

rooted in the despair of the dispossessed or as a mass-based Latin American social democracy that will finally combine traditional economic and national demands with the region's new democratic clamor. Efforts to achieve such a combination have heretofore fared poorly south of the Rio Grande, and present global conditions do not seem favorable to its prospects. Either way, a chapter in Latin American politics has come to a long-awaited conclusion.

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## *The Cuban Crucible*

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In the Museum of the Ministry of the Interior in Havana, together with memorabilia glorifying Cuban intelligence and counterintelligence exploits, there is a letter in a glass case dated July 1960, addressed to "El jefe del G-2," or head of intelligence and security, identifying him as Manuel Piñero. From the very beginning of the Cuban Revolution, this man played a key role in building what became one of the most successful security agencies ever constructed. Over thirty years and despite innumerable attempts by Cuban exile groups, the Central Intelligence Agency, and disenchanting domestic opponents, not a single member of the Cuban leadership lost his life.<sup>1</sup> Piñero, as deputy minister of the interior from 1961 to 1974, helped put together an apparatus that infiltrated the opposition groups in Miami and penetrated the CIA itself. It achieved a degree of control over Cuban society that allowed the regime to maintain itself in power through the 1990s and under extraordinarily adverse conditions. This was done without resort to indiscriminate, bloody repression, but instead by the application of selective and mostly bloodless, though nonetheless brutal, security

1. Evaluating U.S. intelligence failures at the time of the Bay of Pigs and thereafter, the chairman of President Kennedy's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, Clark Clifford, offered the following comment: "We sent teams at one time after another into Cuba to try to get information. They were all 'rolled up,' is the expression, and never heard from again." Quoted in Morris H. Morley, *Imperial State: The United States and Revolution and Cuba, 1952-1986* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 147-148.

measures. Soviet involvement in this area was kept to a minimum.<sup>2</sup>

One of Fidel Castro's contemporaries, Piñeiro attended college at Columbia University in the United States, where he was sent to study business by his father, the Bacardi rum representative in the province of Matanzas. In New York, Piñeiro met and married his first wife, Lorna Burdsall, an American ballet dancer. He joined the revolution in 1958; rumor has it he began his revolutionary career by placing a bomb in the National Hotel in Havana. He then fled to Fidel Castro's refuge in the Sierra Maestra, where he was commissioned to work on intelligence matters, and soon dispatched to join Fidel's brother Raúl. Piñeiro began building the Cuban intelligence and security apparatus before the Revolution had even triumphed.

After the insurgents' victory on January 1, 1959, Piñeiro immediately began working in the G-2 security organization. When the traditional U.S.-armed-forces-style structure of the Cuban government was replaced by a Soviet configuration, Piñeiro set up shop there. By 1962 he was in charge of the Dirección General de Inteligencia (DGI) in the Ministry of the Interior, having relinquished part of his control over counterintelligence activities.<sup>3</sup> In exchange he obtained command over Liberación, a department in the Ministry responsible for "promoting the Latin American revolutionary movement." He would wear these twin hats—intelligence and hemispheric revolution—for more than a decade. His success in the first task brought him growing support in the second, which became the chief focus of his attention.

This was the period when Piñeiro acquired a reputation as a repressive hard-liner and one, moreover, with expensive tastes and an extravagant life-style. Many have blamed him for the harsh crackdown on the MR-26 de Julio organization, and for conspiring with Raúl Castro to prod Fidel toward a more leftward, pro-Soviet stance and

2. "At least as late as the 1968 crisis, the Interior Ministry was also a source of Cuban independence from the Soviets. Ministry staff undertook the surveillance of Soviet personnel in Cuba. . . . At the peak of that crisis, the chief of the ministry's Soviet advisers sought the arrest of Deputy Interior Minister Manuel Piñeiro. . . ." Jorge Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 271–272.

3. Almost by definition, information concerning this period and the details regarding the construction of the Cuban security apparatus are sketchy. One of the reasons is the Cubans' obsession with secrecy and "compartmentalization": "The history of revolutionary Security is a secret history. The CIA would like to know how the Department of State Security [G-2] was built and what its present organization is. . . . Today the Cuban people can count on two silent armies to detect and destroy enemy intelligence: Military Counter-Intelligence and the Department of State Security. This, and only this, is what the Central Intelligence Agency can know, and knows already." Norberto Fuentes, *Nos impulsieron la violencia* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986), pp. 100–101.

toward a break with the moderate sectors of the revolutionary alliance and with the United States. Piñeiro probably was more to the left than others, and possibly more pro-Soviet, though this is uncertain. Cuban dissidents such as Carlos Franqui have stressed these views of him, as well as Piñeiro's apparent life-style:

I walked past the . . . residence of Commander Manuel Piñeyro [sic], the famous and dangerous Red Beard: the deputy chief of Security and the man responsible for the Latin American revolution. Armed escorts were everywhere. This was one of those enormous residences that rich Cubans liked so much: gardens, many acres of land. A farm in the city. Piñeiro kept there, for all to see, his own farm: pigs, chickens, bananas, ducks. A little of everything, all cared for by military personnel. Army jeeps went in and out loaded with food. There was a sense of power, of arrogance, of indifference.<sup>4</sup>

However true this may have been in the initial years of the Revolution, it wasn't the case later on. In late 1987, Piñeiro's home was not located on the Quinta Avenida, nor did it house chickens, pigs, or any other animals. If anything, it was a plain and modest dwelling, similar to that of any mid-level Cuban professional. Piñeiro received his visitors there in shorts, while his daughter roamed through the living room and his wife wandered around with groceries. Piñeiro thus helped confirm the impression conveyed by many other high-ranking officials of the regime, i.e., that the corruption and grand life-styles which characterized the powerful in other Communist regimes were not the rule in Cuba.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever else he may be, Piñeiro (or Barbaroja—"Redbeard"—as he came to be known) is an extraordinarily charming man. Gabriel García Márquez has described his sense of humor as the best he had ever encountered. He is a marvelous yarn-teller, particularly about the old days in the Sierra. His stories resemble the Colombian Nobel Prize winner's tales of the absurd and incredible occurring in everyday life. With the years, his famous—and for some, dreaded—red beard has become salt-and-pepper, and his now-portly appearance belies the slender, purportedly womanizing Piñeiro of thirty years ago—perhaps because of the habits he picked up during the early years when he would meet at ungodly hours with Latin American revolutionaries at the

4. Carlos Franqui, *Retrato de familia con Fidel* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1981), p. 478.

5. Brazilian leader Lula put it this way: "I have been to Commander Piñeiro's house; it is a poorer home than mine. My house is larger than Piñeiro's." Interview with the author, Mexico City, June 6, 1991.

"Casas de protocolo" in the Laguito district of Havana, or in their suites in the better hotels of the capital, eating everything room service could deliver at a pace that hardly suggested an extravagant life-style.

Piñero has charmed countless interlocutors over the years: Mexican foreign ministers and young Chilean women; French intellectuals and gifted novelists from the Southern Cone. He has learned a great deal from his endless discussions: his survival in Cuba, and his presumed enlightened role in the twilight of the Revolution and his own career, are one possible consequence of this exposure. Reports and anecdotes of Piñero's cruelty and cynicism are common; they are balanced by far fewer, but equally reputable, accounts of his ability to listen, his intelligence, and his sense of loyalty to his men and his friends. His subordinates replicated most of Piñero's vices and virtues. Over the years his friends, as well as myriad Latin American revolutionaries, came to appreciate Piñero's—and his subordinates'—personal solidarity and kindness, whatever ferocity he displayed in regard to his enemies.

Piñero's *muchachos* were a faithful reflection of the strength and weakness of the Cuban "International." They knew the countries they "worked" on generally well, and were especially good listeners and open-minded with regard to the political situation in those countries. They also tended to be more independent-minded and liberal with respect to domestic Cuban issues than other members of the *nomenklatura*. But only up to a point: once the leadership had made a decision, or, in the jargon, once *la linea* (literally, "the line," but more accurately, the "politically correct" stance) was handed down, their sensitivity and broad-mindedness evaporated. Then they listened to no one, brooked no dissent, and rejected any alternate analysis or policy. They would stop at nothing to pursue their policies—scheming, manipulating, threatening, and going to any extreme to implement their boss's instructions.

Piñero's revolutionary recruits originated in the guerrilla movement and the urban front. They had belonged either to the 26 de Julio or to the PSP, but all came with some degree of experience in clandestine operations—a predilection they transmitted to two generations of Latin American revolutionaries, some of whom were predisposed to it anyway, others of whom would never have acquired it on their own. Piñero's *muchachos* were generally young, lower-middle-class or quite poor, uncouth but bright, resourceful, and daring, and totally devoted to him. As a Colombian oligarch who knew them from the outset would say years later: "Piñero taught these boys how to dress and use knives and forks at the table." He also gave them a splendid opportu-

nity for social mobility: from the slums of Havana and the hardships of the mountains to embassy parties and the import-export business. Many left the Ministry in 1974 with Piñero, a few split off from his band earlier on, and others still never worked with him directly but had close affinities with his followers. All formed an elite that, along with the cultural apparatus, became the most important link between the Cuban Revolution and the Latin American left. The bond would endure through the nineties and the autumn and winter of the Caribbean experiment.

Piñero and the Revolution's attempts to fan the fires of revolt across Latin America began as the most heroic chapter in its history. From the earliest guerrilla landings in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic to Che's sacrifice in Bolivia, not to mention the countless Cubans who fought, or helped others fight, in guerrilla wars extending over three decades, Fidel's vision of a revolution that had to be exported included some of its finest hours: generous, idealistic, unselfish. In the brief moments of victory or success, and during the long years of defeat and retribution, the Cubans stood by their friends, cared for the widows, orphans, and maimed who survived the hemisphere's Thirty Years Wars. They opened their doors to many who had nowhere else to go and gave much of the best of themselves and their experience to bringing change in Latin America. One may disagree with the tactics, or even with the goals, but they pursued both with perseverance and dignity.

Their isolation explained this as much as their altruism. The island's aloneness was central in defining its attitude toward the rest of the region: it owed nothing to, and felt no liking or respect for, governments who had heeded Washington. The best way to end Cuba's isolation and also to settle scores with those who scorned Fidel and his cohorts, was to wreak havoc on them at home. When these attempts were carried out with the noblest of intentions and by the best and brightest of Latin America's youth and intelligentsia, few could have resisted the temptation to back or encourage them.

Cuba's activities abroad made the humiliated isle of the Platt Amendment and the warehouses of Havana a player on the world stage. It was reviled by Washington, resented by Moscow, but respected, indeed admired and revered, throughout the Third World. The leader of the Cuban people became a world figure, someone they could be proud of in the *bohíos* and the beaches. At its high point—the Sixth Summit of the Non-Aligned, held in Havana in 1979 and presided over by Castro—Cuba's place in the sun was a source of dignity for its people, grudging respect for its leader, and endless irritation for its enemies.

The first directly confirmed instance of Piñero's involvement in a foreign revolutionary venture occurred in 1962: the Salta *foco* in Argentina led by Ricardo Massetti, who, together with Gabriel García Márquez, had founded the Prensa Latina news agency a couple of years earlier. It is not entirely clear whether all of the guerrilla "*focos*" created across the hemisphere during the 1960s were directly linked to Piñero, or if all areas of Cuban involvement remained under his authority. Thus there are reasons for believing that Che Guevara's effort to start a revolt in Bolivia was not handled by Piñero but by others, explaining why some considered Barbaroja to have mourned Che's death less than many: the tragedy of Nancahuazú did not occur on his watch. This would also explain why a series of obvious technical errors were committed in the course of the Bolivian mission, errors which Piñero would probably have avoided.

What seems undisputed is that the means soon became an end in itself, as the chief constituency in Cuba for supporting the armed struggle in Latin America emerged from within Piñero's own teams of agents, conspirators, and accomplices. In their endeavors they had both a strong suit and an intrinsic weakness. Piñero's strongest card was his exceptional personal relationship with Fidel and Raúl Castro, cemented by their time together in the mountains, but, perhaps more important, by the bonds established during the fiercest years of U.S. aggression and Piñero's success in protecting the lives of the Revolution's leaders. Despite a constant series of conflicts—beginning with the Soviets and the old PSP apparatus, then with Carlos Rafael Rodríguez over control of foreign relations, and in the early 1990s with blossoming (then disgraced) heir apparent Carlos Aldana—Piñero escaped unscathed, consistently pursuing his own policies, with his own team and resources. He knew how to listen, how to learn, and how to change where change was required. Without the strong support of Fidel, however, he would never have made it: his bureaucratic clout was simply insufficient.<sup>6</sup> Although a member of the party's Central Committee since 1965, Piñero was never elected to the Politburo, never held

6. Even as extreme a group as the Cuban-American National Foundation accepts the fact—if not the conclusions derived from it—of Piñero's scant political weight in the Cuban apparatus. Speaking about the early seventies—before his eviction from the Ministry of the Interior—Rex Hudson, a Library of Congress researcher who has written the only known published account of Piñero's activities, points out that "the Soviets allowed Castro to keep Piñero, but the agency that he headed lacked bureaucratic status." Rex Hudson, *Castro's America Department: Coordinating Cuba's Support for Marxist-Leninist Violence in the Americas* (Miami: Cuban-American National Foundation, 1988), p. 12.

ministerial rank in the government or high-level standing in the military or Interior Ministry hierarchy. When he was finally removed from his post as head of the America Department in March 1992, it was largely because his business—the business of revolution—had come to an end.

Piñero's strength was also his weakness. As the regime's diplomatic and political needs became more evident and compelling, support for universal revolution dwindled. In 1974, after peace was made with the Soviet Union and became imminent with many of the region's Communist parties and centrist governments, Piñero and his comrades were banished from the Ministry of the Interior. Thus was born the (in)famous America Department of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, or, some might have called it, the Ministry of Revolution. This was, thereafter, where revolution was exported from; its agents were placed in embassies and press bureaus; its headquarters were just next to Fidel's office in the Palace of the Revolution; its links with the Latin American left were extensive, intimate, and decisive. Yet despite the legends that swirled around it during the seventies and eighties, both in Latin America and the United States, its creation and development were as much a sign of continuing island support for revolution in the hemisphere as of the constraints, contradictions, and declining enthusiasm for extracurricular revolutionary activities in Cuban politics as a whole.

The early seventies were dog years for the America Department. Revolution in Latin America seemed doomed, and the normalization of Cuba's diplomatic ties with many of the region's governments imposed a hands-off attitude toward local affairs. In addition, after the Chilean debacle, the prospects for spreading revolution further across the hemisphere became dim. But Piñero made good use of this time, marrying his second wife, Chilean journalist, author, and Marxist theoretician Marta Harnecker. He had met her in Chile during the Allende years. Harnecker would become the largest-selling Latin American author after Gabriel García Márquez, acquiring a distinctive niche of her own in the ranks of the Latin American left.

The Allende experience was important for Piñero. He spent many months in Chile during that time, and several of his closest aides worked there. However, Piñero did not control Cuban operations in Chile during that time. Instead, the Special Troops of the Ministry of the Interior were in charge: Antonio de la Guardia handled Allende's security, and his twin brother, Patricio, prepared Castro's month-long trip in 1972, subsequently remaining in Chile to manage the Cuban

presence there until the coup.<sup>7</sup> (Antonio de la Guardia was executed in 1989 for drug-smuggling; Patricio is now serving a thirty-year prison sentence.)

There was little for Piñeiro to do during this period. The revolution in Latin America was being rolled back nearly everywhere, while Cuba was turning its insurgent enthusiasm to such places as Africa. Piñeiro had virtually no connection with Operación Carlota, the dispatch and active combat role of Cuban troops in Angola, from 1975 onward. This was left in the hands of the other sector of the original Ministry of the Interior, and then of the Army itself. Moreover, when relations between the Cubans and the Latin American Communist parties improved in 1974–75, Piñeiro's influence diminished still further: he was never one to get along well with Stalinist bureaucrats. Until the end of the decade, when the Sandinistas began to make a stronger showing in Nicaragua, Piñeiro was out of fashion, if not out of favor.

But his sphere of action was not restricted to the armed or extreme left. Despite his rivalries with other Cuban officials and his preference for the revolutionary left, he was also in charge of relations with the orthodox Communist parties, social democrats, and the intellectuals and grass-roots groups that make up the constellation of the left in the hemisphere. If on occasions his links with the armed groups seem overemphasized in these pages, it is because these were the bonds to which he himself attached the greatest importance, and which most clearly exemplify his role over the past thirty years. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Piñeiro dealt only with the *fierros*, as the fellows with the guns were familiarly known in the ranks of the Latin American left. The America Department's ties with Chilean Social Democrats, ranging from political activity to health care and lipo-suction, summer camps for the children and conspiracy in the Southern Cone, were well known in the Chilean exile community. But Piñeiro's *raison d'être* was rooted in the guerrilla movements and the armed struggle. That was what he knew and was best at. Therein lay his comparative advantage over other contenders for Fidel's favor and power in Havana:

There was a subjective element in all of this [the armed struggle]. Without guerrillas, Piñeiro was out of business. . . . To keep up a whole

7. Jorge Massetti, interview with the author, Paris, December 8–9, 1991. According to Antonio de la Guardia's daughter, Iliana, her father was with Allende in the Moneda presidential palace on the day of the coup and escaped the burning, bombed building almost miraculously. "Entrevista con Iliana de la Guardia," *Proceso* (Mexico City), January 25, 1992.

Department, with a secret structure, just to have relations with the PRD in Mexico or the Argentine Communist Party was absurd; he could do that with 10 men. . . . the America Department was a super-organization. Without the guerrillas we would have been oversized with a man per country, whereas in fact we had a specialist and five officials for each country.<sup>8</sup>

But by 1978 it suddenly seemed that the Nicaraguan rebels might actually beat Somoza, and the armed struggle in Latin America returned to the fore. So did Piñeiro, albeit under different circumstances. He and Cuba played a triple role in the Sandinista victory, a revolution that would probably have occurred regardless, but that undoubtedly owes an important share of its success to the support of its elders. Cuba served as a conduit between the Sandinistas and other revolutionary organizations. It supplied the Sandinistas with intelligence, communications, and personal security for many of the FSLN's leaders. Toward the end of the war, it even provided the "equipment" to launch a Sandinista air force, which played a minor but symbolic role.

Cuba sent arms, mainly old Belgian FAL automatic rifles, through Panama and the Costa Rican border town of Liberia. It supplied trained military professionals—exiled Chilean officers serving in the Cuban Armed Forces—and provided invaluable advice on how to unify the three Sandinista factions. It also advised the movement in relation to some military issues, the alliance with the moderate sector, the need for achieving and consolidating the support of other Latin American nations, and for avoiding American intervention. It is difficult to determine the specific weight of each of these types of assistance, and what role Piñeiro played in each of them. However, there is some available information which allows us to make an initial assessment.<sup>9</sup>

Some of Piñeiro's men, particularly Fernando Comás, "Salchicha" or "El cojo," played a key role in channeling arms and ammunition

8. Massetti, *op. cit.*

9. Hudson, probably on the basis of U.S. intelligence reports and official U.S. sources quoted in his text, gets some details wrong but the basic thrust of his reasoning is accurate: "Cuba became the FSLN's main supplier of military matériel and other essential support. . . . During the 1978–79 period there were at least 21 flights between Cuba and Costa Rica carrying war matériel for the FSLN; a minimum of 500 tons of arms destined for the Sandinistas were airlifted to Costa Rica from Cuba and elsewhere. . . . Piñeiro personally supervised the loading operations at Havana airport. Julián López Díaz, then chief of the America Department's Central American Section, directed the Cubans' main operations center based in San José for coordinating logistics and contacts with the FSLN and monitoring the airlift. When the FSLN launched its final offensive in mid-1979, Special Troops from the Ministry of the Interior's DOE were with the Sandinista columns and maintained direct radio communications with Havana." Rex Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

through Costa Rica. Comás was the Cuban consul in San José; in his den he keeps a picture of himself in battle fatigues armed with an M-16 helping to cover the runway of Managua's airport the day the Sandinistas captured the capital. But the fact is that Piñeiro's America Department at this time was already far less operational than before. Indeed, in 1974, Piñeiro had lost control over three key facets of the export of revolution. He had no armed troops under his command—they remained in the Ministry of the Interior or Defense—he had no operational logistical capability for shipping ordnance and communications equipment, and documents were all handled now by the Departamento de Operaciones Especiales, or DOE. He may have retained the role of political training of the Latin America revolutionaries at the Nico López Political School, but in all likelihood not military training.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, his organization received less and less money, obliging him to seek funds for his efforts elsewhere.

Piñeiro and his department were simply becoming the political wing of Cuban involvement abroad, and were increasingly obliged to rely on others to implement the decisions taken by Piñeiro and Castro himself. This implied two things: first, that Piñeiro would be constantly at odds with the DOE and others over their support (or lack thereof) for his activities; second, that he would consequently attempt to carry out many of the activities on his own, or have the Latin American guerrilla groups do it for him. Although Piñeiro's recommendations to Castro still carried a great deal of weight, and were decisive, the implementation of those decisions had left Piñeiro's hands. In the face of increasing DOE resistance, Piñeiro spent more of his time attending to documentation, logistics, and "fund-raising" to purchase arms.

Yet despite these limitations and obstacles, the Sandinistas' victory became Piñeiro's vindication. He remained in Managua during the first months following the revolution, and was able to ensure that an America Department member was named ambassador to Nicaragua. He took advantage of the ties he had established over the years with the Sandinista leadership, when few others had paid any attention to them. He

10. The ambiguity of the training situation can be seen in the way that task is generally believed to be shared by Piñeiro and the DOE: "The education of guerrillas in Cuba is overseen by the Department of Special Operations of the Cuban Army and the Department of the Americas, headed by Manuel Piñeiro. Piñeiro, a close friend of Fidel Castro, draws on two decades of guerrilla experience in the region and knows many of the area's leftist insurgent commanders personally." Peter Clement, W. Raymond Duncan, "The Soviet Union and Central America," in Eusebio Mujal-León, ed., *The USSR and Latin America* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 287–288.

also leveraged his newly recovered prestige as a revolutionary strategist into moral authority over the leadership of two other supposedly imminent revolutions: El Salvador and Guatemala.

Until the early 1990s, Piñeiro dedicated most of his time and men to the Central American and Grenadan revolutions (through late 1983). This meant building a new state and party structure in Nicaragua and (until 1983) Grenada, defending them against both internal and external hostilities, and supporting the campaign in El Salvador and Guatemala. Although the DOE and Sandinistas handled the operational aspects, Piñeiro, Ramiro Abreu, and "Ibrahim" made the key political and strategic decisions regarding Cuban support, transfer of arms, training and tactics for the Salvadoran FMLN. Their actual involvement, regardless of the Salvadoran revolutionaries' actual awareness of it, went well beyond what anyone at the time imagined. As long as victory remained possible in El Salvador, and there was something to defend in Nicaragua, Piñeiro's fortunes were intact. Defeats—Jamaica, 1980; Grenada, 1983; Guatemala, 1982; Nicaragua, 1990—were not directly attributed to his strategies. While the Cubans' dismal intelligence record in these countries can be blamed largely on Piñeiro, he did not suffer from the collapse of his pet projects.

His policies and activities followed simple, often unwritten rules. They can be summed up in three theoretical premises—"las armas, la unidad, y las masas" ("weapons, unity, and masses")—and one unspoken tenet: with Cuba's involvement. The first theoretical assumption meant that the armed struggle was central to the Latin American revolution: without it nothing was possible. In one of Piñeiro's few published texts, he states clearly that:

Arms are indispensable for the triumph of any liberating revolution in the continent, and, more important, to preserve its continuity and full realization.<sup>11</sup>

As Piñeiro's power base and apparatus in Cuba shrank over the years, his only remaining source of strength and prestige were his links with the Latin American left. Deprived of arms, troops, money, intelligence, and counterintelligence activities other than those directly linked to backing the Latin American revolution, he conserved only his contacts and converts abroad.

11. Manuel Piñeiro, "La crisis actual del imperialismo y los procesos revolucionarios de la América Latina y el Caribe," in *Memorias de la Conferencia teórica internacional sobre Características generales y particulares de los procesos revolucionarios en América Latina y el Caribe*, Havana, April 26–28, 1982, p. 376.

The second theoretical premise involved unity: for Piñero and for Castro during these years, the need for close cooperation of all revolutionary forces, preferably under a single command, was more important than ever. Where there had been unity, revolution had triumphed, where unity had been absent—Chile, Grenada—it had been defeated. Moreover, Piñero's lease on life depended on the revolutionaries' unity: only if Communists and the different guerrilla factions remained together could he avoid having to take sides openly:

This means that we should acknowledge that in most of our countries, together with experienced Communist parties, other organizations of the left have emerged that have through struggle gained the respect of their peoples and that often represent true examples of leadership. That's why the unity of these organizations among themselves, and of the latter with the Communist parties, is the first guarantee for the advance of democratic, popular and anti-imperialist revolutions.<sup>12</sup>

The third theoretical premise involved alliances—both domestic and foreign—and the terms of their engagement. Whatever he may have said, Castro understood full well both the true lessons of the Revolution itself and those of the years gone by. Without the support of broad sectors of the middle classes, part of the private sector, and the international community, revolution in Latin America was impossible. At the same time, if the revolutionary leadership did not control the alliance thus forged, the revolution rapidly became compromised, and the means used to achieve it soon overshadowed the ends originally sought. Inasmuch as it used the unwitting help of sectors who, if left to themselves, would act otherwise, this was a "stealth" theory of revolution. Nevertheless, it was also an accurate assessment of the situation in many Latin American societies, where such diverse groups as Catholics, students, businessmen, Indian groups, women, middle-class professionals, and other Latin American governments had authentic grievances against the status quo, and were willing to join forces with anyone opposed to what they saw as an intolerable situation.

With regard to the true Cuban stance on alliances and moderation, there is still much dispute throughout the academic and intelligence communities. Nevertheless, there is consensus that the Cubans generally preached moderation and strategic alliances when the revolutionary pole was in a position of strength. Conversely, Piñero tilted toward radicalism when the forces of revolution constituted the

12. *Ibid.*, p. 370.

weaker element of an alliance, or when something else was at stake. This was the case in Nicaragua in 1990, when the Sandinistas' participation in the February elections under international supervision opened up two cans of worms for the Cubans: the possibility of losing power at the ballot box, a heresy for any true revolutionary, and the prospect of giving credence and moral authority to the principle of elections if they won, increasing the pressure on Cuba to do the same.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, there was the practical requirement of Cuban involvement in the entire affair of revolution in Latin America. Without it, Piñero and his men were redundant; with it, they were key players—and if their boys won now and then, they were heroes. A Salvadorean guerrilla cadre recalled how the America Department official assigned to his country repeatedly urged his colleagues to "take power" so that he could join the Central Committee. A successful protégé was a meal ticket for the America Department. A victorious revolution was simultaneously a source of sincere rejoicing and personal advancement.

The issue of Cuban interference was a delicate one, and Piñero addressed it obliquely and somewhat cryptically:

Sometimes there are confusions or deviations with regard to the necessary and healthy independence that revolutionary parties and movements have a right to and a duty to defend. Their true sovereignty, however, instead of excluding others, implies uniting efforts to face common international problems and cooperation in support of the revolutionary movements that most need solidarity at a given time.<sup>14</sup>

The line between solidarity and cooperation on the one hand and heavy-handed pressure and interference on the other was a thin and fuzzy one. All the more so since three intrinsic characteristics of the parties involved pushed in the direction of meddling, and went against the grain of arm's-length nonintervention. First, the Cubans had the disposition to meddle: they honestly believed that they knew more about revolution, guerrilla warfare, international relations, and political alliances than the neophytes on the ground in Guatemala, Colombia, or El Salvador. When high-ranking Cuban officials deny vehemently ever having directly influenced Latin American revolutionaries other than through (sound) advice, they are not exactly lying, but they are being at the very least disingenuous. Castro indeed interfered rarely, and far less than Piñero, who in turn maintained greater

13. The conflicts and tensions between the Sandinistas and the Cubans over the former's participation in the 1990 elections have been most notably revealed in Andrés Oppenheimer, *Castro's Final Hour* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), pp. 204–18.

14. Piñero, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

distance than his deputies. And in turn these, needless to say, were more discreet than the agents in the field. All of them, however, were tireless in offering counsel, and their "advice" was often difficult to ignore. As one field agent put it:

Often he [Piñero] didn't get involved himself; I personally witnessed cases where he found one of his people interfering in a revolutionary movement's decisions and reprimanded him for it. Piñero was not so clumsy. But many of his people, instead of being a link between the Cuban Communist Party and the revolutionary movement, wanted to become leaders of the movement from outside.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the Cubans also enjoyed wielding their power: no matter how sincere and devoted to the cause they may have been, they were all prey to the insidious effects of their years in power, of being constantly idolized, of their effective clout. They had a tremendous amount of leverage. The fact that they provided everything from rest and recreation in Havana to artillery and surface-to-air missiles put them in a position to mete out support judiciously, and play one faction off against another, depending on multiple factors. The Cubans did not create these factions or encourage their emergence; they simply used them to their advantage. There are endless accounts of Piñero choosing favorites among the different organizations making up the FMLN in El Salvador, the URNG in Guatemala, and the several guerrilla organizations in Colombia during the 1980s. Ideology played a role, but frequently the Cubans would open the arms spigot to one group—while closing it to another—simply because the former shared a tactical position with them, even if strategically great differences prevailed. Or, as has been rumored to be the case in El Salvador, the Cubans almost systematically favored the Ejército revolucionario del pueblo (ERP) largely because of Fidel's infatuation with Joaquín Villalobos. The ideological affinity between the Cubans and Villalobos was small, but the chemistry was right, and that was what counted.<sup>16</sup>

So did the third factor contributing to Cuban participation: the Latin American left's willingness to accept—even more: to invite—Cuban intervention by constantly seeking a privileged relationship

15. Massetti, interview with the author.

16. Salvador Samayoa of the FPL in the FMLN phrased this issue in more diplomatic but not dissimilar terms: "Cuba and Nicaragua at a certain point supported the ERP, a group that was less ideologically close to them than the FPL. Concrete, circumstantial factors contributed to this approach." Interview with the author, August 20, 1990, Mexico City.

with the island. Thus, many groups tended to tailor their stances on the major issues of the day to curry favor with Piñero; their intention was never to entice Cuban meddling, but, unavoidably, that was the result of their actions, as any Cuban operative in the field would immediately sense an opening and a possibility for greater influence. This would in turn earn him the approbation of Piñero in Havana. The chain of command and that of bureaucratic opportunism were often indistinguishable. Because Piñero wanted to affect the course of events and because he was able to do so, and finally because the Latin American left placed itself in a situation where such things could happen, the Cubans were frequently an integral part of many organizations, armed and civilian, moderate and extreme, directly political and "parapolitical": journals, the press, and student and academic groups.

In the critical years of the Revolution, after the fall of the socialist bloc, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and Cuba's total isolation, along with the gradual disengagement of the armed struggle in Latin America, Piñero's role inevitably diminished. He was reduced to using his influence and agents to bolster support for Cuba within Latin America. He accompanied Castro to his meetings with Latin American chiefs of state, helping Fidel with his charm and experience in the intelligent but ultimately futile attempt to substitute his Soviet subsidy with a hemispheric economic relationship. His agents and sometimes even his wife lobbied intensely at every meeting of the Latin American left—the São Paulo Forum events, the Congress of Latin American and Caribbean Sociologists, Historians, etc.—with varying success. His Department was formally swallowed up by the International Secretariat of the Party, and his agents abroad lost their Foreign Ministry cover. He was finally eased out of the Department, retaining only his membership in the Central Committee. His passing from power was proof, if needed, that the contemporary age of revolution in Latin America had come to an end.

Piñero left intact a rogue organization that continued to act in Latin America: a tragic, unnerving legacy of a man and a team that more than any others personified the armed revolutionary struggle in the region. According to Jorge Massetti, and this has been confirmed by other sources, as Piñero lost the wherewithal to arm and support the revolutionary left, and thus to maintain his position in Cuba, he resorted to other measures and to the revolutionary organizations themselves. He called on them to prepare documents, take and send messages, and logically, to raise funds for arms purchases. America Department officials would seek out individuals of different revolu-



tionary organizations—mainly Chileans, Uruguayans, and Argentines, but also Central Americans—and suggest that they carry out kidnappings, bank thefts, and other similar activities in countries “where the money was.” Piñeiro’s men would take aside the chief of logistics of a given Central American organization and ask him (or her) to contribute two or three individuals. Others would do the same with the Southern Cone people. Thus the leaderships were involved, but not entirely: only the logistics sector was aware of what was happening, and it was expectedly acquiescent since it knew that the money would be used for weapons. At the same time the rest of the leadership could plausibly—and honestly—deny any involvement. The Department planned the operations, transferred the necessary weapons into the country in question by diplomatic pouch, and expedited the money back to Cuba through the same channel.

Masseti, who was posted in Mexico City as a mid-level Department official from 1980 through 1983 when he was expelled by the Mexican government, is categorical about his own experiences. Weapons would be flown into Mexico, bank holdups, kidnappings, or other crimes would be carried out, and the proceeds would be handed over to the Department for safekeeping. It would then spread them around to revolutionary movements to purchase arms with. In this fashion, Piñeiro’s staff achieved independence from the Cuban treasury, the DOE, and other areas of the state. Self-reliance, or self-management, it could be called: a number of bank robberies in Mexico City and Panama and several kidnappings in Mexico and Brazil of very wealthy businessmen that were later attributed to Southern Cone ex-revolutionaries acting on their own or in behalf of Central American groups (the kidnappings of Juan Diego Gutiérrez Cortina of the GUTSA construction firm and Abílio Diniz of the Pau de Azucar supermarket group in 1989 and 1990) can be presumed to have been Departmental activity, although they were officially blamed on Salvadorean and Chilean groups, respectively.

There has never been any insinuation that this was done for personal enrichment; in the minds of those who participated in these activities, there was always a categorical distinction between the means and the end. Neither Piñeiro nor any of his men got rich themselves or derived privileges from these unorthodox procedures beyond those they already enjoyed. Given the fanatical devotion to the cause and the sheer thrill of the struggle, the issue is a more complicated one: why should any tactic or instrument be illegitimate in view of the overriding virtue of the aspiration behind it? With time, the individual

elements who continued these actions, even after Piñeiro’s retirement, may have sought personal gain. Initially, they did not.

In a sense, the procedure was not dissimilar to that adopted by the Special Troops of the Ministry of the Interior and CIMEX, the Cuban import-export company set up by the de la Guardia brothers. They ended up dabbling, or even getting heavily involved, in drug traffic, but the original motivation is analogous. Nor is it entirely different from what Castro accused Arnaldo Ochoa,<sup>17</sup> the hero of Angola, of wanting the armed forces to engage in: fending for themselves, in order to fend for the revolution, raising funds in any way possible, from drugs to ivory traffic from Africa, but always keeping a safe distance between the illicit activities in question and the central leadership, between means and ends. Piñeiro played this game to the end, though the accusation that surfaced in the Manuel Noriega trial regarding his direct involvement in drug trafficking from Nicaragua was in all likelihood false.<sup>18</sup> Piñeiro was too smart for that, and too much of a survivor. The three decades of his life as conspirator, charmer, and cynic weigh heavily against such a possibility.<sup>19</sup>

The Cuban Revolution impacted the left in Latin America as nothing had ever done before. It was truly a “Revolution within the Revolu-

17. Ochoa, executed on July 13, 1989, was described in Cuba as an arrogant, corrupt, high-flying traitor to the revolution. But the memories he left in Nicaragua at least, where he commanded the Cuban military mission in the mid-eighties, were different. “He always behaved like a true revolutionary in Nicaragua: honest, modest and unselfish.” Humberto Ortega, conversation with the author, Guadalajara, December 5, 1992.

18. “Former Smuggler Ties Top Officials of Cuba and Nicaragua to Drug Ring,” *New York Times*, November 21, 1991, p. 10. A recent, and generally excellent, book flatly disputes this: “Piñeiro is the only Cuban official to have used drug-trafficking methodically.” However, no source or substantiation is provided, and without it I am inclined to believe Piñeiro kept his distance from the drug business. See Jean-François Fogel and Bertrand Rosenthal, *Fin de Siècle à l’Havana* (Paris: Seuil), 1992, p. 99.

19. According to some versions, his downfall was partially caused by the difficulties generated by this rogue organization. In particular a former Chilean MIR agent, René Valenzuela (“Gato”), arrested in Madrid on January 14, 1992, for participating in Basque ETA kidnappings and bombings, was closely associated with the Cubans, had been linked to Piñeiro for nearly twenty years, and ran “rogue” operations in Mexico. The right-wing Madrid daily *ABC* mentioned the Piñeiro-Valenzuela connection on its front page on January 23, 1992. Persons familiar with the case have speculated that when the Spanish government presented Castro with the evidence linking Piñeiro to the ETA it was the final straw, and that Castro reluctantly decided that “there couldn’t continue to be two foreign policies in Cuba” and eased Piñeiro out.

tion." For the first time in the region's history, three processes occurred simultaneously. A radical revolutionary regime—pursuing profound social and economic reforms, from land distribution to the expropriation of national resources, from urban reform to mass education and health programs—took power, consolidated itself in office, and endured. Second, from 1961 onward, the new regime openly embraced "Marxism-Leninism," adhering geopolitically, if not ideologically, to the Soviet bloc, and designating itself the United States' principal enemy in the hemisphere. Washington, of course, reciprocated. The Revolution represented a threat to U.S. interests, not only in Cuba but, by virtue of its demonstration effect, throughout Latin America. Finally, and most important from this perspective, the Cuban Revolution was born with Latin American aspirations. It unabashedly proclaimed its intention of lighting the fires of revolution across the continent, seeing in the repetition of the Cuban experience elsewhere in the hemisphere one of its foremost duties and a major means of insuring its own survival.<sup>20</sup>

In 1959 the Cuban Revolution inaugurated a phase in the history of the Latin American left that lasted until the Sandinistas lost their elections, almost thirty years later to the day. The idea of revolution took center stage in the left's theater. In the words of a supporter who later broke with the Cubans:

For the first time we thought that revolution was something possible in our countries. Until then the idea of revolution was romantic and remote to us, something we took more as an academic idea that could never become a reality in countries like ours.<sup>21</sup>

Before Fidel entered Havana, the left in Latin America was reformist, gradualist, or resignedly pessimistic about the prospects of revolution. For the three decades that followed, revolution was at the top of its agenda. The fact that it did not come about is a different issue, whose significance can only be appreciated with hindsight. After the fall of the Sandinistas and the Berlin Wall, revolution once again disappeared from the left's lexicon.

20. Even a scholar as opposed to traditional clichés about Cuban foreign policy as Pamela Falk is obliged to acknowledge that "Cuba provided military armed assistance to guerrilla insurgents in every nation of the Western hemisphere except Mexico during the first two decades of revolutionary rule." Pamela Falk, *Cuban Foreign Policy: Caribbean Tempest* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1986), p. 21.

21. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Transforming a Lie into Truth," in *A Writer's Reality* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1991), p. 145.

The importance of the Cuban Revolution for the Latin American left can be gauged by two facts which are often ignored today. First, as the French scholar and diplomat Alain Rouquié has pointed out, ever since the launching of the *Granma* expedition from Tuxpan, Veracruz, in 1956, the revolutionary armed struggle in Latin America has never ceased.<sup>22</sup> Second, at some moment or another throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, and practically everywhere in the hemisphere, a group adhering to the Cuban Revolution, its tactics, strategy, and theory, emerged and became an important actor on the domestic political scene. In virtually every Latin American nation the local left was permeated by Cuban influence. The left as a whole—Communist parties, intellectuals, union organizers, and erstwhile populist *caudillos*—was either converted to the Cuban line or split between pro-Cubans and everyone else—orthodox, pro-Soviet Communists, supporters of local governments, subscribers to the notion of an alliance with the "national bourgeoisie."

Fidel Castro and the Cubans did not invent the armed struggle in Latin America or the Caribbean. There was a long tradition of taking up arms in the region, dating back to the nineteenth century, and extending up to the eve of the Cuban victory. Those who did so were nationalists, radical liberals, and, every now and then, Marxists. Villa and Zapata in Mexico, of course; Martí, Mella, and Guiterras in Cuba itself; Sandino in Nicaragua; in a way, Farabundo Martí in El Salvador; the Colombian peasant uprisings examined below; José Figueres in Costa Rica; countless insurrectionary attempts in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Haiti, dating back to Toussaint L'Ouverture: Fidel and his 26th of July had a rich ancestry. But they refined a tradition, and made it a policy of state and party. Had there been no tradition, the deliberate attempt to extend the armed struggle everywhere under the sun would have fallen totally flat (it wasn't exactly successful in any case). Had there been no state-sponsored policy, the tradition would have remained just that: a memory and a nuisance.

The similarities to the Russian Revolution are striking. Between 1917 and the mid-1920s Lenin and later Stalin broke the large Western European Social-Democratic parties into Communist and Socialist wings. They simultaneously created an International body that supported and controlled these new organizations. Like the Soviets, the

22. Alain Rouquié, *Amérique Latine, Introduction à l'Extrême-Occident* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. 303.

Cubans also generated divisions within the Latin American left. But unlike the Soviets, most of the time the Cubans did not intentionally create those divisions. In fact, they would rather have won over those who disagreed with them instead of destroying them.<sup>23</sup>

Another fundamental analogy with the Soviet Union can be made in relation to the Cubans' strategic mistakes, and the reasons they committed them. In what came to be perhaps the most perceptive criticism of "Revolution in the Revolution," Régis Debray's conceptualization of the Cuban strategy, his mentor, the French philosopher Louis Althusser, warned his student:

It may be that your theses are correct, but your text doesn't really provide a positive demonstration of this; it simply gives what we could call a negative demonstration. . . . In your writings, the validity of guerrilla warfare is demonstrated less by its own merits than through the defects or drawbacks of past forms of struggle that you examine; it is supported less by its positive qualities than by the negative aspects of other forms of struggle.<sup>24</sup>

The Cuban Revolution's rift with the rest of the Latin American left was tantamount to a break with the past. The substance of the Cuban innovation can be summed up in six theses and one theoretical premise justifying the strategic and tactical considerations.<sup>25</sup> The theoretical premise was developed primarily by Cubans, but in an ad hoc fashion. Later in the decade and largely *ex post*, it came to be known as "dependency theory," a coherent, articulate corpus of historical, economic, social, and political assumptions about Latin

23. In 1967, without much success, the Cubans "inaugurated the OLAS (Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad) Conference in Havana, an International dominated by Cuba, created against the orthodox Communist parties that had chosen the reformist or peaceful and parliamentary road, and refused to make revolution according to Cuban dictums." *Ibid.*, p. 298.

24. Louis Althusser, quoted in Régis Debray, *La Critique des Armes* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), pp. 262, 264.

25. The corpus of texts, proclamations, speeches and official documents in which these theses were formulated and divulged is far-reaching. It ranges from Fidel Castro's First and Second Declarations of Havana in 1961 and 1962, to Régis Debray's "authorized" theoretical translation of many of Castro's and Che Guevara's views in "Revolution in the Revolution," and includes the multiple pro-Cuban analyses in each country of Latin America. Given the diversity of the texts and the considerable number of treatises on the subject, and the ensuing difficulty of picking out the most useful or relevant ones, we have followed the most recent study of the Cuban ideological influence on the rest of the Latin American left, which also happens to be one of the most insightful. See José Rodríguez Elizondo, *La crisis de las izquierdas en América Latina* (Madrid and Caracas: Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana-Editorial Nueva Sociedad, 1990), pp. 94-98.

America.<sup>26</sup> In a nutshell, this perspective posited the virtual neocolonial status of the hemisphere, the dysfunctional nature of capitalism in the region and the consequent historical impotence of the local business classes, the complete lack of democratic channels of expression and reform, and the inviability of any form of nonsocialist development. While in its most radical elaboration dependency theory was formulated solely by non-Cubans like the Chilean-Dutch sociologist André Gunder Frank and the Brazilian Fernando Henrique Cardoso, it served as the theoretical underpinning for the Cuban condemnation of the Latin American version of Stalin's "construction of socialism in one country."<sup>27</sup>

The first defining statement proclaimed the *hemispheric* character of the Latin American revolution. In the Cuban view, whatever the specific features and peculiarities of individual countries, it was the common Latin American predicament they all shared that was decisive. The "objective conditions" of revolution were perceived as essentially identical throughout the hemisphere. The differences from nation to nation pertained to "subjective conditions," which had to be equalized through political will and revolutionary fervor.<sup>28</sup>

The second premise affirmed the *socialist* nature of this hemispheric revolution. Whereas the Latin American left had typically accepted—indeed, insisted upon—the need for an interregnum between the realization of democratic reforms—parliamentary democracy, nationalization of natural resources and land reform—and a truly socialist revolution, the Cuban approach placed the socialist revolution in a

26. "At the most general level of abstraction, dependency ideas attempt to marry Marxism and nationalism." Robert A. Packenham, *The Dependency Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 27.

27. The link between dependency theory and Cuba has been established on numerous occasions; some authors go beyond this and argue that "Third World ideology" in the industrialized Western nations was also linked to dependency theory: "Among Western intellectuals the ideology of the Third World (*tercer mundismo* in Spanish) experienced a qualitative leap with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and the transformation of Che Guevara in the guerrilla's emblem. . . . Under the label of dependency theories André Gunder Frank, Theotonio Dos Santos, Ruy Mauro Marini, and Samir Amin through their works made it a commonplace conviction to believe that the only road to economic development passed through breaking the economic ties of dependency with the developed countries." Ludolfo Paramio, *Tras el diluvio: La izquierda ante el fin de siglo* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 1988), p. 152. For a radical critique from the left of dependency theory in Latin America, see Jorge G. Castañeda and Enrique Hett, *El Economismo Dependientista* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1978). For a more recent and conservative approach, see Packenham, *ibid.*

28. Rodríguez Elizondo, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-98.

position of priority.<sup>29</sup> Any pleading in favor of so-called "noncapitalist roads of development" was a reformist capitulation ignoring the fact that capitalism in the region was not a going concern.

The third thesis, which derived almost naturally from the first two, came to be the dominant underlying argument for Cuban strategy during most of the sixties. It stated that the continental, socialist revolution could come about and be victorious only through an *armed struggle*, as opposed to the traditional "peaceful paths" previously favored by the Latin American left, particularly the Communist parties. The classic *tactical* consideration of how to reach power became a central *strategic* precept. With time, in fact, it would become the strategic premise, allowing even those groups who never subscribed to the other founding propositions (the M-19 movement in Colombia or the Argentine Montoneros, for example) to conserve their revolutionary purity. This was the most contentious issue Cuba faced, not only with the Latin American Communist organizations but also with the Soviet Union.

The fourth assumption had to do with leadership. The responsibility for conducting this entire process was placed firmly on the purportedly strong shoulders of the region's urban, enlightened, middle classes—the so-called petty bourgeoisie. Through heroic and decisive exemplary acts, students, intellectuals, professionals, and teachers would ignite the consciousness of the disenfranchised, impoverished masses who needed only a vanguard to lead them into revolutionary action.

The fifth postulate held that revolution could allow only revolutionary alliances, and consequently that the Communist parties' existing conception whereby alliances were possible with the "national bourgeoisie," the existing governments, and the union bureaucracy, along with their political expression of populist leaders, parties, and movements, had to be forsaken. The local entrepreneurial classes were irrevocably deemed imperialist traitors, and incapable of taking a stand in favor of the revolution and against its enemies. It followed, by deduction, that the key alliance for the revolution had to be forged between groups that were as far apart as they could be: there was a great rift between the rural peasantry, often linguistically, geographically,

29. This not only displeased many Latin American Communists, it also made life difficult for the Soviet Union. It took more than a year "from April 16, 1961, through mid-April 1962 for Cuba to be definitively and regularly recognized as socialist in Soviet writings." Jacques Levesque, *L'URSS et la Révolution Cubaine* (Montréal: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques/Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1976), p. 51.

and ethnically isolated by worlds and centuries, and the middle-class students and intellectuals of the cities. Che's expedition in Bolivia was an extreme example of this. The corollary of these hypotheses, and basic assumption of the "foco" theory was that the rural peasantry constituted the mass sector of society offering the greatest revolutionary potential, not the small, co-opted, urban working classes. The bourgeoisie was a puppet of imperialism; the workers were stooges: these viewpoints amounted to a severe quandary for self-styled Marxists:

The total negation of the two fundamental classes of society in the Marxist view—one, the bourgeoisie, because it wasn't national, the other, the proletariat, because it wasn't revolutionary—made existing political systems nothing more than devious but clever stratagems of domination.<sup>30</sup>

The sixth and final tenet was, inevitably, that the region's historical Communist parties had ceased to be valid revolutionary instruments. Corrupted and weakened by their allegiance not only to the Soviet Union but to its unconditional defense, accustomed to wheeling and dealing with governing elites, and supported by constituencies with a vested interest in the status quo, the hemisphere's orthodox Marxist-Leninist organizations were irremediably reformist and incapable of leading the revolution. The best proof of this central point lay in their rejection of the first five theses—they refused to accept the armed struggle, the socialist nature of the revolution, the need to abandon old alliances and adopt a truly hemispheric strategy.

It has been argued that the discontinuity between the Cuban revolution and the theory and practice of the traditional Communist parties of Latin America was tempered by an underlying, fundamental commonality of their one-party, Leninist, "dictatorship of the proletariat" conception of what socialism should be. In particular, the Chilean school of socialist renovation that surfaced in the mid-eighties has made this point eloquently; it is not entirely inaccurate. In terms of their intrinsic constitution, but not so much in their international relations nor in their conceptions of revolution, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe *did* form the model the Cubans and their followers believed in. This was not true of all Cuban leadership—Che Guevara's criticisms of Soviet-style socialism were scathing—nor at all times. But one-party rule, a full expropriation of the means of production, and aspirations of social homogeneity did represent undisputed features of the model in question.

30. Rodríguez Elizondo, op. cit., p. 48.

Nonetheless, it is also true that in practice, and in the eyes of many Latin Americans and Cubans, at the outset the island revolution represented a major break with the Soviet model. It was freer, more democratic, disorderly, tropical, and spontaneous, as well as being intellectually more diverse and politically more liberal. With time, the resemblance between the models would grow, and Cuba would come to look much more like the Soviet Union. But in the early stages, at least, the discontinuities clearly outweighed the similarities.

Throughout the 1960s, starting with the Venezuelan and Dominican Republic guerrillas at the very beginning of the decade, the entire continent witnessed the emergence of armed "focos," or small groups of armed militants in the mountains or jungles. This was the logical, unavoidable consequence of the Cuban Revolution's adoption of the viewpoints outlined above. It was not so much a question of the Cubans exporting revolution or supporting these groups' activities in other countries. Rather, the Cubans' most important contribution to the emergence of the focos was one of ideology and example. If Fidel, Che and Raúl had overthrown the Batista dictatorship through the armed action of an initially tiny group of bold militants, the reproduction of the attempt was possible, if not inevitable. Castro's moral authority and prestige—together with the fascination he exerted over every young Latin American militant, intellectual, or political cadre to visit Havana in those early, heady years of the Cuban Revolution—were the island's principal revolutionary export. The arms, training, money, and other equipment were simply icing on the cake.

Armed groups in Latin America sprouted up in reaction to the Communist parties. One exception was Venezuela, where Douglas Bravo and Pompeyo Márquez led the Partido Comunista de Venezuela into a virtually suicidal attempt to wage an armed struggle against the recently established representative democracy headed by Social-Democrat Romulo Betancourt. Another exception was Colombia, which has lived through what French sociologist Pierre Gilhodes has called the longest peasant war of the century, together with that of the Philippines. The Marquetalia "armed resistance" guerrilla movement lasted for nearly twenty years.<sup>31</sup> For the entire decade of the fifties the Colombian Communist Party directed several different guerrilla forces—all of them descended from the Liberal insurgencies of "self-defense" actions of the previous decade, and the so-called "violencia":

31. Richard Gott, *Las guerrillas en América Latina* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1971), p. 222.

The Colombian guerrilla movement pre-dates the Cuban Revolution by at least a decade, with three stages: (1) the period dominated by the Liberal guerrillas (1949–1953); (2) the period marked by Communist guerrillas (1955–1958); and (3) the emergence of ideologically diverse groups in the wake of the Cuban Revolution (1962–1991).<sup>32</sup>

During the 1950s the Colombian Communist Party achieved what countless groups throughout the hemisphere would fail to do later: it created a mass base, with a significant peasant following. Its endurance rested on two pillars: "peasant self-defense groups, and the Communist guerrilla nuclei."<sup>33</sup> In 1965 the Marquetalia guerrilla movement was destroyed by the Colombian military, to a considerable extent because of hemispheric geopolitical considerations. A year later the Colombian Communist Party redefined its position on guerrilla warfare.<sup>34</sup> It proclaimed that all forms of struggle had to be combined, which often led to the devastating exposure of civilian urban movements to the bloody repression initially directed against the armed rural groups. This is clearly what occurred in the second half of the 1980s, when the CP founded the Patriotic Union mass movement and electoral front, which had thousands of its cadres, including its presidential candidate in 1990, Bernardo Jaramillo, assassinated in the cities, while the FARC pursued its armed struggle in the remote countryside. The Colombian CP continued to participate in the armed struggle in Colombia through the FARC, created in 1966 as a response to the destruction of Marquetalia and to the emergence of Cuban and Maoist armed groups on its left. The FARC was the last guerrilla movement dating back to the sixties to negotiate the laying down of its arms, in the early 1990s.<sup>35</sup>

In most cases the Latin American armed groups were led by former Communists; in others, as in Peru, they were headed by ex-

32. Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, *Historia de la guerrilla*, vol. 1: *Las FARC: De la autodefensa a la combinación de todas las formas de lucha 1949–1966* (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia/Tercer Mundo Editores, 1991), p. 20.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

34. "Our Party believes that there still isn't a revolutionary situation in Colombia. Today the guerrilla struggle is not the main form of combat." Gilberto Vieyra, secretary general of the Communist Party of Colombia, quoted by Gott, *op. cit.* p. 246. In fact, many analysts of this period maintain that the independent communist republics like Marquetalia were never really focos or guerrilla wars, but more accurately a peasant self-defense mechanism in the face of Colombian violence.

35. Its leader, Manuel Marulanda ("Tirofijo"), has spent nearly half a century in armed struggle.

members of the mainstream left-of-center populist parties like the APRA. In others still, former military officials led the armed struggle, be it in Guatemala in the early sixties, or in Brazil several years later. On occasions, the focos traced their historical origins back to earlier, abortive national liberation movements: the Sandinista Front in Nicaragua, created at least formally in 1961 by Carlos Fonseca Amador, proclaimed its fidelity to the guerrilla struggle of Augusto Cesar Sandino against American Marines in the twenties; the MR-13 in Guatemala, founded in 1962 by young army officers, was loyal to the memory of the Arbenz regime overthrown in 1954. Focos were created in Argentina, in Colombia—exemplified by Camilo Torres, the aristocratic guerrilla priest—in Peru—by Luis de la Puente's APRA Rebelde and by the MIR, Hugo Blanco's peasant rebellion—and in the Nacahuaquí region of Bolivia, where Che Guevara would live out his final days in 1967.

The region's Communist parties were nearly unanimous in refusing to participate in armed adventures. They maintained their solidarity with the Cuban Revolution, traveled incessantly to Havana, on occasion even signed manifestoes and appeals for armed struggle, but never went beyond paying a peculiarly Latin American lip service to the idea. In nearly every case, either the local Communist organizations ignored the armed groups—collaborating with the regimes in place by denying the guerrillas supplies, money, weapons, or international contacts—or openly attacked them. Conversely, the Castroist spin-offs were often virulently opposed to the Communist Party, frequently formulating their extreme tactics and platforms, and establishing their chosen breeding grounds, in direct response to these parties' "treasons" and traditional stances. In the words of a leader of what would become one of the most successful guerrilla groups in the 1970s, the Salvadorean Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL): "The need to combat the deviations of the Communist Party led us to extreme and opposed positions, to an absolute negation of everything the Communist Party did. . . ."<sup>36</sup> Needless to say, the Communists did not take this lying down, and lashed back with their own viciousness and spite. Che Guevara's death would thus be attributed by many to the Bolivian Communist Party's boycott of his minuscule guerrilla war. Although "a compromise was reached between Cuba and the majority of the

36. Facundo Guardado, interview with Marta Harnecker, quoted in Marta Harnecker, *América Latina: Izquierda y crisis actual* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1990), p. 219.

[region's Communist] parties on the armed struggle in 1964,"<sup>37</sup> it proved short-lived.<sup>38</sup>

Later, urban guerrilla movements would surface.<sup>39</sup> These groups were also a reaction to the Communist parties' perceived inaction, and occurred mostly in countries where the very principle of a rural foco appeared senseless: Uruguay, half of whose population lived in the capital, Brazil, where the Communist Party's urban implantation in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo gave the notion of urban guerrilla warfare a certain credibility, and Argentina, where the Peronist tradition and the overwhelming weight of the capital provided favorable circumstances.<sup>40</sup> The main urban guerrilla groups were Carlos Marighella's Army of National Liberation in Brazil, famous mostly for its drafting and distribution of Marighella's "Mini-Manual de la Guerrilla Urbana," the Montoneros in Argentina, and most notably the Uruguayan Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, or Tupamaros. Marighella, like so many other guerrilla leaders during those years, came from the Communist Party, where he was the head apparatchik for the São Paulo regional section, one of the most powerful in the country. As a result of the debate within the organization over the causes of and responsibilities for the 1964 military coup, Marighella began tilting toward armed struggle and encouraging dissident activities and acting on his own. He was gunned down in São Paulo in 1969, by 1970 virtually the entire Brazilian guerrilla movement had been destroyed. But, though it may have proved ephemeral, remarkably unsuccessful, and totally marginal to the country's political and social life, it was not so to its intellectual community. What's more, many of its chief traits, as studied years later thanks to documents made available during Bra-

37. Levesque, op. cit., p. 143.

38. "The Latin American Communist parties and particularly those that chose the 'peaceful road' were complaining to Moscow about Cuba's violation of the 1964 agreements." *Ibid.*, p. 144.

39. Some students of this period consider the Venezuelan guerrillas to have been an urban movement predating other ones: "At the beginning of the sixties the urban guerrillas of Caracas, in contrast with their successors elsewhere in South America, assembled a powerful coalition including the Communist Party, the rebellious wing of Acción Democrática, students, and dissident sectors of the armed forces." Robert Moss, *La guerrilla urbana* (Madrid: Editorial Nacional, 1972), p. 212.

40. According to the British historian of the Montoneros, "In the following twelve months [from September 1974, soon after Perón died] the Montoneros would become the most powerful urban guerrilla force Latin America had ever known." Some estimates give them up to 7,000 well-trained men under arms at the height of their power. Richard Gillespie, *Soldiers of Perón: Argentina's Montoneros* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 206.

zil's *abertura*, were common to the rest of the hemisphere's guerrilla movements:

In their initial stage, guerrilla movements begin among the highly educated offspring of rural elites and the urban middle and upper classes. . . . In the subsequent stage of the movement, peasants come to dominate in numbers, while power remains in the hands of those with higher status and education.<sup>41</sup>

Of all those persons officially acknowledged to have died as a result of repression from 1964 to 1978—a sample more or less identifiable with the guerrilla movement—64 percent were so-called intellectual workers, of which half were students, and 33 percent were manual workers, of which 3 percent were trained technical personnel.<sup>42</sup> Already at this stage, the predominance of the educated, intellectualized middle class is obvious. In the larger universe of those “officially” tortured by the regime, intellectual workers represented 55 percent of the total, of which 12 percent were trained, technical manual workers: thus two-thirds of the tortured came from the same educated, urban middle class.<sup>43</sup> Students represented 25.9 percent of the total, and together with university professors made up 35.7 percent of those recognized as having been tortured during those years: more than a third thus being linked to the educational sector. In the larger universe of individuals “denounced to military authorities” or subject to prison terms for political activities, the ratios are similar: students and university professors made up 28 percent of the total, although intellectual and manual workers acquired almost equal weight: 45 percent and 44 percent, respectively.<sup>44</sup> These characteristics are largely applicable throughout Latin America during this period, with a few notable exceptions—Mexico, Peru in the early years, and Colombia in the 1950s—though not later. Herein lies one of the main differences separating the guerrilla movements of the sixties and early seventies from those of the second wave:

The revolutionary organizations thus appeared not only as political elites, but as social elites. They were alternative elites, or counter-elites, not mass-based movements.<sup>45</sup>

41. Timothy Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 29.

42. Daniel Araújo Filho, *A Revolução Falto ao Encontro: Os Comunistas no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Brasiliense, 1990), p. 153.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Although the Tupamaros originally had a strong debate with the Cubans over the viability of an urban guerrilla movement, they encountered marked success for several years by acting almost exclusively in Montevideo. They also became the epitome of the armed Castroist groups. The single most important defining trait distinguishing them from the rest of the Uruguayan left would be precisely their recourse to armed struggle. In the words of one of their leaders at the time:

We all proceeded from a mosaic of ideologies . . . but what united us positively was the will to create an apparatus for the armed struggle. . . . The armed struggle had to merge all other efforts; it had to become the main form of struggle.<sup>46</sup>

The Tupamaros were practically wiped out by the ferocious repression unleashed upon them—and on the entire Uruguayan left—by the “golpe blanco,” or civilian-led military coup of 1974. But for several years they seemed to represent the first successful guerrilla group to have surfaced in the hemisphere since Castro's triumph in 1959.<sup>47</sup> After the numerous defeats of the sixties, any organization that survived and remained active was noteworthy. This, undoubtedly, was what led the most informed observers of the continent's armed left, like Régis Debray, to declare the Tupamaros

the only armed revolutionary movement in Latin America who knew how, or was able, to attack on all fronts (and not only at one point or one side) and to neutralize the bourgeois and anti-national dictatorship, questioning its very survival.<sup>48</sup>

The Chilean MIR, founded in 1967, probably came to be the most internationally appealing movement (“sexiest,” some have said, in view of the attractive, charismatic nature of the young men and women from the “golden youth” of Santiago and Concepción who made up most of its leadership). It can also be considered an essentially urban movement, although it always contended that it included a peasant and urban marginal wing.

46. Entrevista con un Tupamaro, quoted in Maria Ester Gillio, *La Guerrilla Tupamaro* [Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1970], pp. 185–186.

47. “For several years the most important and effective urban guerrilla organization in Latin America was the National Liberation Movement [MLN], the Tupamaros, in Uruguay.” William E. Ratliff, *Castroism and Communism in Latin America, 1959–1976* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute–Hoover Institution, 1976), p. 133.

48. Régis Debray, “Apprendre d'eux,” in *Nous les Tupamaros* [Paris: François Maspéro, 1971], pp. 209–210.

The death of Che Guevara symbolized the end of an epoch, though it did not actually coincide with its conclusion.<sup>49</sup> As Debray puts it,

The physical disappearance of Che, brutal, precipitous, incredible, was like a cold shower for those living in the euphoria of this exceptional period. It is more than a symbol, his death represents a real shift in the struggle. In 1967 the rural guerrilla's curve turned downward, ineluctably, irreversibly.<sup>50</sup>

Guevara remains the icon of the armed Latin American left: its cross and its glory. He symbolizes an intellectualized middle class outraged by an intolerable estrangement from the society it lives in, and the abyss separating that class from the vast, undifferentiated universe of the poor. Che's travails in Africa evoke this gulf in its most extreme form: his wanderings across Tanzania and the Congo, leading a struggle of people "of another language in an unknown land" (as he wrote in his notes on the revolutionary war in the Congo) underline the absurdity of a white Argentine doctor trying to convince rebels in Kisoma to cross Lake Tanganyika for a meeting, something they were too terrified to do.<sup>51</sup>

But Guevara also represents the heroism and nobility of myriad middle-class Latin Americans who rose up in the best way they could find, against a status quo they eventually discovered to be unlivable. If ever there was an illustration of the anguish evoked in sensitive and reasonable, but far from exceptional, individuals at being affluent and comfortable islands in a sea of destitution, it was Guevara. He will endure as a symbol, not of revolution or guerrilla warfare, but of the extreme difficulty, if not the actual impossibility, of indifference.

One after another rural, and later urban, guerrilla movements were defeated. Some, emerging after Che's death, were destroyed by the mid-seventies, nearly ten years after his execution. Others, like the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the MIR in Chile, were just beginning to thrive when Che died, and passed from the scene much later, only to

49. Other students of this period establish a slightly different sequence, without altering the basic periodization: "The death of Guevara in Bolivia . . . is the first blow to 'foquismo,' though it also creates a heroic legend around the figure of the guerrilla fighter. Castro's support for the invasion of Czechoslovakia is the next blow: from then on it was clear that even in Cuba the only politics was *realpolitik*. But the decisive blow would be struck by the military coups in Chile and Uruguay and Argentina, where the groups that predicated or practiced the armed struggle were not only defeated but smashed in an indescribably ferocious fashion. Their defeat, and its cruelty, are accepted as the epitaph of the *foco*." Paramio, op. cit., p. 139.

50. Debray, *La Critique des Armes*, p. 245.

51. Tania Pajoni, "Che nel Africa" (Liberazione, Rome, August 21, 1992.)

reappear as civilian political organizations in the political thaw of the mid-eighties. The divisions between the Communists and the Castroists also outlived Che, although it became obvious with time that the infighting was partly to blame for many of these defeats:

The division was deep and disastrous, because the *guerrilleros* needed the Communists—without them, where would they get their troops?—and the Communists needed the guerrillas—otherwise, how could they continue to be revolutionaries!<sup>52</sup>

Hopes for region-wide revolution faded. The Soviet Union demanded greater order and discipline as a condition for aid to Cuba, and, given its increasing reliance on Moscow, Havana was progressively forced to accommodate itself to Soviet wishes, both in economic policy and in international affairs. In reaction to this turn of events, it also began to develop relations with other Latin American governments.<sup>53</sup> Cuba established ties with the reformist Peruvian military regime in 1969, with Omar Torrijos in Panama around the same time, and later with new and more markedly social-democratic regimes in Venezuela and Jamaica, along with Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, and Colombia. The Cuban Revolution was mellowing; its support for revolution throughout the region was being subordinated to reasons of state:

Cuba supported revolutionary movements in the Americas less often in the early 1970s than before because it bargained effectively to expand its state-to-state relations for the first time since 1960.<sup>54</sup>

It was high time. The view, sincere or disingenuous, of many American policymakers, that in the seventies and eighties Cuba dabbled more than ever in the export of revolution, arms, and ideology was largely false, at least as regards Latin America (although it was undeniably true in Africa).<sup>55</sup> Fidel Castro began supporting revolution

52. Gott, op. cit., p. 40.

53. "One crucial change that Havana made in its approach to international affairs was to become more ecumenical in defining its friends. Rather than relying on the strict criteria that in the past had tended to limit its political partners to like-minded radicals, Havana became more flexible. . . ." H. Michael Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations: The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Books, 1985), p. 33.

54. Domínguez, op. cit., p. 114.

55. For example two scholars state that "Latin American insurgents of the 1960s and 1970s had not yet developed a sense of unity and political organization, nor did they receive extensive support from external sources. . . . This third wave of insurgents . . . of the 1980s . . . [have heeded] the mistakes of the past . . . benefiting from strong coordination and support, especially international support." Andrew Hoehn and Carlos Weiss, "Overview of Latin American Insurgencies," in Georges Fauriol, *Latin American Insurgencies* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies/National Defense University, 1985), pp. 10, 17.



abroad virtually weeks after he took power and never stopped. The difference between the early 1960s and the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America lay in the island's enhanced capability to provide such support in later years, and in the fact that on the receiving end, the capacity of Latin American insurgent groups to absorb aid was also far more developed. However, in relative terms, it is highly questionable that the Cubans delivered—or that their allies throughout Latin America obtained—more support in the seventies and eighties than during the first decade of the Revolution.

The process of rapprochement with the USSR was definitively inaugurated by Castro's famous speech in 1968, where despite all his twists and turns, the Cuban leader approved the Brezhnev invasion of Czechoslovakia: "We accept the bitter necessity that required sending those troops into Czechoslovakia."<sup>56</sup> It was accelerated by the Chilean experience, and by Castro's month-long sojourn in the southern nation. Salvador Allende's electoral victory in 1970 appeared to be a confirmation of the Communist parties' theses regarding "the peaceful road to socialism"; Castro's support for the Chilean experiment and thus for the CP could not but be perceived as a mellowing process.<sup>57</sup> Although Cuban sympathies perhaps lay equally with the Socialist Party and the MIR—and the training and arms MIR cadres received on the island as the Chilean drama unfolded were well known—Castro's "détente" with the Chilean Communists was undeniable.<sup>58</sup>

As the entire Southern Cone was submerged in the repressive blood-bath of national-security military dictatorships, starting with the Brazilian crackdown in 1968, including the Chilean coup in 1973, and extending to Uruguay in 1974 and the Argentine dirty war that started that same year with Perón's death, a double transformation was occurring within the ranks of the Cuban-inspired Latin American armed left. Something had to be done to solve the riddle in the aphorism that

56. Fidel Castro, "Discurso sobre Czechoslovakia," August 1968.

57. In one of his first speeches in Chile, Castro emphasized this point in his inimitable fashion: "There was never any contradiction between the conceptions of the Cuban Revolution and the roads followed . . . in Chile, we never questioned that path. . . . And we followed the events on Election Day with great interest, like you keeping track hour by hour of the tally and the predictions. But I must say that after a couple of hours I scribbled some calculations of my own and assured myself that we had won. And in our country this fact was received with great joy, it was received as a great popular victory." Fidel Castro, "En la reunión con la Directiva de la Central Única de Trabajadores," Santiago, November 23, 1971, in *Chile 1971: Habla Fidel Castro* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria Cormorán, 1971), pp. 18–21.

58. Andrés Pascal Allende, interview with the author, Mexico City, June 26, 1991.

so aptly described the fate of the Latin American revolution since Fidel's *barbudos* had come down from the Sierra Maestra in 1959. It was either "*las armas sin el pueblo*" ["weapons without the people"] or "*el pueblo sin armas*" ["the people without weapons"].

On the one hand, the old wounds between the Castroist guerrillas and the Communist bureaucracies began to heal. The Communists—encouraged by Moscow and now on good terms with Havana—increasingly acquiesced to Cuban leadership and the principle of the armed struggle.<sup>59</sup> For their part, the former "foquistas" and their advocates among the pro-Cuban political-military organizations accepted the need to work with the Communists as well as many of the latter's theoretical premises regarding the need for alliances, the nature of the coming revolution, and the character of "*el enemigo principal*." An initial convergence took place on the occasion of Leonid Brezhnev's first visit to Cuba, in 1974. The statement that emerged from this encounter included a reference to "party-to-party ties" that in the Communist liturgy could only be interpreted as a meeting of minds with regard to previous disagreements on the Latin American revolution.<sup>60</sup> But the true turning point was the meeting in Havana in June 1975 where the Communists, Cubans, and indirectly the political-military organizations associated with them finally made peace. Among the more striking formulations the Cubans accepted were resolutions stating, among other things, that:

Without diminishing the struggle for democratic rights and the conquest of new structures within our countries, we Communists are willing to back and encourage the positions of those Latin American governments that imply the defense of our natural resources or the effort to set limits on multinational corporations. . . . There are sectors of the Latin American bourgeoisie that can adopt positions converging with the anti-imperialist struggle. . . . These bourgeois sectors can par-

59. The Communist parties that actually assimilated these changes proved more resilient to the passage of time than others. The best example is generally considered to be the Salvadorean Communist Party. With regard to the Castroist groups, its secretary general, Shafick Jorge Handal, in his own weighty jargon, has acknowledged that: "In many cases, some of these leftist organizations not only grew more rapidly than the respective Communist parties, but they matured before the Party, and led the workers and other classes to victory and transformed themselves into the Marxist-Leninist party leading the march to socialism." Quoted by Harnecker, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

60. The joint communiqué stated that: "The most solid base for the unbreakable friendship between Cuba and the Soviet Union is the fraternal collaboration between the Communist Party of Cuba and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, two Marxist-Leninist revolutionary parties. . . ." Quoted in *La política exterior de la Cuba socialista* (Moscow: Editorial Progreso, 1980), pp. 10–11.

ticipate in different forms of democratic and anti-imperialist unity with the popular forces.<sup>61</sup>

The governments actually mentioned in this connection were the Peruvian military regime headed by Juan Velasco Alvarado, Torrijos in Panama, and the military junta that took over in Ecuador in 1972.<sup>62</sup> The fact was that many Latin American governments had attained greater elbow room in their dealings with the United States, and were also tilting to the left, at least in international affairs. As they were able to defy Washington on Cuba, Cuba was able to break out of its regional isolation. This in turn diluted its interest in supporting revolutionary armed struggle, which made a rapprochement with the Communist parties possible. Soviet encouragement—and leverage—did not hurt, either.

For the Cubans, peace with other Latin American countries capped a major change in their policy toward revolution. The setbacks they suffered were real, as was the growing influence of the Soviet Union: the Cuban Revolution had grown tired; it would get its second wind years later, in Central America. The deal it cut with the Communist parties was advantageous for both sides. But in order to get what they wanted—i.e., the Communists' recognition of the validity of the armed struggle, and the beginning of their reconciliation with the Castroist organizations—the Cubans had to put their own revisions on paper. The Communists were obliged to make their concessions explicit too.<sup>63</sup>

The trade-off between the Cubans and the Communists could not have been more manifest.<sup>64</sup> Havana would henceforth desist from sup-

61. "La América Latina en la lucha contra el imperialismo, por la independencia nacional, la democracia, el bienestar popular, la paz y el socialismo," Encuentro de Partidos Comunistas de América Latina, La Habana, Junio 13, 1975, published in *Boletín de información. Documentos de los Partidos Comunistas y Obreros. Artículos e intervenciones*, 12/75, Editorial Paz y socialismo, Prague, December 1972, pp. 40, 43.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

63. "It is the right and the duty of all the popular and revolutionary forces to be ready to respond to counter-revolutionary violence with revolutionary violence, and to clear the road, through different forms of popular action, including the armed struggle, for the sovereign decision of the majority. . . . Outside our parties, there exists today a left with different nuances. . . . The Communist parties will take into account the fact that some of those movements are opposed to imperialist oppression and are advancing toward socialist positions." *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

64. A distinguished student of Cuban foreign policy summed up the trade-off between the Cubans and the Communists the following way: "Cuba thus compromised on several points about the proper path to power for the sake of receiving the allegiance of the Communist parties. This was a necessary precondition for the unified Communist support that was given to Central American revolutionary movements in the years that followed. Cuba's newly recognized vanguard role helped it lead some of these cautious Communist parties toward the path of armed struggle in late 1977." Jorge I. Domínguez, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

porting revolution in Latin America, unless and until multiple conditions were met: good chances of success, Soviet acquiescence, and unity among revolutionary groups. The foco era and its sequels had come to an end.

How much did Cuban intervention matter? For years conservatives, some in Latin America but mainly in the United States, reduced every revolutionary movement, whisper, or suspicion in the region to Cuban inspiration. The left, for its part, ranging from U.S. liberals to Latin American Marxist-Leninists, dismissed the idea of Cuban involvement, emphasizing always the home-grown roots of revolt and anger in a continent whose history amply justified both.

The left was correct in that the Cuban catalyst was no more than that: a factor contributing to the maturation and efflorescence of other, deeper processes already in motion. There had been revolutions, insurgencies, and subversion, Marxist- and Soviet-inspired or not, in Latin America long before the Cuban experience. There would continue to be such many years after its passing. But the right also had reasons for sticking to its guns, so to speak. Where conditions were ripe for insurgency, the absence of any overt Cuban connection did not necessarily imply the nonexistence of a Cuban factor, and where nothing else seemed to explain the outbreak of armed struggle and the emergence of guerrillas in town and country, the hypothesis of Cuban incitement was often a sound one. And finally, where a mysterious peace, perhaps sporadically punctuated by millenarist or peasant uprisings contrasted with the upheavals described in the preceding pages, the assumption of Cuban inaction enhanced its comprehension. Perhaps the best illustration of the impact of Cuban backing for revolution may well be provided by the dog that didn't bark: what happened when the Cubans truly stayed out of the way, as in Mexico.

Although the Mexican guerrilla movement never got off the ground, it acquired many of the features the Cubans would have wished guerrillas to possess throughout Latin America. The saga of the guerrillas of the late sixties and early seventies was long cloaked in silence—and then, as frequently occurs in Mexico, it inspired a rash of books, novels, articles, and essays nearly twenty years after the fact. Much remains to be revealed about those years, but several important aspects of this episode of Mexican history have been brought to light.

The postmortem assessment is not uniform, particularly with regard to one point: whether the armed movement included, like its counterparts in the hemisphere, a middle-class, counterelite, student

component, or whether it was above all—and exceptionally—a truly peasant movement. In a novel that contributed significantly to renewing the debate in Mexico over those troubled years, Héctor Aguilar Camín sought to portray the guerrilla movement of the seventies as at least partly urban, middle-class, and student-based.<sup>65</sup> This it was: the 23rd of September League and the other small groups that carried out kidnappings, assassinations, and bank robberies during the turbulent times of President Luis Echeverría were chiefly composed of radicalized university graduates frustrated by the bloody defeat of the 1968 student movement and the unresponsiveness of an authoritarian political system.

Other writers have also stressed this point. Simply through the identities of the mothers of the disappeared and the way in which many of the guerrilla leaders who survived were reintegrated into society and peaceful political activity, it is clear that a significant number of middle-class youth helped fill the ranks of the urban armed movement in Mexico. They came from Monterrey and later from Sinaloa, from Guadalajara and the National Polytechnical Institute in Mexico City. And yet, while students joined the armed struggle, they did so only in the cities, not in the countryside, where another struggle was gathering steam. And they did so, in any case on a small scale, quite unlike—in relative terms—what occurred in Uruguay, Venezuela, Argentina, and perhaps even Brazil. No effective convergence of students and rural guerrillas ever took place. There were some attempts; all failed.

Two other features of the Mexican guerrilla wars, however, overshadowed this failure, so common to the entire hemisphere. First, there was a legacy of armed *peasant* uprisings in rural Central-Southern Mexico: in Morelos, from the days of Emiliano Zapata to the movement led by Rubén Jaramillo in the 1950s until his murder by the Mexican Army; and in Guerrero, where schoolteachers had kept alive a tradition of armed confrontation for the land. This became the real constituency for the rural guerrillas of the late sixties and early seventies: for Genaro Vázquez's ACNR in the Chilpancingo region, and for Lucio Cabañas's Party of the Poor in the Atoyac area. In another novel, less well written but perhaps more substantive and focused on the guerrilla movement than Aguilar Camín's, another Mexican author presents the fictional but strikingly realistic reflec-

65. Héctor Aguilar Camín, *La guerra de Galio* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena Editores, 1990), mainly parts 3 and 4.

tions of a high-ranking army officer on the subject of the armed movement:

The main point is the concerted support of the villages in the sierra. We are not dealing with a fistful of men in arms going from one place to another independently and isolated, like other terrorist groups. This is a guerrilla movement that the people of the region support, maintain and hide. Our war is thus a war against everything and everyone that supports those armed men. The enemy is in the villages, not just in the fistful of men. . . . It may well be that we are combating a struggle of the Mexican people, not suppressing an uprising against the people. This century the entire region followed Zapata. Zapatismo never built a regular army; it was a guerrilla army, like Lucio Cabañas's.<sup>66</sup>

The movement Cabañas led was weak, localized, doomed to defeat, and largely devoid of any urban alliance or program. But it had one key attribute that most other Latin American armed focos direly lacked: a true peasant base or constituency, however territorially isolated it may have been.<sup>67</sup>

Cabañas and Genaro Vázquez were both rural schoolteachers, a product of the mass education drive in the countryside that was begun in the 1930s but foundered quickly as the Revolution of 1910 ran out of steam. Like tens of thousands of their colleagues, they were close to the communities where they lived and taught, and highly sensitive to the destitution and the aspirations of the peasantry, as well as to the permanent threat of violence by the authorities. Indeed, armed peasant movements in these areas arose largely out of the need for self-defense. In marginal, isolated communities like these, armed defense was usually the only safeguard against police and army brutality. This was the strength and weakness of the Guerrero movement.

In a nation of great, sprawling urban conglomerations like Mex-

66. Carlos Montemayor, *Guerra en el paraíso* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1991), pp. 349–351.

67. "By late 1973, in a relatively small zone, the Party of the Poor had consolidated its hold. It never had territorial power, with a fully liberated zone. [But] the solidity attained by political-military organization and its consolidation among the rural population allowed it to solve the problem of traditional territorial control. . . . The army had to concentrate many thousands of men to fight the guerrillas. By early 1971 it already had 24,000 men in the State of Guerrero. The movement . . . had no recruitment problems and had difficulty in absorbing the many peasants who wanted to join." Marco Bellingeri, *Del agrarismo armado a la revolución de los pobres. Ensayos de guerrilla rural en México contemporáneo* (University of Turin, Mimeo, 1991), pp. 100–101.

ico, no localized rural guerrilla movement had any chance of success, but the bonds that united the schoolteachers and the peasantry of Guerrero were undeniable. Had Cabañas and Vázquez received outside help, to break their isolation and increase their meager resources, and had the urban middle-class student movement been more developed and committed, history might have taken a different turn. The guerrillas could not have won, but they could have made contact with the students and forced the government to negotiate and accept a democratic politics or unleash the repression elsewhere that fell upon Guerrero.

History did not take a different turn partly because of the second key characteristic of the Mexican guerrilla wars, in contrast to the rest of Latin America. The Party of the Poor and the ACNR, not to mention the urban groups such as the 23rd of September League, never received a drop of aid from Cuba: no money, no training, nor arms. Cuba's policy toward the armed struggle in Mexico was similar to the one it would follow in relation to the legal Mexican left during the late seventies and early eighties, and toward the Cárdenas movement in the late eighties and early nineties: hands off. The game was well worth the candle for the Cubans: in exchange for their nonintervention in Mexican affairs, they were able to count on the maintenance of diplomatic relations during the worst years of their hemispheric quarantine, and on quite cordial ties later on. They gave up very little, obtaining much in return. This did not deter Havana from helping or inciting Central American guerrillas to operate in Mexico for different purposes, or to recruit Mexican leftists for "Central American" chores. But in the entire literature on Cuban involvement in the Latin American armed struggle, there is no evidence or claim that the Cubans ever supported guerrillas in Mexico.

This reluctance meant more than lack of arms or money for the peasants in Guerrero and the students in Monterrey and Sinaloa. It resulted in scant or no international resonance for their cause. If the Cubans didn't take them seriously—and the Cubans took everybody who was anybody seriously—then no one would. Only the North Koreans were ever known to have trained Mexican guerrillas: not exactly an international outpouring of mainstream support.

Conditions were ripe in Mexico for the emergence of a significant armed movement. There were angry students and peasants, a repressive government, and the beginnings of an economic downturn. Tradition, a culture of violence, and lack of alternatives seemed a perfect recipe for armed strife. Some have speculated that most students did

not take up arms precisely because there had been a student movement: they were vaccinated.<sup>68</sup>

Cuba did not make revolution happen in Latin America. Where it tried to force things, it failed miserably. Similarly, where favorable circumstances prevailed, but Cuba was not around to help, little occurred. However, where a propitious environment and Cuban support coincided, revolution triumphed or made quite a go of it, as the next chapter will attempt to show.

68. "In the months following the end of the movement, thousands of us began searching for a road, inside the University and out. The worst of the wounded joined an urban guerrilla movement that bled to death for the next five years, in dirty war with no quarter. Most of the young went to the barrios, founding the neighborhood associations that for the next twenty years offered a hope of popular resistance." Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *68* (Mexico City: Ed. Joaquín Mortiz/Planeta, 1991), p. 113.