Latin American society can be understood. While he stresses upon the need for a serious study of this "matter of life and death" problem, he goes on to ignore it. Instead he presents us a picture of a guerilla fighter in action, a military figure equipped physically but not intellectually, for the success of the revolution.

Petras has described Debray's theory as 'elitist' which lays the basis for "an ultra centralised personality cult", consisting of guerilla fighters only.³⁹ Debray, he suggests, is wrong in thinking that it is guerillas with their exceptional personal qualities that can bring about a revolution.

Debray's observations on the Cuban revolution from which he has drawn much of his inspiration are contradicted by two Cuban writers, Torres and Arronde who point out that he misrepresents both the history as well as the forces behind the Cuban revolution:

39. Petras, James "Debray Revolutionary or Elitist" in Huberman, Sweezy., pp106-114.

"The Cuban lesson as conceived by Debray is a sectarian lesson and therefore a bad lesson which in no way can help the revolutionary organisations of the continents to solve the problems which have already arisen, the problem of unification of the truly revolutionary forces".⁴⁰

While all these writers have subjected Debray to scathing criticism, his important contribution both to an understanding of the problems of Latin American society and to the development of revolutionary theory is respected. Neither his intellectual abilities nor his deep sense of dedication to revolutionary change are disputed. Woddis has spoken of his 'sincere commitment' to the anti-imperialist struggle. All have expressed their sympathies with Debray during his period of imprisonment and some have even campaigned for his release before 1970.

Debray has been sensitive to these criticisms, many of which were made after the publication 'Revolution in the Revolution' in 1967. He considers himself to have become the "ideological scapegoat" for the Communist Parties of Latin America. He thinks that such an attack on him was only due to the long felt resentment by these communist parties of the Cuban leadership in Latin America. It is only because the communist parties were unable to express their dislike of Cuba, directly against Fidel or Guevara that they had to vent their feelings against him.

40. Torres and Arronde, "Debray and the Cuban Experience" in Huberman and Sweezy.

He doesn't however, respond to these criticisms rationally except for saying something against Althusser who alleged that Debray had given 'negative demonstrations' in analysing Latin America. While Althusser thinks that there may be some validity in what Debray says, he is nonetheless sceptical about the way in which Debray tries to prove the correctness of his approach. His response to Althusser is simply that the latter has misunderstood his intentions in writing about Latin America and his prime concern which was "the immediate future of the armed struggle, the life and death of those involved in it".⁴¹

Partly in response to these criticisms and his own desire to revise his approach, Debray did attempt a review while in prison in 1968. He set about this review by pointing to four main concerns :

- (1) Importance of the town,
- (2) Linking tactics and strategies organically
- (3) Placing deeper roots among local people and
- (4) A greater understanding of the nations' history.⁴²

What is important, however, is Debray's recognition of some of his limitations. He acknowledges that the above review "smacks of short-sighted, theoretical reformism" and that he had "not yet come to understand what a people's war is at heart-the abolition of the principle of identity".⁴³

41. Debray.R., Critique of Arms, p.258.

42. Ibid, pp. 253-254

43. Ibid, pp. 254.

It is unfortunate that it has not been possible to follow Debray's later thinking on these important issues. The last of his writings "Conversations with Allende" he criticises participation in parliamentary democracy by saying that it has resulted in "diffusing and sublimating the direct action of the working class forces." ⁴⁴

In what has indeed, been a strange turn of events we find Debray today in a position, which he had rejected in 1971. Soon after, the victory of French Socialist Party this year, Debray was appointed Foreign Policy Adviser to the President, George Mitterand. ⁴⁵

It is difficult to comment on the reasons for accepting this position as he has not been given much prominence since his appointment. But there is no doubt that he'll play an influential role in French politics and in shaping French policies towards Latin America. Already the French Government has expressed its criticisms against American's role in El Salvador and its support for the liberation movement in that country.

44. Quoted in Woddis, p. 276.

45. Indian Express

CHAPTER → III

REVOLUTION : THE ARMED ROAD

C H A P T E R - IIITHE ARMED ROAD

We have seen Debray's failure to present a coherent theory of revolution in Latin America. But we would be failing in our understanding of Debray if we were to merely discredit him in this way and not look at his writings from what was his prime concern-creating the revolution through armed struggle. That the armed struggle is the only solution to a socialist transformation in Latin America Debray takes for granted. He doesn't examine why there is a need to wage an armed struggle or why other forms of struggle such as participation in parliament, trade union activity or other legal methods are inappropriate to the Latin American situation. Nor does he give a description of the forms of violence perpetrated by the Latin American ruling class which demand an armed response.

If we are to assume both that there exists a need for armed struggle and that other forms of struggle are irrelevant, Debray has still to explain why he sees guerilla warfare is appropriate for all Latin American countries. This he does not do.

Before we look at his understanding of guerilla warfare and its organisation let us examine the historical background of this form of struggle.

Guerilla warfare according to Laquer has its origins

in the Thirty Years War waged by the Spanish against Napoleon^I. It was common during the nineteenth century amongst armed resistance movements in Europe but it was yet to be developed into a science. It was Clausewitz who for the first time formulated a theory on warfare drawing his conclusions from the Napoleonic and Prussian wars. But his theory was evolved not to meet the needs of guerilla warfare, but rather it was in response to the need for introducing a systematic account of the emerging national armies of Europe. He was the first to recognise the political and military factors determining the conduct of wars.

"War is not an independent phenomenon but the continuation of politics by different means. Consequently the main line of every major strategic plan are largely political in nature;..... there can be no question of a purely military evaluation of a great strategic issue, nor of a purely military scheme to evolve it".² Clausewitz's work has been recognised as a classic on warfare not because of his brilliance in giving details of how to conduct a war but because he recognises warfare as inherently political. He is credited with giving a scientific explanation of the causes of war and developing the framework within which the uncertainties of war can be foreseen and planned for in advance.

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1. Laquer Walter, *Guerillas: A Historical and Critical study* (London, 1977) p.100.
 2. Clausewitz on War (New Jersey, 1976) p.7.

But it was not Clausewitz's contribution alone that gave modern guerrilla warfare its scientific basis. Throughout the twentieth century and particularly after the second World War we have seen guerilla warfare developed into a military science by revolutionary leaders. The forms of guerilla warfare used during Second World War were qualitatively different from the modern revolutionary forms. While guerilla warfare was seen as a military instrument to defeat enemy forces during Second World War the revolutionary wars waged in Russia, China, Vietnam and Cuba were primarily ideological. These were aimed at not only defeating enemy forces but also winning over the masses of people in the region on the side of the revolution. Thus Mao-Tse-Tung saw war as "the highest form of struggle for resolving contradictions..... between classes, nations, states or political groups"³ He further distinguished between just and unjust wars regarding all revolutionary wars as just and the counter revolutionary wars as unjust. To Mao "Neither a beginner nor a person who fights only on paper can become a really able high ranking commander: only one who has learned through actual fighting in war can do so!"⁴

Both Mao and Giap stressed the need for the participation of the people in a revolutionary war. They believed that without people's support the war is destined to fail. "The revolutionary war is the war of the masses, it can be waged only by mobilising masses and relying on them".⁵

3. Mao-Tse-Tung, Selected Military Writings (Peking, 1975): p.78.

4. Ibid, p.87

5. Mao-Tse-Tung, Quotations from Mao (New York, 1967): p.48.

Debray has no doubt made a study of these military scientists and has drawn from the experience of both Chinese and Vietnamese wars. But above all he has been influenced in his approach to guerilla warfare by the Cuban revolution and the writings of Che Guevara. While he sees a little that the revolutionary movements in Latin America could gain from the experiences of the Vietnamese or Chinese wars he thinks that the Cuban experience could be repeated in the other Latin American countries. His reasons for thinking that the former do not offer any concrete lessons for Latin America are based on geographical and demographic differences such as density of population, terrain etc. The following conditions he says are peculiar to Latin American countries; (1) The guerillas are scattered in areas having small population; (2) The control of certain areas directly by imperialist forces through religious and community institutions and (3) The absence of semi-regular or regular forces.⁶

But it is not these conditions alone which gave Latin America its different character. In addition we must take in account of the fact that the proximity of United States' places severe restraints on revolutionary movements and their activities. It is possible for United States to mobilise its forces of repression and intervene in the domestic affairs of what it considers to be its backyard. Ever since

6. Debray, "Revolution in Revolution" (Middlesex, 1967) pp 50-52.

the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States has reserved its right to intervene directly in the affairs of the Latin American States. The history of the imperialist intervention in Chile and recently in El Salvador is clear evidence of naked intervention. This is an important consideration in making a comparison between the Asian and Latin American situations.

One of the fundamental differences he sees between the Cuban revolution and those preceding it is the character of the leadership in particular Fidel Castro. In Castro he sees the unity of political and military leadership which he believes contributed to the success of the Cuban revolution. He believes like Fidel "to those, who show military ability also give political responsibility. "These qualities were absent in the leaders of previous revolutions. While Debray plays on this theme throughout his writings and considers it a necessity for a leader to have military as well as political ability, it is clear that he places military above political considerations. In other words, if one cannot excel in military warfare and master the ~~laws~~ laws of military science he cannot become a political leader.

His writings reflect an overriding concern with military leadership, organization, strategies and tactics. In leadership he sees Castro as embodying all the necessary qualities for a guerilla fighter.

In organization he sees the group of armed guerillas organised in the foco. Unlike the organisation adopted during Chinese revolution which was centred around establishing bases from the masses upwards, Debray's form of organization is founded on the guerilla foco, the "Nucleus of the popular army". The foco is "the small motor" that sets 'the big motor' of the masses into motion".⁷ The semi-regular and regular forces are established after this foco has begun its activities. The foco therefore has no rear base to depend on for its survival. Its rear base has to be established amongst the people, The foco has no fixed base but it is mobile all the time. Unlike the Chinese situation the guerillas cannot be "like fish in the water" because of their constant mobility and their inability to establish firm roots amongst the people. The foco is therefore very open to the might and force of the enemy wherever it moves.

Debray sees guerilla warfare in Latin America developing in three stages: firstly stage of establishment; secondly the stage of development and thirdly the stage of revolutionary offensive.⁸ It is in the first stage the guerillas face the most serious dangers both from the enemy that is firmly in control of rural areas and from the people themselves who have not been educated so as to be sympathetic

7. Ibid, p.83.

8. Ibid, p.31.

to the movement and its aims. Debray rejects the idea of self defence and sees the role of the guerillas as being an offensive one. The self defence he says, "is partial whereas revolutionary guerilla warfare aims at total warfare by combining under its hegemony all forms of struggle at all points within the territory."⁹ He believes that if the guerillas were to confined themselves to mere self-defence they will be threatening not only their survival but also that of people in the region.

In brief therefore the guerillas play the role of vanguard leading the movement but lacking a firm base and support from the people. The people upon which both Mao and Giap based their entire organization do not seem to feature significantly in Debray's guerilla net work. On the contrary Debray sees the formation of the foco independently of the people and shows a great distrust for the peasants for fear that they will betray the guerillas. There is no provision for the establishment of means of communication with the people nor is there any reference to education and organization amongst the people. It is for this reason that the guerillas have to depend heavily on material assistance from the cities. Debray approves of Guevara's statement that "a guerilla war is a people's war and it is a mass struggle. To attempt to conduct this type of war without the support of the populace is a prelude to inevitable disaster. The guerilla force is the people fighting vanguard.....supported by the masses of peasants and

9. Ibid, p. 29.

workers of the region and the entire territory in question. Except on this basis, guerilla warfare is unacceptable." ¹⁰ The people's war, he says, has not yet commenced in Latin America.

Debray further devotes a great deal attention to the question of the correct strategies and tactics of revolutionary war i.e. decisions concerning day today organization and programme of the guerillas. According to Mao, "strategy is to study those laws on war that governs the war situation as a whole. The task of the science of campaigns and the science of tactics is the study of those laws that govern a partial situation." ¹¹

"Military strategy according to Debray springs first of all from a combination of political and social circumstances, from a relationship with the population, from the limitation of the terrain, from the opposing forces and their weaponry." ¹²

The fundamental strategic problem which Debray sees is the formation of the rear guard. Whereas in 'Revolution in the Revolution' he does not pay any serious attention to the importance of a rear base, in his "Critique of Arms" he emphasises the need for such a base. Without the base the guerillas face three serious setbacks:.

- (1) Fighting to survival rather than surviving to fight;
- (2) The problem of having no base and excessive mobility which poses dangers of easy capture;
- (3) Not being able to sustain the struggle for too long a period. ¹³

10. Debray, Critique of Arms (New York, 1977) p. 81
 11. Mao, n.3 p. 31
 12. Debray, n.8, p. 59.
 13. Ibid, p. 136- 156

The Latin American revolution, Debray acknowledges cannot gain ground or advance without fully accomodating and winning the support of the masses on whose behalf it is being waged. It is the masses who constitute the rear guard that can sustain the guerrillas. Debray puts it in the following way:

"The crisis of the revolutionary movement in Latin America may be summed up as a crisis of the revolutionary rear guard"¹⁴

In the **last** chapter we have seen Debray's attitude to the communist parties in Latin America. This attitude stems largely from his perception of the party as a reformist organization with no understanding of the problems of the guerrilla fighters. It is because the communist party is involved largely with the organization of the working class in the cities its programme, strategies and tactics are formulated with a view to advancing the immediate interests of the working class. Even while it supports the armed struggle he does not give attention to the needs of the guerrilla fighters and the organization of the peasantry. It is for this reason that Debray called for a radical reorganization of the party:

"The effective leadership of an armed revolutionary struggle requires a new soyle of leadership, a new

14. Ibid, p.155

method of organization, and a new physical and ideological response on the part of leaders and militants."¹⁵

Unlike Vietnam, where Giap tried to coordinate the activities of the urban and rural guerilla bases Debray rejects urban warfare. He does not seek to combine the two forms of struggle and bring about a unity of the urban and rural leadership. We have noted his reasons for denouncing the urban leadership and his anti-city sentiments. Commitment to the armed struggle in Latin America is therefore a major thrust of Debray's conception of revolution. He believes that only through armed struggle, organized around the foco, can socialism be made a reality.

C H A P T E R - I V

REVOLUTION IN LATIN AMERICAN STATES : BIRD'S EYE VIEW

REVOLUTION IN LATIN AMERICAN STATES: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

We have examined Debray's theory on revolution and his approach to the armed struggle in Latin America. We have seen how Debray firmly believed in the establishment of guerrilla units in the rural areas of Latin America which would wage a war against enemy forces for the overthrow of oppressive regimes and the creation of socialist societies based on the Cuban model.

The aim of this chapter is to examine some of the political realities existing in certain Latin American states during the sixties. It is against this background that Debray's theories could be tested and his arguments on the state of the Latin American revolution be analysed. We will confine ourselves to examining the four countries which Debray himself describes in his writings namely Venezuela, Uruguay, Guatemala and Chile. In these four studies we will note several differences in political conditions giving rise to different approaches, policies and organization of the revolution. These conditions belie Debray's suggestion that a continental unity exists in Latin America which would make it possible for the Cuban revolution to be repeated. These revolutions are revolutions that have failed and it is therefore important to understand why they have failed for the success of future revolutions.

The sudden out-break of revolutionary zeal in these countries followed closely after the success of Cuban revolution in 1959. Radical social change in one country inevitably has its impact on people of neighbouring states and gives them confidence in their own struggles against oppression. This was certainly true of the Cuban revolution which took place right under the nose of the most powerful imperialist power. Movements throughout Latin America were stirred by this historical accomplishment and began to intensify their efforts to bring about socialist change. They were greatly encouraged by the expressions of solidarity and support from Fidel Castro and Che **Guevara** who made it clear that Cuba cannot be free until the whole of Latin America has been liberated. They pledged their material support for movements that showed a commitment towards true socialist aims. In the following years Cuba was to keep its pledge by giving every kind of assistance including the dispatch of Cuban guerillas to revolutionary movements in Latin America, much to the distaste of both the Latin American dictatorships and the United States.

Because of the importance of the Cuban revolution we will only concentrate on developments in the post Cuban period. While it is not possible in the study of this kind to give any details of the struggles waged by movements in these countries reference will be made to significant

events and strategies pursued by different organizations. Gott has given an excellent account of these developments¹ while Debray's writings have been sketchy and full of personal reflections.

We will follow Gott's periodization of Latin American revolution which is given as:

- (1) 1959-61 the era in which the struggles were led by students who were over enthusiastic about the prospects of revolution.
- (2) 1962-65, the expansion of the guerrilla movement with the support in some cases of the orthodox Communist Party.
- (3) 1966-69 - the first meeting of the Tricontinental Conference in 1966 after which the communist parties abandoned the guerrilla method of struggle.²

VENEZUELA

The Venezuelan revolution of 1958 which overthrew the dictator Perez Jimenez brought into power a bourgeois democracy under the leadership of the Accion Democratica headed by a Romulo Betancourt. This was a popular government which as events were to show defeated the aims of the revolution and acted against the interests of the people. Betancourt, who was once a member of the communist party, began a violent assault on the members of the Communist Party and other organizations fighting for socialism. Soon after his

1. Richard Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, (New York, 1970).

2. Gott n.1, p.12.

election deputies within his government became disillusioned with both his internal anti-people policies as well as his attack on what he referred to as "Castro-Communism". These deputies together with other radicals broke away from the Accion Democratica to form the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) which was headed by Domingo Alberto Rangel. In particular this break away was due to the relationship that Betancourt continued to maintain with the United States. While claiming to be anti imperialist Betancourt continued to encourage American investment in the oil economy of Venezuela. Betancourt states his policy as being

".... anti-imperialist, but we understand anti imperialism as the defence of Venezuelan interest and of America, not the anti-imperialism which attacks the United States in order to put itself at the service of Soviet expansionist policy.... we are willing to negotiate with United States and European investors who want to deal with the government which is aware of the nations wealth".³

Betancourt's bourgeois government claimed to believe in democracy and the protection of civil liberties contained in the constitution. But soon after his appointment he began suppressing student and worker movements without any regard to democratic norms. The people soon realized that he had no desire to work in their interests.

3. Ibid; p. 135

The problem, according to Debray, that faced the revolutionary movement was whether an armed struggle could be successful under a bourgeois democracy with some semblance of legality.

In the early sixties a concerted attempt was made to reduce the power of the communist party by attacking its leadership. Although the communist party had supported Betancourt during the election and believed in following a non-violent and legal struggle for socialism they were forced in 1962 to adopt a policy of armed struggle. Fabricio Ojedia one of the party leaders who was captured in October 1962 stated in a letter from prison;

"We should all have preferred the fate of Venezuela to have been decided peacefully, by non-military means, because that solution would have avoided the loss of lives and destruction of tools and resources which could be used for progress and development. But unfortunately the ruling classes have prevented this with all the means in their power. Our people has been left no other means than violence."⁴

Before the party officially adopted this policy the MIR had already commenced its guerilla activities and had set up fronts in the countryside. The party had to pursue this policy with much reluctance until 1967 when it finally abandoned the armed struggle.

4. Ibid, p. 145.

It was in 1963 when the party together with the MIR and a number of army officers that were opposed to the policy of Betancourt came together and founded the Fuerzas Armadas De Liberacion Nacional (FALN). The main objectives of the FALN were ;

- I. To enforce respect for national sovereignty and independence, the freedom and democratic life of the Venezuelan people.
2. To defend the national heritage, its integrity and wealth.
3. To support the authorities set up by the revolution and to see that the laws made by them in accordance with their powers are carried out.
4. To protect the interest of the people, their property and enstructions.
5. To set up a revolutionary, nationalist and democratic government.⁵

With the establishment of FALN, which was to coordinate the guerilla activities, a parallel organization Frente de Liberation national was formed to implement political decisions. This body was largely dominated by communists although its programme of action stated that "the FALN isnot communist organisation nor does this programme propose a communist solution to the country."⁶ Its objectives were "to win national independence, liberty and a democratic life for our nation; to rescue our patrimony, integrity and national riches; to establish a national and popular revolutionary government."⁷

5. Ibid, p. 165.

6. Ibid, p. 165.

7. Ibid, p. 166.

In the national elections of 1964 the call for a boycott failed miserably when ninety percent of the population turned out to vote for the Accion Democratica candidate Raul Leoni. Leoni took over the presidency with a call to the communists that if it were to abandon the armed struggle its existence would be restored to legality. Both leaders of the MIR Rangel and the communist party reacted favourably to this call. Although they did abandon entirely the armed struggle they began to show some opposition to it. However, the guerilla fighters themselves and in particular its leaders Douglas Bravo were not happy about this change of policy. Subsequently a heated exchange took place between the communists on one hand and the guerillas on the other. The question of urban versus rural warfare surfaced once again, the communists being in favour of confining the armed struggle to the cities while the guerillas favoured a policy of "combined insurrection", which stressed the need for both urban and rural networks. This long internal struggle came to a head when Bravo issued the "Iracara Manifesto" in the name of the Jose Leo Nardo, Chirinos Front in March, 1966. This was the beginning of the split within the FALN. Bravo was later to be joined by a further contingent of guerillas led by Luben Petkoff who landed off the post of Venezuela in July 1966. Towards the end of the year this group was the only one effectively in operation; the other fronts controlled by communists had by then become inactive.

An event in early 1967 further divided the communists and guerrillas and brought Fidel into the conflict. This event was the killing of the brother of the Foreign Minister and the former director of the social security system, Dr. Julie Iribarren Borges. FALN pamphlets were found near his body stating that there were other political leaders on their death list.

Borges death evoked sharp reactions from both the communist parties and Fidel Castro after an article appeared in Granma, in which Elias Manuit, a leader in Bravo's front associated that front with the killing. The party expressed its "unqualified rejection" of the crime. Fidel's retort came in a speech at the University of Havana;

"Our honest opinionis that if it was revolutionaries we consider that it was a mistake to do it, for the enemy will use it against you, and the people will not be able to distinguish between you and the people".⁸

Fidel continued to criticise the communist party and accused it of the betraying theguerilla struggle.

The party reacted to Fidel's statements by accusing him of trying to set himself up as the Latin American Pope. At its congress in April 1967, it vaguely supported the continuation of the armed struggle and stressed that the "non peaceful revolutionary path as the axis of the Venezuelan

8. Ibid, p. 209.

people's strategy of struggle for national and social liberation, for socialism!"⁹

The party formally expelled Douglas Bravo from the party. Theodore Petkoff summarised the position of the party on the question of guerilla warfare. "An analysis of party activity shows that though guerilla warfare is something we can not abandon, it is not the chief form of struggle. In our country guerilla action depends upon developments in the towns. Guerilla units may survive without help from the town, but they cannot develop without it."¹⁰

The period after this in which the party played little, if any, role in the guerilla movement, was a period of rapid decline for the guerilla fronts set up by the MIR and Bravo. This decline was accentuated by the divisions within the guerilla movements. Members of the Bravo front were unhappy about Bravo's prolonged stay in the city. They felt that there was no scope for action in the city. Finally in 1968 a split took place in Bravo's front leading to a weakening of the guerilla resistance in western part of the country.

Ten years of guerilla warfare against a bourgeois democracy leads Debray to conclude that "revolutionary violence can not win against a broadly liberal Republic in which universal suffrage and normal political life serve to canalize, and reflect the energy of the masses."¹¹

9. Ibid, p. 210.

10. Ibid, p. 220.

11. Debray.R., Revolution or Trail (Middlesex, 1978) p. 119.

URUGUAY

The political history Uruguay is best understood in the context of the conflict between the two major political groups, that emerged after the civil war in 1838, the Colorado Party and the Blanco Party. In 1865 Blanco came into power and governed Uruguay upto 1958, when it was unseated.

The most significant period for our purpose is from 1971 to 1972 when the Movimiento De Liberacion (MLN) or as they are commonly referred to as the Tupamaros rose to prominence against a background of intense political violence. On sixth December 1971, 106 Tupas escaped from prison through a 30 yard long tunnel. Few days later the military regime introduced a decree establishing the Fuerzas Conjuntas which combined the military and semi-military forces in the state. This body was given a free reign over the suppression of the guerilla forces. Between the period September 1971 to April 1972 the MLN entered into a truce with the regime and participated in elections which brought about a change of government. After 14th April 1972 a vicious repressive campaign was conducted against the Tupas by the armed forces and a terrorist dictatorship was introduced.

Towards the end of 1971 the MLN entered into an alliance with the Frente Amplio, an electoral coalition consisting of a number of political parties on the left. By so doing it exposed itself legally and invited reaction from the State. Soon after this alliance the MLN leadership formulated a plan to intensify the guerrilla campaign, known as the Tatu plan. Broadly, the plan envisaged the establishment of suburban and rural committees under the Frente Amplio. The aim of the plan was to disperse the forces of repression. The country was divided into seven columns under a single urban based command. These committees were, however, given a large amount of discretion to cope with local decisions and were responsible for their own maintenance.

In the elections of the Nov. 1971 the Colorados came to power through their ability to hoodwink the electoral process.

The Frente Amplio achieved limited success receiving 301,275 votes out of a total of 1,664,119 votes cast. The elections were significant in that for the first time in Uruguay's history the left had been able "to achieve a place in the sun"¹².

What was clear from this election was the fact that the historical **domination** of the Colorados and Blancos could not be removed over night. These parties had come to be identified as the expression of the political life of Uruguay itself.

12) Ibid, P. 145

Towards the end of 1971 the imprisoned leaders of the MLN drafted the plan to be executed in 1972. The plan examined the situation after the election and stressed the need to raise the level of the armed struggle and to end all dialogue with the regime. The plan stated;

"The step we must take is to make direct and systematic harassment of the repressive forces a major form of military and political action. What we are now proposing is to lift the problem out of the realm of theory in which it has remained up to now and set it formally in the sphere of immediate task."¹³

The plan went on to state:

"We must stop seeing direct and systematic harassment as a remote goal and make it the practical and immediate aim in which all our energies are to be concentrated."¹⁴

Towards the end of 1971, the MLN carried out a series of attacks against the Montevideo Golf Club, Police, radio and other military installations. But these attacks were small fry compared to the events after the first March 1972, when the Death Squadron was given the approval of President Bordaberry. Debray describes the squad as:

"the official police repression and military intelligence also functioning in a parallel unofficial way."¹⁵

13. Ibid., p. 156.

14. Ibid., p. 159.

15. Ibid., p. 161.

The squad began with a campaign of terror against leftist leaders, organisations, and institutions. No one was spared during this reign of terror which continued upto September. Some of the worst atrocities carried out by the squad include the killing of an arts student who was found with thirteen bullet holes in his body; the killing of eight communist militants in cold blood; the employment of the worst forms of physical and chemical torture including beating, electric shocks, psychological tortures, injection of tetracycline into the body of prisoners etc. Between 15 April to 9th September the following official figures of the acts carried out by the squad and the Fuerzas Conjuntas were given as follows:

5,570 repressive operations

1,987 arrests of seditious persons

84 persons recaptured

29 killed

26 wounded

247 hiding places, illegal centres and stores discovered;¹⁶

In addition it was estimated that in 1973 they were between 4,000 to 5,000 political prisoners in Uruguay.

These attacks completely paralysed the revolutionary movement and destroyed most of the bases set up by the MLN. Faced with such a massive terror campaign the MLN was forced to declare a truce in June and August 1972.

16. Ibid, p. 179.

CHILE

The history of the defeat of the Chilean revolution is the history of many lessons for Latin America. Unlike the other Latin American countries where the armed struggle had been adopted almost to the extent of all other methods of struggle, in Chile the revolutionary leadership during the sixties still believed it was possible to bring about socialist change through constitutional means. To this end Allende led a broad coalition of political parties under the United Popular in the elections of 1970. The U.P. turned out to be victorious and Allende became the first socialist president of Chile.

Allende and his socialist grouping in the U.P. intended to use the bourgeois machinery to bring about a socialist transformation of Chilean society. It was Allende's belief that the socialist would be able to defeat the forces of bourgeois reaction through the use of bourgeois democratic institutions and procedures. Allende's party further believed that:

"The class nature of the state could be transformed without being destroyed first. It was to be taken over as it stood; it would then be destroyed by the irresistible force of the changes in the economic infrastructure."¹⁷

17. Ibid, p. 270.

Underlying these intentions Allende presupposed three things;

- (1) That control over the government was the most important instrument of power.
- (2) The bourgeois legal system could be used to transform existing bourgeois legality into socialist legality.
- (3) That it was possible to use existing constitutional procedures to foster a new society.

The propositions proved to be incorrect in the course of the three years of Allende's rule. Firstly, it was shown that it was not control of the government that ensured supreme power, but it was the state and its coercive machinery which include the armed forces that was the most powerful instrument of control. It was the armed forces that had to be seized for the success of the revolution. Secondly, confronted with force and violence of the ruling class it was naive to talk about using bourgeois legality to counter act the counter revolutionary forces. The ruling class has no respect for their own institutions and repeatedly violate the very principles upon which they seek to base their rule of law. Thirdly, in the course of the revolution no continuity exists as it passes through different stages, each stage introduces elements leading to a continuous crisis in which the revolutionary movement has to "take a revolutionary leap forward or a counter revolutionary step backward." ¹⁸

¹⁸. Ibid, p. 204.

As a result of these errors in judgement the revolution was short lived. In 1973 Allende was over thrown by a military coup which governed Chile in the tradition of Latin American juntas.

Allende has been severely criticised by many writers for labouring under the illusion that it was possible to introduce socialism through purely legal and democratic means and failing to see the necessity of arming the revolutionary forces. It has been said that he failed to apply the "iron laws" of revolution and that he had not armed the people to counter act the force of the ruling class.¹⁹

Allende did not have to look very far to see the need for the use of armed force in the struggle for socialism. In Venezuela, Guatemala and Uruguay, we have seen how the armed struggle has been the mainstay of the revolution. Chile, Debray says:

"Reminds me that a door must either be opened or closed. The door leading to socialism can only open if the repressive locks of the bourgeois state, are forced. In the meantime, though it is useful to do everything one can to push that door open a crack, or loosen it, it is fatal to forget that it may at any moment slam back into place, crushing your fingers or even your entire body."²⁰

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19. See Simon.C, "Allende's Chile: Contemporary History and the Counter-factual" in Journal for Latin American Studies, Vol. 12, Part 2, Nov. 1980.
20. Debray, *Critique of Arms*, p.314.

GUATEMALA

In June 1954 President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman was unseated by the Central Intelligence Agency. The overthrow of Arbenz is an important event in Latin American history if only for the fact that it showed the ability of the United States to act against any legitimate government opposed to United States' interests. The apparent reason for the overthrow was the expropriation of property belonging to the United Fruit Company which had a major interest in the Guatemalian economy.

The successor to Arbenz, Castillo Armas began a counter-revolutionary programme that has continued to dominate Guatemala up to today. His successors, General Ydigoras Fuentes and Mario Mendez Montenegro both continued to act against revolutionary movements strongly opposed to U.S.A. imperialism.

In 1960 a group of officers in the Guatemalian army, disillusioned with American intervention and the complicity of the Guatemalian rulers in the oppression of the people, planned a coup. Two of the leaders of the coup, which did not materialise, Marco Antonio Yon Sosa and Luis Augusto Turcios Lima were to play a very significant role in the guerrilla movement of the sixties. It is these officers, coming from reasonably wealthy backgrounds that were to turn into revolutionary leaders. They drew their inspiration largely from Augusto Sandina, the Nicaraguan general who fought against U.S. imperialism. It is only after contact

With the member of the banned communist Partido Guatemateco de Trabajo (PGT) that they became attracted to revolutionary ideals.

In February 1962, the small group of officers who had succeeded in attacking a few military garrisons in course of previous two years formed the guerrilla movement. Aljandro de Leon November thirteen (MRI3). In a statement, the guerillas declared that:

"Democracy vanished from our country long ago. No people can live in a country where there is no democracy. That is why the demand for changes is mounting in our country. We can no longer carry on in this way. We must overthrow the Ydigoras government and set up a government which respects human rights, seeks ways and means to save our country from its hardships, and pursues a serious self-respecting foreign policy."²¹

This movement later joined the PGT and the "12 April Movement", a student organisation, to form a military alliance to coordinate the activities of guerilla fronts in the country. This alliance was known as the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR). While the FAR was largely responsible for military decisions, political decision making was vested in the hands of the Frente Unido de Resistencia (FUR). The FAR's programme stated that the main objective was the establishment of a national democracy.

21. Gott, p. 54.

The communists, while laying claim to supporting the guerilla struggle, supported Jorge Toriello who stood for Mayor of Guatemala city towards the end of 1962. The guerillas accused the communists later of diverting the attention of the revolutionary movement by engaging in parliamentary politics.

On 30th March 1963 Ydigora's defence minister overthrew him and took control of the country. Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia made clear his intentions when he asserted that Guatemala was " on the brink of an internal conflict as a result of subversion promoted by pro-communist sectors, and because of the infiltration on communists that had become more alarming each day²². The guerillas responded to this policy of the new government by stating its commitment to continue the armed struggle and called upon all the people to unite to overthrow the new dictator.

Yon Sosa, one of the leaders of the MR-13, anxious to obtain assistance from any source for the activities of his guerrilla front and owing to lack of support from the communists, approached the Latin American Bureau of Buenos Aires - a section of the Fourth International. Gradually members of this Trotskyist faction began to infiltrate the organisation and influence its political direction. Yon Sosa himself was for a time influenced by Trotskyist thinking as a result of which he became more alienated from the communists.

22. Ibid, p. 58.

In December 1964 the MR-3 issued its new policy which was contained in the "First Declaration of the Sierra de las Minas". It stated that nothing could be done in Guatemala "without arming the masses and without destroying the machinery of the capitalist state, i.e., making the socialist revolution as in Cuba." ²³

Thus Yon Sosa's movement became the first guerrilla movement in Latin America to adopt an outright socialist programme others proclaimed the need for a national democratic revolution before a socialist revolution the MIR believed in waging a struggle directly for socialism. Yon Sosa was speaking for the MIR when he said that "in the process of fighting, living with peasants, and encountering many frustrations, we reached the conclusion that in Guatemala the only revolution of masses that can be made is a socialist". ²⁴

But the views of Yon Sosa were not shared by all the guerrillas in the movement. In particular members of his front, the Edgar Ibarra front disagreed with Yon Sosa. In October, 1964 the leadership of the front wrote to the Central Committee of the PGT and the leadership of MR 13 stating that "this entire (Trotskyist) position leads, by means of clever manoeuvre to the removal of revolutionary contact from the guerrilla movement to the denial that it can become the army of the people ... to the splitting of the people forces and diversion of revolutionary efforts into the peaceful organization of unions and mass organizations" ²⁵

23. Ibid, p. 66.

24. Ibid, p. 73.

25. Ibid, p. 78.

Before Yon Sosa realised his mistake of taking the Trotskyists into his confidence Turcios had perceived the negative intentions of this group and convened a conference in March 1965 of the leaders of the PGT, the Communist Youth Movement and other guerrilla leaders. Out of this conference emerged a joint and centralised leadership in the form of "the Provisional Revolutionary Leadership Centre". The programme of this new leadership stated that:

"The formula of the socialist revolution is a general pattern in which the Trotskyists like to fit the diverse and manifold realities of every country of the worldSocialism is not a state of consciousness but a scientific theory confirmed by history."²⁶

It is significant that Castro invited Turcios and the communists and ignored Yon Sosa and the MR 13 to the Tri-continental Conference in January 1966. Castro took this opportunity to criticise in very strong terms the Trotskyist elements in Guatemala especially the Trotskyist infiltration of the MIR. He described Turcios as the "representative of the revolutionary movements of Guatemala".

The elections in 1966 in which Mario Mendez Montenegro, leader of the Revolutionary Party stood as a candidate for the presidency caused some disagreement between the PGT and the FAR. In the absence of Turcios the PGT resolved to support Montenegro and his party. Surprisingly Montenegro

26. Ibid, p.81.

won the elections and took office in July. He issued an appeal to the guerillas to cooperate with him to which Yon Sosa replied:

"There is no truee at all...I think that any one who has Marxist ideas will not accept, even in his dreams, an amnesty." ²⁷

Even the communists rejected the amnesty proposed by Montenegro, since they could not accept to conditions under which the amnesty was proposed.

In October 1966 Turcios died in a tragic car accident on the outskirts of Guatamala city. With his death the guerilla movement lost one of its most experienced and dynamic leaders. Turcios second-in-command Cesar Montes took over the leadership. Under his leadership the guerillas experienced difficult times. Soon after Turcios death Mendez began a campaign to wipe out the guerillas. He enlisted the support of the American Green. Barets "Special Forces" and American advisors to initiate socio-economic projects to win the support of the peasants. Together with the government onslaught, a number of rightwing organizations emerged and with the support of army attacked and killed communists and leftist supporters. The government was able to inflict severe losses on the guerilla movements with the support of the American forces and the right wing groups.

27. Ibid, p.95.

Following serious differences between FAR and the PGT on the question of the armed struggle the FAR announced its break from PGT in January 1968. In their declaration the guerrillas stated that :

" After four years of fighting this is the balance sheet; three hundred revolutionaries fallen in compact, 3,000 men of the people murdered by Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro's regime. The PGT (its ruling clique) supplied the ideas and the FAR the dead!"²⁸ Montes supported this break and resigned from the PGT. In his statement of resignation he said:

" I will never resign my question as a communist which is earned not through a membership card but through strength, through combat, through acting ideologically in harmony with the proletariat - i.e., serving its interest in every way!"²⁹ The PGT responded to this by forming their own armed forces, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolutionaries. In the course of 1967 a number of killings took place, notably the killing of U.S. Ambassador, John Gordan Mein. This killing symbolized the anti-American sentiment prevailing in Guatemala too. Christian workers who were sympathetic to the cause of guerrillas and who were expelled from Guatemala 1967, wrote to an American Senator warning him of these sentiments and of the impending revolution:

28. Ibid, p. IO9.

29. Ibid, p. IIO.

" There is only one solution: revolution. I would like to think that these revolutions could be peaceful, but I know from my personal experience that the two percent that are bleeding the masses white will not give up their power peacefully. It must be taken from them. It is they then who are provoking the violence not the poor." ³⁰

Today the once defeated Guatemalan revolutionary movement is emerging from the blows suffered in the sixties. The guerrillas are once more organizing themselves into a force to be reckoned with. The lessons of the sixties will surely be followed this time and their victory is almost certain.³¹

30. Ibid, p. 146.

31. ~~Indian~~ Indian Express 24th July, 1981.

C O N C L U S I O N

THEORIES OF REVOLUTION AND REGIS DEBRAY

CONCLUSION

In the course of this study we have traced Debray's revolutionary thoughts on central questions relating to Marxist theory and practice. We have seen how Debray interpreted the revolutionary experience of Latin America which led him to conclude that the armed struggle was the only solution to imperialist domination of the continent. We have also, albeit briefly, been able to examine the spread of the revolutionary tide through Latin America after the success of the Cuban Revolution and in particular the abortive revolutionary attempts in Venezuela, Uruguay, Chile and Guatemala. After two decades of revolutionary struggle in the continent only one country has emerged victorious viz, Nicaragua in 1978, after a bitter struggle under the leadership of the Sandinista guerrillas. The fundamental question still remains: what has been the causes of these failures? Is it a question of a lack of understanding of the nature and content of the struggle which has led to incorrect strategies or is it the result of miscalculated strategies? Is it the manner in which the armed struggle has been conducted or is it the lack of sound leadership in the movements? To answer these questions would require an analysis of the programmes and strategies pursued by these movements. It is not the intention to make such an analysis here, but it would be appropriate to point to some of the weaknesses that may have contributed to such failures.

A remarkable feature of the Latin American revolutionary movements is their independence. Except from some assistance from Cuba and Algeria there is not much evidence to indicate that there was any material aid forthcoming from the socialist bloc of states. The assistance that Cuba has been able to render has been restricted by its economic reconstruction programme. No doubt ideological disagreement with the orthodox communist states may have dissuaded them from seeking assistance from these states. While such independence has been ideologically rooted, it is inconceivable that the revolutionary movements could succeed against American imperialism without some measure of support from the international socialist community. This is perhaps be one of the weaknesses that has led to their downfall.

We have noted the weak peasant base that these movements had in the countryside. Although they enjoyed some peasant support it was not sufficient to gain their confidence and win their sympathies. Debray's observation that peasants should not be trusted may have been correct only because their level of political consciousness had not reached the extent of understanding the aims of the guerrillas. What is absent from the guerrilla movements is a political education programme which would serve to increase the peasants' awareness of the ways in which the guerrillas seek to eliminate their condition of economic and social oppression.

Thirdly, the political disunity amongst the revolutionary movements contributed a great deal to their failures. The communist parties certainly have played a role in fomenting disunity as a result of their wavering policies towards the armed struggle. We have seen that these parties have only payed lip-service to the armed struggle while at the same time following their path of legal methods of struggle. These policies have caused great uncertainty within the ranks of the movements and has on more than one occasion led to serious splits. This is not to ignore the contribution the communist parties have made to the advance of the revolutionary forces in Latin America but simply to point to their weaknesses and to the incorrect policy of abandoning the armed struggle at a time when its continuation was an urgent necessity in the face of violent repression from the state.

Despite these and other setbacks the revolutionary movement in Latin America has been greatly enriched by the long years of battle against national oppression and imperialism, although at the expense of many lives, including that the leading revolutionaries. The **inspiration** provided by the example of the victories in Cuba and Nicargua will continue to instil confidence in the movements that have yet to succeed.

Today we are once again witnessing the resurgence of revolutionary movements in Guatemala, Bolivia, Argentina, El Salvador. In Guatemala the guerrillas have once again gone into action by attacking strategic targets.

In El Salvador, a heroic battle is being waged by the people against the might and power of US imperialism. Despite all efforts of the US to prop up the El Salvador regime through considerable military aid the people are determined their resolve to be free from the shackles of domination and oppression. The international socialist movement has its attention pinned on events in that continent.

Debray has enriched Marxist theory by his contributions on Latin America. Marxists cannot ignore Debray and his writings if they are to reach a better understanding of the nature of the conflicts taking place in Latin America today. Debray will continue to live in the minds of Latin American revolutionaries for a long time to come. It remains to be seen however how Debray will exercise his intellectual influence as foreign policy advisor to President Mitterand and how he will influence French policy towards Latin America.

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