

On the Urban Guerrilla

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STRUGGLESSESSIONS



ON THE URBAN GUERRILLA



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“As for the armed actions in Europe, we’ve seen protracted armed struggles. They are an expression of objective reality. Therefore, the task is not to condemn them, but to understand, study, and analyze them to see how they are an expression of the fact that there is also a revolutionary situation in old Europe. And beyond that, that there are those who have taken up arms, understanding that that is the only way to seize Power. This is a powerful blow to revisionism, because in Europe itself, considered to be one of their bastions, revisionism is beginning to be abandoned. Regardless of the level reached, and the problems that remain to be solved, this is undeniably an important advance.”

–Chairman Gonzalo, Interview, 1988

Introduction

There is a lot of talk about the theory of People’s War, its universality and its ability to be applied to every country on earth. Contributors to the debate on both sides of the barricade will both condemn and defend the experience of the Urban Guerrilla. For a different approach to the topic we intend to go into more detail on several important European Urban Guerrilla movements. Making it clear that we hold that the only Maoist position is that People’s War is universal, for more on this topic we recommend researching the public documents from [Norway](#) and [Germany](#).

We find that many who speak on the Urban Guerrilla miss the point; they are either short in their understanding of the particular phenomena or in their understanding of MLM. The subject lends itself to a wide variety of right and left opportunist interpretations.

Study Don’t Condemn

Right opportunists rush in to condemn outright the entire period of the European Urban Guerrilla. They insist that the objective conditions were just not right, as if

ideology, Maoism itself were but a trivial matter and anyone with any ideas could make revolution provided the existence of a “revolutionary situation” – ideology, tactics and strategy are left unconsidered. What is more, the critics who stand to the right tend to ignore the necessity to learn from the failures of past experience in the process of summing up what was successful.

Most notably this rightist view is held by a few articles hosted on the website of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines. The NDFP has been criticized by Maoists for its international support for revisionism. To point out flaws of the most common rightist positions we have to first look at where it could be correct. It is true insofar as that the world did not enter the age of strategic offensive of world proletarian revolution until around 1980, and that most of the Urban Guerrillas were at their peak in the 1970s, including the national liberation struggles in Ireland, Basque Country, etc. The widespread occurrence of these armed groups in capitalist countries were limited by their conditions while at the same time a product of the objective conditions which were hurdling fast toward the strategic offensive of world proletarian revolution. Nonetheless, Chairman Gonzalo was correct to insist that the existence of these groups spoke of an existing revolutionary situation in old Europe, the bastion of revisionism. We would of course insist that the age of strategic offensive of world proletarian revolution has set the objective conditions for revolution in every country without exception.

The total rejection of the experience of the urban guerrilla has historically been elaborated by Avakian and his supporters, not in order to insist upon the mass line (which they explicitly reject), or proper Communist Party leadership (which they have systematically failed to provide), but to shoe in their theory of protracted legal struggle and quick insurrection—a dogmatic and outdated viewpoint to say the least, but one of the main features which proves the Revolutionary Communist Party USA was never an actual MLM Party. Nonetheless this viewpoint was circulated in RCP-controlled *A World To Win* Magazine as far back as the 1980s and has been taken as something of a default common sense position. This view distinguishes itself from the revolutionary optimism expressed by Chairman Gonzalo at the beginning of this article. US Maoists have been outspoken of the need to overcome the vestiges of Avakianism which still plague and discredit, which still find currency among many right opportunists.

MLM is equipped with all the tools necessary to make a sober analysis, a summary and synthesis of the experiences of the urban guerrilla. What did they get right?

What were their major theoretical and ideological shortcomings which brought about their demise, in other words, what were their internal contradictions? How did they respond to their conditions, correctly and incorrectly? Maoism allows us to reach beyond the problematic of the urban guerrilla on more than a few points without being dragged backward any.

Through this short study, without the blanket condemnation, certain qualities emerge which are of the utmost value to anyone theorizing armed struggle in imperialist centers, regardless of their position. Only those who theorize the armed struggle of the masses, that is people's war, can overcome the errors of the urban guerrilla and reach greater heights. Inversely even incorrect stratagems, like the dogmatic view on insurrection, should be understood without compromise as liquidation of the question of armed struggle. It is our aim to insist that critics on both sides proceed from an accurate study of the urban guerrilla and not from bourgeois myths or fear of armed struggle. The reality of the urban guerrilla is persistently obscured by both romanticism and pessimism. Let us cut through the fog at least a little bit.

On the Red Brigades of Italy

“We have always hit the enemies of the people and we have always hit them from vast movements of struggle”

-Red Brigades, Milan, 1971

As Maoists we insist that ideology is never dismiss-able, so we must start with the urban guerrilla group who arguably had developed the best ideology among the various groups we can examine here. Red Brigades (BR) was far better at articulating their theories, their stance against revisionism etc. and so they stand out among all other European “Marxist-Leninist” urban guerrilla groups for their clear and undeniable links to the Italian proletariat, as they existed in tandem with above-ground mass protest movements and labor struggles, especially inside the auto factories of northern Italy. BR was not composed of mainly students, professionals and intellectuals like their German counterparts the Red Army Faction. Instead, they were mainly factory workers turned soldiers.

On Charges of Focoism and its actual negative birthmarks

BR was not focosist and they even explicitly stated such. Instead they relied upon factory cells to be “the direct expression of the class movement” which added a great deal of strength to their organizations. Nonetheless they remained, at least to some degree, influenced by either the essence of focosism, or by groups which exemplified foco errors.

BR drew from many sources in the third world for inspiration for their struggles, and at times they veered into eclecticism as a result—they simultaneously took a correct and hard-line stance against the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) as well as making a huge mistake in allowing their principal consideration for who could be united based exclusively on support for extra-parliamentary armed struggle—regardless of tactics, strategy and ideology. BR refused to condemn even their most vocal critics as long as those critics maintained some foggy support theoretically for armed struggle. This must be grasped as a failure to keep politics in command of the gun—an error akin to the principal shortcomings of foco theory.

BR was influenced highly by the Tupamaros of Uruguay, a semi-feudal semi-colonial country. Unlike Maoists, the Tupamaros believed in the urban guerrilla struggle as the principal struggle. In their defense we can understand that Maoism had not been realized as a force in Latin America, nonetheless we must insist that it was correct of the comrades in Peru to denounce foco strategy when their party made left deviations in the 1960s. The correct line held by Chairman Gonzalo was to reconstitute the PCP and begin preparations for PPW. The Tupamaros were guilty of responding correctly to their objective conditions without proper preparation of their subjective conditions (the inverse of what the dismissers of the urban guerrillas project onto the European experience) which was in essence the same fundamental mistake of the BR. Any study of postwar Italy reveals rampant conditions which were ripe for armed struggle; armed struggle was not the mistake of the BR.

Drawing so heavily on the example of the Tupamaros and sources like Brazilian Carlos Marighella necessarily damaged the potential of BR. In spite of this limitation—and because of its reliance on the proletariat—BR accomplished many great and successful actions which drew on the support of the proletariat and in the process drew more proletarian support.

Winning mass support through militant confrontation

Even prior to the formation of BR, their precursor organization Sinistra Proletaria saw amazing success with organizing housing struggles for proletarian families. Unlike the revisionist and legal left, SP organized proletarian families to ignore legal channels, which divert and bog them down, in favor of direct and militant confrontation with class enemies. They taught the masses correctly that the struggle for housing was part of the proletarian struggle for power, and from this to fortify their housing occupations and prepare for violence with the police, which resulted in many cops being hospitalized. Contrary to the narrative and propaganda of revisionists, these tactics did not meet with the alienating disapproval of the masses, but with increased mass support. Eventually the housing authority gave in and gave housing to the workers. SP commented that:

“They [the workers committees set up by SP in the housing struggle] have won against the revisionists and all other ‘false friends of the people’ who preach moderation, who wanted to rely only on negotiations, who accused the people in struggle of extremism and adventurism. Revisionists of all varieties said we would be defeated! And instead we won! The new law of the people has won!” [1]

Contemporary assessments of BR

We find few articles in English about BR which approach their history and experience from anything akin to a Marxist perspective; we admit that we have not totally researched this, and that we must contend with what we have read. Recently the Canadian academic and revisionist Joshua Moufawad Paul produced a brief article that, in spite of the shortcomings which we will address, also has merit. In his reflections on two books released by Kersplebadeb and AK press, *Strike One to Educate One Hundred*, and *1978: A New Stage in the Class War*, he correctly highlights the mass links maintained by BR and the tendency among left-leaning academics in the imperialist countries to focus only on the Italian autonomist movement, making this one of his better articles. Still we are confronted with certain misunderstandings or possible obfuscations that deserve correction. [2]

The first mistake which must be corrected is the idea that BR attempted “people’s war” which they never claimed to do. Through various articulations like “protracted revolutionary war” or “protracted armed struggle” they overlapped with, or came in proximity to the Maoist theory of PPW, but not close enough to qualify their armed struggle as PPW proper or even an attempt at initiating it in terms of the scope and methods of a PPW. We can concede some ground to the idea that through creative

application of theory BR attempted to theorize something similar to urban PPW, but they failed to do this properly due to a number of theoretical mistakes which we will sketch out below.

The Maoist view is that PPW must be initiated by the Communist Party, that it is impossible without the Party at its helm, that the fully reconstituted Party has the historic obligation to initiate PPW as soon as possible. This was not the case with BR. In their defense, we must also grasp that armed struggle is not always PPW even if the latter always contains the former—armed struggle can exist prior to the Party and the PPW as a matter of necessity as evidenced throughout history. JMP correctly insists that the lack of the Party was the Achilles heel of the BR, but his consideration that they were waging PPW or attempting to wage it lacks enough supporting argument. Suffice it to say that without a Party there can be no attempt at genuine authentic PPW, but there can surely be experience with armed struggle in the imperialist center—which again holds many useful lessons—the thing to consider in this regard is the necessity to convert existing armed struggles into people’s war, for which again the Party is a prerequisite. At certain times and in certain conditions armed struggles will erupt, albeit with far less frequency, even in imperialist countries. These eruptions must be used in the interest of initiation of PPW and not confused as a stand in.

BR was not incorrect to believe that it could build the Party through armed struggle; many Parties have been built through armed struggle most notable among these are the Communist Parties of China and Peru. The CCP began with a scant few representatives at its founding meeting, there were less than 100 members in all of China, none of whom according to Mao (including himself in this assessment) had the answers to making revolution in China, however it still encountered both exponential growth, as well as near eradication and regrowth—all through and with the condition of armed struggle and eventually PPW. The most glaring demarcation is that the CPP already realized and constituted itself as the vanguard Party.

BR on the other hand had no such Party condition. Instead of attempting to “build the Party through PPW” we encounter the fact that they attempted to constitute or reconstitute the Party mainly through their urban guerrilla campaigns. Here we must understand the two concepts; that of building and that of constitution/reconstitution. All Parties must build themselves up through armed struggle, no Party waging any sort of revolutionary struggle can maintain the same quality and quantity as it started out with, any healthy revolutionary Party will grow

and enrich in the process of Party building which is an ongoing process throughout the whole existence of the Party.

On the other hand, constitution/reconstitution is not an ongoing reiterative sequence throughout the whole life of a Party, but a necessary pre-requisite to its ongoing “building” which begins as soon as constitution/reconstitution is completed.

Conflating these two distinct concepts is not a matter of semantics but an error of principle, a matter of obscurantism, which intended or not tends toward bankrupt notions of “accumulation of forces through protracted legal struggles.” Suffice it to say that a party which has not yet been accomplished cannot build in either the quality or quantity of the Party as such until it makes the leap from non-Party entity to Party, from Party embryo to Party proper through reconstitution/constitution—which also involves advancement in quality as the principal consideration.

To make matters clear, Party building only happens with the condition of a Party, prior to this condition the organization is not “party building”; it is constituting or reconstituting itself as a Party. JMP’s formula, which we will take as it is, as a casual observation, limits getting to the very root of the error of BR, that it sought something unrealistic and impossible for them, to constitute itself or reconstitute itself after initiating what they sometimes called “protracted revolutionary war.” Furthermore, it might be possible to reconstitute the CP in the condition of armed struggle, but to do this, one would necessarily need to possess the correct concept of the Party, which BR did not.

This mistaken concept as well as the unintended foco influence seriously damaged their unmatched potential among leftwing urban guerrillas. Building the Party through war would be a totally reasonable goal, one that has been proven attainable in almost every experience, however leading a revolutionary war without having constituted the Party is highly unlikely to meet any long-term success in terms of conquering power for the class.

In an updated version of the article JMP improves his assessment, nonetheless we still must make our disagreements clear since they matter a great deal in analyzing BR, he concludes:

“For those of those familiar with the Communist Party of Peru’s notion of the ‘militarization of the party’ this is even one step back from that notion since it seems to be a ‘militarization of the pre-party formation’. [EDIT: Based on discussions about

this comparison I should clarify that this mainly a rhetorical distinction designed to show that a contemporary Maoist understanding of PW is superior to the understanding of the BR. It is clear that, in its early stages, the BR's 'militarization' of its pre-party formation was in fact successful and contributed to its strength. The precise problem is that, when the BR entered the military stage of strategic defensive, it had no party apparatus in place and hoped to build such an apparatus in the civil war. More accurately, the BR entered the formal military stage without having established a vanguard party project.] By the 1980s, perhaps due to this lack of a pre-established party that could control the gun—but instead a process of the gun seeking to discover the party—different columns of the BR would split, thus rendering them more vulnerable to the state's counter-revolution. Drawing such lessons from their defeat, though, is because they possess a revolutionary legacy. And we should seek to learn more from those defeated movements that pursued revolution than those movements that were never defeated because they never tried." [3]

We argue that JMP is not among those familiar with the theory of Party militarization, at least not familiar enough. He is of course correct to cite mainly the lack of a Party in command, on this we could not agree more. The conflation, which we must point out and correct, is on the theory of Party militarization itself. BR conceived of a total merger of the Party and the Army, which forces two distinct instruments into one, this was the model they followed in the pre-party formation and it was how they viewed their future party. This is totally alien to Party militarization, which, as the PCP correctly insists, is the series of adjustments and modifications necessary to lead people's war. Neither the theories of the PCP or their historical experience with militarization argue that the Party and the Army are combined into one body—the fighting CP as theorized by BR. Contrary to this formulation, as well as the mistaken understanding of JMP, the PCP conceived of and realized the militarized CP which concentrically constructed its army around itself—bigger than itself. The Party was the utmost political command center, where the few converge, and through its army, which is constructed around itself and was much more numerous, it is able to conduct its mass work. For more on this topic we recommend the work of the Brazilian comrades, as well as the speech presented by a comrade of the former Red Guards Austin, who call precisely for the militarization of the Party in embryo. [4]

What is remarkable in the JMP article is his understanding that the militarization of the pre-party formation was to the benefit of BR and not to its detriment, yet he

fails to assert that Party militarization is a universal component of MLM. This is still a valuable insight anyway, as it is beyond question that a non-militarized body would have with certainty been unable to accomplish what BR did. This is evidenced by history too, among other things by the fact that BR was seldom infiltrated, while the majority of the revisionist organizations, chief among them the PCI insisted that BR was a police plot, rife with informants and infiltration—the opposite was true, it was the PCI who contained CIA agents on its Central Committee, who through their subterfuge managed to provide intelligence which led to the death of hundreds of Latin Americans in parties with fraternal relations to the PCI. [Strike One]

A similar situation exists among US revisionists who insist that the Maoists which operate in secrecy are composed of agents carrying out modern COINTELPRO, a baseless accusation considering that these revisionists enjoy police protection and almost never face major charges or repression, while those associated in some way or another with the Maoist movement face a near constant barrage of charges and state repression, including an assassination attempt and numerous frame ups, entrapment, surveillance etc. What we see is that those most susceptible to infiltration by their own structure tend to come into no contradiction with the state and face the least amount of profiling, project onto those who are organized against infiltration and who face repression the charges that it is they who are infested with state agents—of course these charges are never proven with any facts.

Being only partially correct is not ever enough, we must understand the difference between a militarized CP and the merger of army and Party, between constitution/reconstitution and building if we genuinely desire to bring our understanding of BR (or any urban guerrilla) further than the general problematic. We must defend building the militarized CP through PPW; we must not flatten the Party and the Army into one organism.

To further the point on the errors of the BR we must examine the 1975 document “The Assault on the Heart of the State” which seeks to theoretically justify the flattening of the party and army into one organism, while of course postponing building the party through armed struggle to a later date:

“Mass line for guerrilla warfare does not mean, as some interpret it, ‘organize the mass movement on the terrain of armed struggle’ or at least it does not mean this right now.

“In the immediate future, the main aspect of the question remains the building of the Fighting Party as the real interpreter of the political and military needs of the ‘objectively’ revolutionary class stratum, and the development of fighting organizations on a class wide level on the various fronts of the revolutionary war.”
[5]

BR succinctly exposes their major errors better than any of their contemporary or historic critics could. Organizing the mass movement on the terrain of armed struggle is the exact task required of the Red Army, and it can only be accomplished if at the core of this army is the Communist Party, which commands it in every respect, is militarized but distinct as an organization from the military—this is what is meant by concentric construction of the three instruments of the revolution as outlined in the General Political Line of the Communist Party of Peru.

Instead the BR set itself up for defeat by flattening the Party and the Army into one organism that would seek to mobilize and organize the masses in armed struggle as a horizon rather than an objective necessity—the mass line in guerilla war or any other time relies on the principle that the masses make history, and the Party must lead them, acting as a lever. Peoples war then sets to rights the mistakes of the BR, what is left is to learn as much as we can from their successes.

So what are the necessarily lessons we must extract from BR?

Firstly understanding their orientation toward the modern revisionist PCI, its collaboration with the Christian Democrats and its political location internationally, BR existed as a genuine force among the proletariat, in many instances operating inside of factories in direct opposition to cadres of the PCI who would attempt to derail or crush shop floor struggles, as well as against remaining fascist management and owners, common in Italy. This reflects their correct understanding that revisionism is the main danger for the Communist struggle, understanding that PCI was one of the largest and most powerful of the revisionist organizations without state power in any imperialist country. The contradiction between modern revisionism and revolution was the contradiction which created BR, and without the ideology of MLM they were unable to navigate this and gave in to the aforementioned eclecticism regarding the united front. What shines through in all of this was the BR’s ability to act as a lever on the proletariat and carry out bold and supported actions against revisionist domination and reformism.

Militarily BR was correct to denounce both the Comintern insurrectionary strategy and focoism. BR grew from a longstanding tradition of armed struggle in Italy with protracted characteristics, including the anti-fascist struggles during WWII as well as a refusal to disarm which existed among numerous PCI cadres and cells as well as militant workers militias at the adoption of revisionism. Armed struggle was no stranger for Italian Communists, making the betrayal of the old CP all the more devastating. The failure to develop the antifascist war of resistance into people's war is one of historic proportions, which must be placed on Togliatti and the other notorious traitors of the proletariat.

We must understand that the actions of BR labeled as "adventurist" still by our contemporary right opportunists were often actually a credit to BR. Their targets were often the most reviled, and in some cases they would try enemies of the people and make examples of them as conscious propaganda actions, such as shaving the head of a fascist manager and tying him to a flag pole outside of an automobile factory with a placard on his neck. Such activity bolstered support and increased the confidence of struggling workers. Marches of hundreds of workers with red flags inside of the factories where management had been targeted by BR were not uncommon. BR understood that the Italian proletariat sought armed struggle and that this desire was facing attempted murder by the modern revisionists of the PCI.

BR's history hosts a wealth of lessons for modern antifascists who seek to combat and resist fascist influence in the communities and factories of the working class. They stand out among the post WWII antifascist struggles as one of the most militant, developed, and capable antifascist forces, yet the contemporary left in imperialist countries is all too happy to sit in its soiled anarchist diapers, no matter how many times reality beats it over the head.

There are many important examples to draw from the way that BR was organized. Some militants were found to have accomplished deep cover in anti-communist trade unions, while others had dropped publicly their leftist views in order to go undetected by the state while carrying out BR actions. At no point were these actions divorced from the ongoing class struggle in Italy while acting in solidarity with international struggles. Unlike the Weather Underground in the US, BR focused on going undetected while maintaining and developing its mass links. Any protocol which they employed that allowed them to function should be studied by any serious revolutionaries.

Armed propaganda must be demarcated from “propaganda by the deed”. The former uses revolutionary violence to gain mass support and build up organizational forms for the proletarian revolution. The latter only hopes to inspire similar acts organically with no organizational expression. We can again grasp that BR tended toward the former, while anarchists tend toward the latter. Historic arguments for armed propaganda can be found in the PCP’s early trials against cattle thieves and rapists, who would be executed after a people’s court was completed. These examples are found in every people’s war to date without exception, and in many cases even Parties and organizations without having initiated PPW are able to conduct such trials and punishments on behalf of their masses. It must be understood that individual trials and punishments of a culprit will not in and of themselves eliminate such crimes from taking place; there will still be cattle theft and rape until power has been secured and a revolutionary government can impose its rule, in many cases these will go on and have to be targeted with the proletarian dictatorship and the cultural revolutions once power has been seized nationwide. What is of value to this discussion is that these acts of punishment serve to recruit and inspire the masses to take part in and support the revolution, any function as a deterrent to anti-people crimes is then a fringe benefit. The laws of motion governing this only strengthen the argument for the universal application of PPW. BR was particularly adept at armed propaganda and understood this as an instrumental to the first salvos of any guerrilla struggle.

BR approached revolutionary theory with the genuine intention of applying the universal to the particulars of Italy; much of their analysis about Italy and the world was ahead of its time and thus valuable for all revolutionaries while other theories fall short of thorough science. What matters is that they did not traffic in stale dogma and broke decisively with all which sought to kill the revolution in endless legalism, making even their failures worth far more than any so-called successes of the legalists (including the Autonomists). BR simply did not go far enough in their theory to land on the correct ideology and the correct military strategy—what they lacked was Maoism fully theorized as MLM, they could only go so far as to creatively apply an albeit eclectic Marxism-Leninism with a wealth of great results, proving the capabilities of carrying out armed struggle in Europe. Tied to their success was the fact that Italy was one of the more backward of the European powers; it still maintained a high degree of reaction from the fascist period fostered by the Catholic Church, especially in regard to women, there was still semi-feudal elements in the south and widespread racism against southerners who would immigrate to the north for factory jobs. These conditions helped to make BR one of the most successful of

the urban guerrilla. These Italian specificities alone do not make BR unique, what does was their firm proletarian orientation and their desire to theorize and demonstrate the question of armed struggle in an imperialist country. It is no great leap to suggest that those concerned with revolutionary armed struggle in imperialist countries would do well to study and analyze BR; it also makes sense to defend them against right opportunist views which seek to liquidate armed struggle in the imperialist center. In any analysis BR should be understood as on the correct side of the barricades. Their mistakes were those of revolutionaries trying something new, and we should value this contextually to PPW, similar to how we conceive of the Paris Commune in the context of the proletarian dictatorship.

Red Army Faction

“We have no more to say to you about our methods than we do about our plans for action—you shitheads! ... What do you mean adventurism? That one only has oneself to blame for informers. Whatever.” –Red Army Faction, Build the Red Army, 1970

The Red Army Faction derived several of their theories from Mao Zedong, who they quoted more than any other revolutionary. The main among these are best understood as incorrect application of correct ideas, or going about the right thing the wrong way. It is correct to insist as RAF did on the primacy of practice in the accumulation of knowledge, and that this too applies to making war—because of this truth the only way to comprehend the RAF is as a great experiment in armed struggle. From the Maoist principal of unity-struggle-unity, the RAF held that it was impossible to unify the German working class with itself and with the progressive or revolutionary intellectuals without armed conflict. The bourgeois and sometimes right opportunist viewpoint on RAF is that they were childish and impetuous, more of a gang; nothing could be further from the truth as a cursory examination of their theory proves that they were highly concerned with Marxist-Leninist theory, highlighting Mao among the greats. Far from being unconcerned with concrete conditions, they proceeded directly from their understanding of these and made quality theoretical defense of their arguments.

Unlike the BR, the RAF was far less concerned with maintaining and deepening their base among the German proletariat and admitted as much themselves in their most important document “The Urban Guerrilla Concept” when they claimed:

“Our original organizational concept implied a connection between the urban guerrilla and the work at the base. We wanted everyone to work in the neighborhoods and factories...to learn. It has become clear that that doesn’t work.”
[6]

By negating the three with rule followed by Maoists, the RAF sought to theoretically justify the division between the army and the masses, rather than find a way to resolve this contradiction as BR did. This viewpoint would remain a constant hurdle for RAF and would time and time again see them detached from the proletariat.

Being one of the most documented of the urban guerrilla groups RAF cannot possibly get the treatment it deserves and we must surrender ourselves only to the most scant outlines. First among its features, we must examine the willingness of RAF militants to self-sacrifice and give up even their own parental rights as was the case with Gudrun Enslin and Ulrika Meinhof both of whom were mothers, who were forced to choose between active motherhood and dedication to the life of an underground militant. We start with this departure point because it vividly illustrates a popular sentiment among German women at the time; that armed struggle was the only way to secure a livable future. This thinking was reinforced by the amount of former ranking fascists who composed the heads of industry and government of West Germany. For the generation of militants which populated the RAF there was a great deal of continuity between the pre-war and post-war governments. The fact that the traditional CP had been banned and destroyed by a continuance of fascistic policy only taught the youth one thing; the way of the gun as the only political recourse. Sympathizing with this is necessary to understanding the RAF, which is necessary to the formulation of any criticism which must rightly be placed on them.

The RAF more so than BR was an example of an “army” without a Party. They considered themselves an armed fraction of the armed struggles taking place in the third world, and so found themselves over focused on solidarity and supportive actions, which simultaneously benefited them logistically, for instance this support was reciprocated by the Black September group who included the RAF prisoners in the list of Palestinian prisoners they demanded released when they took hostage the Israeli wrestling team at the Munich Olympics. This over focus also hurt them logistically as it was unable to tap into the existing struggles of the German working class, thus compromising their most valuable weapon—the armed people.

What is of value in the RAF was their ability to reproduce themselves generation after generation in these conditions, were they to have secured a proper mass base, with the correct ideology at the helm and led by a real and genuine Communist Party they might have been unstoppable. Again we see good objective conditions with bad subjective ones. How far they got waging a guerrilla war in a strong western imperialist country is remarkable in terms of what they could pull off and get away with, what they could withstand in terms of state surveillance and repression inherited from Nazi Germany etc. All of this translates into the tragic fact that they lacked the all-powerful revolutionary ideology of MLM. Even before major violent actions, the West German state began mobilizing its forces to do away with RAF almost immediately after the publication of the “Urban Guerrilla Concept”, over three thousand heavily armed police patrolled the cities of Northern Germany setting up check points and hunting the RAF. The revolutionaries’ ability to withstand this is remarkable.

Those who wish to replace discussion of ideology with discussion of conditions most sorely miss the point on this topic. The conservative view, which seeks to learn nothing, will insist that we must forgo ideological discussion entirely and that the RAF essentially failed because armed struggle in Germany was not possible. In fact, the RAF proved the validity of armed struggle in Germany quite well; they also proved at their own expense that armed struggle must follow the correct ideology of Maoism, and due more to ideological failure than “bad conditions” the RAF was never going to win.

As mentioned it was not uncommon for the RAF to quote Mao; they even titled their April 1972 document “Serve the People”, posing that their armed campaigns were in service to the people among many romanticized notions of the Tupamaros and the Black Panther Party. We can concede that this serving the people with armed struggle is true in one sense, that the people were served long term but not served immediately, mainly through summarizing their experience with bold propaganda actions which forced the imperialist state to drop much of its democratic façade. Early polls conducted among the German masses actually showed widespread sympathies for the early actions of the RAF. This support would be crucial to repopulating their ranks even when the first generation of leaders had been captured. This mass sympathy was not maintained however, largely due to the RAF treating itself as a proxy, a deviation which could not occur under Maoist Party leadership. While BR saw success in their campaigns, meeting objective goals (aside from the release of political prisoners) was not such a concern for RAF.

The RAF must be viewed as a scientific experiment on what the bourgeois democratic state will attempt in the interest of crushing armed struggle, and of course what revolutionaries can do to counter balance this. Modern penal isolation techniques were pioneered by the West German state to confront the RAF, but this could only accomplish so much and could not prevent literally decades of armed actions carried out by the RAF. In this regard the principal that the enemy is a paper tiger strategically but a real tiger tactically is highlighted. Their methods of action can be revisited guided by a real revolutionary Party and carried out by a real Red Army at its disposal, from expropriations, to abductions and other uses of revolutionary violence the RAF proved that their methods, adjusted by a Party, can hold true for any urban terrain. The fact that these went on for as long as they did serve as a testament to the fact that any armed struggle will take on a protracted character, that it is mobilizing and arming the masses which can prevent many of the military errors made by the RAF.

As mentioned before the composition of the RAF was mainly intellectuals and professionals, which without the correct proletarian leadership will become impulsive and disconnected from the people. The strong points of BR expose the weakest points of the RAF, who were as sophisticated militarily. Nonetheless it is correct to view such formations as well-meaning but incorrect comrades in the struggle than to consider them abominations to oppose wholly. To do this properly we must insist that the RAF lacked the revolutionary ideology of the proletariat and so made real mistakes, but that at the same time they made a genuine push to upset the imperialist country in the face of the dominant type of revisionism which sought to disarm the struggle, What must not be done is to enter into the chorus of denunciation which revisionists past and present have hurled at the RAF. Our criticism must be nothing like that of the revisionists, those who await genuine mistakes to celebrate the extermination of revolutionaries.

In this regard the RAF expressed the objective reality of their conditions—that only through armed struggle can power be accomplished. This is of course correct but can only reach its true potential if MLM is made incarnate. Revisionists of all stripes rush to condemn the experience of the RAF and others like them, because their main goal is to renounce armed struggle. The material conditions of the 1970s led to the urban guerrillas grasping out for guns. It is true that the masses clamor to grasp the gun and make revolution; we would be remiss to condemn them due solely to the fact that they lacked the correct leadership of the CP., just as we would be incorrect to assert that the burning of buildings and looting of stores is unacceptable for the

masses of the oppressed black nation in the US. The main thing is to insist on reconstituting the Communist Party of Germany, so that the youth who composed the RAF receive their correct leadership. Maoists in Germany have taken up this task of Party reconstitution, and have masterfully elaborated on the universality of PPW. Their documents can speak for themselves and they would be better qualified to comment on the experiment of the RAF than we, so we can only offer our understandably limited viewpoint.

More than anything else, the RAF demonstrates that even those at the heights of power are not bulletproof, that even in an advanced imperialist system they are vulnerable, this is of objective value to the proletariat who is told daily that their enemies exist behind an impenetrable wall of defense. This myth of omnipotence is reproduced by all who argue for protracted legal struggles of an above ground, open to the public “party,” an idea that was just as bankrupt in the 1970s as it is today. The abduction and execution of Hans Martin Schleyer hopefully haunts the ruling class still, and offers inspiration that any enemy can be reached.

In synthesis, the thing is not to get carried away with condemning the very obvious shortcomings of these militants, but to celebrate the undeniable fact that political power grows from the barrel of a gun, and that even flawed, poorly structured groups can strike and penetrate the armor of the imperialists in their own country. The RAF proved this with their blood and the blood of the enemy. This should be recognized and valued while being analyzed and improved upon.

While the RAF never sufficiently articulated the need for reconstituting the Communist Party of Germany, they proved to be tenacious, courageous and capable of many great actions, their legal left revisionist counterparts in Germany at the time offer not a single useful lesson, and are nothing more than a re-run of already proven failures, in most instances failures that had already been theorized as such for over a hundred years.

Irish Republican Army

“The position of the Irish Republican Army since its foundation in 1916 has been one of sustained resistance and implacable hostility to the forces of imperialism, always keeping in the forefront of the most advanced revolutionary thinking and the latest guerrilla warfare techniques in the world”

–IRA Green Book, 1956

Finally, and beyond the nominally Marxist efforts we must address the experience of the National Liberation struggles in advanced capitalist countries, Northern Ireland remains occupied by the UK, one of the world's old colonial powers and leading imperialist powers. Yet the IRA was able to wage a prolonged guerrilla war against this imperialist juggernaut. Even those who are quick to condemn the Marxist leaning urban guerrillas of Europe are far more restrained when it comes to assessing the IRA; it is hard for anyone to ignore the severity of brutality committed against the Irish as it is impossible to ignore the plight of the Palestinian people.

Ireland was England's first colony, its litmus test for its empire. As such the Irish people have always rebelled, always fought back by various means at their disposal at various times. For our interests we should focus mainly on the troubles, though for lessons of urban guerilla war we should not forget to mention the semi-successful Irish war of independence which could not be militarily defeated and had to be beaten back politically with the partition of the country. This is where the urban guerilla was born.

War of attrition or protracted peoples war?

The IRA described its Guerrilla Strategy in five points as follows:

1. A War of attrition against enemy personnel which is aimed at causing as many casualties and deaths as possible so as to create a demand from their people at home for their withdrawal.
2. A bombing campaign aimed at making the enemy's financial interest in our country unprofitable while at the same time curbing long term financial investment in our country.
3. To make the Six Counties as at present and for the past several years ungovernable except by colonial military rule.
4. To sustain the war and gain support for its end by National and International propaganda and publicity campaigns.
5. By defending the war of liberation by punishing criminals, collaborators and informers. [7]

It is clear that the Guerrilla Strategy lacks the wherewithal found in the far more advanced theory of PPW; it does not contain appropriate understanding of how to develop the guerrilla war into warfare proper, on how to crush the enemy militarily and force their total defeat by mobilizing the masses and setting up the new state.

The whole thing is contingent on the hopes that the enemy will just go away when the cost of engagement eventually becomes too much. This lapse in military theory must be understood as a kind of nearsightedness, which has led historically to negotiation, unreasonable compromise, and capitulation.

War of attrition, as expressed by the IRA hinges on the side with the greater resources for survival winning, in practice this tends to divert to what Mao warned of as “passive defense” or “defensive defense” an error that PPW theory has accounted for and overcome. None the less, these theories had great traction in the Northern Ireland struggles for independence. It can be accurately argued that the IRA engaged in a war of attrition sequence from around 1969 to around 1998 upon its eventual betrayal and capitulation to parliamentarianism. The major consideration was to make war unbearable for the British, by surviving the hardships inflicted upon the national liberation forces. The limitations imposed on war of attrition overlap with considerations that a PPW must maintain, but unlike war of attrition, PPW grows in strength and gains not only mass sympathy but mass support and participation from its ability to inflict damage upon the enemy and its infrastructure.

Through its albeit flawed military strategy the IRA was able to attack and defend in a careful balance, in this process it was able to carve out enclaves which stood as a pseudo base area of mass support, where the police and army feared to enter and the Republican forces could begin managing the day to day affairs of the people. In this the experience of the IRA is rich in examples of the aforementioned armed propaganda, which they even address in point 5 of the guerrilla strategy.

Reliance on war of attrition also encouraged the IRA to rely on sympathetic anti-British forces for its arms, like Libya, as its main means of arming itself. This is contrary to the Maoist theory of PPW which maintains its independence through its treatment of the enemy as a supply line. In this regard we can see how the principle of snatching arms from the enemy, converting unarmed forces into armed forces, is far superior to the reliance on financial and armed support from abroad. The Irish struggle has always been marked by this defect, in the 1920s precursors to the IRA relied upon funding from Irish Americans and often relied on the charity and the good graces of the propertied class in Ireland, careful not to offend them with too much socialist activity—this was a failure to implement the national front which keeps proletarian interests as principal, essentially ceding leadership over to the upper classes which are also oppressed by imperialism.

Even with this major defect at play, the IRA enjoyed the support of the poor as its main force, national oppression serving as the basis for cross class alliance. Unemployment, racism, and poverty served as the recruiting ground for IRA combatants. It was proven time and time again that the British military could not defeat the IRA militarily and had thus defeated them politically time and time again. From the partition of the country to the Good Friday Agreement the sting of British politics is still felt on the Irish people, who especially in the north cannot surrender; armed actions persist and mass rebellion is on the rise with Brexit negotiations. Even many imperialist politicians fear a continuance of armed struggle rising to the level of the Troubles. Suffice it to say that armed struggle has never gone away, even with official capitulation, because the conditions which demand armed struggle have not gone away. This follows the universal laws of revolution and stems from the principal contradiction in the world today, that between imperialist countries and countries oppressed by imperialism.

It is the duty of all Communists to reconstitute their Party, Ireland is no exception, upon accomplishing this task the only way to conduct armed struggle without lapsing into the past mistakes is through initiating PPW. What the experience of the IRA especially throughout the troubles offers all revolutionaries is a glimpse into the possibilities of urban base areas, while met with their limitations under the political and military control of the national bourgeoisie these experiences must be unfettered under the political military leadership of the proletariat.

General Lessons from the IRA

Useful among the experience and history of the IRA was their combination of principally urban and secondarily rural armed struggle. Among Chairman Gonzalo's numerous contributions is the theory of Unified People's War, which answers the question of how a PPW can contend with the modern condition of mega cities, and the rural poor being forced from the country side to the shanty towns surrounding major cities. This theory immediately applies to the third world which have mega cities with increasing populations, as well it applies to the imperialist countries themselves in regard to managing the struggle inversely with the principal aspect being the urban struggle and this being supported by a rural component. While there are no mega-cities in Ireland, hundreds of years of mainly urban battles carried out by the forces of Irish liberation are of objective value to all revolutionaries in the third world as well as in developed capitalist nations, their experience must be studied far beyond what we hope to accomplish here.

It is not without reason that the life of Michael Collins was studied by Mao himself, this study was to improve Mao's understanding of guerrilla warfare which Collins had helped to elevate. Before his betrayal of the people, Collins advanced urban guerrilla warfare in Ireland; he understood the value of counter intelligence and its connection to the war of information, he used small mobile teams to carry out operations, he insisted on total operational secrecy, he insisted on daring and unconventional actions. Our modern skeptics would likely turn their nose up at Mao's study of Collins' urban guerrilla techniques; instead of such pretense, genuine revolutionaries must study hard in the interest of applying similar concepts to PPW. While his theory lacked the scope of PPW, his practice was enough to force the British to panic and ask for negotiations, what followed due to lack of persistence in victory was the partition of the country, a mistake Collins paid for with his life. What is incompatible with history is the idea that the guerrilla war waged by Collins and the early IRA was conditionally appropriate, but that today the conditions do not exist in any urban industrial country for people's war, which is far more advanced and complete than any mere guerrilla war. The effectiveness of urban guerrilla war as well as the impossibility of protracted legalism followed by quick insurrection has long been proven by the Irish.

Other Considerations Regarding the Urban Guerrilla

With considerable limitations we have begun to outline some positive and negative examples, some strengths and weaknesses in the interest of further discussion, on which we welcome disagreement. This is by no means considered by us to be an in-depth examination as such would require volumes on any of the three examples given. In all of them, and in fact in all cases of the urban guerrilla (with the exception of those which exist in an actual PPW) there are certain features of the Communist led army which are absent and must be considered.

The army as the Party's mass workers: the social work carried out by People's Armies, for nations oppressed by imperialism demanding new democratic revolution, or the Red Army for capitalist countries demanding socialist revolution, is necessary to the maintenance and development of mass links. This is not existent in the experience of the urban guerrilla outside of actual PPW. Thus the theory of universal PPW already resolves the matter of maintaining and improving mass links.

Stemming from the law that the masses are the real heroes, the Maoist theory espouses the Army of a New Type, which engages principally in combat against the

old state, but also maintains its role in production, allowing it to be self-sustaining and preventing it from parasitism. Negligence of this principle spells disaster and hinders the urban guerrilla's ability to maintain combat over a long period of time. This defect leads the army or revolutionary force to capitulation politically, in every case weakening it to ideological attacks from the state which cost it support, corralling it with advanced counter insurgency apparatus into a political compromise with the old state, which in essence must be understood as capitulation.

People's war is conceived of as developing through stages, with each stage containing its own laws of operation—mistaking this point or negating it altogether also leads to mistakes which compromise the revolutionary struggle. We can see this having an effect on all three groups we used as an example, having not conceived of the three stages they were unable to respond to them accordingly. This is a subjective error and not evidence of the “conditions just not being right” for revolutionary activity. The argument of conditions not being right is used as a blanket argument to dismiss armed struggle, exemplified by the fact that an incorrect strategy and ideology regardless of its implementation in the third world or an imperialist country is doomed to failure. The Tupamaros failed because their ideology and strategy of warfare did not allow them to succeed, the same can be said for the FARC or any of the examples of the European urban guerrilla. No one argues that the examples given were realized as people's wars; the thing is that the theory of PPW would save these experiences from their respective conclusions, and must be insisted upon by revolutionaries moving forward.

Unlike the denouncers of universal people's war, we must have faith in the masses to make revolution, we must believe that the Communist Party can act as a great lever on the masses and that PPW can be as successful in the imperialist countries as it is in the countries oppressed by imperialism. Nowhere will we argue that the experience of either the PPW of the third world or the urban guerrilla struggles can be reproduced or rubber stamped on the conditions of an imperialist country and be at all successful.

Our argument is simple and unavoidable: we must study experience and theory in order to creatively define and apply the military strategy of the proletariat to the specific conditions of imperialist countries. To deny this is to deny the right to rebel for the proletariat in imperialist countries, which does nothing to serve the world proletarian revolution or the national liberation struggles. In all respects, legal struggle must aim to give cover to and strengthen illegal struggle, this has been and

always will be a part of Leninism and more so, this principle exposes the naked opportunism of those who attack the theory of PPW being applied to imperialist countries on the basis of an imagined “protracted legal struggle.” We must be vigilant against the assorted dogma of insurrectionism which states that Lenin or Mao had the first and last word on this subject and assumes their views would not develop according to the times. Evidence to the contrary exists, when conditions developed so did the views of these great leaders, should they be alive today it is certain that they would insist that imperialism has entered its death throws and that PPW is the only way forward. We must insist on mass participation in revolutionary war, we must insist that a small force can grow into a large one if it struggles correctly—these views are in accordance with the law of contradiction which is the only fundamental law of dialectical materialism. We hope to write more extensively on the theory and practice of the groups we have written on here as well as expanding our scope to other groups, this is a task for the future and to accomplish it we must make our small contribution to the discussion on PPW.

Conclusion, A Brief Engagement with the old Avakianite View of the Urban Guerrilla in the 80s

We find in issue 4 of *A World to Win Magazine*, published in 1985, and tucked behind several useful articles, an article published by the pen name of P. Becker, a long articulation on the Avakianite opportunist views on the urban guerrilla. It must be stated that P. Becker’s actual affiliation is unknown to us, but that in all probability he was a member of the RCPUSA, or some equivalent, who maintained a lot of influence if not control over the magazine, including the fact that to get a copy of the publication in the US you had to go through the RCPUSA controlled Revolutionary Books. Becker’s views are what is concerning, his affiliations are secondary.

Throughout the article the term “terrorist” is used to describe every urban guerrilla, there is no revolutionary argument for using such a bourgeois method of denunciation and such a device truly stinks of the RCP. Lenin used the term to describe various forces in his times, but the author falls well short of this example. To be clear, terrorism is but one tool in the arsenal of all revolutionaries, there is no sense in moralizing it beyond the realm of tactics. There are conditions which permit its use, and conditions which discourage or forbid its use. Just like assassination and execution, it would be moralizing and ridiculous to refer to every organization which has used these tools as “assassins” or “executioners” collectively; a tactic itself does not present the principal characteristic of a political organization. This moralization

by Becker exposes an aversion to political violence more generally, revolutionary violence sometimes means killing, but to refer to revolutionary organizations as “killers” is reactionary, hence his use of the word “terrorist” is reactionary in the same way. Again not a question of semantics but a question of analysis, class stand and which class ones propaganda serves.

The 1985 article states:

“The terrorist line argues that the carrying out of armed attacks on imperialist institutions and personnel is generally the principal, and at any rate an indispensable task of the revolutionary forces from the very inception of their activity. These attacks are at the center of their strategy: ‘protracted people’s war in the imperialist countries’ [8]

This quotation deserves some comment, for starters not one of the urban guerrilla groups in western Europe, which the article intends to address, ever claimed to be carrying out “protracted peoples war”. The author, in line with Avakian simply claims as much to discredit the possibility of doing such, and in so doing he is arguing against armed struggle. Secondly, had the author actually studied the history or documents of the feared western European urban guerrilla groups he would know that these groups did not consider armed attacks as the starting point, as we saw above with Sinista Proletaria, these groups started out in a combination of legal and illegal struggles and developed toward armed struggle, the RAF even said so bluntly:

“Before deciding to take up the armed struggle, it is important that one first experience the legal struggle. When one’s connection to the revolutionary left is based on just wanting to follow the latest fad, then it is better to not start anything you will not be able to get out of later on.” [9]

Not only does the author falsely attribute claims of people’s war to the urban guerrilla, but he reveals that he does not even grasp people’s war as it was applied in the Chinese example, he conceives of it as:

“Starting on the strategic defensive, building a Red Army step by step, which in coordination with the guerrillas would advance from base areas in the countryside, and go over to strategic offensive, to surround the cities and establish a revolutionary government.” [10]

This muddled understanding neglects to mention that peoples war contains three stages and not two, that it relies on the conquest of dual power and the formation of a revolutionary government which operates as the new state in the liberated areas well before it advances on the cities. In the mind of Becker the guerrillas “coordinates” with the Red Army, and are not an appendage of it. Perhaps by neglecting to be precise with what peoples war was historically he can simply distort its meaning to the point of being indefinable.

Of course, according to Becker there is almost never a revolutionary situation in the imperialist countries, and this is due to the fact that the working classes in imperialist centers keep getting bought up by the spoils of imperialism! This viewpoint is totally anti-Maoist in the sense that it is anti-masses, not only does it view the masses as prostitutes, but it does not even correspond to reality. All theory which verges on the existence of a country with a majority of labor aristocrats is counter revolutionary. The US for example is the world’s second largest manufacturer which necessitates a large urban industrial proletariat, for the world’s second largest proletariat to be denounced as all “labor aristocratic” requires us to suspend all understanding of dialectical materialism and reason. Without bogging down this article with statistics and poverty rates to prove that exploitation is rampant in the US, we are correct to just state that if there is an aristocratic strata of workers, and there most certainly is, then there has to exist a deeper and more profound or more numerous strata of proletarians which the aristocrats are distanced from; one cannot exist without a relationship to the other.

Becker and company demarcate between the leftwing urban guerrillas and the national liberation forces like the IRA, to make this demarcation he only provides some vague commentary about how the latter has mass support or is an extension of the already existing mass struggles. This demarcation is correct in regard to groups like the RAF as well as anarchist groups which utilized armed struggle, but it falls short of a historical assessment when it comes to the majority of the life of BR as already discussed in detail.

Becker insists that the faulty strategy of the IRA is the exact grounds in which they must be defended, and what demarcates them from the leftwing urban guerrillas:

“The IRA’s military strategy of protracted warfare is a reflection of their political goal—to drive the British out of Ireland—and as such reflects the national character of the struggle. For these reasons it has been able to draw continuing mass support. On

the other hand, similar (on the surface) tactics take on a whole different meaning in the context of the imperialist countries: these bourgeoisie cannot be driven into 'leaving' their home base and must be utterly smashed." [11]

The idea that Ireland would be free if only the British would physically leave has been proven reactionary since 1922 when the Republic of Ireland was founded, which is culturally and economically still under mainly British control, and again in April 10 1998 when the Good Friday Agreement included the physical withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland. It should be clear to anyone with even a basic understanding of the situation that it is more complex than British withdrawal and that Ireland cannot be free while divided, and cannot achieve its national liberation without transition into socialist revolution upon the founding of a unified republic.

This has long been the argument made by the leftwing of Irish revolutionaries, who Becker and company sit well to the right of in their effort to fling mud at other urban guerrillas. As mentioned before, the war of attrition lacks the scope and ambition of people's war, and so the slogan of people's war for Irish liberation is the only slogan with revolutionary legs to stand on. Both of the Irish states need smashing, the inclusion of "Republicans" in the state has not, and will never accomplish liberation —this is what Maoism teaches. Becker simply needs to rationalize away the fact that urban guerrilla struggles can gain and maintain mass support.

Becker exemplifies "tailing the masses" when he claims:

"a day of revolt by the masses of Birmingham [England] does a hundred times more material damage to the imperialists than years of their urban guerrilla warfare" [12]

We must scratch our heads and wonder what exactly is meant here by "material damage" because if he is talking about property damage then clearly years of exploded buildings add up more economically. If he is talking about political damage —the results of both are identical, because both are without the guidance of a Party capable of fusing the struggle to the long term need to conquer power. What we have is just a strange fetish which the RCP has always been guilty of, that is to insist on legalism with their day to day organizing, and then go interfere with organic rebellions which they have no links to. This mentality is exhibited in Becker's argument, and his line is just as guilty of failing to establish links to the heroic masses in rebellion. Rightists who use the real errors of groups like the RAF to present an argument even worse than the errors of these groups are particularly despicable. Our consideration must be based on the need for organization, and

specifically a method of organization which masters illegal struggle while maintaining mass links—in essence the Communist Party.

Par for the course for the dogmatist is the view that the role of the vanguard is simply that of preparation, which of course in their mind cannot include preparation with experience in armed struggle:

“What is demanded of revolutionaries is not that they retreat into isolated acts of sabotage and assassination, but that they raise their own ability to politically forge this class consciousness of the proletarians, above all into a vanguard party itself” [13]

The class consciousness of the proletariat must not be counterpoised to sabotage and assassination, the two things are not mutually exclusionary, as discussed in the context of armed propaganda and building the party in the conditions of armed struggle. A muddled formula of politically forging the class consciousness of the proletarians into a vanguard party itself is not at all sufficient, due mainly to the fact that organizations are made of people and not consciousness, consciousness itself does not determine reality; reality and mainly the relationships to production forge consciousness. This is to say that the class struggle is the main catalyst to forging class consciousness and communists, who reconstitute or build their parties. By counterpoising mutually dependent and beneficial concepts Becker presents us with a dog that won't hunt, even more useless than the lessons of the urban guerrilla.

Becker and others of course rely on the fact that the Western European urban guerrillas were on the decline in the 1980s and it is true they were, but they were not unique in this regard. All formerly major revisionist parties were also shrinking all over the US and Western Europe, the anti-revisionist new left and new communist movement groups were also shrinking without any exceptions. What is important is that in this same period Maoism was being incarnated by the people's war in Peru and the PCP. The decline and collapse of revisionism was being seen at the very same time as the emergence of MLM, which would place the genuine anti-revisionist parties and organizations on the correct path to growth and strength. This very ideology is what must be used to analyze and not condemn, as instructed by Gonzalo. It is incorrect to proceed as Becker did, from the point of condemnation, cynicism and disdain. After all Becker's formula for assessment was not the science of MLM, which must paint an altogether different picture. Many years later the hacks like Becker are still at it, making the same lifeless, subjectivist “analysis” and not

grasping the essential truth that it is right to rebel against reactionaries and MLM alone can correct the historic mistakes made by the various urban guerrilla groups. Ideology is more important than guns or bombs, or laws for that matter.

Becker, by intentionally distorting the BR's line regarding the Aldo Moro kidnapping attempts to frame BR as reformists, claiming that their only intention was to break the alliance between the Christian Democrats and the PCI, his position however falls short of understanding that the BR incorporated this tactic into their policy of attacking the heart of the state; they considered Moro a fitting target as the historical leader of the Christian Democrats as well as the former prime minister of Italy, a scope going well beyond determining composition of parliament. According to BR, the Christian Democrats were "the main enemy of the moment" and they must be "liquidated, beaten and dispersed," goals not met by the kidnapping tactic, but inform the strategy of the campaign, which was successful in regard to increasing the contradictions among the Christian Democrats, many of whom came out publicly to more or less reveal themselves as hoping for Moro's execution, due to the dirt they were afraid he would spill on them under BR interrogation—dividing the party.

Contrary to the actual position of the BR, Becker stated that:

"When the Red Brigades executed Moro in order to influence the composition of Italian parliament, what they told the proletariat with their guns was that the real political content of 'striking at the heart of the state' was having one and not another political coalition in office." [14]

Not principally interested with the parliamentary results of the Moro campaign BR instead, having identified him as the best target, sought to bargain Moro's life in exchange for the lives of revolutionaries. This was a tactical consideration to politicize the plight of the political prisoners and create friction among the Christian Democrats conducted while BR held people's court for the crimes of Moro, who according to BR:

"Is perfectly aware of being senior hierarch of this regime, of being responsible at the highest level for anti-proletarian policies that imperialist hegemony has imposed on our country, the repression of the productive forces, the condition of exploitation of the workers, the marginalization and misery of entire layers of the proletariat, unemployment, the armed counter revolution unleashed by the Christian Democrats."

In terms of people's court serving armed propaganda, Moro was symbolic of all crimes against the people, since materially he was the leading imperialist. On the topic of prisoner exchange the BR stated:

"The demand for the release of political prisoners was advanced, therefore with two goals:—to push the contradictions within the state to their extreme;—to establish a path toward the solution of this problem. Both these goals have been achieved"

The BR summed up their understanding of armed propaganda in previous communiques before the Moro campaign:

"To create the maximum number of political contradictions within the enemy camp [like sowing division between the major revisionists and the Christian democrats], that is dismember it, make it non-functional;

"Clear a path for the resistance movement using as yet unknown, but no less essential, methods of struggle;

"Organize the advanced class stratum into the Party and class wide fighting organization on the various fronts of the war."

Nothing here conforms to Becker's superficial analysis. Further still from Becker's claim that BR thought they could change things fundamentally with the trial and execution of bourgeois figure heads, lays the reality that this tactic contained the kernel of truth that such actions divided a quarreling bourgeoisie, which is an essential and even universal component of any peoples war. The BR were accused by Becker of narrowing their scope to a handful of men and merely amusing the masses, he is committed to rejecting even the useful bits of armed struggle in the imperialist centers. The agreements or common political ground we find with Becker, mainly due to his trafficking in Maoist concepts have already been outlined in this paper and are by coincidence not any genuine political unity.

Becker's concept is even more vulgar than that of the urban guerrillas when he claims that the armed struggle in the imperialist countries must proceed from:

"the masses themselves in their millions taking up not only the guns that will finally batter and break the military power of the imperialist states, but the understanding

that will guide them to this in a way that will not lead to replacing one imperialist exploiter with another.” [15]

How idealistic! Suffice it to say that the Comintern strategy for insurrection, and especially every people’s war to date have never proceeded from this formula that millions of masses must take up arms at initiation of armed struggle. Such a formula would have made the peoples war in China nothing but a long waiting game, and the peoples war in Peru could have never began in the Andes and grown to the shanty towns of Lima etc. With all of their faults many urban guerillas highlighted a truth which is obscured by Becker, that it takes initiation of armed struggle to grow and that a single spark can ignite a prairie fire, which is exactly what Mao was getting at when he made his famous statement:

“The remaining forces are very small and those comrades who judge by appearances alone naturally feel pessimistic. But if we judge by essentials, it is quite another story. Here we can apply the old Chinese saying, ‘A single spark can start a prairie fire.’ In other words, our forces, although small at present, will grow very rapidly” [16]

This is the principle that must command the revolutionaries to constitute or reconstitute their Parties, and as soon as possible initiate their people’s wars as part of the proletarian world revolution. The Maoist Parties and organizations of the world today are poised to do just this, building on the experience of the urban guerilla in imperialist centers, as well as every battle waged by our class historically. These might be small in number today, but as Mao’s optimism correctly insisted will grow rapidly, not in waiting, but in fighting, every step of the way, from militant confrontation with class enemies to the initiation of armed struggle and people’s war!

[1] Beck, Chris Aronson. “Strike One to Educate One Hundred,” Chapter 3. 1986. Seeds Beneath the Snow Publication.

[2] Paul, Joshua Moufawad. “Some Thoughts on the Memory of the Red Brigades,” M-L-M Mayhem, June 14, 2019. Retrieved at <http://moufawad-paul.blogspot.com/2019/06/some-thoughts-on-memory-of-red-brigades.html>

[3] Ibid.

[4] Red Guards Austin. Documents from the US Maoist Conference For Line Struggle, "Toward a Sea of Armed Masses." 2018.

[5] Beck, Chris Aronson. "Strike One to Educate One Hundred," Chapter 10. 1986. Seeds Beneath the Snow Publication.

[6] Red Army Faction. "The Urban Guerrilla Concept," Chapter 5, The Urban Guerrilla. Kersplebedeb Publishing, 2009.

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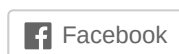
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