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## Two methods for the Latin American revolution

(Critical remarks to the works of Ernesto “Che” Guevara “The guerrilla warfare”, “Cuba: exceptional case or vanguard in the struggle against colonialism” and “Guerrilla warfare: a method”) Article published in the magazine *Estrategia* (second era), Buenos Aires, 1964.

### Guerrilla warfare or struggle of the working class and the masses?

The Cuban revolution is the most important Latin American event so far this century; it marks the beginning of the socialist revolution in our continent, the United States and the Western world and has also given rise to a new generation and revolutionary tendency at continental scale: Castroism. Its leaders are the undisputed leaders of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro and “Che” Guevara. The latter is the only one who has made efforts to transfer to the theoretical and programmatic field the experiences of this new revolutionary tendency. He has tried to do the same with another aspect of revolutionary work, building a socialist economy, by promoting discussion on the application of the law of value in the Cuban economy. We cannot but congratulate him for this magnificent example. But not only that, rather we also want to participate fully in the debate on the revolutionary strategy for Latin America.

Trotsky, incidentally commenting on the polemics of Bukharin with Lenin, noted that he made it on his knees, apologetically, just as a child argues with his parent or a student with his teacher, as if it were a disgrace. We place ourselves in front of Guevara and Fidel Castro in a similar position. Our admiration, respect, and gratitude to them, as leaders of the Latin American revolutionary process, have no limits. In the case of Fidel Castro we have not hesitated to consider him alongside Lenin and Trotsky, one of the greatest revolutionary geniuses of this century.

This position is not a “salute to the flag” as Chileans say, or among us, “a show off”. Fidel and “Che” have shown in deeds and have popularised several political and theoretical issues of fundamental importance, which cause that of them it is possible to be said, paraphrasing, what Sartre says of Marx philosophy, “today there is no day another revolutionary current in Latin America than Castroism”.

There are two main theoretical and political conclusions of Castroism. First, that there is no other way for the triumph of Latin American and world revolution, that of the class struggle with its inevitable corollary, the armed struggle to destroy the apparatus of state repression of the regime. Second, that this process of armed struggle is the beginning of a revolution in permanence, or as Guevara says, that increasingly gets deeper. We leave aside the fact that these two conclusions are the *raison d'être* of Trotskyism.

These two cardinal ideas of Castroism make us consider ourselves their disciples against the reformist variants of all kinds, from the Khrushchevist up to the national reformist which believes just the opposite: that the class and armed struggle is not essential and that the bourgeois-

democratic revolution should not deepen more and more, and that it is possible to carry it out in large historical stages.

Our principled agreement with the Castroism does not prevent us, however, from warning that since the Cuban revolution, the Latin American revolutionary movement has suffered a series of colossal losses, starting with the total and crushing failure of the Paraguayan guerrillas, supported by a passionate enthusiasm and mobilisation of an impressive vanguard, and ending with the Venezuelan guerrillas wanting to prevent the election and subsequent inauguration by Leoni.<sup>1</sup> To these failures has joined the fall of Goulart and Brizola,<sup>2</sup> a colossal defeat of the Latin American workers as a whole.

This compels us to a careful analysis of the positions and practice of the more Orthodox Guevarists, as the leaders of several of these failures have declared themselves Guevarists fanatics. That is to say, our critical analysis of Guevara's positions analysis is not for a mere theoretical but, on the contrary, a practical interest. What do Guevarists respond to this? "Why argue about a method, guerrilla warfare, which has demonstrated its absolute correctness with the triumph in Cuba?" We are against the method of passive acceptance and generalisation of revolutionary triumphs. We stand for the unconditional defence of them, but in terms of methods we still insist on the critical-theoretical method that characterises us.

This forces us to critically examine both successes as well as failures, and raise them both to a plane of theoretical generalisation. Criticism must be relentless. That is the only way to surpass the successes and avoid failures. This will be the framework of our analysis of the theory and practice of Guevarism.

### Is guerrilla warfare the only viable method?

Guevara speaks of guerrilla warfare as a method to take power. But this is not for him a method among others, but the only one who can lead us to victory, "because we believe that under the current conditions of America, guerrilla warfare is the right way. There are fundamental arguments, which, in our opinion determine the necessity of guerrilla action in Latin as central axis of to the struggle".<sup>3</sup>

The author demonstrates his categorical and dangerous statement — as a result of which have died and continue to die the best fighters of the Latin American petty bourgeois vanguard — in a schematic and abstract way. The "fundamental arguments" are three, one technical and two others that have something to do with the reality of our continent.

First, guerrilla warfare is the only technical possibility of hiding the revolutionary leadership, because if done in the city it almost certainly falls into the hands of the reaction. "... Instead the guerrilla command, settled in favourable terrain for the fight, ensures security and permanence of the revolutionary command".<sup>4</sup>

Second, "the general situation of Latin American peasantry and the increasingly explosive character of their struggle against the feudal structures, within the framework of a social situation of strength among both local and foreign exploiters".<sup>5</sup>

And third, the "continental character of the struggle".<sup>6</sup>

1 **Raul Leoni Otero** (1905–1972) was President of Venezuela from 1964 until 1969. [Translator's note.]

2 **João Goulart** (1918–1976) was a Brazilian politician who served as the 24th President of Brazil. **Leonel de Moura Brizola** (1922–2004) was governor of Rio Grande do Sul from 1958 to 1964. Both of them were deposed by a military *coup d'état* on April 1, 1964. [Translator's note.]

3 Guevara, Ernesto: "Guerra de guerrillas: un método [Guerrilla Warfare: a method]". *Estrategia*, No. 1, third age, March 1961, p. 45.

4 *Ibid*, p. 45.

5 *Ibid*, p. 45.

6 *Ibid*, p. 45.

Let us study each of these arguments, starting with the first, i.e. what is the best way to hide the revolutionary leadership.

This seems infantile to us. For us, to hide well the revolutionary leadership is not a technical but a political and social task. It's not about finding the best geographical place to hide but the best political-social sector. Fidel Castro took shelter in Eastern Cuba because there the bourgeois and landowners nuclei that supported him and were in opposition to Batista were located. The entire East sympathised with the "26 of July" and Fidel Castro. This law is general: the revolutionary leadership has to hide in the social environment that is unconditional to and supports them politically, be it urban or rural. There are hundreds of examples of urban fighters who have not fallen into the hands of repression living in cities. The whole Nazi Gestapo could neither stop nor discover the leadership of the French Resistance, or Camus, director of underground newspaper, although they hid in Paris. That was because the vast majority of French people supported them. Between the years 1943 and 1945 in Argentina it was impossible to detain Geronimo Arnedo Alvarez, who was hiding in Buenos Aires, because at that time the Argentine Communist Party relied on important sectors of the labour and intellectual movement. Instead, guerrilla leaders have been liquidated or imprisoned despite the perfection of their hiding spot, because of not counting from the beginning with the support of the population (Paraguay, Venezuela, Spain and the guerrillas of Salta lately in our country). Hiding a revolutionary leadership requires organisation and strong social support, not merely hiding technique.

Let's continue with his second "fundamental argument" — "the explosive character of peasant struggle". Let it not be said that peasant rebellion against feudalism means automatically "guerrilla warfare", because the Bolivian, Peruvian, Brazilian, examples indicate just the opposite; large peasant struggles, among them the triumphant Bolivian, without guerrilla war. The Russian Revolution, moreover, relied on a massive peasant mobilisation without having to resort to guerrilla warfare to get rid of feudalism. That is, Guevara gives an element that alone does not prove anything, when he points to an indisputable fact — that Latin American peasants mobilise against the archaic structures that oppress them. From that certain fact does not arise or may arise that guerrilla warfare is the "correct way" or the "central axis of the struggle". The peasantry in Brazil or Peru have favoured unionisation and massive land occupations and have had no tendency towards guerrillas. Where does Guevara get his conclusion if the historical and Latin American experience does not endorse it? It cannot be from another source than his own will and desire. But will and desire are bad advisers if they are not based in a responsible study of reality. The peasantry, like all oppressed classes, advance in their means of struggle according to its experience. Why does Guevara want to remove this experience of the peasants replacing it with a schema? Why does he aspire to use only one method? Why does he deny in advance all forms of armed struggle or of combination of methods? Isn't it much more correct to accompany the peasant experience rather than trying to impose a form of armed struggle?

We leave aside the subordinate argument of "alliance between local and foreign exploiters" because we will explore it extensively in the corresponding chapter.

The third and weakest "fundamental argument" is almost inexplicable on the lips of a serious revolutionary as Guevara. We do not understand why from the "continental character of the struggle" follows that the only possible method in each of our countries is guerrilla warfare. The continental character of the struggle brings together the different national struggles of the workers, facing a common enemy: US imperialism, and gives them a common goal, Latin American unity (which Guevara does not explicitly raise), but it can never by itself indicate the nature and modalities that this struggle will acquire in each of our countries.

The balance is truly bleak — Guevara does not give a single argument worthy of being taken into account to justify his tremendous conclusion.

But we would be unfair to our "Che" if we did not acknowledge that from his work emerges a little more solid and comprehensive framework to prove his theory.

We will see then that guerrilla warfare is the “central axis of the struggle” for three reasons that stem from his writings: an analysis of Latin American reality, a study of historical experience, mainly from Cuba, and the decisive, of a technical nature, the military advantages of guerrilla warfare and the disadvantages of the other methods. That the technical arguments are the decisive ones (as evidenced among other things the fact that his first argument in favour of the guerrillas is to hide the revolutionary leadership) invalidates by itself all his theoretical structure from the Marxist point of view.

For Marxism the essential is precisely the opposite: the analysis of Latin American reality and the historical experience. Only this can enable us to find the right strategy and not super abstract technical generalities, like guerrilla warfare is the only method of destruction of the oligarchic army.

## Ignorance of national realities

By thinking and demonstrating so, Guevara denies the essence of Marxism that always starts from reality, from the concrete to return to it modifying it. Only a thorough, exhaustive study of Latin American reality and of each of our countries can allow us to reach the conclusion that guerrilla warfare is the only viable method of making the revolution in this stage.

This study has to be a deep, complete study of the history and traditions of each country, mainly the mass movement (it is not the same the Argentine proletariat with its colossal anarchist, communist and Peronist experience, that the Cuban or Brazilian), of the economy, of the society with its relations of classes and sectors, of the policy of the exploiters with their State and political parties, and finally the unions and workers and peasants parties with their leaders. Only then can we find the correct revolutionary political line and methods.

However the Guevarist myopia on the different characteristics of each Latin American country could not be any greater. Guevara recognises, for example, that there are problems with the mass movement: “Countries, that even without speaking of effective industrialisation, have developed a light and medium industry, or have simply undergone processes of concentration of population in major centres, find it very difficult to prepare guerrillas”.<sup>7</sup>

In a very, very discreet, almost unnoticed, way he tells us that nothing less than in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, i.e. 80 percent of Latin America, which has developed its “light and medium industry” is “very difficult to prepare guerrillas”. This confession does not perturb Guevara nor does it make him draw political conclusions. He starts from the premise that the only feasible approach is the guerrillas, and then you have to do it even when “it’s very difficult”. Some questions occur to us: If in these countries is “very difficult to prepare guerrillas”, cannot we find other easier forms of armed struggle? Isn’t the resistance of working people to the guerrilla a warning to the dogmatic who do not take any account of national realities? Isn’t it easier to deal with the armed struggle according to the methods and places that workers and their vanguard adopt? If the reality of the country makes guerrillas very difficult, why insist on it? Could it be for purely technical reasons and the obsession that no other method exists? And isn’t accepting a single method condemning ourselves to the most complete failure?

## The Brazilian experience

For Guevara these questions have no importance or at least he does not seem to give them any. That’s why he does not explicitly raise the big problem in Latin America at this stage: the Brazilian revolution.

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<sup>7</sup> Guevara, Ernesto: “Cuba: ¿caso excepcional o vanguardia en la lucha contra el colonialismo? [Cuba: exceptional case or vanguard in the fight against colonialism?]”, Collected Works, Ediciones del Plata, Buenos Aires, 1967. Vol. 2, p. 57.

If we had made a serious study of reality in Brazil we would have come to the conclusion that the main revolutionary task in Latin America was much more modest than preparing guerrilla warfare: it was necessary to prevent the triumph of the reactionary gorilla<sup>8</sup> putsch that was being prepared.

The Latin American situation, as that of Brazil, with its history, economics, social relations, politics and nature of Government were suggesting that a reactionary coup was inevitable. The great task then was to mobilise the Brazilian mass movement to stop it or crush it, without placing the slightest trust in the government of Goulart or Brizola. This single concrete analysis would have been worth more to the revolution and revolutionary Cuba than all theoretical works of Che, because it meant a political line and strategy required for half of Latin America.

For we must not delude ourselves: Brazil has been the most tragic defeat of the Latin American mass movement in the last 20 years. This defeat will be reflected throughout our continent, including in Cuba, where the *gusanos*<sup>9</sup> will begin to raise their head. Fidel and Che, undisputed leadership of the Latin American revolution, must demonstrate to history and self-criticise, if necessary, what was the policy they advised to Brazil. From the works of Che it is clear it was guerrilla warfare. In this case it was a political crime, because the great task was to prevent the reactionary coup from the cities, with labour trade unions and NCOs. If instead it was to confront the reactionary coup, all the theoretical work of Guevara are useless, since in this case “the possibility of the triumph of the popular masses of Latin America” was not “clearly expressed by way of guerrilla warfare” for half the continent.

Desire for controversy can lead to find another answer: Guevarism raised the struggle against the coup d'état preparing guerrillas. You can still find another argument: Facts have proved that no other way than the guerrillas, as the urban masses were unable to do anything for Goulart. These are nothing but controversial arguments to save face. The fact is what was put forth to a Castroist in Brazil: either to prepare the guerrillas or to defend Goulart developing the mobilisation of the mass movement with organisations that had taken place (unions of NCOs, peasants and workers). It is an iron dilemma and no controversial argument can avoid it. If we prepared the guerrillas we could not mobilise and if we mobilised from the unions we could not prepare the guerrillas.

Brazil is a tragic warning and demands from us to say once and for all: Enough with recipes and generalities! Enough of technical advice! Let's begin to study the Latin American reality and each of our countries in particular to give ourselves a specific and correct political line and thus find the method of armed struggle appropriate to this political line!

## The Latin American situation

All the Latin American revolutionary movement agrees that the situation of our continent is pre-revolutionary. Despite this agreement, when it comes to delve into it out by pointing out the essential factors that make to the characterisation and to the time of starting the armed struggle, the discrepancies are almost total.

This theoretical analysis of the minimum conditions that make the possibility of armed insurrection or the beginning of guerrilla warfare is the most important for revolutionary Marxists. Guevara does not seem to give it importance, since “not always do you have to wait until all conditions for the revolution are met; the insurrectional focus itself can create them”.<sup>10</sup> However in

8 **Gorilla** is a derogatory name initially used in Argentinian politics to refer to detractors of Peronism. With the passage of time it has spread to other Latin American countries as synonymous of “reactionary” or “right wing”. [Translator's note.]

9 **Gusano** (worm). Derogatory term used by the revolutionary Cubans to designate the native Cuban friend of American imperialism. [Translator's note.]

10 Guevara, Ernesto: “Esencia de la lucha, estrategia y táctica guerrilleras [Essence of the guerrilla struggle, strategy and tactics]”, *Collected Works*, Ediciones del Plata, Buenos Aires, 1967. Vol. 1, p. 37.

some of his work he points to some minimum conditions. But before taking them into account let's take a look what the classics of Marxism have said on this cardinal problem.

Classic Marxism had identified four conditions to define a situation as pre-revolutionary with conditions for armed insurrection. They are: first, general crisis of the exploiting classes. Second, crisis without solution and neutralisation, despair and a turn of the middle class towards a revolutionary solution. Third, the existence of large organisations that group together the whole of the workers and have part of actual government power, especially of the working class. Fourth, a strong revolutionary Marxist party that raise the issue of power and armed insurrection.

In this post-war period and in those countries in which triumphant guerrilla warfare took place, this scheme suffered modifications of fundamental importance. For example, it was possible the initiation of armed insurrection and its triumph without revolutionary Marxist parties. This lack of an essential element of the classical scheme was offset by the strengthening of other factors. In all countries where guerrilla warfare triumphed it was preceded by a pre-revolutionary situation characterised by these four elements: first, a general crisis of the exploiting classes never before known; second, turning of the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie and even of bourgeois sectors to guerrilla warfare on a massive, desperate way; third, the existence of large petty bourgeois mass parties that replace and synthesise the specific organisms of power of the working masses and the revolutionary Marxist party; fourth, neighbouring states supporting the guerrillas since its outbreak.

If we put aside the quotes frankly infantile or devoid of the slightest seriousness, we note from all of Guevara's works that it is clear that for him the minimum conditions to start guerrilla warfare are opposite to the classics of Marxism, or that he does not take them into account at all. So we see that, first, the first condition for classical Marxism, which is the total internal crisis of the exploiters themselves, not only it does not exist for him, but on the contrary, there is a monolithic unity, as the exploiters (imperialism, landlords and bourgeoisie) are more and more tightly together, the same as their parties, governments and armies.

Second, the peasantry is the only class that can begin the armed struggle, since the urban classes cannot cope with it for long and the most they can do is to accompany the peasantry. The massive turn of the urban petty bourgeoisie and sometimes sectors of the bourgeoisie itself to guerrilla warfare, is not even taken into account by Guevara as another probable condition.

Third, he does not even mention the need for mass organisations and the revolutionary Marxist party of the classical scheme, or the large mass parties of guerrilla warfare.

Fourth, he forgets all the help from neighbouring countries in the scheme of guerrilla warfare. He is satisfied with one superstructural condition: the Cuban revolution lifted the spirits and showed the masses that it is possible to win.

What we see is that Guevara defends guerrilla warfare as the only method, by means of an analysis that has nothing to do with the Marxist analysis of what a pre-revolutionary situation is in the classical and guerrilla warfare revolutions.

We believe exactly the opposite of what Guevara does — in Latin America there is a pre-revolutionary situation of power struggle on the part of the workers, with its inevitable prospect of armed struggle, because:

First, the whole structure of the exploiters is cracking; there is increasingly violent friction among them due to the decline in national income, and of some of them with imperialism itself, as a result of the exploitation of the latter. This is reflected in the character of governments and armies, which are not increasingly monolithic, but on the contrary, go from crisis to crisis.

Second, as a consequence of the foregoing, the workers, the petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry, and the Latin American proletariat see no other way out than the revolutionary, despairing against the regime.

Third, there are large mass organisations, the worker and peasant trade unions, locked in struggle against the oligarchic state regime. In this sense it is very much like the classical situation and not like the initiation of guerrilla warfare.

But this pre-revolutionary situation has special characteristics for the lack of two elements: revolutionary Marxist parties or petty bourgeois mass parties that raise the revolutionary struggle against the regime and — excluding the Central American countries — there isn't the least chance of help from bordering countries. That is to say, the Latin American situation is pre-revolutionary but with a colossal weakness of the subjective factor which is not compensated, not even close, by the enthusiasm aroused by the triumph in Cuba.

All of this in general; we're not talking about Guevara's methodology in relation to each Latin American country. He doesn't even deign to consider the problem, which, however, is the fundamental. Marxism is a method that requires a concrete, specific, analysis of each reality. That's the first thing each Marxist highlights — there are no general truths that apply in general. And Guevara ignores or forgets the simplest of Marxist truths — that the method of armed struggle in each Latin American country can only be specified after a prior concrete study of each of them. Anything that ignores this method is to replace Marxism by dogmas, by recipes that may be as honest and revolutionary as you want, but completely and utterly useless. Even if the person doing them has led a revolution.

### The crisis of the regime of the Latin American exploiters

Why did “reds” and “blues”<sup>11</sup> almost come to a civil war in Argentina? Why did the big landowner Goulart appeal to the NCOs and the labour movement? Why did the sector of the army that supported him to assume command, later on betrayed him? Why servile Betancourt,<sup>12</sup> Yankee agent, had to resort to an important land reform against large landowners? Why did the Prado<sup>13</sup> government accept the peasant unionisation against the landlords of Cusco? Why in Cochabamba the Bolivian peasantry is reactionary and the mining proletariat revolutionary? Why the Paraguayan peasants supported the sinister capitalist government of Stroessner<sup>14</sup> against the guerrillas?

This chaotic situation of all Latin American countries, which demonstrates the brutal, endless, crisis of the exploiters themselves, deserves from Guevara a superficial comment and a very simple conclusion — in fact all exploiters are tightly united in a monolithic, indestructible front ... And the bourgeoisie?, he will ask.

“In many countries of America, there are objective contradictions between the national bourgeoisies who struggle to develop and imperialism that floods the markets with its articles, to defeat in unequal fight the national industry as well as in other forms or manifestations of struggle for surplus value and wealth.

“Notwithstanding these contradictions, the national bourgeoisies are incapable, generally, of maintaining a consistent attitude of struggle against imperialism. They demonstrate they fear more the popular revolution than the suffering under oppression and the despotic rule of imperialism that crushes nationality, affront patriotic sentiment and colonises the economy.

11 **Reds** (colorados) and **blues** (azules) refer to two factions within the Argentine army formed in the early 1960s. One faction, called the “blues”, the institutional wing, favoured a return to civil government. The other faction, known as the “reds”, was composed of recalcitrant anti-Peronists who favoured an indefinite military dictatorship. “Reds” and “blues” faced each other militarily in 1962. [Translator's note.]

12 **Romulo Ernesto Betancourt** (1908–1981), leader of the social democratic party *Acción Democrática* [Democratic Action] and twice President of Venezuela from 1945 to 1948 and again from 1959 to 1964. [Translator's note.]

13 **Manuel Prado y Ugarteche** (1889-1967) was a Peruvian banker and political figure. Twice President of Peru (1939–1945 and 1956–1962). [Translator's note.]

14 (1912–2006) was a Paraguayan military officer, politician and dictator, who served as President of Paraguay from 1954 to 1989. He ascended to the position after leading an army coup in 1954. [Translator's note.]

“The big bourgeoisie confronts directly the revolution and does not hesitate to ally itself to imperialism and large estate owners to combat the people and close their path to revolution.

“Imperialism, desperate and hysterical, decided to undertake all kinds of manoeuvres and to give weapons and even troops to their puppets, to annihilate any people that rises, a fierce, ruthless landlordism experienced in the most brutal forms of repression, and a big bourgeoisie ready to close by any means all roads the popular revolution, are the large allied forces opposed directly to the new popular revolutions in Latin America.”<sup>15</sup>

“[...] within the framework of a social situation of alliance between local and foreign exploiters.”<sup>16</sup>

Nothing could be more false and dangerous than this simplistic analysis of the exploiters. As always, Guevara is brilliant in his attack on the opportunists, when he notes that “the national bourgeoisies are incapable, generally, of maintaining a consistent attitude of struggle against imperialism”. We are in this respect more Guevarists than Guevara: we do not believe that “generally” they are inconsistently anti-imperialist but rather that they never are, that there is no possibility, not even as an exception, that some part of it can get to fight consistently against landowners or imperialism. We believe that any bourgeois or landowner sector, strong or small, forced by the imperialist pressure and competition that dislodges them from the market can outline and maintain anti-imperialist positions or even to have deep friction with other bourgeois, oligarchic, pro-imperialist sectors. Moreover, we believe that the crisis of the imperialist sectors among themselves, of factions of US imperialism itself, of the latter with national exploiters and sectors of these among themselves, will go on increasing, will reach its climax, as a result of the crisis the capitalist world economy in general and especially the colossal imperialist exploitation suffered by our countries, which condemns them to live in decay and stagnation.

The national bourgeoisie, governments and armies are then faced with a highly contradictory situation — they have to dispute a portion of national income to the workers and to imperialism. Sometimes they lean towards a pro-imperialist and anti-labour policy and at other times towards pro-labour and anti-imperialist. What they will never have is a consistent policy because of the very nature as national exploiters. In these contradictory terms are synthesised the contradictions of the national bourgeoisie, including its most powerful landowning and industrial sectors. By being exploiters they are linked to imperialism, although they can speculate with different sectors of the latter. By being national they suffer the general exploitation of the country. This explains the abrupt turns of bourgeois sectors that from reactionary become progressive and vice versa. How otherwise to explain the cases of Brazil, Argentina or Chile? Haven’t we seen in Brazil a landowner and petty bourgeois government like Goulart, in a beginning of civil war with another sector of the bourgeoisie? And don’t we see today in Chile a petty bourgeois nationalist movement, the FRAP [Popular Action Front], supported by sectors of a bourgeois party, the radical, against other bourgeois sectors? And in Bolivia don’t we witness the possibility of clashes between bourgeois, petty bourgeois and worker sectors against Paz Estenssoro?<sup>17</sup> And what does it mean in Argentina the deadly struggle between integrationist and anti-integrationist bourgeois sectors that placed it permanently on the brink of civil war? If we do not have a policy to use these contradictions to the benefit of the workers we commit a serious error and we eliminate the magnificent and perhaps only chance to defeat the forces of repression of the regime already weakened by their own crisis.

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15 Guevara, Ernesto: “Cuba: exceptional case...?” op. cit., p. 56.

16 Guevara, Ernesto: “Guerrilla warfare...”, op. cit., p. 45.

17 **Angel Víctor Paz Estenssoro** (1907–2001) was a Bolivian lawyer and politician; four times President of Bolivia for the bourgeois *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR – Nationalist Revolutionary Movement). [Translator’s note.]

## The Latin American governments

Everything we have said about the crisis of the regime applies to the governments of the Latin American exploiters. Analysing the character of these has a fundamental importance to ensure the correct revolutionary policy with which we must deal with them, which is, after all, the first problem to be solved given that the taking power is raised.

Guevara addresses this problem with two proposals opposed by the vertex, antagonistic. When the Cuban revolution had just triumphed, under liberal pro-imperialist and petty bourgeois democratic influence, he stated: “Where a government has come to power through some form of popular consultation, fraudulent or not, and at least an appearance of constitutional legality is maintained the guerrilla outbreak is impossible to occur because the possibilities of civic struggle have not been exhausted”.<sup>18</sup>

This has little to do with a Marxist analysis of the governments of backward countries, since it doesn't start from an analysis of the relationships between classes and of these with imperialism. Our approach cannot be “the appearance of constitutional legality” but essentially the relations with imperialism and the national classes. A Bonapartist government with little or no “constitutional legality” and with deep friction with imperialism and the oligarchy, and that relies on the mass movement — as the last governments of Vargas or Peron — is much more progressive than an oligarchic one like Prado who has, however, “appearance of constitutional legality”. This does not mean that this relatively progressive government is our government or that we should give it our critical support. On the contrary, it remains our class enemy, but our policy towards it must be completely different from the one we have with the oligarchic agents of Yankee imperialism.

Anyway we would prefer the attempt to make a, summary, liberal, classification of the governments, rather than the current Guevarist position — all governments are the same and if they are not, we must fight for them to be the same, and thus the will masses learn faster. We Marxists must be extremely careful in the judging of the Latin American governments, not dissolving this analysis in the night of abstraction where all cats are grey, as does our author in his work “Guerrilla warfare: a method” when he says: “Today, we can see in America<sup>19</sup> a state of unstable equilibrium between oligarchic dictatorship and popular pressure. We call it with the word oligarchic expecting to define the reactionary alliance between the bourgeoisie of each country and its landed classes, with greater or lesser preponderance of the feudal structures. These dictatorships take place within certain frameworks of legality that were awarded by themselves for their best work throughout the period of unrestricted class domination, but we are going through a stage in which popular pressures are very strong, knocking at the doors of bourgeois legality and this had to be violated by its authors to stop the momentum of the masses [...] We must never forget the class, authoritarian and restrictive nature of the bourgeois state”.<sup>20</sup>

The quotations from Lenin on the general nature of states and governments which he gives thereafter, serve to endorse a serious mistake; he dissolves the concrete analysis of the different types of Latin American government in a super abstraction (“they are oligarchic dictatorships”). We ask, was Goulart an oligarchic dictatorship? And if it was, why did the oligarchy ousted him? Was it not? And then, why does he say that “today we can see in America” “only oligarchic dictatorships”? The governments of Goulart, Peron and Vargas<sup>21</sup> were bourgeois dictatorships just

18 Guevara, Ernesto: “Essence of the guerrilla...”, op. cit., p. 38.

19 When Nahuel Moreno and Che Guevara refer to America, they both refer to the whole North and South American continents, not to the country United States of America. [Translator's note.]

20 Guevara, Ernesto: “Guerrilla warfare...”, op. cit., p. 42.

21 **Getulio Vargas** (1882–1954) was President of Brazil, first as dictator, from 1930 to 1945, and in a democratically elected term from 1951 until his suicide in 1954. He favoured nationalism, industrialisation, centralisation, social welfare and populism — for the latter, Vargas won the nickname “The Father of the Poor”. He was a proponent of workers' rights as well as a staunch anti-communist. [Translator's note.]

as the governments of Castello Branco<sup>22</sup> or Aramburu-Rojas, but it is a crime to say that because of this they are the same. The Spanish Republican government, for example, was as bourgeois as Franco's, but for us they are profoundly different despite this similarity of social character. Lenin, who defined the Kerensky government as a bourgeois government in the service of the bourgeoisie and Allied imperialism, knew to distinguish it carefully from Kornilov, representative of a counter-revolutionary coup.

As revolutionaries we must have a different policy towards a Bonapartist government, although bourgeois, that displays some resistance to imperialism and tends to lean on the labour movement (Goulart and Peron cases), from the policy we would have towards a government openly reactionary, ally of imperialism like Aramburu-Rojas.<sup>23</sup> In this sense we must be champions in the fight for the defence of popular and democratic achievements, although they were granted by a Bonapartist government, not disparaging them with the argument that they are an illusion of the exploiters to better exploit the people, as Che suggests. Faced with these governments, our policy should be to try to prevent it from falling as a result of a putsch of the oligarchic-imperialist reaction by mobilising the masses and overcoming it with a workers' revolution. But before that, it is imperative to make a correct analysis of each Latin American government. Precisely what our author doesn't.

## The Latin American armies and guerrilla warfare

Latin American armies, especially its officer corps, are for Guevara a monolithic unit, a caste completely divorced from the people, in the unconditional service of the oligarchy and imperialism.

“We call the attention primarily on the manoeuvre of the military coup mentioned above. What can the military give to true democracy? What loyalty can be asked if they are mere instruments of domination of the reactionary classes and imperialist monopolies and as a caste which is worth because of the weapons it possesses, it aspires only to maintain its prerogatives?”

“When in difficult situations for the oppressors, the military conspire and overthrow a dictator — in fact defeated — one must assume they do so because the latter is unable to preserve their class prerogatives without external violence, which generally is not convenient at the present time to the interests of the oligarchy.

“This assertion does not mean in any way that it is discarded the use of the military as separate individual fighters in the social environment in which they have acted, and in fact, rebelled against it. And this use must be made within the framework of the revolutionary leadership to which they belong as fighters and not as representatives of a caste.”<sup>24</sup>

The conception of a monolithic army leads him to a unique strategic conclusion: “First: accepting as true that the enemy will fight to stay in power, we must think about destroying the oppressor army; to destroy it, it must be opposed by an opposite popular army.”<sup>25</sup>

Here we find the typical schematic way of thinking — a general truth, super abstract, from it to arrive at a syllogism based on this major premise. If the army is a caste that defends its prerogatives, it is then a monolithic unit; if it is a monolithic unit it can only be destroyed by a long war; to conduct a long war a popular army is needed which we will start building from the guerrillas.

Fortunately for the exploited, humanity have long since learned that this type of reasoning, suitable for the fifth year of any Latin American high school, is completely useless. Reality is

22 **Humberto de Alencar Castello Branco** (1897–1967) was a Brazilian military leader and politician. He served as the first President of the Brazilian military government after the 1964 military *coup d'état*. [Translator's note.]

23 **Pedro Eugenio Aramburu** (1903–1970) was an Argentine Army General. He was a major figure behind the military coup self-named *Revolución Libertadora* (Liberating Revolution) against Juan Domingo Peron in 1955. He became de facto president of Argentina from 13 November 1955 to 1 May 1958. **Isaac Francisco Rojas** (1906–1993) was an Argentine Admiral of the Navy and de facto Vice President to Aramburu. [Translator's note.]

24 Guevara, Ernesto: “Guerrilla warfare...”, op. cit., p.44.

25 Ibid, p. 45.

never monolithic. Neither fascism, nor Stalinism, or the Inca Empire was monolithic. There is no monolithic human reality. For that reason, we always have to study reality, every reality, with its contradictions.

Guevara, with the sharpness that characterises him, denies himself somewhat when he recognises that as a minimum there are two types of Latin American armies. “In addition, there is another type. Batista’s army with all its enormous defects was an army in such a way that all were complicit in the exploitation of the people, from the last soldier to the loftier general. It was a completely mercenary army, and this gave certain cohesion to the repressive apparatus. The armies of America, in their vast majority, have professional officers and regular recruitment”.<sup>26</sup> This difference in the structure of Latin American armies doesn’t lead him to draw any other conclusion than this facilitates the guerrillas. It gives the impression that our author is not aware of the importance of his characterisation and that from it may emerge different methods of destruction of the army and the armed forces. In general terms, an army with professional officers and regular recruitment roughly reflects the society to which it belongs. The strategies to destroy one army or the other cannot be the same because we are dealing with completely different enemies. In our country there are military factories with military regime. But we cannot have towards these factories the same tactic as towards a police station, although both have armed guards at the gates. In the military factory we cannot aim to the frontal defeat of the factory as a company, doing sabotage or indiscriminate terrorism to sink its production and destroy the machinery; we must win the good will of the workers, our comrades, and coordinate with them how to beat the bosses.

The same can be said with respect to the armies that reflect society as a whole; we must win the non-commissioned officers and the troops and develop the contradictions among the officers. Moreover, working people who have their children in the army will rightly resist destroying it as advised by Guevara and will want, instead, to win it, to get their children to support them. The children of the working people in the militias will do the same: they will resist crushing their family raised against the regime. If we do so, we will just help the objective situation, as the armed forces, reflecting countries or societies like ours, in permanent crisis, also live in permanent crisis (struggles amongst its officers, of NCOs with officers and sectors of troops with the officers). Batista himself in Cuba was once the product of those deep contradictions, as he led the putsch of the sergeants who accompanied the initiation of the bourgeois democratic revolution in Cuba. This democratic process was subsequently diverted, aborted, frustrated, but this was from within the army itself. The same thing happened recently in Brazil. This also happened in Argentina with Peron. Later we shall see how the theoretical difference Guevara makes among the Latin American armies is general to the historical and global experience.

This experience and theoretical analysis of the different character of the Latin American armies make us conclude that the development of the social and internal contradictions of the army or armed forces can lead to defeat and annihilation of the regime’s forces, often without guerrilla warfare, by a process of disintegration caused by the confrontation with the mass movement and its own contradictions.

Guevara recognises that Bolivia gave “three of the examples that fundamentally helped the Cuban revolution: the abolition of the army, agrarian reform and the nationalisation of their mines”.<sup>27</sup> This abolition of the army in Bolivia was not caused “opposed by a popular army opposite” or “with the development of guerrilla warfare on favourable terrain, supported by the struggle in the cities”, which as Guevara advocates, are the only ways to suppress Latin American armies. In Bolivia the armed forces were liquidated using their contradictions to the end: police against army; commander in chief against the rest of the army, and as a result the urban and mining proletariat of La Paz could defeat the army in three days of fighting without using at all Guevarist methods.

We do not see why some Bolivian variant cannot be repeated and we should only repeat the Cuban variant. We precisely believe that while the armies reflect society as a whole the most likely

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26 Guevara, Ernesto: “Essence of the guerrilla...”, op. cit., p. 63.

27 Guevara, Ernesto: “La guerra de guerrillas” [“Guerrilla Warfare”], op. cit., p. 173.

variant will be the Bolivian: acute crisis of regime's repressive apparatus which falls disintegrated under the onslaught of the mass movement.

## The dogma of the peasantry

For Guevara in all Latin American countries the vanguard class is the peasantry and the urban classes or the agricultural proletariat play the role of chaperones in the first two stages of the armed struggle. "[...] it is the countryside and that, from the countryside, a peasant army that pursues the great objectives for which the peasantry must fight (the first of which is the fair distribution of land) will take the cities" [...] "the peasant class of America will produce the great liberating army of the future, as has already been done in Cuba".<sup>28</sup> "The possibility of the victory of the popular masses in Latin America, is clearly expressed in the way of guerrilla warfare, based on the peasant army, in the defeat of the army in frontal struggle, in the taking of the city from the countryside, etc."<sup>29</sup>

Not even the Argentine peasantry ceases to have its vanguard role. The only variant that he recognises are the different peasant mentalities: "Of course there are particularities in America; an Argentine farmer does not have the same mentality as a communal farmer from Peru, Bolivia or Ecuador, but the hunger for land, permanently present in the peasants, gives the general tone of America and because in general they are even more exploited than they had been in Cuba, the chances of this class taking up arms increases".<sup>30</sup> But the general conclusion, without exception, is the same: the peasantry is the class at the vanguard in all Latin American countries. Never does he pose the slightest possibility that this situation may vary from country to country and that different peasant mentalities cause different relations between the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry.

Not only is it not the same a Peruvian peasant to one Argentinian, but also there isn't the same relationship of revolutionary classes in Peru and Argentina. Those are the fundamental and specific differences that vary from country to country and from stage to stage and not the peasant mentalities. The only argument he gives, and very much in passing, is that in some Latin American countries the peasantry has begun a process of revolutionary upsurge. The true Guevarist argument is technical and not social. He appeals to the peasantry and the countryside for being the class and the area ideal for the guerrillas. That is, the guerrillas and the armed struggle are not in the service of the mass movement of the country, of its dynamics, but on the contrary, the mass movement and geographical locations, are in service of the guerrilla warfare. The peasantry is the advanced class because this will be better for the development of the guerrillas, not because it is in reality.

In Uruguay, as in Argentina, the peasantry is the bastion of reaction. This Guevara doesn't even notice. Dogmatists always crash into reality the same way. This is why Guevara analyses so badly the Cuban revolution and its class composition. No one has proven to date that in Cuba the vanguard sector was the peasantry and not the agricultural proletariat and the urban petty bourgeoisie. We will soon pause in this aspect of the problem.

We believe that the exploited class at the vanguard of the Latin American revolution varies from country to country and from stage to stage. We have overcome the Trotskyist scheme that only the proletariat is the vanguard of the revolution, but not to fall into another so fatal as that. On the contrary, as our theoretical and practical work demonstrates, we were the first to point out that in Peru the vanguard was the peasantry of Cuzco. In Bolivia in recent months we came to believe that the vanguard class may be the peasantry of La Paz and the mining proletariat passed into the background. Facts have proved categorically that we were wrong, as the mining proletariat remains the vanguard. And we are not willing to sacrifice our method for any peasant dogma. We take reality, including the relationship of the exploited classes, as it is given. We do the same with

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28 Guevara, Ernesto: "Essence of the guerrilla...", op. cit., p. 54.

29 Ibid, p. 61.

30 Ibid, p. 62.

the revolutionary and armed struggle methods: we adopt not a single one, but that one which is suited to the vanguard class and its experience.

## The bystanders

Clawsewitz, the great theorist of war quoted by Lenin, Mao and Trotsky, already over a century ago said. “War is the continuation of politics by other means” Mao, whom Guevara considers himself a disciple of, said: “War is a bloody policy and politics a bloodless war”. These great masters of war have not denied Guevara, who never stops in his work to analyse or merely point out the need for revolutionary politics.

Rather, he has a revolutionary political objective — the seizure of power by the workers, after destruction of the armed forces or the reaction, but this alone cannot be called scientifically revolutionary politics. First of all, because politics have partial means and objectives, linked to each other, which are synthesised in a program. But a revolutionary program does not operate in a vacuum, it isn’t an intellectual cloud; somebody executes it on something. This is where the two fundamental terms of the design and development of the program appear. The program is executed and elaborated by a revolutionary party to educate, raise the workers with their degree of consciousness and organisation to the revolutionary tasks. Then we have that the revolutionary goal is to eliminate the oligarchic-imperialist bourgeois regime, but that can only be done through the conquest of the mass movement with their organisations for the task. The conquering of the mass movement then becomes a decisive end because only thus we will defeat the regime.

The program as a synthesis of revolutionary politics aims precisely to gain the mass movement for the revolutionary goals of the party. It is the intermediary between the party and the mass movement. This program, to be correct, cannot fail to take into account the needs, traditions, forms of organisation and aspirations of the movement of the working masses. The relations between the party and the mass movement cannot be a dialogue of the deaf, such as Peruvian or Brazilian peasant who says: “I want to organise a union to get water” or an Argentine worker who says: “I want a minimum, vital and indexed wage” and the revolutionary who answers: “Don’t be a shit eater, let’s do the insurrection”. They will never understand each other. If instead the revolutionary starts from what the peasant or worker wants (the union, water, or the minimum wage), he will manage to elevate that worker with his organisation to the fight for power. Now, let’s suppose the peasant or the worker has his union. In that case, the revolutionary cannot ignore not only the current aspirations of the worker but also this conquest already achieved which is their union.

To Guevara the only factors that exist are two which are complementary and that in turn will deepen during the course of the struggle: “awareness of the need for change and the certainty of the possibility of this revolutionary change [...]” So there are no doubts he insists that “the first is the possibility of triumph, as it is now well known the ability to crown with success an enterprise such as that undertaken by that group of deluded expeditionary of the ‘Granma’ in their fight of two years in the Sierra Maestra [...]”.<sup>31</sup> Not a single word of the party, policy or revolutionary program and the mass movement. Let’s take a closer look at the author’s reasoning to see if we find them somewhere.

Nothing is more important for a revolutionary organisation than the historical moment in which it is resolved to start the armed struggle, the civil war against the regime. How does Guevara see the commencement of armed struggle in its relationship with the program, the party and the mass movement? “At the beginning there is a group more or less armed, more or less homogeneous, dedicated almost exclusively to hide in the wildest, most remote places, maintaining little contact with the peasants”.<sup>32</sup>

So declares Guevara, generalising — as he himself says — the Cuban experience. “There need to be a base of 30-50 men; this figure is enough to start an armed struggle in any country of

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> Guevara, Ernesto: “Guerrilla warfare...”, op. cit., p. 102.

the American world with situations of good territory to thrive, hunger for land, repeated attacks to justice”, “in general a guerrilla struggle begins by some will already made; a prestigious chief raises it for the salvation of his people and this man must work in difficult conditions in some other foreign country”. “Obviously it should start with a conspiratorial task away from the people and a reduced or small group of insiders, if one really intends to start this war from another country or from different and distant regions within the same country.” “Let us think how a guerrilla focus could start”. “Relatively small cores of people choose favourable places for guerrilla warfare”.<sup>33</sup>

As a sample it is enough — “a small group of 30-50 people” to stay “maintaining little contact with the peasants” and that in their preparation have been “removed from the action of the people” is needed to start the guerrilla struggle, the civil war that will lead to the defeat of the regime. It couldn’t be simpler! You can start with almost nothing! We have the beginning of the defeat of the oligarchy within reach, provided we remain “maintaining little contact with the peasants” and “removed from the action of the people”. Party? Program or revolutionary policy towards the peasantry and the people? What for? Instead, what we need is an abstention, a lack of political program, since the best way of “maintaining little contact with the peasants” and keeping ourselves “removed from the action of the people” in a neighbouring country or “a distant province” is not having policy or program of any kind that can force us to intervene in the actions of the mass movement, which is not appropriate if you want to organise the guerrilla. On the other hand Guevara never tires of pointing that a group is sufficient, only one group and a chief, to start the guerrilla struggle, without any previous social or political, peasant or popular support. Nor does he cease to systematically ignore the need for the revolutionary party, with its program and revolutionary policy towards the mass movement with their organisations.

Does it seem strange then the guerrilla failures in Peru or in our country? What is so mysterious that heroic revolutionary militants fall smuggling weapons and organising guerrillas in Salta? Perhaps they haven’t done it according to the orthodoxy of Guevara, away from the people, without contact with the peasants and workers and without the support of any party?

The existence of this revolutionary politics, of the slogans felt by the mass movement, synthesised in a revolutionary program, along with the party that carries them out in intimate connection with the workers and their organisations, is a prerequisite to any revolutionary action, mainly to armed struggle. Otherwise, any action, however small, is transformed into an adventure.

The party and the revolutionary program are the bridge between the subjective cravings of the revolutionary vanguard and the objective needs of the mass movement, without which there is no revolutionary action with possibilities of success. Forgetting these conditions is characteristic of the sectarian currents and of Guevarism.

## The workers and peasants unions

Any leftist militant slightly informed by reading newspapers is used to read that “peasant leagues of Julião”<sup>34</sup> or “mining unions of Sao Paulo” or “NCOs or banking worker unions in Brazil”, “have raised this or that claim”, that the miners’ unions of Oruro, Siglo XX, Catavi, have rebelled against the government and have taken hostages”, the “Chilean CUT started a strike in favour of Cuba against the US invasion of the first socialist country in Latin America”, that “the Argentinian or Uruguayan unions” “declared a plan of struggle” or “began the general strike”, that the “peasant unions of Cuzco have been locked in battle with the military or police reaction”.

Guevara in none of his theoretical works, when referring to the Latin American situation, stops to consider these obvious facts that shape the current landscape of our continent — the existence of large union organisations of masses locked in struggle against the regime of the exploiters. The

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> **Francisco Julião** (1915-1979) was a peasant leader of the mobilisation that gave birth to the “peasant leagues” and land occupation of lands at the beginning of the 1960’s in Pernambuco State, in Brazil’s north east. In 1964 they were repressed by the dictatorship and Julião was gaoled and later on exiled. [Translator’s note.]

Chilean CUT, the Bolivian COB, the Peruvian peasant unions, i.e. the organisations that bring together three quarters of Latin American workers do not exist in Guevara's analysis, strategy or method. We make ours the phrase of Toscanini to the Colon Theatre Orchestra: "Gentlemen, silence is also music", asserting that in politics silence "is also political". Even better, there is a comment that the author made rashly on these organisations, where their existence is considered a negative symptom, a disgrace: "In addition the ideological influence of the populated centres inhibits the guerrilla struggle and gives flight to the peacefully organised mass struggles".<sup>35</sup> About the colossal effort of organisation and struggle of the workers to develop those organisations, he says not a word.

We wholly disagree with Guevara, except that we agree that the existence of large organisations "inhibits the guerrilla struggle". We do not believe, however, that the populated centres originate "peacefully organised mass struggles". And Bolivia? Didn't Guevara recognise that there the oligarchic army was liquidated by the trade unions? And the great insurrectionary struggles of Argentine, Chilean and Uruguayan workers movement? And were the union struggles of the Peruvian or Brazilian peasantry and proletariat always peaceful?

What happens is that Guevara does not realise that the creation of these massive trade unions is the most important step undertaken by the South American working masses.

He commits the same crime towards the trade unions as the Latin American ultra-leftists commit with socialist Cuba — they ignore it because it is not perfect as they want it. Because of the (institutional) defects of the large trade union organisations, we should not commit the political, military, revolutionary crime of ignoring them. They are to the Latin American revolution something as important as the existence of Cuba and it's equally important for us to defend both. The organisations of workers are, like Cuba, great conquests torn from imperialism and the oligarchy by the working masses. Each workers or peasant trade union organisation in Latin America is, at the national level, what Cuba is at a continental scale — a socialist island in the middle of a hostile continent.

This sectarian crime of ignoring the only socialist, proletarian homeland, that each worker recognises as his own in his country (the trade union organisations), is accompanied by Guevara with an encyclopaedic ignorance of the future of these organisations. This future is the same as that of Cuba; imperialism and the oligarchy don't want, cannot and will never admit a socialist Cuba or mass workers and peasants unions. No matter what the institutions are, neither there is, nor there will be a true agreement between Cuba and imperialism. The fate of Cuba and the Latin American unions are parallel, are linked because they are the same: great, fabulous achievements of the Latin American workers. This is why it is criminal the contempt, ignorance and lack of policy by Guevara towards the institutional islands that foretell the future workers' power. It has been these trade unions institutions that prevented so far that all Latin American countries be aligned with the Yankees to defeat Cuba.

Undoubtedly Guevara is right in two aspects. These mass organisations serve to incubate reformist tendencies; negotiations and agreements with the State and the exploiters, as well as to develop the workers bureaucracies. Likewise the development of modern medicine in technical teams bureaucratises medicine, but no one denies that it is progress. Just like the big unions — they are a colossal progress and conquest although they have the danger of becoming bureaucratized.

Furthermore, where such organisations exist it is very difficult to convince an organised worker to do guerrillas. This worker wants to defend and develop his organisation and does not want to be separated from his co-workers. The same is true today in Cuba, as we shall see later. If there is an imperialist attack the defence of Cuba will be from what has been achieved, from the workplaces and through workers organisations and not with guerrillas. The same approach is had by any union activist — he wants to defend and attack from his organisation, which he considers his great victory against the bourgeoisie and imperialism and there is no Guevara to convince him to abandon what has been achieved.

<sup>35</sup> Guevara, Ernesto: "Essence of the guerrilla...", op. cit., p. 57.

This situation forces us to contemplate the whole revolutionary struggle, including armed, from another angle: the existence of large mass organisations is a revolutionary blessing, not a disgrace as for Guevara (“inhibits the guerrilla struggle”). But this blessing we need to take into account not to institutionalise the regime but to see how we defeat it. Praised be the revolutionary potential of Brazil and the crisis of their exploiters that allowed the emergence of NCOs and peasants unions! This must be our battle cry and not the Guevarist grumble. This does not exempt us from having a revolutionary policy towards these mass organisations but, on the contrary, it peremptorily requires us to have it. The only thing that we cannot say or do is what Guevara (how unfortunately!) does, or to shrug our shoulders.

## Wishful thinking or transitional program

“First of all it should be noted that this form of struggle is a method; a method to achieve an end. This end, indispensable and inescapable for every revolutionary is the conquest of political power”.<sup>36</sup> Marxism calls this relationship between the means or methods and the ends, revolutionary program. Hence the importance it gives to the development of a correct program. For this it is essential, first of all, to take into account the situation of the country as a whole, the experiences and situation of the working class, as well as its organisations, the character of the government, the situation of the exploiters and finally the situation of the revolutionaries themselves. From this analysis will emerge the purposes we propose and the means to achieve them. These goals, which are linked to each other and subject to the ultimate goal of taking power, sometimes become means and vice versa.

For example, the taking of lands in Peru is an end, a goal with a means to achieve it: defending it with the armed struggle. But at the same time is a means: the means to accelerate the seizure of power by the workers, because without a workers’ government the peasants will never come to hold the land permanently. Means and ends keep changing places as the revolutionary process deepens. Hence the difficulties when we have to specify the program, which may not be the mere aspiration of desire to take power. The key element, from which we must begin, is what the working masses want and their degree of organisation. We cannot pose power in Peru, where peasants occupy land, with slogans or means such as sliding scale of hours for the workers in the Argentine meatworks or as the mere aspiration to take it. The ends or slogans of the revolutionary program for the mass movement are transitional stages and its achievement are gains used to prepare the subsequent progress and any delay or detention only will only move us away from the ultimate goal: getting power.

The Russian revolution was made raising fundamental purposes: to end the war, to give land to the peasants, to call to a constituent assembly. And to achieve all of this there was the need to impose “all power to the Soviets”. These purposes or slogans were combined differently every month of the year 1917. Precisely here was the genius of Lenin who knew how to achieve the perfect combination of slogans to check mate the bourgeois power and reach the taking of power by the workers.

Mao in China did the same, but without the courage and genius of Lenin — each stage of the Chinese revolution had fundamental and secondary slogans and means tailored to the needs and aspirations of the people. During the Japanese invasion the great task was to resist the invasion and the united front with the Kuomintang itself and Chiang Kai-shek; afterwards the fight against this and finally land reform south of the Yellow [Huang He] River to end up defeating it.

The revolutionary program cannot then be the work of a revolutionary Marxist who contemplates the mirror saying: “We must do guerrillas to take power”. It is, however, the revolutionary answer to the problems faced by the workers, linked to the prospect of taking power. If no such response to the specific problems exists, it isn’t a program but wishful thinking.

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36 Guevara, Ernesto: “Guerrilla warfare...”, op. cit., p. 41.

Just in case we are told that the immediate revolutionary program is the insurrection by the guerrillas and that's enough, let's follow our author. Perhaps he doesn't pose us the need for a political party and politics at the start of the guerrilla warfare, but for later. What better to know the policy advocated by Che to develop the guerrilla than the propaganda he advises to carry out: "The propaganda that would be more effective [...] is oral by radio". "On radio it must be given above all, live news of fighting, meetings of all kinds, murders committed by the repression and also doctrinal guidelines, practical teachings to the civilian population, and from time to time, speeches by leaders of the revolution".<sup>37</sup> "A task of great importance for women is teaching literacy and even revolutionary theory, to the peasants of the area essentially, but also to the revolutionary soldiers".<sup>38</sup> Specifically we must propagandise everything — history, theory, teaching the alphabet, popularising wins, etc. Only one activity should not be propagandised — the program, the political slogans of the revolutionary army to seize power. These slogans and this program don't exist for Guevara. This is the explanation.

## The program for our continent

It happens that Guevara reverses the terms; because he has neither a program nor slogans to meet the needs and mobilise the workers for these purposes, but on the contrary, he has ends adequate to a means or method— the guerrilla warfare. Guevara puts the cart before the horse. This is how when he defends a method, guerrilla warfare, as the only adequate, he finds that it must be conducted in a rural environment and hence the agrarian revolution is for him the third leg of his revolutionary table. The agrarian revolution is the only programmatic slogan that Guevara takes into account but only in function of the guerrillas and not the latter in function of depending on the former. That's why instead of a transitional program, variable depending on the objective circumstances, he gives us an immovable dogma of only three tasks— taking power, guerrilla warfare and agrarian revolution. It is a methodological crime what is committed here, since precisely the revolutionary program varies from country to country in Latin America although they unite in an uneven process of a single revolution.

Guevara points as a fundamental feature in favour of the guerrilla the continental character of the struggle. But he has never considered the common task that unites the Latin American revolution. In short: he has no slogans or tasks to respond or channel this continental fight! We do have them— Unification of the Latin American republics in a Federation of Socialist and Workers' Republics and immediate federation with Cuba of any country that is free of imperialism.

In all Latin American countries the working masses have raised the realisation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. This means they have raised tasks covering popular sectors of different social formation. These are tasks for the people as a whole — working class, petty bourgeoisie, semi proletariat, unemployed and peasants, sometimes lower sectors of the bourgeoisie — and not for a single sector. Although these tasks vary from country to country, in general terms we can point out four kinds of great democratic tasks: agrarian revolution, national liberation from imperialism, democracy (the right to vote, freedom of press and assembly for all workers and popular organisations), urban reform (right to housing). It is false to say that in all Latin American countries the axis of the revolution is the struggle for land for the peasants and against feudalism as understood by Guevara, who accepts that what varies is only the character of the agrarian struggle in each country.

We believe, however, that the study of each country demands a different combination of tasks and struggles. First of all, we do not believe that the struggle against feudalism is prevalent in the Latin American countryside. On the contrary, the fight against agrarian capitalism is almost as important as the struggle against semi-feudal or semi-slavery remnants. Cuba is the best example; there was no feudalism but great agrarian capitalism. But this difference within the same agrarian

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 126.

revolution hasn't the same importance in Peru than in Argentina, as Guevara believes. In many Latin American countries the struggle for national liberation, for formal democracy or for urban reform, comes to have greater importance at a given time than the agrarian revolution. It cannot be otherwise, since you cannot compare Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, with about 70 percent of urban population with Peru, which has just opposite numbers or 70 percent of rural population. Nor can you say with Guevara, that the only thing that changes is the peasant mentality, but that basically all peasants are the same, when the peasants in north-eastern Brazil are practically starving and Argentinian or Uruguayan farmers are practically millionaires.

These bourgeois democratic tasks are always combined, since its inception, with workers, socialist tasks. The Latin American working class, not just the urban population, from the beginning of the revolutionary struggle plays a role that can be predominant.

This combination of democratic and socialist tasks also varies from country to country. Only this specific study at a given moment of a revolutionary process can afford us to point out how these different tasks are combined, and only then can we come to formulate the program of the revolution in that country.

In general terms, we can say that the agrarian problem becomes less important as it descends towards the south of Latin America, and other bourgeois-democratic and socialist workers problems acquire it. Specifically, the struggles for national liberation, for formal democracy, urban reform or direct gains of the working class, take highest prevalence that the agrarian revolution itself.

Currently this is so in Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and to a large extent it is so in Brazil, which summarises all the contradictions of the Latin American revolution in its own territory.

## The historical experience

“We are interested in the case of a group that is progressing in the struggle against the established power, whether colonial or not, that becomes established and progresses as in rural areas as its sole basis. In all these cases, whatever the ideological structure that encourages the struggle, the economic base is given by the desire for land tenure. [...] The China of Mao begins as an outbreak of the southern workers”.<sup>39</sup>

No matter how hard we seek in all of Guevara's works for other historical references, we will not find them or, as he says, they hold “no interest for this analysis” (!), and the quotes are unfortunately of extreme poverty and danger.

Guevara has systematically ignored the experiences of annihilation of the regular armed forces by the action of the urban and workers mass movement. However, we cannot forget them because they are of incalculable wealth and value for our conclusions. In general terms, we can say that the armed forces of the exploiters so far in this century have been defeated by two means — the insurrectional action of the urban and workers masses (whose relevant examples are Russia, Germany, Spain, Hungary and Bolivia) and guerrilla action of peasants, petty bourgeois or the underclass masses (in the cases of Yugoslavia, Indochina, North Korea, Cuba and Algeria). Any serious study of the methods for sweeping the repressive forces of the exploiters must start from these two great experiences.

Of the two the more expedient, categorical and less expensive, is the insurrectional action of the urban and workers mass movement. These are always resolved in a relatively quick fight, given its geographical setting, the cities. The city is par excellence a place of resolutions and lightning-fast communications. The Russian October Revolution triumphed in fact in one night, the Spanish revolution in seven days and the Bolivian in three. To this speed it has been counter argued (in the case of the first), that the previous work of destruction of the army was fulfilled by the German army and all the Russian revolutionaries had to do was defeat an army already defeated. However, this was not so in the case of Bolivia and Spain. Moreover, revolutionary Russia was able to defeat

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<sup>39</sup> Guevara, Ernesto: “Essence of the guerrilla...”, op. cit., p. 41.

21 nations almost without much struggle due to the action of the mass, workers movement of the imperialist countries. The French Navy turned in favour of the Russian Revolution despite coming from winning a war. While recognising the influence that a defeat has for a regime, including its armed forces, we believe this is secondary, as evidenced by the examples of Spain and Bolivia. The key is the degree of combativeness, awareness and organisation of the urban masses movement and the decomposition of the bourgeois regime with its forces of repression.

In all these cases the mass movement apparently acquires a more or less spontaneous character. Suddenly the working class faces or destroys the regime forces, as it happened in February 1917 in Russia, in the Spain of 1936 and in Bolivia. We say apparently because all these countries had many years of previous revolutionary education of the workers movement (in Russia the Socialist Party and especially its Bolshevik faction; in Spain anarchism and secondly socialism; in Bolivia over ten years of Trotskyist preaching against the armed forces and in favour of the workers' and peasants' militias). The spontaneous character of this struggle is given by the fact that it is led by a movement, a current of opinion and middle leaders of that current, and not by a leader, leadership or centralising agency. The Russian Revolution of October, for example, was perfectly organised; here nothing was left for improvisation. The other features of these great revolutions are: crisis of the regime (the struggle among exploiting sectors has come to a head); the situation of the armed forces, which not being mercenary or foreign reflect society as a whole, which makes its internal crisis to burst out, the product of the contradictions between its different sectors.

The victories obtained by guerrilla warfare are very important for the experience they have left us and are far from the picture Guevara makes of them. It is false to begin, that "the China of Mao begins as an outbreak of the southern workers". The workers movement and the Communist Party of China had everything going in their favour to repeat the experience of the Russian revolution and confront the bourgeoisie in a revolution in the cities, especially in Shanghai, for it to be almost immediate. They had control of the workers movement, part of the army and the peasant movement in southern China. Instead the Communist Party of China capitulated by suggestion of Stalin to the bourgeoisie and its leader, Chiang Kai-shek. What the Communist Party of China didn't do (to face and crush the bourgeoisie and its party), the bourgeoisie did it with the workers.

That's when suddenly Stalin's ally, the Kuomintang and Chiang Kai-Shek, crushed in a bloodbath the proletariat and the Communist Party of Shanghai. This defeat charged to the account of Stalinism, forced the Communist Party of China to take refuge in peasant organisations and start the guerrilla warfare. We shouldn't forget that it already controlled the peasant movement and was a national organisation of great strength. The forced march northward is forced, so as to not fall into the hands of Chiang Kai-shek, and follows two fundamental reasons— to seek a better geographic area for the guerrilla warfare and have a border, i.e. a favourable rear-guard. Specifically, in China the guerrillas are started by a strong centralised party, with great support of the mass movement and which to survive must seek the support of Russia, lying on its borders because the full support of the peasantry is not sufficient to withstand the onslaughts of the reaction. The Communist Party of China at every stage of its guerrilla struggle changed the focus of its political program, which is not the agrarian reform for many years and instead it becomes very important the fight against Japanese invaders. That is, dealing with foreign or mercenary armies.

In Indochina we have a similar situation; it isn't in Saigon where the revolutionary movement can win, which was already very strong with the Communist and Trotskyist parties, but in the north relying on a neighbouring country, revolutionary China, and not where the large concentrations of workers are.

Algeria is also a confirmation of these rules. Guerrilla warfare is started by a strongly centralised armed apparatus of the political party that draws 90 percent of the Arab population, the ANM [Algerian National Movement]. It is on behalf of this movement that the insurrection is called. Furthermore, it has the continued support of Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, countries that border it.

In a separate chapter we will study the case Cuba, which does nothing but confirm these general premises of every victorious guerrilla movement— before starting guerrilla warfare the absence of large mass organisations, trade unions, urban soviets and a revolutionary situation in the cities is compensated, with a colossal development of other subjective factors. Specifically, in all countries in which guerrilla warfare triumphed we found: 1) that the armed forces of the regime are foreign or mercenary; 2) There is a strong party and leaders recognised by the mass movement that initiate guerrilla; 3) The weakness of the domestic objective situation is offset by a massive aid from neighbouring countries.

These conclusions are categorical. They are confirmed by the Yugoslav experience that Guevara doesn't quote and the guerrilla failures which are numerous and that our author does not analyse. The Yugoslav guerrilla started based on a very strong mass party, the Communist Party; had the indirect border support of the Russo-German war and the Great War in general. Among the noteworthy failures we must quote the Spanish attempts. The lack of support for guerrilla attempts in Spain by the neighbouring countries and by the large mass organisations aborted any experience of this type, even though the country has all the ideal conditions for the guerrillas.

In short, we know of no country where a guerrilla group has succeeded according to the Guevarist schema. We do not say that this is impossible in the future, only pointing out that historical experience shows otherwise: for the guerrillas to be able to start with probabilities of success were necessary factors Guevara doesn't even mention, mainly the existence of a large mass party and the support from neighbouring countries. That is to say, where a group of brave men have the least chance to succeed is precisely in the guerrillas, as opposed to large urban clashes where the initiative of a small group that relies on the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses can do wonders. More than any other form of struggle, the guerrilla demands the existence of a strong centralised party or of large recognised leaders of the mass movement. By forgetting these clear indications given by historical experience Guevara is committing a teaching crime— of creating serious illusions about the ease of making the guerrillas and about the objective and subjective conditions it demands.

We may be possible be told: “Guevara does not know well the historical experiences but he does the Cuban, and its conclusions follow it”. Let's see.

## The Cuban experience and the future of Latin America

The Cuban revolution is no exception to the general laws that have characterised all countries that were freed through guerrilla warfare. As in Yugoslavia, China, Indochina and Algeria in Cuba we have: first, a mercenary army hated by all the people. Second, a leader and movement of the petty bourgeois masses, Fidel Castro and the 26 of July Movement. Third, a colossal direct or indirect support of the closest countries: Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica and an important sector of Yankee imperialism itself. We make it clear that Guevara accepts almost all of the factors we pointed out, to which he considers the uniqueness of the Cuban revolution, but he gives little or directly different importance than what we give ourselves. Let us dwell a little on this point. For Che Guevara the fact that the Cuban army was mercenary was an impediment to the revolutionary process. However this had and has a contradictory result in Latin America. It is much harder to face a national army than a mercenary one. No worker likes to attack and kill an army formed by his brothers. So to start the frontal armed struggle it is much better for it to be mercenary, an enemy in its entirety of the working people.

On the second point is where our differences with Guevara are much larger. He gives a fundamental importance to the existence of Fidel Castro; he insists it was a triumph led by a genius. We agree with Guevara that Fidel was a genius, but we totally disagree with the criticism he makes him: to have announced the approximate time of initiation of the guerrilla struggle against the main technical standard which is surprise. The phrase of Fidel that Che criticises is “in the year 1956 we will be free or we will be martyrs”. We consider it a formidable slogan that made the

Cuban petty bourgeoisie stand against the regime. Like the other “technical errors” this answered deeper political reasons and needs: to mobilise, to enthuse the masses who supported him. That is precisely the genius of Fidel; to have always found the formula, the appropriate slogan to the political end, even if this were opposed to guerrilla standards.

The revolution was made by a united front of all classes, institutions and parties not directly linked to the Batista regime. We insist: all classes, institutions and parties. The vanguard of this revolution was a great party and leader of the petty bourgeois masses, the 26 of July Movement and Fidel Castro, heir and disciple in turn of another great movement and petty bourgeois leader, the movement of Chibás.<sup>40</sup> The unequalled political genius of Fidel is rooted in the rich experience of a Cuban political class, the urban petty bourgeoisie, of which Chibás and Fidel were its highest expressions. Guevara and Baran<sup>41</sup> recognise, for example, that the landowners supported the guerrillas or were neutral toward it. But they forget the bourgeois parties that supported them in full at first and two colossal institutions— the Catholic Church and Freemasonry. Baran admits only to the opposition of the Catholic Church to Batista and forgets that not only opposed it but supported Fidel just like the Rotary Club did. If Guevara leaves on the shelf most of the bourgeois institutions or political parties, he frankly loses his step when it comes to the popular institutions or classes which supported the guerrillas. He never tires of saying that the Cuban or foreign example indicate that the guerrillas or guerrilla soldier since their inception are agrarian revolutionary peasants, “[...] but that, in the first fight, the peasant, centre and core of the Rebel Army, is the same as it is today in the mountains, proudly owner of his plot [...]”.<sup>42</sup>

Everything indicates, even Guevara himself, that it is not so. Baran, for example, believes that the guerrilla stronghold process was the proletariat of the large sugar mills. But both Guevara as Baran trip when they acknowledge that the landowners supported or were neutral towards the guerrillas. We do not believe, though Guevara swears by it, that the landowners supported or looked sympathetically to their exploited peasants wielding weapons for the agrarian revolution. We do not believe, we insist, they have been so wrong. Like any schematic, dogmatic, Guevara contradicts himself when he goes to act or recount what he did. Then schemes become shattered by reality. Let’s see what he tells us about how they did the training school in Cuba: “The important part that should never be neglected in the school of recruits is the indoctrination; important because men arrive without a clear understanding of why they come, only with vague concepts about freedom, freedom of the press, etc., without any logical basis”.<sup>43</sup>

In these few lines, said casually, there is a much deeper, serious, responsible, analysis of the Cuban historical and social experience than in all of Che Guevara’s revolutionary works together. What class nurtures these recruits of the Cuban guerrilla who “arrive without a clear understanding”, “only with vague concepts about freedom...”? There can be no doubt, it is the landholders bourgeois youth and the petty bourgeoisie, and not the peasantry or the agricultural proletariat that, if anything characterises them, do not exactly have fuzzy concepts of freedom, but quite specific concepts about what they want, mainly the peasant who knows he wants land and food. Guevara shot down all his interpretation with one sentence. Besides, it is not true that these class sectors joined the guerrillas “without any logical basis”, but rather they responded to a deep logic that was the basic program of Fidel’s movement: Down with Batista! Let’s get democratic freedoms for the people! Once again we must refer to the genius of Fidel, who in this case knew how to create a fabulous guerrilla united front of all anti-Batista classes applying the principle that at every stage of the mass movement one must specify the main political transitional slogans

40 **Eduardo Chibás Ribas** (1907–1951) was a Cuban politician who denounced corruption and gangsterism rampant during the governments of Ramón Grau and Carlos Prío which preceded the Batista era. He believed corruption was the most important problem Cuba faced. [Translator’s note.]

41 **Paul Alexander Baran** (1909-1964), was a Russian born American Marxist economist, and professor in Stanford University. In 1961 he published the pamphlet *Reflections on the Cuban Revolution* in the *Monthly Review Press*. [Translator’s note.]

42 Guevara, Ernesto: “Cuba: exceptional case...?” op. cit., p. 62.

43 Guevara, Ernesto: “Guerrilla warfare...”, op. cit., p. 148.

to mobilise the vanguard classes. Regarding the third point we agree with Guevara in that US imperialism supported or turned a blind eye to the guerrilla movement. What Guevara does not say is that several neighbouring countries (Venezuela, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico) also supported the 26 of July Movement and Fidel Castro.

Overall, the in-depth analysis of the Cuban revolution, the great Cuban revolution, can never lead to draw the conclusions Guevara draws for Latin America. In Cuba we had a united front of the landowners, the bourgeoisie, and the petty bourgeoisie, working people as a whole, Yankee imperialism, the nearby countries, Freemasonry, the Catholic Church and the larger bourgeois parties.

Let's suppose in Argentina under Frondizi<sup>44</sup> a guerrilla in Tucumán, supported by Peronism and with Peron or Cooke<sup>45</sup> directing it in the mountains, with the support of Brazil, Chile and Bolivia; Kennedy, the Catholic Church, Freemasonry, the UCR, Argentine and Democratic Socialism and the conservatives. Or for example, a guerrilla in Brazil today against Castello Branco, with Goulart or Brizola in the mountains, with the support of PTB [Brazilian Labour Party], the PSD [Social Democratic Party] and Kubistcheb,<sup>46</sup> the church, Freemasonry, Johnson, Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela, landowners of the Northwest and Sao Paulo's bourgeoisie. That's what happened in Cuba and what will never, ever happen again. That's what you have to tell every young Guevarist who risks his life — the Cuban experience never again will repeat; never again will such exceptional conditions happen. That is, Cuba confirms the historical experience of all countries where guerrilla warfare succeeded and at the same time the impossibility to repeat that experience. This is not to say that in Latin America guerrillas and armed struggles will not take place in the future, but they will follow a pattern completely and utterly different from Cuba.

To find the specific form of armed struggle that each of our countries requires, we will need a comprehensive study of the stage that each of them lives and, following the brilliant example of Fidel in Cuba, we will need, first and foremost, to synthesise this analysis in a clear national revolutionary political program. This is what the example of Cuba demands from us and not mere copies of something that has nothing to do with our national realities.

## The United Front and the revolutionary party

We have already seen that Guevara doesn't even consider the need for a revolutionary party linked to the mass movement to start the guerrilla. At best, he speaks of progressive parties and the opportunity for such a party to manifest in deeds. That's all.

For us, however, the problem of the revolutionary party is essential. Today we find ourselves with two parallel phenomena caused by the Cuban revolution — a colossal rise of the mass movement that leads us towards a situation of dual power and the emergence of a large petty bourgeois, workers and peasant vanguard, who raises the issue of the revolution. Guevara with his theory of the guerrilla group and his ignorance of the revolutionary party, all he does is encourage the dispersion of this vanguard in many preparatory guerrilla groups as aspiring Fidel Castros among us. The dream of the guerrilla has become almost a tragic fashion in the petty bourgeois revolutionary circles. On the other hand, this vanguard is isolated from the mass movement, from the study of reality and from the formulation of a revolutionary program. The only thing that the heroes who are willing to fight contribute is their unflinching courage.

Unfortunately this is a path that leads to the defeat of this vanguard. To prevent it or to ensure these defeats bear fruit through self-criticism, there is no other way than to propose that the revolutionary vanguard must join together in a revolutionary united front as a prelude to the

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44 **Arturo Frondizi** (1908–1995) was elected President of Argentina between 1958, and 1962. He was overthrown by a military *coup d'état*. [Translator's note.]

45 **John William Cooke** (1919–1968), Peronist leader who, after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, became the ideologist for the filo-Castrist wing of Peronism. [Translator's note.]

46 **Juscelino Kubitschek** (1902–1976) was President of Brazil from 1956 to 1961. [Translator's note.]

formation of a single party of the Latin American revolution. The revolutionary vanguard should aim to work together in the mass movement with its recognised organisations in order to fight the opportunistic, reactionary leaderships that tend to “institutionalise” the workers organisations. The revolutionary united front has this precise objective — to dispute the leadership of the workers to opportunism. At the same time this task is combined with two others: to elevate the spontaneous vanguard of workers to a consciously revolutionary position and to the struggle for power to the workers themselves. To achieve these Herculean tasks there is no other way than to work fiercely united among the workers. This unity can only be achieved if we are developing the revolutionary program that the masses feel as theirs because it responds to their aspirations or needs. Therefore the great task posed to the vanguard is to join a revolutionary united front and develop a common program to work on the workers, peasant or urban movement, which will depend on the country in question.

And the armed struggle? And guerrilla warfare? Precisely it will be task for this united front and party of the revolution to set in accordance with the program, the timing and form to be taken by the armed struggle. What it should never do is to accept a dogma instead of developing a program tailored to that reality. Put bluntly: the revolutionary united front should reject the dogma of guerrilla warfare as the sole method and adjust their actions, including armed action, to the development of a program and to the experience of the mass movement and the vanguard itself organised in a united party of the revolution.

### The dogma of the three inexorable stages

“The guerrilla war or war of liberation will have, generally, three stages. First, the strategic defence, where the small force that flees bites the enemy; it has not taken shelter to carry out a passive defence in a small circle, but rather its defence consists of the limited attacks that it can perform. Past this, it comes down to a point of equilibrium in which the possibilities of enemy and guerrilla action stabilise. Then the final moment of overrunning the repressive army leading to the capture of the big cities, large decisive encounters, the total annihilation of the adversary”.<sup>47</sup> “[...] in the defeat of the army in frontal struggle, in the taking of the cities from the countryside”,<sup>48</sup> “[...] that links with the peasant masses, that grows from low to high, that destroys the army in frontal struggle, that takes the cities from the countryside”.<sup>49</sup>

And thus we could go on *ad infinitum* — the guerrilla struggle is, without exception, the only correct revolutionary method in Latin America and it should always follow the same pattern, the same three phases. First, a small nucleus begins the guerrillas; second, the guerrilla nuclei become a popular army that clashes in a war with the official army; third, once defeated in the countryside only then the frontal struggle in the cities begins.

The most important analysis a revolutionary leadership must do is to specify the stages of a revolutionary process and the tasks suited to them.

The stage is characterised by the country’s relations with imperialism, the classes among themselves and with the state, the situation of the exploiters, the movement of the working class with its organisms and officials. Based on these four elements of reality the character of the stage is defined and from this character the revolutionary tasks to carry out. It is not the same the stage subsequent to the triumph of Odría’s<sup>50</sup> reactionary coup in Peru, with the total defeat of the workers’ and peasants’ movement and unity of the bourgeoisie behind Odría, that the current colossal rise of the peasant movement and of rupture among the bourgeois sectors. Guevara, by pointing out a

47 Guevara, Ernesto: “Guerrilla warfare...”, op. cit., p. 47.

48 Guevara, Ernesto: “Cuba: exceptional case...?” op. cit., p. 61.

49 Ibid, p. 61.

50 **Manuel Arturo Odría** (1896–1974) was the President of Peru from 1948 to 1956, essentially ruling as a military dictator. [Translator’s note.]

fixed, unchanging order of tasks, indirectly tells us that the stages are the same, fixed, inexorable, immovable.

His schema saves us from racking our brains to clarify these stages, i.e., the relations between classes in the country and the tasks we need to take up. For example, why should we despair thinking about what we would do in Brazil when Goulart felt? We already had the solution — the first stage requires us to prepare the guerrillas. This is then what we have to do now and what we will have to do in 10 years, if we have not yet entered the first stage. As we see, the Guevarist formula has all the advantages except one — it serves absolutely no purpose, or rather only to cause direct or indirect disasters.

European Marxism had and still largely has a schematic conception of the stages, when asserting that armed struggle is the culmination of the rise of the mass movement, essentially workers and urban, and that the previous stages are evolutionary, ideological, organisational, political. They could not imagine that the armed struggle could and should be used anytime and with any class sector at the forefront and at any stage of the class struggle. Hence it made a fetish of propaganda and the gradual development of the mass movement and the working class. Guevara has made a fetish the armed struggle, its stages and a variant of it, the guerrillas, as well as of a class — the peasantry.

For Guevara, like for European Marxists, there are neither variations nor combinations of tasks. Always, always, we must begin with a guerrilla nucleus which is always transformed in a popular army, and eventually it ends up disputing the cities to the oligarchic army. Guevara doesn't even dream that, for example, it is quite possible that the peasants of Cuzco organise first a peasant army, the peasant militias, which could use guerrilla warfare in greater or lesser degree. In Guevara's conception does not enter the possibility that the revolution in Brazil went through urban political-propaganda struggle, to develop NCOs organisations and its ties with the workers, instead of organising the guerrilla. That is to say, if this happened, before the guerrillas, we had the struggle within the very own cities. The revolutionary stages and their combination with the armed struggle vary from country to country and are always different, because the combinations of classes of the revolution and its stages are different. That is, there are no specific forms or ways of making the revolution and the armed struggle.

Here it is necessary to make a fundamental clarification on the Khrushchevist theory of the specific roads to socialism. Under that name hides a reformist position which authorises each communist party to have a policy of class collaboration in their countries. We believe, with Guevara, there is no other way to get to socialism than the class struggle and its inevitable corollaries, the armed struggle and the destruction of the regime's forces, although these general laws have specific forms of application from country to country and from stage to stage.

The forms the armed struggle must acquire should vary with the stages of the class struggle and the revolutionary who takes an oath to use at every stage a single method is giving a great advantage to the reaction. A true Marxist will use the form of armed struggle which best suits the development of the struggle in his country. Taking hostages in Bolivia or Argentina, accompanied by armed defence, can be explosive if it's massive and well organised. Why would we deny this possibility? Terrorism gave great results to Spanish or Argentinian anarchist workers movement, and also in other countries. The armed insurrection and the insurrectionary general strike also gave a great result based on workers' and peasants' militias or defence committees. Discovering what is the best way to address the armed struggle is a must, but we must start from a premise: there is no fixed way from here to eternity, but rather it varies from country to country and from stage to stage of the class struggle.

## **Cuba: an exception**

The funny thing about Che is that he thinks that there is an exceptional country where neither should the method of guerrilla warfare, nor its stages be applied. That country is Cuba.

Our author envisages the defence of Cuba, before an alleged attack of imperialism, as follows: “[...] each peasant during the day will be a peaceful farmer of his land and in the evening will be the dreaded guerrilla, scourge of the enemy forces. Something similar will happen with the workers; the best among them will be also prepared [...]. Each social type, however, will have different tasks; the peasant will do the typical struggle of the guerrilla [...] the worker, however, has in his favour the fact of being within a fortress of enormous dimensions and efficiency, as is a modern city, and at the same time the difficulty of not having mobility [...]”.<sup>51</sup>

Guevara contradicts himself phrase after phrase. First of all he pulls the wool over our eyes, since a peasant who “during the day is a peaceful farmer of his land” is anything but a guerrilla, as he has explained. This peasant can be part of the peasant militia, of a defence committee or member of a clandestine army, but what he will never be, while still attached to his work, is a guerrilla.

What jumps out at first glance, is that Guevara’s plan to defend Cuba goes against all Guevarist’s arguments.

First of all he intends to confront an army not yet defeated, freshly landed, in the cities, contrary to everything he said about the impossibility of defeating it in the cities if previously has not been defeated in the countryside. To this it may be argued that it is done so because the working class is already armed by the revolutionary government. We respond to this objection by asking a question that is the quintessence of this polemics: If the working class of any Latin American country, in order to defend their conquests or to get new ones, manage to get armed, if it cannot confront from the city the weak national army, how will the Cuban working class confront a huge invasion army? Asked another way — can the Bolivian experience be repeated? If we do not believe that the Cuban working class for telluric reasons is different from the rest of the Latin American working class, the answer cannot be anything but: Yes, you can address the defeat of national armies from the cities and the only problem is how to arm the working class and how to weaken and anarchise the forces of repression. There are no technical reasons that are valid, such as in the cities you cannot fight an army that has not been previously defeated in the countryside.

We only need to add that we believe that to arm the working class only a correct policy is needed.

Guevara, as usual when he doesn’t theorise, when he has to face a concrete experience, he contradicts himself. Given the current organisations of the Cuban working masses and the possibility of invasion, he doesn’t ignore them, as he advised us, until we defeat the invading army in the countryside through guerrilla warfare. On the contrary, he relies on them to face the new armed struggle of the Cuban masses. He is quite right; he does what we insist we have to do in Latin America — take into account past militancy and organisation of the mass movement, whether urban or rural, without making a fetish of any social or geographical area, or of any stage or form of armed struggle.

Nor do we agree with Guevara to abandon a schema to fall into another. We’re not sure if the invasion forces are very numerous, more than half a million Yankee soldiers, for example, what the correct tactical armed struggle should be. Perhaps guerrilla warfare made by a colossal guerrilla army of masses and not the defence of cities. Only the study of reality and its changes may indicate us the correct method, since there is no dogma valid to the class struggle, nor to its maximum expression, the armed struggle.

## The class character of Guevarism

Guevara quotes Lenin systematically with regard to the problem of the State to fortify his positions. He introduces us to Lenin in profile. The genius of Lenin — Trotsky used to say — is not only reflected in the fact that he led the October Revolution, but also that he knew to back down in Brest-Litovsk. We have the same to tell Guevarists — Lenin’s genius is not only reflected in his

<sup>51</sup> Guevara, Ernesto: “Guerrilla warfare...”, op. cit., p. 184.

theoretical works against the opportunists on the role of the bourgeois state and its armed forces, but in his ruthless criticism of the sectarians.

Sectarianism is one of the worst plagues of the revolutionary movement and it is a colossal historical merit of Leninism to have fought it ruthlessly as the flipside of opportunism.

Shortly after the Russian Revolution within the world communist movement arose a current called communist left, sectarian, which believed that as the Russian revolution had triumphed through the slogan “All Power to the Soviets”, we had to do the same in other countries — Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Argentina — not working in the recognised organisations of the workers. Nothing could be easier. What do we need the study of reality and the work in the workers movement for, if we had the perfect formula? Hadn’t the Bolsheviks seized power with this slogan?

The surprise was that Trotsky and Lenin began a violent polemic against these Left Communists demanding they adjust their slogans, program, to the reality of each country and of the workers. In Germany there was no time to build soviets and what it had to be done was to join with the Socialists for common tasks against the bosses and to develop the factory committees, the organisations that the German workers knew. The Left Communists were amazed — Lenin and Trotsky who had taken power, who had made the revolution with the slogan “All Power to the Soviets” refused to extend and apply this slogan indiscriminately and demanded a thorough study of each national reality. The conclusion of the Left Communists was that Lenin and Trotsky were opportunists, hopeless reformists. The latter pointed out how ultra-leftism is a product of the petty bourgeois despair; the attempt to replace reality by revolutionary will.

Today we find in Latin America a similar social political phenomenon — Guevarism, the sectarian, ultra-leftist current of the Latin American Castroist movement. As in Cuba the power was taken through guerrilla warfare, and the formation of a guerrilla army, this new ultra-leftist current raises the banner of the guerrilla instead of the soviets and strives to ignore the work in the organised mass movement. Like the Left Communists they try to absolve themselves from studying the reality of each country and of working in the mass movement by mechanically applying the method which already triumphed in Cuba. With an aggravating factor — the leaders of this new sectarian, ultra-leftist current are those leaders of the Latin American revolutionary process.

It is no coincidence that Guevara is the leader or theoretician of this current and that Fidel supports him. Their entire past explains this role. In Cuba, trade unions were collateral of the Batista regime and the petty bourgeois revolutionary movement had to see them justifiably with deep hatred. Fidel, forced by circumstances, has ignored the work in the workers’ organisations, although he tried a direct work on the working class from the 26 of July Movement. This was not serious for the reasons already mentioned — the great mass movement was the 26 of July Movement itself and the workers organisations were chained to the regime. Guevara made his first political learning as “opposition” in our country, as a mortal enemy of the organisations and the workers movement as it was, as Peronism. That is, their past leads them to totally ignore the formidable role of organisations of the Latin American workers’ and peasants’ movement. Here they also generalise a unique experience, which is not repeated in the rest of Latin America where trade unions are not transmission belts of the oligarchic regime, but on the contrary, their mortal enemies, as opposed to what happened in Cuba.

Every analogy is very dangerous, because never two human phenomena occur in the same way. The advantage of Guevarism is that the desperate petty bourgeoisie and the underclass, social base of Guevarist sectarianism, are relatively positive in the Latin American revolutionary process and in some countries may come to play a vanguard role; but unfortunately in Latin America the guerrillas are becoming in many countries a sure way to isolate the petty bourgeois and underclass vanguard from the mass movement and organisations. The examples of Hugo Blanco or Juliao are relevant. These two leaders coming from the middle class have been much more useful than hundreds of petty bourgeois in their countries who were isolated for months or years in order to prepare the guerrillas. They joined the mass movement, helping to organise it, penetrating it and fulfilling a leading role. Any petty bourgeois revolutionary can be a Hugo Blanco or a Juliao to the

extent that they join the mass movement. If they are capable of this, and subsequently of finding the right tactics, which cannot be other than a happy specific combination of armed struggle and mass organisation that matches the country, the personal future of that revolutionary petty bourgeois, and, what is more important, of the country and Latin America, is assured. Otherwise, this will be bleak, plagued with disasters for ignoring the mass movement and the reality of our countries.

## How Guevara quotes Lenin

All these problems were studied by Lenin and are woefully neglected by Guevarists. Lenin in his work on the guerrillas never tires of pointing that this is only one method among many others and to know whether or not its application fits, a study of reality is required, just as we have said.

“It recognises the most varied forms of struggle; and it does not ‘concoct’ them, but only generalises, organises, gives conscious expression to those forms of struggle of the revolutionary classes which arise of themselves in the course of the movement.” “[Marxism] continually gives rise to new and more varied methods of defence and attack. Marxism, therefore, positively does not reject any form of struggle. Under no circumstances does Marxism confine itself to the forms of struggle possible and in existence at the given moment only, recognising as it does that new forms of struggle, unknown to the participants of the given period, *inevitably* arise as the given social situation, changes. In this respect Marxism *learns*, if we may so express it, from mass practice, and makes no claim whatever to *teach* the masses forms of struggle invented by ‘systematisers’ in the seclusion of their studies.”<sup>52</sup>

“In the second place, Marxism demands an absolutely *historical* examination of the question of the forms of struggle. To treat this question apart from the concrete historical situation betrays a failure to understand the rudiments of dialectical materialism. At different stages of economic evolution, depending on differences in political, national-cultural, living and other conditions, different forms of struggle come to the fore and become the principal forms of struggle; and in connection with this, the secondary, auxiliary forms of struggle undergo change in their turn. To attempt to answer yes or no to the question whether any particular means of struggle should be used, without making a detailed examination of the concrete situation of the given movement at the given stage of its development, means completely to abandon the Marxist position.”<sup>53</sup>

The genius of Lenin, like that of Mao, could not help but noticing that the class that often wants to use as sole means the guerrillas are the outcasts, the lumpen. “It is said that guerrilla warfare brings the class-conscious proletarians into close association with degraded, drunken riff-raff. That is true.”<sup>54</sup>

“The lumpen proletariat forms the majority of the Red Army [...] as a result of this, a political mentality of errant insurgents has emerged.”<sup>55</sup>

None of this scares Lenin, who points out, however, that what distinguishes the revolutionary Marxists is the fact of using all methods, including guerrilla, appropriate to the class that is at the vanguard and the situation the country is going through, but subject to the party of the proletariat and its socialist objectives. In other words, Lenin gives fundamental importance to the existence of a revolutionary Marxist party and its objectives. The guerrilla experience has made a modification to this Leninist position — with large mass revolutionary parties it is possible to take power and start the guerrillas, but it has not eliminated the urgent need for these parties to exist:

52 V.I. Lenin: “Guerrilla Warfare”, 30 September 1906, *Lenin Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1965, Moscow, Volume 11, p.213.

53 Ibid., p.214.

54 Ibid., p.221.

55 Resolution written for a conference of the Communist Party organisations of the IV Red Army in December 1929, which together with other similar quotes were subsequently amended and summarised in the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. Quoted by several historians of the Communist Party of China and in Hong Kong by Hsinmin Chu-panshe, 1949, p.14 and 15.

“But it only means that the party of the proletariat can never regard guerrilla warfare as the only, or even as the chief, method of struggle; it means that this method must be subordinated to other methods, that it must be commensurate with the chief methods of warfare, and must be ennobled by the enlightening and organising influence of socialism. And without this *latter* condition, *all*, positively all, methods of struggle in bourgeois society bring the proletariat into close association with the various non-proletarian strata above and below it and, if left to the spontaneous course of events, become frayed, corrupted and prostituted. Strikes, if left to the spontaneous course of events, become corrupted into “alliances” — agreements between the workers and the masters *against* the consumers. Parliament becomes corrupted into a brothel, where a gang of bourgeois politicians barter wholesale and retail “national freedom”, “liberalism”, “democracy”, republicanism, anti-clericalism, socialism and all other wares in demand. A newspaper becomes corrupted into a public pimp, into a means of corrupting the masses, of pandering to the low instincts of the mob, and so on and so forth. Social-Democracy knows of no universal methods of struggle, such as would shut off the proletariat by a Chinese wall from the strata standing slightly above or slightly below it. At different periods Social-Democracy applies different methods, *always* qualifying the choice of them by *strictly* defined ideological and organisational conditions.”<sup>56</sup>

Guevara ignores the teachings of Lenin when eliminating all forms of armed struggle which are not guerrilla warfare, when ignoring the class character of the guerrillas and when ignoring the importance of the party, even of the great mass party; that the own guerrilla experience teaches us it is indispensable.

## The reason for the failures

The time has come to explain once and for all and from the hand of Lenin, the social and political causes of the serious disasters and defeats of all Latin American guerrilla attempts — they are the inevitable consequence of an ultra-leftist, sectarian tendency which ignores the need for a party and a revolutionary policy towards the mass movement, and replaces that ignorance with a huge revolutionary will, a mechanical and caricatured way of applying the Cuban experience (sometimes even of Cuban idioms). What’s strange then that those national realities they ignore come over and destroy their plans?

If the guerrillas fall or if their weapons are intercepted at the border, for us this is another consequence of not having a revolutionary party and turning their back on the mass movement. They will keep saying these are subjective, technical failures — someone washed himself in the river, some “sneak” spoke or there were too many guerrillas for the amount of food deposited.

When we look for the cause of the failures in deep objective reasons (state of the country and the mass organisations), we are consistent with Lenin and Marxism. They, with their technical explanations are idealistic, metaphysical, see only one side and the least important.

This method of Guevara explains why he has never stopped to analyse the negative experiences of Latin American guerrilla warfare, i.e. their colossal and tragic failures. Consistent to the end, he gives in advance an explanation for the failures in his book, in his only known comment on the issue, saying: “Almost all popular movements that have been tried in recent times against the dictators have suffered from the same fundamental flaw — an inadequate preparation. It is that conspiracy rules, which require a highly secret and delicate work, do not usually apply in these cases we have quoted”.<sup>57</sup> In plain language, they fail because of inadequate technical preparation. It isn’t the case either that our author, with the intellectual, revolutionary honesty that characterises him, recognises that the heroes of the Sierra Maestra, including Fidel Castro, failed precisely in one of the fundamental aspects of technical preparation of the guerrillas and does not ask why they triumphed despite these errors.

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56 V.I. Lenin: “Guerrilla Warfare”, op. cit., p.221.

57 Guevara, Ernesto: “Guerrilla warfare...”, op. cit.,

We believe that the Guevarist conception is the true theoretical cause of the failures, although there are class reasons for this: they reflect the despair and inability to work within the mass movement of the best revolutionary cadres of the petty bourgeoisie and lumpen in Latin America.

## Two methods

We now intend to synthesise the differences and draw conclusions. The revolutionary reader will say, "Everything is fine. Guevara gives us a method that may have all the defects you want, but it is better than nothing. With it we begin the battle against this disgraceful regime and the most it can happen is they kill us". We want to answer categorically why they are two different methods and how ours is the only practical, effective one, which can actually lead to the defeat of the oligarchy and imperialism. Let's now spell out the agreements and differences between Guevara and us:

1) Between Guevara and us there is agreement in principle and in fact. *In principle*, because we are against Khrushchev and national bourgeois or petty bourgeois opportunism, which vindicates the peaceful road to socialism and collaboration with the bourgeoisie, and we are in favour of the revolution in permanence and of the armed struggle to destroy the repressive apparatus of the regime, as essential and unavoidable. *In fact*, because we vindicate the same social political movement of Guevara: Castroism.

2) This agreement does not prevent us from disagreeing with Guevara in everything or almost everything else:

a) We do not accept that there is only one method of defeating exploiters in Latin America, which is guerrilla warfare.

b) Nor do we believe in the technique of this method (the three inexorable stages).

c) We do not agree that guerrilla warfare is the only viable way of armed struggle.

d) It seems very dangerous to us to judge, as Guevara does, that the exploiters with their key institutions (government, armed forces) form a monolithic structure without serious crises. We believe the opposite, that they live from crisis to crisis and that these should be used in depth with skilful revolutionary politics.

e) We consider downright criminal Guevara's ignorance in his analysis and strategy, of the large organisations of the Latin American masses, the workers' and peasants' unions, as well as of the concerns and actions of the mass movement.

f) As bad as the previous, and closely linked to it, is the oblivion of program, party and revolutionary politics.

g) We do not believe therefore in the myth that a group of brave persons away from the working people, without program, politics, or revolutionary party, may initiate the armed struggle and guerrilla warfare, despite their courage and desire to oust the exploiters.

(3) Our method is radically opposed to Guevara's and is based on these criticisms.

a) First of all, we believe that the revolutionary vanguard of each Latin American country, organised in a strong revolutionary party and intimately linked to the mass movement, must adopt its own *revolutionary program, and the way and time of starting the armed struggle*.

b) This means in a sense that our method is to not have a fixed, immovable method for all countries, but instead, a set of general principles to be applied to each country. The first is precisely that there is no fixed method, since this should be adjusted to reality, which is different in each country and at every stage of the revolutionary process. The second, that the form of armed struggle, which is inevitable — we insist, inevitable — is subject to analysis and the political program for the country given, and not the other way. The third, that the program and the analysis should be based essentially on what the working masses want and have achieved organisationally, politically and in degree of consciousness.

c) These principles require that the petty bourgeois or underclass vanguard, stronghold of Guevarist policy, give importance to work within the movement of the working masses, to the construction of the revolutionary party, to the program, thus avoiding its separation of the actual revolutionary process the Latin American workers are going through and also tragic and heroic adventures.

The revolutionary student who reads us will despair and insist: “Everything is well and good, but what do we do?” Taken the question to the fore we cannot but say the opposite of what our author says — unite all revolutionaries into a single party in each country to adopt a revolutionary program that allows us to work within the workers’ organisations, from these to organise the seizure of power by armed struggle methods appropriate to the level of development and awareness of the mass movement in the country. And just in case we aren’t understood we can tell what is not to be done — to accept the honest but criminal counsel by Guevara to organise a remote guerrilla group away from working people and to demand, as a minimum, the right to elaborate the political line for the country united in one body to the other revolutionaries, without accepting recipes of any kind. If this is done, it will be with the method of Lenin, Trotsky and Fidel Castro, who led the great Cuban revolution and against the ultra-leftists who are sowing the road of defeats. §