

Marxism and Guevarism*

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1 IT IS NECESSARY TO TALK ABOUT GUEVARISM

In Latin America, the Guevarist movement, for over two decades, has been passed off by the petty bourgeois and sectors of the bourgeois as the most revolutionary and accomplished doctrine. Many “Marxists” consider Guevara to be the master of the Latin American proletariat, and his influence in some circles that claim to uphold Marxism-Leninism is evident. Others view Guevara as a communist in the making, etc., exposing the theoretical inconsistency of these so-called Marxists and their lack of knowledge of the revolutionary theory of the proletariat.

The crisis currently faced by the communist and revolutionary movement, the ideological confusion, and the political vacillations of the petty bourgeois create fertile ground for the resurgence of anarchism and focoism. We have done well to “anticipate,” so to speak, what lies ahead.

This is not the first time that Guevarism has been criticized; various articles have mentioned focoism, but the closest thing to a general critique has been the article “Guevara, Debray, and Armed Revisionism” by Lenny Wolff, published in *Revolution*,¹ the organ of the Revolutionary Communist Party of the United States, in 1986, and also published separately as a pamphlet.

*<https://www.bannedthought.net/Colombia/Contradiccion/Contradiccion-01.pdf>

¹*Revolution*. Issue no. 53. Winter/Spring 1985. <https://www.bannedthought.net/Cuba-Che/Guevara/Guevara-Debray-Wolff.pdf>

Since some people try to evade the issue by claiming that Debray is one thing and Guevara is another, we have omitted any reference to Debray and focused on the theory and practice of Guevara and his followers.

So far, the lack of a profound critique of such a “doctrine” allows some newly awakened workers and individuals with little experience and training to join this movement, as they do not find other answers to their political concerns. Thus, honest revolutionaries continuously join Guevarist organizations, only to later become disenchanted and often fall into skepticism upon seeing their aspirations frustrated.

Obviously, it is not a matter of ignoring that Guevara was a great revolutionary and man of action who opposed revisionist pacifism and died convinced of his cause. In that sense, he was a courageous man, which we cannot say about his followers, who have currently abandoned everything revolutionary about him to embrace openly reformist positions.

In the history of the labor movement, Marxism has fought tenaciously against anarchist conceptions and other ideas contrary to the proletariat. Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, in their struggle against anarchism, provided valuable theoretical weapons to scientifically substantiate socialism and defeat this harmful petty bourgeois current for the working class at the time.

Anarchism, however, constantly resurges within the ranks of the labor movement, and therefore, communists cannot let their guard down in the constant criticism of anything that may be considered “petty bourgeois, semi-anarchist revolutionary or capable of flirting with anarchism,” as Lenin put it.

We will then address the central tenets of Guevara’s theory, its evolution in the neo-Guevarist movement—since we cannot hold him responsible for what his followers may have done or recently “invented”—and we will compare them with the theory of the proletariat.

We intend to settle old-new discussions that have been left unfinished and demonstrate that there is a profound abyss between Guevarism and Marxism. The former is harmful to the working class and the revolution, while the latter serves the cause of the proletariat.

And while right-wing opportunism is currently the main enemy, we cannot forget that it finds its natural complement in “left-wing” opportunism. By doing so, we are contributing to the clarification in the process of establishing the ideological basis that truly unifies Marxist-Leninists, which will serve as a guide for the future Political Party of the Working Class in Colombia.

Finally, we want to show how revisionists, Guevarists, and neo-Guevarists express solidarity by aligning themselves in a “holy crusade” with the entire bourgeois world, with the intention of “burying” Marxism.

WHAT GUEVARISM OFFERS US

Guevara argued that “even if the theory is not known, the revolution can succeed if historical reality is interpreted correctly and if the forces involved are utilised correctly.”² Meanwhile, Lenin, in his work *What Is to Be Done?*, criticized the cult of empiricism and voluntarism and defended the thesis that “without a revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement.”

To be vanguard men, a vanguard theory is required, as the communists have insisted, and they have constantly been concerned with purging the workers’ movement of bourgeois theories that are alien to their interests. They attribute the assured victory to ideological struggle, where the proletariat has the upper hand in advance. Thus, from Engels onwards, Marxism has been revitalized time and again with new discoveries and contributions, to the point where it has become what we have today, a science that, far from losing relevance, is confirmed as correct by life itself.

Guevara, like all those who deny the importance of revolutionary theory, ended up in empiricism, and his followers have refurbished old bourgeois theories, presenting them as “authentic Latin American Marxism”; they have found no other way out than to introduce the ideological contraband of the old Russian Mensheviks from the beginning of the century. Yet they do not have enough shame to tell the masses the truth. Instead, they have given their theory the label of “critical Marxism” or “national Marxism.”

Nevertheless, there are those who call themselves Marxist-Leninists and still repeat like parrots that theory should not be known, that workers must be spoon-fed the ABCs, that knowledge is a matter for academics, etc. But let’s take it step by step.

WHAT IS THE THEORY OF GUEVARISM?

Guevarism has been claimed as a movement consistently struggling for socialism; however, its socialism is an eclectic and contradictory mixture because

²Guevara, Ernesto “Che.” *Notes for the Study of the Ideology of the Cuban Revolution*, 8 Oct. 1960, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1960/10/08.htm>.

its disdain for scientific theory has led them to endorse, for example, the theory of Jeffersonian democracy (the foundations of bourgeois American democracy) in the July 26th Movement in Cuba, only to later advocate for “socialism” and “communism” based on the teachings of revisionists (while acknowledging that Guevara firmly opposed the revisionist line regarding material incentives as the basis for socialist construction, openly favoring moral incentives for this purpose).

Similarly, Guevarism has taken up the struggle for national liberation, which they conceive solely in relation to Yankee imperialism, but their wavering has led them to kneel before other currents and centers of imperialist power: Cuba to social imperialism and the neo-Guevarists, as well as to social democracy and Christian democracy.

WHAT ARE THE “TEACHINGS”?

However, it is in the field of the “teachings” of the Cuban revolution where more emphasis has been placed, and where some “Marxists” continue to repeat the theses summarized by Guevara as follows:

“

1. Popular forces can win a war against the army.
2. It is not necessary to wait until all the conditions for revolution to exist; the insurrection can create them.
3. In underdeveloped America the countryside is the basic area for armed fighting.”³

Based on these “great discoveries,” they developed another series of “theoretical” postulates that the petty bourgeois continues to echo in moments of desperation and in their yearning for adventure.

Theories such as continental revolution, which aims to reduce internationalism to the narrow framework of Latin America while ignoring the particular development of contradictions in different countries, and third worldism, which leads some individuals to consider that the only revolutionary movements are those in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, even suggesting that the proletariat in imperialist countries is also an enemy of the revolution.

³ *Guerrilla Warfare*. Ernesto “Che” Guevara. 1961.

The worn-out thesis that it is not necessary to build a Vanguard Party of the Working Class, but rather a political-military organization primarily composed of peasants and not proletarians. Some, going beyond Guevara and aligning themselves with Salvador Cayetano Carpio, try to “make fashionable” the theories of the “party in arms” and a series of other “theories” that we will have to analyze later.

The tactics and strategy of Guevarism are based on the belief that a “focus” [RedLibrary: This translates to *foco* in Spanish, hence the name *focoism*.] or an army of peasants, raising the banners of the struggle for land, can seize power and build socialism. From there, other “teachings” are derived that lead them to disregard the concrete analysis of the concrete situation and turn Che Guevara’s expression “to use all forms of struggle, with armed struggle as the main axis” into a general principle. This approach has been disguised as Leninist and Maoist, and in the face of it, the leaders of the “Revolutionary Communist Group of Colombia,” those of the “PLA-EGP,” and others who claim to be Marxists, bow down and make concessions to focoism.⁴ We will discuss this further later, as this revisionist interpretation has caused and continues to cause serious harm to the revolutionary movement.

It can be argued in its defense that individuals mature their concepts as they develop, and evidently, after the triumph of the Cuban revolution, Guevara completed his education, and his theory became a scientific theory.

But we can assert, as we will demonstrate later on, that despite the “Marxist” language of their discourse, there was no fundamental modification whatsoever, except for adding transfusions of modern revisionism to “their theory.”

WHAT DO THEIR FOLLOWERS SAY?

By that path, the “radical” gentlemen of the 1960s, who told us that the Second Declaration of Havana was “The Communist Manifesto for Latin America”⁵, today, after their adventurous mischief, they are returning (from a political point of view) to the bosom of their revisionist father because they fancy that the bourgeois democracy in Colombia, which is outdated, needs to be “rejuvenated.” It does not cross their minds that what society

⁴see “Alborada Comunista” of May 1988

⁵see documents from the Communist Party of Colombia, P1—L

truly needs today is proletarian democracy. Instead, they are trying to turn back the wheel of history and desire a “new constituent assembly” similar to the one in 1863.⁶ These Marxist-Leninist “radicals,” petty bourgeois, do not look forward to the future; they are infatuated with the past and want to pass off their reactionary theories as vanguard theories.

But the most consistent Guevarists of the 1960s, the ELN (National Liberation Army), currently only hint at the most insignificant and narrow “bourgeois nationalism.” Their “national Marxism” (as called by the Sandinistas), their “Camilist socialism” as Manuel Pérez calls it, which is based on defeating Yankee imperialism and, together with social democracy, Christian democracy, and social imperialists, building a “free” and “just” homeland, is nothing more than the reactionary endeavor to indefinitely postpone the principal contradiction. The contradiction between capital and labor, which can only be resolved through the abolition of private property and classes.

They tell us that the socialism of orthodox Marxism is not achievable in underdeveloped and “peripheral” countries, that the proletariat is not the class capable of building socialism (according to them), and that the dictatorship of the proletariat is an invention of Lenin, “the dogmatic” (who did a lot of harm with the book *The State and Revolution*). They argue that only the petty bourgeois as the leading nucleus, together with the “national bourgeois” and all popular sectors, can gradually bring society closer to the ideals of equality and other things pleasing to the petty bourgeois.⁷

These “brand-new theories” of the neo-Guevarists are nothing more than ideological contrabands of old origins, reminiscent of Bernstein and Menshevik ideas, which only highlight the eagerness of the petty bourgeois to maintain capitalism as long as they can share power with the bourgeois. However, they also demonstrate the continued relevance of Marxism-Leninism and the incapacity of the petty bourgeois, who, in their desperation, find no other option but to “revive” old reactionary theories, already rightly refuted by the communists.

“We do not consider Marxism as a dogma, nor as something finished,” says Lenin, “we are convinced that this theory has only laid the cornerstones of the science that socialists must promote in

⁶see the Rionegro Constitution of General Mosquera

⁷See *The Difficult Transition* The self-determination of small peripheral countries. José Luís Coraggio and Carmen Diana Deere and another “pleiad of great thinkers” for the working class, Siglo XXI Editores, 1986

all directions if they do not want to lag behind life...” Therefore, there cannot be a strong Communist Party or a strong Revolutionary Workers’ Movement without a revolutionary theory that brings together all vanguard men, from which they draw, educate themselves, and apply in their struggles. “Marx’s theory made clear the true task of a revolutionary socialist party: **not to invent plans for restructuring society** (which is what the neo-Guevarists do), **nor to preach to capitalists and their acolytes** about the need to improve the situation of workers (which today the Trotskyists, ‘mamertos,’ and other revisionists do), nor to plot conspiracies (as understood by anarchists and as understood by Guevara), but to organize the class struggle of the proletariat and to lead this struggle, which has as its ultimate goal the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the organization of socialist society.”⁸

2 The Guevarist Conception of the World

Despite stating that “we recognize the essential truths of Marxism as incorporated into the cultural and scientific heritage of peoples, and we take it with the naturalness that comes from something that no longer needs discussion,”⁹ he (Guevara) never understood the elementary truths of Marxism. His theories and, more precisely, his practice demonstrate his lack of understanding, both of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, in such a way that he could never grasp the objective material limitations that surround individuals and social movements.

WHO MAKES THE REVOLUTION?

Guevara tells us that the will of a “small group of men supported by the people and unafraid of dying if necessary” is enough to defeat any army and seize power.

Thus, the problem of revolution and social liberation is a matter of faith and the will of small groups or individuals, who, through armed struggle and

⁸See ‘Our Program.’ Page... 195 and U.T. 8 Complete Works, Editorial Progreso 1984. The emphasis and parentheses are done by the authors of this article.

⁹Works, Vol. II p. 94, according to the Casa de las Américas edition, 1977

heroic actions, create subjective conditions and, through their example, lead the masses to follow them.

Guevarism falls into an idealistic conception of history when it defends the idea that great men are the driving force of history and when it grants the decisive role to the “vanguards.” The inability to understand the role of the masses and the lack of knowledge of the development of contradictions allows Guevara and his followers to continue asserting that “we do not always have to wait for all the conditions for revolution to be present; the insurrectional focus can create them,”¹⁰ granting the masses the role of collaborators and supporters of the great men who, inflamed with hatred, fight or “struggle to change the social regime that keeps all their unarmed brothers in disgrace and misery. They launch themselves against the special institutions of the institutional framework of a given moment and dedicate themselves to breaking, with all the vigor that circumstances allow, the molds of that institutional framework”¹¹.

Marxism, on the contrary, asserts that “the liberation of the working class is the work of the working class itself” and assigns the masses a determining role, placing them as the driving force of history. It has always demonstrated the validity of its analysis. Thus, materialism maintains that individuals, including “the great ones,” are a social-historical product, ultimately resulting from the contradictions of the society in which they live. “That a certain particular man and no other emerges at a definite time in a given country is naturally pure chance. But even if we eliminate him, there is always a need for a substitute, and the substitute is found *tant bien que mal*; in the long run he is sure to be found.”¹²

The essence of Marxism lies in basing and grounding itself not on ideas and beliefs but on the analysis of the objective movement of society. Ultimately, development is determined by the contradictions between different classes and their economic interests. Regardless of their will, these classes confront and struggle against each other until these struggles acquire political and ideological connotations, often taking violent forms.

But Marxism has never disregarded the role of individuals in history; on the contrary, it grants them their rightful place. We know very well that

¹⁰Strategy and Tactics of the Latin American Revolution, p. 38, Ormigón Publishers, April 1981

¹¹Strategy and Tactics of the Latin American Revolution, p. 41, Ormigón Publishers, April 1981

¹²Letters on Historical Materialism, F. Engels, 1890-1894, Ed. Progress, 1980. Page 27.

depending on their understanding of the social movement they are part of, an individual can either accelerate or hinder a process, just as leaders can either help avoid unnecessary sacrifices or lead to setbacks. Thus, individuals can play a revolutionary and progressive role if their actions align with the objective course of the movement, or they can play a reactionary role if their actions go against the general movement of society.

At times, as was the case with Guevara, when individuals disregard objective laws, circumstances, and limitations in their actions, believing that revolution is solely a matter of good faith and strong will, they end up aborting a process, delaying it, and making it more painful and difficult. This occurred in Bolivia and other Latin American countries with the theory of the “foco.” The damage caused by focoism is immeasurable, not only in terms of the unnecessary loss of lives (great revolutionary leaders who disappeared pursuing this adventure) but also in the fruitless exhaustion that has led to the perversion of guerrilla warfare. Nowadays, the petty bourgeois seeks to use it not to overthrow the regime but to negotiate agreements—through pressure—with the bourgeois, in an attempt to share the apparatus of domination.

THE FORCES OF MOVEMENT

But the Guevarist conception not only stops at seeing the masses as the support for the heroes, it is incapable of understanding the movement in a dialectical way, and like the anarchists, it only admits leaps, cataclysms, and revolutions. Guevara tells us that “the precise date on which the revolutionary actions that culminated on January 1, 1959, began was July 26, 1953. A group of men led by Fidel Castro attacked the Moncada Barracks in the province of Oriente in the early hours of that day,”¹³ thus telling us that before July 26, 1953, there was neither a revolutionary movement nor revolutionary action. This narrow view of history, this attempt to fit facts into imagination, leads him to disregard that from the year 1900 to the year 1959, over twenty uprisings of peasants, farm laborers, and agricultural proletarians erupted in the same province of Oriente, not to mention the significant student protests and strikes in the early decades of the century.

Guevara and the Guevarists have not understood that quantitative changes, no matter how small, prepare and mature the significant qualitative leaps that emerge as ruptures in continuity.

¹³Works Vol. II, Page 367

“The movement is evolutionary,” says Stalin, “when progressive elements spontaneously continue their daily work and introduce small changes, quantitative modifications, into the old regime. The movement is revolutionary when these same elements come together, embrace a common idea, and launch an attack against the enemy camp to uproot the old regime and introduce qualitative changes into life, establishing a new regime. Evolution prepares the revolution and creates the groundwork for it, while the revolution crowns evolution and contributes to its further work.”¹⁴

IDEALISM AND ETERNAL TRUTHS

Similarly, Guevarists and neo-Guevarists have believed that revolution and socialism are not the result of the historical development of productive forces and class struggle, but rather obey, as Bakunin believed, and in this they do not differ much from Hegel, the natural instincts of freedom, justice, and equality—eternal laws or ideals—to which humanity has been approaching. It is for this reason that they now try to identify Marxism, science, with Christianity and that among their great teachers is Camilo Torres Restrepo.

Freedom, Marxists argue, is nothing but the awareness of necessity, and to that extent, they have always been concerned with contributing to the liberation of the working class and the masses, seeking behind every proposition the interests of the classes that argue for them. They have clearly established that what idealists consider eternal truths—morality, justice, and equality—have always corresponded to the interests of classes and their consequent evolution through different social stages.

All ideas have a class stamp and a particular meaning for each one of them. If freedom, which for the bourgeois and for subjective idealism located within it, guerrilla-ism, is the demand for individual freedom (in the bourgeois to exploit and compete in the market, and in guerrilla-ism to “make revolution”), in the proletariat it consists only in the knowledge of the laws that move the processes and phenomena to make them act according to a plan for our purposes, according to their nature.

Socialism was not always possible; for it to be possible and necessary, humanity had to have created modern productive forces and these forces had

¹⁴Complete Works, *Marxism and Anarchism* Vol. I, page 308, June 8th edition

to have come into contradiction with the social relations derived from the capitalist mode of production.

In such a way, equality, justice, and morality have their particular meaning in the bourgeois, which ultimately only seeks to justify exploitation and defend private property, thereby serving as another tool to subjugate and prevent the working class from removing the veil that covers its real content. On the contrary, for the proletariat, they have no other meaning than the abolition of private property and classes themselves. Any consideration that deviates from this real basis inevitably falls into sophistry. Therefore, when a supposed justice and equality in general are mentioned and discussed, it contributes to obscuring their real content and, consequently, falls into the same bourgeois field - the one most interested in maintaining the veil.

“...all moral theories have been hitherto the product, in the last analysis, of the economic conditions of society obtaining at the time. And as society has hitherto moved in class antagonisms, morality has always been class morality; it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or ever since the oppressed class became powerful enough, it has represented its indignation against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed. That in this process there has on the whole been progress in morality, as in all other branches of human knowledge, no one will doubt. But we have not yet passed beyond class morality. A really human morality which stands above class antagonisms and above any recollection of them becomes possible only at a stage of society which has not only overcome class antagonisms but has even forgotten them in practical life.”¹⁵

Friedrich Engels

Unaware of these truths, Guevarism and Neo-Guevarism do not contribute to revealing the contradictions and scientifically explaining the upward movement of society; on the contrary, they contribute to obscuring the consciousness of the masses and perpetuating their ignorance, thereby serving their alienation and not their liberation, as their leaders pretend to believe or as their membership sincerely believes.

Marxism is the most revolutionary theory, not because of dogmatism - as idealists argue - but because it is the only theory and method that has

¹⁵Anti-Dühring, Friedrich Engels.

been able to discover the general laws that have led humanity to the era of imperialism. It has also clearly established the laws and contradictions that mark its agony and the bright future of communism. Above all, it has discovered the only class capable of directing society towards that goal: the working class.

“FOCOISM”: THE ARMED STRUGGLE “MAIN AXIS”

Speaking about the teachings of the Cuban Revolution and claiming the merit of “having destroyed all salon theories,” Guevara says, “We have demonstrated that a small group of determined men, supported by the people and unafraid to die if necessary, can impose themselves on a regular and disciplined army and definitively defeat it. There is another lesson that our Latin American heirs must learn, those situated in the same agrarian category as us, and that is the necessity of carrying out agrarian revolutions, fighting in the fields, in the mountains, and from there bringing the revolution to the cities, without attempting to do so in the cities alone, without a comprehensive social content.”¹⁶

It is not only the cult of great men that characterizes Guevarism, but also the belief that a guerrilla focus that is “carrying out agrarian reform” is simultaneously carrying out socialism and going even further. The deduction that the revolution consists only of defeating the army leads to the proposition that “there are fundamental arguments that, in our opinion, determine the necessity of guerrilla action in America as the central axis of the struggle”¹⁷, and in such “arguments” there is not a single reference to class struggle and the forms of organization and struggle of the masses, except to place them as potential “collaborators” of the guerrilla group, of the “foco.”

This revisionist postulate, which they have later condensed as “using all forms of struggle with armed struggle as the main axis,” is nothing more than the petty bourgeois interpretation of class struggle.

Many of those who call themselves Marxist-Leninists nowadays seek to reenact “focoism,” from the leaders of the Revolutionary Communist Group to figures in “Deslinde,” passing through the PLA EGP, “Praxis,” and so on. These comrades have not yet understood the ABCs of class struggle, or at least that is what they demonstrate by echoing the revisionist postulates of

¹⁶Works Vol. II 9.21

¹⁷Strategy and Tactics, page 58

Guevara and Carpio in their insistence on “Party in Arms” and the adoption of the Guevarist thesis of armed struggle as the “main axis” (we will discuss “parties in arms” later on).

LENINISM: ON THE GUERRILLA STRUGGLE

Let’s let Lenin speak for us:

“In principle *we have never rejected, and cannot reject, terror.* Terror is one of the forms of military action that may be perfectly suitable and even essential at a **definite juncture** in the battle, given a definite state of the troops and the existence of definite conditions.” And he continues to make it clear that as long as there is no strong party, this practice does not disorganize the enemy forces but one’s own. “...We need but recall the recent events. With our own eyes we saw that the mass of workers and ‘common people’ of the towns pressed forward in struggle, while the revolutionaries lacked a staff of leaders and organisers. Under such conditions, is there not the danger that, as the most energetic revolutionaries go over to terror, the fighting contingents, in whom alone it is possible to place serious reliance, will be weakened? Is there not the danger of rupturing the contact between the revolutionary organisations and the disunited masses of the discontented, the protesting, and the disposed to struggle, who are weak precisely because they are disunited? Yet it is this contact that is the *sole guarantee* of our success...” And isn’t this precisely the painful experience of all the previous “focoism” in Latin America? Isn’t this precisely the most serious mistake of the PCC (M—L) [Communist Party of Colombia (Marxist-Leninist)] and all the revolutionaries of the 60s? “...Far be it *from us to deny the significance of heroic individual blows*, but it is our duty to *sound a vigorous warning against becoming infatuated with terror, against taking it to be the chief and basic means of struggle*, as so many people strongly incline to do at present.” And it is not towards there that some Marxist-Leninists are heading again when the fundamental effort is directed towards forming military detachments, when there is not even a significant influence in the working class? “Terror can never be a regular military operation;

at best it can *only serve as one of the methods employed in a decisive assault.*¹⁸

And let these “Leninists” and “Maoists” stop attributing revisionist theses like “armed struggle as the main axis” to revolutionary theory because communists have never regarded revolutionary war solely as a confrontation between armies or apparatuses, but rather as a confrontation between classes. Armed struggle is not, therefore, the main activity for Marxists at all times, as the Guevarists claim, but rather when the insurrection is near, or when armed struggle takes on a mass character, or when armed masses confront the enemy (uniformed or not), or when class struggle takes on the character of generalized civil war. As history has shown us in the case of the communist movement, in the People’s War in China, in the People’s War in Vietnam, and as we see now in the People’s War in Peru.

In this approach, there is no danger of deviation, as argued in a discussion by a colleague from “Deslinde.” We have already stated that we do not oppose all violent actions, but “The proletarian party *can never consider guerrilla warfare as the only method of struggle, not even the main one*; this method must be subordinate to the others, it must be proportional to the main methods of struggle, and it must be ennobled by the enlightening influence of socialism.”¹⁹ The forms of struggle that are left to their spontaneous course, that is, when they do not have the direction of the proletarian party, decompose, pervert, and prostitute themselves (see the cited work). And hasn’t the guerrilla struggle directed and waged by the Colombian petty bourgeois led to the perversion of this method?

FOCOISM HAS NOTHING IN COMMON WITH PEOPLE’S WAR!

Can some Marxists become “infatuated” again with focoism, without conducting a serious analysis and repeating history? Possibly, but only the petty bourgeois can continue to venture and believe that their war is the war of the proletariat and the masses. Comrades who are genuinely involved in focoist groups can continue to believe that they are doing their best, but anyone who doesn’t “swallow it whole” or possesses some knowledge, any serious

¹⁸Complete Works, Vol. 1. “Where to Begin?”. Lenin. Emphasis done by Contradiction.

¹⁹Lenin, Complete Works Vol. 14, p. 10 *On Guerrilla Warfare*; emphasis done by Contradiction.

Marxist has to recognize that the focoist struggle waged in the country does not serve the interests of the proletarian class struggle, but rather obscures the consciousness of the masses.

Focoism, wandering guerrilla warfare, groups of professional fighters who arrive in rural areas as saviors and do not involve the masses in a true people's war, have led guerrilla leaders to compromises with capitalists (defending private property in exchange for a share, involvement in drug trafficking, kidnapping). In the end, as in the case of the M-19, they not only renounce guerrilla warfare but also class struggle, disillusioning honest revolutionaries who are members of these groups, all in exchange for crumbs in the apparatus of state power.

The guerrilla struggle born from the 1948 period is the result of specific objective material conditions, very different from the guerrilla "foci" created by the petty bourgeois in the late period. Is it a form of struggle implemented in rural areas (under Debray's "foco" theory and a mechanistic application of petty bourgeois protracted people's war), which has been going on for over twenty years without evolving into a people's war, into a war of the masses. This is in stark contrast to what is happening in Peru, with the MASS WAR directed by the Communist Party of that country.

Regarding the Marxist-Leninist comrades who mechanically apply the concept of protracted people's war and argue that we should go to the countryside and make guerrilla warfare the main form of struggle, they should look at the mirror of the efforts of Marxist-Leninists in the 1960s. Despite their good intentions, they ended up forming isolated pockets of resistance. It is because, even here, it is the specific conditions that determine the historical validity of the forms of struggle.

THE VANGUARD ORGANIZATION "ARMED PARTY" OR CLASS PARTY?

Unable to comprehend the class struggle, incapable of assimilating historical materialism, Guevara never crossed his mind the necessity of the political party of the working class, and, like the declassed elements, he fancied that "the sleeping masses still to be awakened, whom it was necessary to mobilize, and their vanguard, the guerrilla, the driving force of the movement, generator of consciousness and combative enthusiasm. This vanguard was the catalyst, the one that created the subjective conditions necessary for vic-

tory.”²⁰ Only anarchists - Bakunin, who spoke of “propaganda by deed” - can conceive that their actions generate revolutionary consciousness and mobilize (anyone who knows history can only smile at such a “great lesson” that the petty bourgeois still repeat like parrots); narcissists cannot understand that the masses mobilize and fight revolutionarily when they become aware of their real interests and not simply by blindly following the “vanguard men.”

The so-called political-military organizations, the “Armed Parties,” are a petty bourgeois invention and have demonstrated their inability to lead the class struggle of the proletariat. Their ideologists have had to resort to inventing and implanting the so-called “Intermediate Mass Organizations” or “Mass Political Organizations,” which are neither natural mass organizations nor party organizations.

In all political-military organizations, in all “parties in arms,” each leader (of a command, squad, column, etc.) decides for their subordinates, and the Supreme Leader or “Commander-in-Chief” decides for everyone, thus turning the organizations into not instruments of the class but docile instruments of their “masters and owners” —in a feudal style where each lord has their serfs— and it is not unknown to anyone how ideological and political discussions have been settled within all these organizations, either through assassination, referred to as “execution,” or through expulsion without arguments (Roque Dalton in El Salvador, Aguilera, Romero Buj in Colombia, etc.). On the other hand, it is common for each “commander” to carry out their activities and lead “their people,” not under the guidance and direction of a central body but according to their own criteria, inevitably resulting in autonomous organizations within the organization (Sandinistas, UC-ELN, ADO, etc.).

Contrary to what the petty bourgeois believes, the communists argue that the vanguard of the masses, the vanguard of the proletariat, can only be the most conscious part of the proletarian class, their ideologists and leaders, their distinguished segment that must organize itself into an independent party. Secondly, it must uplift the backward masses, not only in terms of activity but primarily in terms of understanding their interests and their historical mission at their level of comprehension. Thirdly, this can only be achieved through their own struggle; economic (resistance), political, and ideological-theoretical; rather than relying on the struggle fought by “heroes” on their behalf.

²⁰Works Vol. II p. 368, emphasis added by Contradiction

The proletariat needs its Revolutionary Party, the leader of all forms of struggle and organization of the masses that emerge in the development of class struggle; Marxists *do not invent* forms of struggle, communists learn from the masses and generalize, organize, and make conscious the forms of struggle that the masses develop and that serve their purpose: to defeat the bourgeois class and destroy its apparatus of domination, its state, replacing it with the State of the proletarian class and the armed people.

From here it is understood that the superior form of organization, the vanguard, cannot be the guerrilla foco of petty bourgeois radicals, as the neo-Guevaristas continue to believe. Nor can it be, therefore, the organization of middle-class workers and groups of conspirators, who at most can trail behind any fashionable bourgeois current.

Finally, his followers can say that Guevara, after the triumph of the Cuban revolution, “converted” to Marxism and defended the Leninist theses of the Party of Cadres, but there we will also see that “his Marxism” only consisted of the injections he received from the revisionists. This supports the theories of “collective discussion, decision, and unique responsibilities,”²¹ that is to say, there is discussion but ultimately it is the leader who decides.

To conclude, in order to continue promoting in Bolivia and in common agreement with the leftists, not the Marxist-Leninist Party which was mentioned once and which the working class needed in Bolivia, but a sadly notorious “guerrilla foco.”

IDEOLOGICAL PLURALISM OR PROLETARIAN HEGEMONY?

Guevara, the radical, “furious critic” of the opportunistic, leftist parties, ends up joining them in the “Unified Party of the Revolution” in Cuba and defending the island’s submission to Russian imperial rule (see farewell letter to Fidel Castro). Therefore, it is not surprising that no terrorist organization (ELN, Tupamaros, ADO, FALN, FPL, Sandinistas, etc.) on the continent has taken a principled stance against the opportunistic parties and social imperialism. Similarly, it is not surprising that Guevara ended up “reconciling” with the opportunists of the “Bolivian Communist Party,” reaching agreements to promote a guerrilla focus in that country. It is also not surprising

²¹see Works, *The Marxist-Leninist Party*

that various neo-Guevarist groups peacefully coexist, including “Christian-Marxist” social democrats, nationalists, and all kinds of opportunists.

The Neo-Guevarists, the “critical Marxists,” now bring us the “latest in guarachas” and against all “orthodox dogmatism,” they propose that in the face of the existence of a number of “vanguards,” what must be done—defending pluralism in the style of Kautsky and Trotsky—is a “collective vanguard.” This is more or less a somewhat less “modest” version of Guevarism, and it can only be seen as an openly revisionist and opportunist position.

Since Marx and Engels, communists have defended in theory and practice the correctness and necessity of the *ideological, political, and organizational independence of the proletariat*. The proletariat cannot fulfill its historical mission - the abolition of private property and classes - unless it independently struggles to ensure its *HEGEMONY* in leading the revolutionary movement. The only class that has nothing to lose, and therefore the only class capable of leading society to the abolition of all forms of oppression and exploitation, is the working class. To that extent, it must “win over,” so to speak, the rest of the exploited masses to its program, tactics, and methods. The working class needs its party not only to conquer political power but also to sustain itself in power. Just as the bourgeois needed its parties in different states and countries to conquer political power while using the state through them, the proletariat cannot abandon itself to fate but, on the contrary, must organize itself before and after seizing power to achieve its objectives.

Translate to English:

Communists have learned over more than a century of existence that unity is achieved through ideological and political differentiation, rigorously defining nuances and combating opportunists. Being a communist is not just about putting on a label, and history has shown (sometimes painfully) that agents of the bourgeois also disguise themselves as communists, arm themselves, and claim to be “revolutionaries.” In decisive moments, they can jeopardize everything, cause the revolution to fail, and the only guarantee that this does not happen is to expose them to the masses, expel them from the party and proletarian organizations, and defeat them theoretically and practically within the movement.

Those who in good faith believe that every opportunist who wields a weapon and proclaims themselves a revolutionary is indeed one, and fail to unmask them before the masses, also become opportunists and traitors to the cause of the workers.

ON THE STATE: DICTATORSHIP OF WHOM? ANARCHISTS AND REVISIONISTS

The Guevarists can argue that their leader theoretically and practically defended the dictatorship of the proletariat, and that in itself is a principled opposition to anarchism. Firstly, anarchists have been violent proponents of the abolition of the state. However, after Marx and Engels demonstrated the inconsistency and utopian nature of their theories regarding the state, many switched sides and aligned with the revisionists, following Bernstein and Kautsky. They defended “autonomism” and “pure democracy.” Now, the neo-Guevarists speak of “socialism” alone. Their petty bourgeois status makes them resistant to discipline and work, much like the bourgeois. They cannot accept that the “ignorant masses” should lead society.

Secondly, it was only after the Cuban revolution that Guevara theoretically accepted the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but he understood it as conceived by the dominant clique in the USSR, that is, as the dictatorship of party bureaucrats who, in the name of the workers, exploit and oppress the masses of their country and plunder other peoples.

Guevara, even after the Cuban revolution, continued to attribute all the merit to the great men and placed them as the “backbone” for socialist construction. His socialism remained nothing more than the work of the leaders, displacing the masses and underestimating their creative and transformative role, excluding them from conscious participation in state administration, economic planning, and control over the state bureaucracy. They were thus relegated to merely fulfilling the directives of the bureaucrats in their factory or workplace. The factory assemblies and others that Guevara defended were not aimed at enabling the masses to define and adopt a conscious attitude towards *all problems*, but rather to discuss specific and concrete problems within “their factory,” thereby stifling their potential.

It’s just that for the petty bourgeois, it’s very difficult to accept that the masses are truly the driving force of history, besides hiding behind their attitude, the selfish interest in preserving their privileged positions in power.

THE “MARXIST CREATORS”

The entire struggle of the petty bourgeois is to live well without having to work. That’s why the neo-Guevarists, the “creative Marxists” (Sandinistas and other ideologists of the Latin American “radical” petty bourgeois), now

tell us that “the old models of the industrial proletariat as the leading force and the vanguard as its political representative within a dictatorship of the proletariat have no validity for the transitions to socialism that occur in small peripheral countries... at the same time, the bearer of this contradiction (main contradiction) is not, as the internal logic of capitalist development allowed us to theorize, the peripheral industrial proletariat but a heterogeneous conglomerate of social and ethnic forces in which peasants and urban sectors that are hardly identifiable within the traditional (Marxist) class system predominate, as a social force, and a revolutionary petty bourgeois, as the ruling group.”²²

This is how the “newest revisionists” theorize, evolving Guevarism, with the intention of convincing the workers that their dictatorship represents the whole society, to the extent that the bourgeois “committed to the revolution” and other classes also have representation in the state: economically through mixed enterprises and economic planning bodies, politically through the “People’s National Assembly” (ANP), and the “vanguard” orchestrates class reconciliation. (Refer to the cited work: *La transición...* and analyze the proposal *To Fight*).

The dictatorship of the proletariat, these “great thinkers” argue, is a great theoretical mistake by Marx, taken to its extreme by Lenin in his pamphlet *The State and the Revolution*. On the contrary, Marx says that his theory only reveals that the inherent laws of capitalism lead there; and of course, this discovery, which constitutes the cornerstone of the entire Marxist doctrine, is precisely what makes it more dangerous and abhorrent to the petty and large bourgeois. It is for no other reason that Bernstein, Kautsky, and from them, all the “latest” bourgeois currents have this postulate as their main target of attack; therefore, it is not the first, nor will it be the last time, that we have to subject Marxism to scrutiny.

“It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organization of bourgeois

²²La transición difícil, Carmen Diana Deere - José Luis Coraggio, and others, Sigla XXI Editores, 198, pp. 35 and 15. Parentheses added by Contradiction.

society today.”²³

And, we add, it is also not about what such and such a small or large bourgeois or even the entire bourgeois class may want or aim for at a given moment. It is an antagonistic contradiction that, as a law of capitalism, imposes itself despite and against all those who pretend to ignore it or who naively seek to humanize capitalism.

From where is it inferred that bourgeois society and bourgeois democracy lead society to establish the domination of the proletarian class, its dictatorship? Let’s see: Marxism discovered the genesis, development, and contradictions that mark the end of the capitalist mode of production and deduced from there the premises of socialism. Leninism developed the Marxist theory by analyzing the new conditions of developed capitalism, imperialism. Lenin demonstrated that *imperialism is the superior and final phase of capitalism, that is, the dying capitalism, the precursor to the proletarian socialist revolution worldwide*. Marxism-Leninism shows us, then, that we are just a “little step” away from socialism, that we only need to align modern productive forces with new social relations of production.

No one dares to deny that capitalism, in its evolution, has replaced free competition with monopoly, just as it has put parasitic financial capital in the predominant position opposed to industrial capital. This has also led to a handful of capitalists dividing the world among themselves and, in their unrestrained pursuit of markets and sources of raw materials, dragging nations into imperialist wars of plunder. Thus, the imperialists have led humanity to two of these carnages, and we all know about the preparations for a third, where even the very existence of humanity is at stake.

And it is that imperialism has no other way out than to burn a large part of the productive forces created by labor, given the capitalists’ inability to satisfy the needs of humanity. It’s not because the premises to satisfy them do not exist, but because capitalism and the imperialists would lose their essence: the interest in profit.

In parallel with the development of productive forces, centralization, and monopoly, capitalism has increasingly been socializing the productive processes, progressively linking the workforce in large industries, expanding the ranks of the proletariat, and diminishing, almost extinguishing, the class of peasants.

²³Karl Marx, *The Holy Family*.

The “sectors that are difficult to locate within the traditional (Marxist) class system” are nothing more than proletarian workers also serving the big capital, which extracts surplus value from them through loans (mostly from financial capital).

The conditions that constitute the proletariat as the vanguard class called upon to build socialism have not changed (the main contradiction remains the capital-labor contradiction); moreover, their numerical strength and experience are not decreasing but growing every day. The progress of society does not deny but confirms the historical tendency that brings the working class closer to power and propels it (despite and against the intentions of its enemies) to establish its domination.

The defeats suffered by the proletariat in the countries where it has come to power not only do not invalidate the justice and necessity of its dictatorship, but on the contrary, they alert us to make it total and all-encompassing, as the Chinese comrades would say, and to not abandon the territories once conquered. This is the main and greatest contribution of Mao Tse Tung and the experience of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China: *the abolition of classes and private property, encompassing an entire era of revolution. With the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, classes do not disappear; socialism only provides favorable conditions for the working class to fulfill its mission, but no one can guarantee in advance that the bourgeois will not seize power again.* No one can claim that it was the dictatorship of the proletariat that turned socialist Russia into a social imperialist state; on the contrary, it was the counter-revolutionary bourgeois forces that usurped power from the workers (not only recently but for more than 30 years) and dismantled their revolutionary forces many times through bloodshed and violence in order to restore capitalism, just as the Chinese bourgeois did afterwards.

PETTY BOURGEOIS INTERNATIONALISM OR PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM

Despite what has been said, there remains a field in which Guevarism “can” defend itself: internationalism. His followers can present Guevara as the accomplished internationalist who, being Argentine, fought in Cuba and contributed greatly to the victory and socialist construction in that country, fought in the Congo, and died fighting in Bolivia. This cannot be obvi-

ously ignored and thrown into the trash bin. However, as we saw previously, it is not good will and faith that define communists. There we can also demonstrate that his voluntarist attitude to “make revolution” led him to his different adventures, as in the realm of principles, he did not go beyond continental chauvinism regarding Yankee imperialism, without ever worrying about social imperialism, with which he walked hand in hand in all his exploits.

It is not for any other reason that, in the face of the major international debate of the early sixties, at the time when the communist movement was defining the orientation of the world proletariat (the discussion and demarcation between the revisionism of the PCUS and Maoism), Guevara and the leaders of Latin American terrorist groups simply stated that “given the virulence and intransigence with which each cause is defended, we, the dispossessed, cannot take sides for one or another form of expressing the disagreements, even when we sometimes agree with certain approaches of one side or the other, or to a greater extent with one side than the other. In the moment of struggle, the way in which the current differences become visible constitutes a weakness; but in the state in which they are, wanting to resolve them through words is an illusion. History will either erase them or provide their explanation. In our world in struggle, any disagreement regarding tactics, methods of action for the achievement of limited objectives, must be analyzed with the respect that others’ assessments deserve. As for the great strategic objective, the total destruction of imperialism through struggle, we must be uncompromising.”²⁴

For Guevarism, the discussion of principles divides (rather than purifies), but its metaphysical conception of the world, which leads to eclecticism, allows it to separate tactics from strategy, methods from political line, and in turn, ideology. This vulgar and opportunist reduction of the postulates, this hesitation to confront the enemies of the proletariat, does not lead to unmasking the traitors to the workers’ cause, but rather reduces their danger.

Guevara did indeed take sides and betrayed the interests of the global proletariat (not only those of Cuba) when he reconciled with the social imperialists instead of fighting alongside Chairman Mao and Enver Hoxha (who rose up against the imperialistic preteritions of the new stronghold of capitalist reaction).

Some argue that Guevara couldn’t do it because he held positions of

²⁴ *Works*, T II p. 597 s.n.

responsibility in the Cuban state, where he was in the minority. But such an argument is nothing more than justifying opportunism. The enemies of the proletariat are not adorned or their rapacious interests concealed. On the contrary, they must always be denounced and unmasked. Guevara never took a principled stance against the new tsars of Russia; he covered them up. Regardless of what his defenders say, not only did he not denounce them, but he also made agreements with their representatives in Bolivia.

Guevara and the other Cuban leaders never trusted in the invincible strength of the worldwide proletariat and, in order to defend “their revolution,” made friends with the social imperialists, handing them control of the island.

For this reason, the various conferences held in “Socialist Cuba” never invited Marxist-Leninist parties, but rather invited opportunistic parties and petty bourgeois radical guerrilla groups from the continent.

His internationalism never went beyond providing assistance to the foco groups in different countries of the continent, hoping to divide the forces of the Yankee empire and prevent their direct intervention on the island (given the distrust they had anyway of the aid from the social imperialists).

Proletarian internationalism is not the personal adventure of any individual or group. If that were the case, Trotskyists or any petty bourgeois could confuse us (like the Simón Bolívar Brigade in Nicaragua, for example). Quite the contrary, proletarian internationalism is the recognition of the existence of the proletariat as a single global class, with an equally global enemy. This recognition entails the necessity of a global struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeois, transcending national or patriotic interests. Therefore, more than empty rhetoric and isolated heroic acts, the proletariat needs a correct leadership that helps them understand their situation and how to confront their enemies.

Now the Neo-Guevarists not only cozy up to social-imperialism, but also suck up to social democracy and the democratic Christian imperialist capital.

Their internationalism remains confined to a “national Marxism” and attending the tail end of the imperialist bourgeois at all conferences and events where external debt is discussed and pressure is exerted for the “New International Economic Order” (NIEO), which essentially means a “New Proposal for the Redistribution of Global Spoils.” They also embrace the trappings of bourgeois democracy, such as “national sovereignty,” the defense of natural resources, and other topics that are pleasing to the bourgeois, as long as the discussion avoids class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the

necessity of a Communist International that would bury the putrefying yet still walking corpse of capitalism.