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REGIS DEBRAY AND REVOLUTION

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

by

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This thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Political Science

1969

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INTRODUCTION

Regis Debray, twenty-eight year old French Marxist philosopher, now sits imprisoned for allegedly giving assistance to the late Che Guevara in his attempt at sparking revolution in Bolivia. It is now of little significance whether or not the Bolivian government's claim is true that Debray provided active assistance to the rebels, or whether it is true, as Debray contends, that he was simply an observer of Che's activities. These are political-legal points of interest which were for all practical purposes decided upon by the Bolivian government's sentencing of Debray in October of 1967 to thirty years confinement.

Of what interest then is Regis Debray? The answer lies in the fact that Debray regarded his revolutionary doctrine as a progression beyond prior Marxist revolutionology. The title of his now-famous book, Revolution in the Revolution?, itself, makes obvious the fact that Debray believed he was saying something new. That his scheme seems to have failed in Bolivia is of slight consequence, at least in Section I of this study. My interest lies not in preparing an exegesis on how the doctrine failed to take into account Bolivia's airborne

troops or the powerful tentacles of the CIA's Bolivian branch, for these are topics best reported by inquisitive and qualified journalists. Rather, my aim is to view Regis Debray's work in relation to the philosophical base from which it claims to emerge, and upon which it claims to improve. This base is, of course, Marxism. Therefore, the central thrust of my examination will be to determine the importance and relevance of Debray's philosophy within revolutionary Marxist thought.

In using the word "importance," I mean Debray's significance as a philosophical product within a philosophy whose history has been dotted with polemical confrontations, revisionist tendencies, and charges of dogmatic stagnation. By claiming his adherence to Marxism, he also claims to be a product of, for instance, the controversies surrounding the Third International, or the historical exchanges between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. And it is because Marxist thought is so heavily interlaced with ideological differences that the labeling of Regis Debray a "Marxist" without further information is of little meaning to the serious observer of this sort of affair. It is only after an academic dissection is performed

upon Debray's "revolution in the revolution," and it is viewed side by side with the historical progression of Marxist theory and practice, that any and all importance can be given to Debray as both an effect and a cause with revolutionary Marxism. It is as an effect that Debray has importance; and it is as a cause that he may have relevance.

To speak of relevance, as I do in Section II, implies pertinence to some other thing. In the case of Régis Debray, his relevance is to three entities: (1) Marxist theory; (2) contemporary Marxist-based governments and revolutionaries; and (3) contemporary non-Marxist (or in most cases, anti-communist) governments.¹ In the case of category number one, Debray's effect is upon a tenet basic to orthodox Marxism. Despite polemics on various other issues, there exists little heresy in the unity of theory and practice, and it is with

¹Because reality is too spectrum - like to divide governments in as arbitrary fashion as here, I ask that this procedure be accepted here on journalistic expediency. Not important are the specific countries to which these categories apply, but that there exists, within the complex arrangement of nation-states, a political division of this sort.

this point of doctrine Debray is concerned. In fact, it is this principle through which Debray is operating and simultaneously commenting upon. Categories two and three are affected by Debray in a similar way. Marxist-based governments and revolutionaries, understandably, are highly interested in the movement of Marxist revolutionary theory and practice. Although hamstrung by the passions, principles, and behavior made necessary by their unavoidable participation with nation-state power politics,² contemporary Marxists still regard revolution, as ordered by dialectical materialism, the ultimate or decisive agency for change in those portions of the world not yet governed under a Marxist-communist arrangement. As for non or anti-communist (Marxist) governments, Debray's influence is mainly in the area of increasing the instability of the status quo by innovation the existing threat, revolutionary Marxism. And in as much as his philosophy alters, improves, or simply sustains

²For discussion of this point see John Plamanatz, Man and Society, Vol. 2, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), pp. 397-402

the existing threat, Debray is of interest to that which is threatened, the non-communist portions of the world.

Hence, Section I, in pursuing the importance of Regis Debray, will involve itself with the concept of the unity of theory and practice, and his peculiar participation in the concept. In its entirety, this section will consider Debray's works, Revolution in the Revolution? and two shorter essays, as they have been published, and will at no time in this section make relevant the apparent failure of his theory in the Bolivian-Guevara episode. However, this is not to deny the importance of Debray's theoretical "failure," for in terms of Marxian theory and practice, a lesson has been taught.

This "lesson" will be the subject of Section II, where we shall examine Regis Debray's relevance and the failure of Debray's theory from a Marxian basis. That is to say, we shall consider the impact in toto of his revolutionary scheme as observers in a revolutionary world.

Preferring to keep speculation to a minimum, our approach will be generally directed toward bringing to the surface questions created by the efforts to Debray to revolutionize the

revolution. Although it may prove anti-climatic, answers to the questions raised will not be forthcoming in these pages. To put forth "answers" would be overly presumptuous and completely out of context with the purpose of this study, which aims at capturing the Marxist-Debray message. The questions will appear, but the answers will come about only as time moves forward and while events take shape. One thing is certain, however, and it is that the questions will be answered. We must remember, as Debray put it, "For the revolutionary, failure is a springboard."³

³Regis Debray, Revolution in the Revolution?, (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 23.

As I have already hinted, the issue of Régis Debray, from a philosophical standpoint, is intimately bound up with Marx's concept of knowledge through the unity of theory and practice. It would, however, be inappropriate and a matter of mis-emphasis to now launch a comprehensive discourse on the many intricacies of this concept.¹ Nevertheless, because it is essential that this fundamental element be fully appreciated, I will preface the beginning of our Debray examination with just enough words to sketch briefly the dimensions of this concept as I perceive them and wish to apply them.

Because Marx was revolutionary in intent, he quite predictably opposed the materialism of the eighteenth century,² which provided neither explanation nor agency for development and change. His theories clearly required a philosophy having

¹Discussions of this concept may be found in the following sources:

R.M. Carew Hunt, The Theory and Practice of Communism, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 57-60.

Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" appears in Howard Selsam and Harry Martel (Eds.), Reader in Marxist Philosophy (New York: International Publishers, 1963).

²Represented by, for example, Holbach, La Mettrie, and Diderot.

the following attributed: (1) materialistic, it has to be "scientific"; (2) determined, at least to the degree that the Revolution was inevitable; and (3) non-mechanistic, at least to the extent that it somehow resolved the tension between determinism and free will by making man more than simply a passive element in the process of progress. It is to this final point that the Unity of Theory and Practice concept has relevance.

We must bear in mind that to Marx the material world is reality. However, while the preceding materialists posited the notion that human knowledge of the external world, as well as all ideas about it, was produced by the impact of sensations upon our mind -- a passive procedure -- Marx taught in his Theses on Feuerbach that these sensations provided only stimuli to knowledge which completed itself in action. In short, Marx believed that we perceive a thing as a part of the process of acting upon it. This is the unity of theory and practice, Marx's activist theory of knowledge which asserts that knowledge

is firmly bound up with action (or praxis).³ Writing in The Theory and Practice of Communism, R. N. Hunt elucidates on this matter:

...Marxists have always insisted that theory and action are one. A theory of which the truth is not confirmed by action is sterile, while action which is divorced from theory is purposeless, the two stand in much the same relation to one another as do faith and works in Christian theology.⁴

...it is practice which alone determines the truth of theory....but on the other hand, theory equally determines practice, since, if the theory is wrong, its error will inevitably reveal itself in the sphere of action.⁵

The key to understanding lies in remembering the materialistic basis of Marxism. As has been pointed out already, the materialist approach regards matter as primary and the mind as secondary, as an entity formed on the basis of matter. Hence, as man engages in self-preservation, his ideas of his

³This Marxian concept is one which has remained comparatively unchanged since its appearance. Mao, however, has claimed to "develop" the concept further in his essay of 1937, "On Practice". But, the addition is not substantial, and an explanation unnecessary here. See Stuart Schram, The Political Thought of Mao-tse-tung, (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 124-128.

⁴Hunt, op. cit., p. 59.

⁵Ibid.

existence and his methods of living follow. Practice comes before theory.

It was simply out of organizational preference that I reviewed Marx's Theory and Practice concept. For with this For with this in mind, I believe we are now able to proceed on into the words of Debray with a foundation upon which to stand. And as time goes on, the relevance of what has just preceded will become fully apparent.

At the very start of his book, Debray makes plain two points: One, that he disavows theory prior to the military actions of a guerrilla foco.⁶ With no time wasted, Debray clearly alienates the intellectual, as well as the romantic, from a successful American revolution. Both being prone to reminisce and theorize -- a sin of the gravest sort -- they are apt to fall victim to History's "advances in disguise". As Debray allegorizes, history, "appears on stage wearing the mask of the preceding scene," and it is the politicians,

⁶Roughly translated from Spanish, it refers to a center of Guerrilla operations, as opposed to a military base. (French: Foyer)

intellectuals, and pure theorists who uselessly catalogue pieces of script, so to speak, which are inappropriate, and even deadly, to the needs of contemporary revolution in Latin America. Hence, we are left understanding at the outset that revolutionary theory drawn from experience foreign in time and geography to the struggle at hand is Debray's foremost enemy.

The second point established early by Debray is that the armed guerrilla unit, the foco, is the military and political center of the revolutionary movement. Operating upon the premise that practice begets best theory, the only authentic agency for evolving theory, according to Debray, is that agency engaged in confronting the existing enemy, the guerrilla unit. By virtue of the fact that it is involved in deadly struggle with the army of the oppressor, the foco produces by necessity the revolutionary theory appropriate to the situation at hand.

There are implications arising from this approach which appear at once. The role of the urban based "party" is reduced to being a distant secondary position. For as a body of persons unable to do meaningful battle with the bourgeoisie, they inherit the aura of "legal Marxists," a term used in

ideological confrontations to denote those who would rely upon an evolution of sorts to the ignorance of revolutionary tact. More specifically, an urban-based "party" -- very often the Communist Party -- at best, arrives at and transmits erroneous "theoretical" conclusions and programs based upon foreign experiences. And at worst, the urban, non-revolutionary Party becomes the unknowing tool of the oppressors. The Party's reluctance or inability to attack the basis of its oppressor's state, i.e., the basic institutions, neuters its potential as an embryo for revolution and beyond. Debray plainly expresses the kernel around which he has elaborated when he says that, "the union of theory and practice is not an inevitability but a battle, and no battle is won in advance."⁷

Debray points out that the "old guard" which he opposes, following its habit of insatiably theorizing, is responsible for the notion of armed defense. Briefly, this is a system which is looked upon by Debray as "suffering from a profusion

Debray, Op. Cit., p. 107.

of admirable sacrifices," but inept as a revolutionary tact. It attempts to bring everyone within a rural area into the armed struggle, creating a mass guerrilla force of men, women, and children; it aims at establishing an initial zone in which the oppressor's army lacks control; and it appears to be chiefly a "holding action". Debray finds several shortcomings: (1) The scheme's success depends upon a tacit non-aggression pact between aggressor and rebel; (2) it threatens the lives of peasants within the zone by denying the organic separateness of the armed unit to the civilian population; (3) it is open to encirclement; and most importantly, (4) it has failed in, for example, southern Columbia (1964) and Bolivia (1965). As Debray remarks,

A self-defense zone when it is neither the result of a total or partial military defeat of enemy forces, nor protected by a guerrilla front constantly on the offensive, is no more than a colossus with feet of clay.⁸

The brunt of Debray's attack on the system of armed self-defense is taken by the Trotskyites, who are apparently the vanguard of the "old guard." The common denominator shared by proponents of armed self-defense and Trotskyites is a

reliance upon the trade union as the organizational base, motive force, and spearhead of the class struggle. To Debray this is heresy for two reasons. The first, of course, is that it emphasizes the urban units who have a history of being "corrupted" by urban politics; secondly, and most importantly, it is an approach born not of praxis, but of fond and hopeful recall of a currently non-existent situation. The harshness with which Debray denounces the Trotskyites is understandable, being that the Trotskyites described by Debray clearly seem to be dogmatizing the events and arguments of the revolutionary ideas formulated at the turn of the century.

Let us look more closely at the position Debray attributes to the Trotskyites. It begins by reducing the role of the guerrilla from primary to, at best, secondary. The task of forming factory and peasant committees, which will have as their purpose economic agitation, becomes the primary path of the revolution. As the class antagonisms increase in intensity, strikes and general uprisings in cities and mountains gradually and ultimately serve to overthrow the bourgeoisie. The revolutionary path, quite obviously, runs through

the doors of the union hall, so to speak.

Hence, and for the reasons already stated, Regis Debray's antagonism towards the Trotskyites is quite predictable. And to the degree that past attempts in Latin America at semi-legal approaches have resulted in corrupting the entire movement, Debray represents an expected doctrinal reaction. He firmly claims to adhere to the evolution of theory praxis, and therefore makes virtually sacred the form through which praxis shall be realized.

In which way does Debray's program differ? Interestingly enough, it takes on a distinct Leninist hue in that it is clandestine, secretive, and select. The guerrilla unity functions independently of the civilian (peasant) population, thus relinquishing a need or obligation to defend it. The sole aim of the movement is the seizure of power, and its distinguishing feature is that the guerrilla foco, a single political-military group, serves as the embryo in which is contained the future revolutionary party and state. The military-guerrilla foco, as it experiences the struggle of seizing power from the existing state and of developing pertinent theory, forms a counter-

state. It is precisely on this point, the counter-state, that Debray's importance within Marxist thought comes directly to the fore. For unlike either "economic Marxists" who stressed the eventual-decay-of-capitalism approach or the "legal Marxists" who stressed the participation-with-parliament approach, Debray's language seems to be a Leninist-like adaptation to the revolutionary struggle in Latin America. His emphasis on the seizure of power might well mean that Debray represents revolutionary Leninism as revised and adapted for South America. His philosophy places him squarely within the "non-orthodox" wing of Marxism-Leninism, and his creation (dare I say addition?) of a revolutionary counter-state places him squarely in line for close examination.

Why is the counter-state unique? Essentially, this aspect of doctrine differs from other socialist concepts in that it places little hope in an evolution of society or in a revolution led by a strata of the population within the oppressed society. Rather than a counter-society, which many interpret entails the pure seizure of existing state power. Unlike Lenin's cognizance in What Is To Be Done of a

"consciousness" (although only of a trade-unionist sort) among the workers in the first few years of the 1900's, and unlike Mao Tse Tung's observations that the pre-revolutionary Chinese proletariat was "the most politically conscious class in Chinese society,"⁹ Debray disregards the matter of consciousness among the people, at least in the initial stage of the struggle. This is not to say, however, that Debray is without concern for mass consciousness. But as Debray views it, the armed unit will, by its military action, serve as a "small motor" and activate the latent consciousness among the people.

If Devray's philosophy deserves to be regarded as a "revolution in the revolution," much of the credit for being so must be given to this aspect of "consciousness" in his program. For in a very distinct way, Debray's de-emphasis on mass awareness runs counter to Marx, Lenin,¹⁰ Mao Tse Tung, and

⁹Quote appears in an excerpt from Mao's "The Chinese Communist Party." See Schram, op. cit., p. 192.

¹⁰Lenin's program, of course, was based on a small, secret party concept. But, Lenin also gave notice, if only as lip service, that his Bolsheviks needed mass consciousness. See Lenin Selected Works. Vol. 2 (New York: International Publishers, 1967), pp. 365 - 370.

Ho Chi Minh. The importance of this consciousness among the masses lies in the fact that it provided a legitimacy distinct from "putschism" or "mass action" movements which, paradoxically, Debray denounces in his earlier piece, Latin America: The Long March. I say "paradoxically" because Debray's formula exonerates the disregarding of mass consciousness -- the foundation of Marxist revolutionary legitimacy -- in favor of military confrontation prior to mass awareness. The essence of this point is illustrated by Debray's use of Che Guevara's words, "It is not always necessary to wait for all the conditions of the revolution to be given; the insurrectional foco can create them."¹¹

This point is further exposed in his chapter titled "Armed Propaganda." It is here that Debray's differences with preceding Marxist revolutionology become apparent. Writes Debray:

In other words, armed propaganda follows military action but does not precede it. Armed propaganda has more to do with the internal than with the external guerrilla front. The main point is that under present conditions the most important form of propaganda is

¹¹ Marxist Strategy in Latin America, p. 41.

successful military action.¹²

Clearly, the above statement places Debray in theoretical opposition to so-called orthodoxy. We have only to remember that Marx, in Section IV of the Manifesto, spoke of the communists' role in promoting class consciousness as a prelude to overt revolutionary techniques. Or we can recall Lenin's What Is To Be Done, where he quite emphatically reveals the vanguard's duty to expose and agitate the contradictions which lead to oppression between the bourgeoisie and the proleteriat. Indeed, the one constant we find in communist theory is the duty of communists, when objective conditions dictate, to agitate and hasten the intensification of the subjective conditions (inclinations) for revolution which the objective conditions have produced. This was constant at least until Regis Debray emerged.

Reasserting his premise that conditions peculiar to Latin America and distinct from Asia and Africa must give

¹²Debray, Revolution in the Revolution?, op cit, p. 56.

rise to differing approaches to revolution, Debray goes on to herald the fact that, "Fidel did not hold a single political rally in his zone of operations."¹³ What are these Latin American peculiarities? The most striking peculiarity is that, unlike China and Viet Nam, Latin America is victim of an advanced type of imperialism. Where China and Viet Nam were involved in liberation struggles against foreign colonialists, the people of Latin America have no on-going military effort directed at a foreign occupational power. Instead, they are a highly dispersed and sparsely situated people who live under a virtually unassailable police-army force of oppression. An attempt to simply politically indoctrinate the population would greatly reduce the effectiveness of the already small and select guerrilla band. Also, it would expose the cadres engaged in indoctrination of the rural population to entrapment and, even more seriously, infiltration by informers. And in addition to the latent dangers to the foco, armed propaganda techniques in Latin America would invite serious reprisals upon the

¹³Ibid., p. 54.

"strategic" villages by the regime in power. The conclusion, according to Debray, is the need for a revolutionary force to "prove" the vulnerability of the existing regime by direct military confrontation. Only after the guerrilla foco has weakened the oppressor's hold can it engage in overt propaganda methods and large-scale enlistment programs.

The Debray procedure of practically investing 180° prior revolutionary concepts continues in his discussion of the guerrilla base. Here he shuns the idea of fixed bases of operation in favor of non-permanent positions. In Debray's own words:

...for the guerrilla force to attempt to occupy a fixed base or to depend on a security zone, even one of several thousand square kilometers in area, is, to all appearances, to deprive itself of its best weapon, mobility, to permit itself to be contained within a zone of operations, and to allow the enemy to use its most effective weapons.¹⁴

Debray is careful to cite definite reasons for disavowing fixed bases, a successful concept for the revolutions in China and Viet Nam. As Debray views it, fixed-positions

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 62-63.

strategies require an extensive territory having poor communications to the backlands, high density of rural population, the existence of a common border with a sympathetic country, and the absence of airborne enemy troops -- none of which, says Debray, can be found in Latin America.

The alternative to a fixed guerrilla base is vividly portrayed Debray's remark, "In the initial stage the base of support is in the guerrilla fighter's knapsack."¹⁵ His technique of inversion regarding the guerrilla base is defended by his relating an experience of the Cuban revolution, Debray's exemplar supreme, in which Fidel Castro's preparing of a base camp prior to an extensive period of mobile encounters with Batista's troops proved erroneous and premature. It was only after a year and a half that the guerrilla unit led by Castro had gained sufficient control over a zone of operations and were thus able to prepare a fixed base within the zone.

The point wished to be made by Debray is, of course, that the theoretical necessity, based especially upon Mao Tse Tung's experience in China, of preparing a base camp is

¹⁵Ibid., p. 65

dangerous and useless superimposition of strategy. Below is a lengthy quote of Debray made on the matter of base camps. The excerpt, however, is equally relevant to his entire philosophical posture. And for this reason, it has been included so as to allow a glimpse of Debray speaking on his own philosophy:

That an intellectual, especially if he is bourgeois, should speak of strategy before all else, is normal. Unfortunately, however, the right road, the only feasible one, sets out from tactical data, rising gradually toward the definition of strategy. The abuse of strategy and the lack of tactics is a delightful vice, characteristic of the contemplative man -- a vice to which we, by writing these lines, must also plead guilty. All the more reason to remain aware of the inversion /author's emphasis/ of which we are victims when we read theoretical works. They present to us in the form of principles and a rigid framework certain so-called strategic concepts which in reality are the result of a series of experiments of a tactical nature. Thus it is that we take a result for a point of departure. /emphasis added/ For a revolutionary group, military strategy springs first of all from a combination of political and social circumstances, from its own relationship with the population, from the limitations of the terrain, from the opposing forces and their weaponry, etc. Only when these details have been mastered can serious plans be made. Finally -- and this is even truer for guerrilla forces than for regular armies -- there are no details in the action or, of you prefer, everything is a matter of detail.¹⁶

¹⁶Ibidl, p. 60.

Debray's pattern is unchanged when he turns to a discussion of the guerrilla focc's relation to "the Party." The party, from sheer tradition, is the urban-based revolutionary organization which formulates policy based upon analysis and interpretation of the class struggle, participates in existing politics to varying degrees, and retains central domination over any guerrilla operation taking place in the hills. This is the "party" Mao Tse Tung spoke of in his, The Struggle in Chingkanq Mountains,¹⁷ and it is the "party" of Ho Chi Minh today. Debray finds several errors in this tactical arrangement.¹⁸ It must be remembered, however, that Debray is operating upon the premise that only through praxis -- the acting out by revolutionaries -- can theory be formulated and/or tested. Hence, the inversion by Debray of the status given

¹⁷Cohen, Communism of Mao-Tse-Tung, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 53.

¹⁸Problems perceived by Debray are: (1) descent to the city by focc leaders exposes them to capture; (2) extraordinary dependence upon the city by the guerrillas, logistically and militarily; and (3) lack of single command which, in turn, produces an uncoordinated urban-rural effort.

to the urban-centered party and that of the guerrilla foco is quite logical and in keeping with demands of doctrinal consistency. That the unit performing the military confrontation should be subjected to the superimposed theory (and domination) of the urban party, which has dared little or nothing in the way of meaningful confrontation, contradicts the Debrayan perspective of Marx's theory of knowledge, i.e., the unity of theory and practice.

Debray's list of reasons for opposing the party appear to be, on the surface, basically tactical in nature and thus need not be listed verbatim. What is of prime importance, though, is that his opposition is not tactical in fact, but firmly philosophical. Expectedly, while discussing the "artificial leadership of an improvised political front," Debray reveals an opinion of "party" members:

...and such people are not yet liberated from the old obsession; they believe that revolutionary awareness and organization must and can in every case precede revolutionary action.¹⁹

¹⁹Debray, *Revolution, op. cit.*, p. 83.

In discussing the nature of the Party, Debray makes two points which illuminate the practical considerations within Latin America. These considerations serve to reinforce his philosophical dedication to praxis. First, Debray notes that "the initially great disproportion between the strength of the revolutionary forces and that of the entire repression mechanism"²⁰ makes revolution a concern, not of mass combatants, but of experts grouped into small cadres. Secondly, Debray reminds his readers that the young revolutionaries in Latin America lack the long political experience of the sort he feels is required for the future in Latin America. He disavows the "pure" politician for his inability to lead an armed struggle. Again, revealing the philosophical basis of his program, as opposed to being essentially tactical, Debray asserts, "By the experience acquired in leading a guerrilla group, they ["pure" military men] become politicians as well."²¹ This

²⁰Ibid., p. 88.

²¹Ibid., p. 89.

statement, as do others scattered throughout his writings, emphasize the attainment of knowledge (and theory) through action (praxis). This is clearly Debray's message when he denounces the Party, and it is so when he decries the continuing existence of alliances by the Party with other segments of the society. Labeling them "outworn, discredited and eroded by failure." Debray rejects the theory of the alliance of four classes; association with the national bourgeoisie; and the prevailing contempt in many quarters for the peasantry.

There are three points of significance raised by Debray's attack on the prevailing theories and ideas just mentioned. In rejecting as not acceptable the "alliance" concept, Debray plainly follows through, and is thus quite consistent, with his repudiation of theory drawn from foreign practice. More specifically, however, he is stationing himself out of doctrinal alignment with Lenin, Mao Tse Tung, and Ho Chi Minh -- the three foremost Marxist revolutionaries from whom "orthodoxy" can be determined.

Beginning with Lenin, we can see, for example, in his Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question²² that

²² Appears in Lenin Selected Works, Vol. 3, op. cit., pp. 428-438.

he was well aware of the peasantry. Lenin, reflecting his analysis of the peasantry, was sure to cite differences between mere toilers of the soil and those owning small plots, medium plots, and those known as Grossbauern (big peasants). Only the latter two, the medium and big landowners, represented threats to the proletarian revolution. The smaller landowners, as well as the simple toiler, were, according to Lenin's diagnosis, valuable allies to the struggle.

Although it is little discussed, Lenin also looked to elements within the bourgeoisie for revolutionary comradeship. Below is an excerpt from his The Stages, Trends, And Prospects of The Revolution of 1906:

The labor movement flares up into a direct revolution, while the liberal bourgeoisie has already united in a Constitutional-Democratic party and thinks of stopping the revolution by compromising with Tsarism. But the radical elements of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie are inclined to enter into an alliance with the proletariat for the continuation of the revolution.... (author's emphasis)²³

Despite Lenin's allusion to such an alliance notion, it was with Mao Tse Tung that the concept truly surfaced. Although there is little question that Mao's formation of the alliance was based upon Lenin's earlier doctrinal

²³ Excerpt appears in Cohen, op. cit., p. 50.

suggestions regarding the peasantry and bourgeoisie, not to ignore Stalin's pertinent remarks.²⁴ Mao Tse Tung is given full credit for applying in practice a revolutionary movement made up of bouregois elements under the leadership of the vanguard proletariat. One has only to read Mao's Analysis of All Classes in Chinese Society²⁵ to perceive the extent to which Mao Tse Tung relied upon an alliance approach:

The whole of the petty bourgeoisie, the semi-proletariat, and the proletariat are our friends, our true friends. As to the vacillating middle bourgeoisie...its left wing may become our friend.²⁶

The Vietnamese conflict provides an example of the alliance notion in total dominance, at least as an announced concept. Contained within an anonymously written pamphlet published by the National Liberation Front in 1967, we can detect frequent reference to the alliance idea. Judging from the following paragraph, one could not help but conclude that the alliance principle appears to be the declared

²⁴Stalin: "Hence, the Task of the Communist elements in the colonial countries is to link up with the revolutionary elements of the bourgeoisie...." See, Cohen, Ibid., p. 51.

²⁵Appears in Schram, op. cit., pp. 143-147.

²⁶Ibid., p. 146.

philosophical cornerstone to the National Liberation Front's movement in Viet Nam:

The force that guarantees the fulfillment of the above task of fighting against U.S. aggression to save the country is our great national union. The South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation constantly stands for uniting all social strata and classes, all nationalities, all political parties, all organizations, all religious communities, all patriotic personalities, all patriotic and progressive individuals and forces irrespective of political tendency, in order to struggle together against the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys, wrest back our sacred national rights, and build up the country.²⁷

The purpose of this philo-historical sketch is, as I mentioned a short while back, to show the degree to which Regis Debray's repudiation of the alliance principle stands aside from the thrust of Marxist revolutionology. Quite obviously, Debray believes the Latin American situation to be exceedingly distinct from prior events and experience.

The second point of significance I wish to examine concerns Debray's disdain for the evolutionary elements within the Latin American socialist movement. As a matter

²⁷ Political Programme of the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation (South Viet Nam; Giai Phong Publishing, 1967), p. 13.

of fact, this issue is closely coupled with the third point; past de-emphasis of the peasants' role. Therefore, both matters are best treated together. For when so taken, these twin issues provide substance for considerable analysis, which in turn fosters an understanding of Debray's importance as a Marxist philosopher.

We may begin by focusing on the evolutionary trends within Latin America. It is unquestionable that leftists of the past, and even today, have engaged in activities somewhat less dramatic than guerrilla warfare and considerably closer to that of a trade unionist movement. Even today, we can read accounts of such activities. For example, a member of the Nicaraguan Socialist Central Committee urges as part of the Party's program, measures,

To create and consolidate the different legal organizations waging a struggle in defense of the specific demands of the peasants.... (emphasis added)²⁸

.....
To make the most of existing possibilities
for legal work. (emphasis added)²⁹

²⁸ Luis Sanchez, "Nicaraguan Communists in Van of Liberation Movement." See World Marxist Review, February, 1968, p. 37.

²⁹ Ibid.

Another example can be found in the words of a prominent member of Haiti's People's Unity Party. Here we are able to discover, in addition to a decided reliance upon the Party, an obvious inclination towards Mao Tse Tung's alliance concept:

Recognizing the need for armed struggle as the decisive form of revolutionary action in Haiti, our Party advanced the following guiding principle: 'Greater political work among the masses must be the pivot of the preparations for the armed struggle.' We must make the most of the negligible opportunities for legal work, carry on underground activity as effective as possible, do everything to strengthen our Party and awaken the political consciousness of as many people as possible.³⁰ (emphasis added)

.....

'The armed front is therefore designed to become, in view of its organization and discipline, the broadest form of a people's union, including patriots of all trends....'³¹ (emphasis added)

So, of what significance is it that Debray, unlike the indigenous Latin American Marxists just reviewed, shuns semi-legal participation and political works, and places instead, the entire spotlight on armed, clandestine guerrilla warfare to the extent of denying any initial value to the Party movement? The importance of Debray's

³⁰Saintigene Guillaume, "Haiti and The Revolution." See, World Marxist Review, February, 1968, p. 43.

³¹Ibid., p. 42.

approach on the philosophical level flows not so much from what he says explicitly---much of which is on tactics and has, subsequently, been placed in serious question---but from what ramifications can be deduced from his having to say something in the first place.

In this sense, Regis Debray is long expected doctrinal first-response to Marxism's encasement within the nation-state arrangement. And as were Trotsky's permanent revolution and Lenin's law of unequal and uneven development early theoretical expression of apprehension regarding Russia's continuing existence in a "capitalist world"---overlooking the more generic demon presented by the nation-state arrangement---the Soviet Union has proceeded in practice to hedge somewhat on its intellectual honesty when overlooking the "imperialist potential" i.e., the need and desire of increased national power they possess ipso facto as a nation-state, despite the absence of capitalist investments. The Soviet Union also has blinded itself to the pervasive effect State politics has had, and continues to have, upon the impulse of oppressed nations to disentangle themselves from that which oppresses them, in as much as the Soviet Union "politics" with virtually all the "capitalist" nation-states as do they with her. In brief,

the demands of State have had priority over the ideals of the socialist movement. With this in mind, one could say that Debray represents the Third World's implicit voicing of the belief that the nation-state arrangement---its necessary preoccupation with self-interest---has hindered, perhaps even inadvertently, the movement of independence and freedom. It is worth noting that within much of the "radical" student movements throughout Europe and the United States there exists an obvious renunciation of nationalistic perspective and an emphasis instead upon a horizontal, international perspective---a sort of man to man approach. It appears that the direction of the new politics, as embryonic as it seems, is away from obtaining images of the world and its problems from the mirrors of ones own government, but rather from looking directly across at the world with un-nationalized eyes. More on this line of thought in Section II.

This problem Debray is attacking, that of Marxist parties intertwining themselves into the national State fabric, can be traced to discussions engaged in during the Second Comintern Congress (1920). It was during this period that Lenin issued his most concise statements regarding the

"backward" and colonial nations. And as it now seems, it was Lenin's insistence upon domination of the struggles by the urban and industrial proletariat pursuing the formation of model Soviets which led to the "Marxist Establishment" in Latin America. In the Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question,³² a major document of the Comintern (Third International) reflecting Lenin's view, we read the words:

Only the urban and industrial proletariat, led by the Communist Party, can liberate the working masses of the countryside from the yoke of capital and landed proprietorship from ruin and the imperialist wars which will inevitably break out again and again if the capitalist system remains. There is no salvation for the working masses of the countryside except in alliance with the communist proletariat, and unless they give the latter devoted support in its revolutionary struggle to throw off the yoke of the landowners (the big landed proprietors) and the bourgeoisie.³³ (emphasis added)

This excerpt, however, does not reveal the full story. Lenin was well aware of the peasants' potentialities. He was careful to include in the document a statement saying that the revolution.

...cannot be achieved unless the class struggle is carried into the countryside, unless the rural working masses are united about the Communist Party of the urban proletariat, and unless they are trained by the proletariat.³⁴

Several observations are in order. First, Lenin places responsibility for the revolutionary mission with the urban proletariat. Secondly, Lenin regarded the Communist Party--an organization he tied to the International--as a representative of the revolution and, thirdly, Lenin strongly favored collaboration with bourgeoisie-nationalist elements within the backward nations. Says Lenin:

The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form.³⁵

Now light is being shed on the situation. Indeed, the course of the revolution, according to Lenin, was to be proletarian-nationalistic and was to involve the peasants in so far as the proletariat was to "teach" them their mission. Much like the parties and Trotskyites today in Latin America, Lenin never held for a peasant vanguard. In the Preliminary Draft Theses he reminds us of the Russian experience and lectures that the mass strike method is "alone capable of rousing the countryside from its lethargy...and revealing to them in a vivid and practical manner the

³⁵
Ibid., p. 427.

importance of their alliance with the urban workers."³⁶

However, the revolutionary proletariat, the vanbuard, was still to understand that "the deepest of petty-bourgeois prejudices" were inherent among the peasants, and that complete victory over capitalism would not be achieved unless both the proletariat and the working people in all countries united.³⁷ The meaning of all this is that Lenin's general doctrinal posture provided a basis from which revolutionology evolved in China and Viet Nam. We can plainly see the culmination of a program based upon Party, Party control and bourgeois-nationalistic emotions in the socialist revolutions just mentioned.

The essence of Debray's tact, with its guerrilla foco and rural emphasis, can be found in those same early discussions so dominated by Lenin. An Indian politician and Marxist revolutionary, Nath Manabendra Roy, forwarded a thesis at the Second Comintern Congress which differed with Lenin's thesis on one important matter; It emphasized

³⁷ In his The Attitude of Social Democracy Toward the Peasant Movement, written in 1905, Lenin stated: We support the present movement in so far as it is revolutionary and democratic. We are making ready (making ready at once, immediately) to fight it in so far as it becomes reactionary and anti-proletarian...." See Cohen, op. cit., p. 4.

agitation among the peasant masses, as coposed to Lenin's preoccupation with urban activities and nationalist leaders. Where Lenin stated, "The Communist International should support bourgeois-democratic national movements in colonial backward countries...",³⁸ Roy held that "the real strength, the foundation, of the liberation movement cannot in the colonies be forced within the narrow frame of bourgeois-democratic nationalism."³⁹ Roy posited the notion that communists must organize peasants and workers of backward countries into revolutionary organizations which, while preventing the domination of the mass struggle by nationalists, will assist a class conscious proletariat in its attempt to by-pass bourgeois nationalism and its accompanying factor, capitalism. As noted historian E. H. Carr relates to us, Roy's theses were not in contradiction to those of Lenin, but "they were markedly different in emphasis and, on the vital issue of tactics, seemed to point to a different conclusion." This conclusion, simply stated, was that supporting of bourgeois-democratic revolutions, as proposed by Lenin, would merely

³⁸Lenin Selected Works, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 426.

³⁹E. H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, Vol. 3, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 256.

serve to give strength to the capitalist order, and that the task of the communists would be better realized by opposing nationalistic trends.

Roy's two premises were that the workers and peasants of backward countries could be won for communism, "not through capitalist development, but through the development of class consciousness,"⁴¹ and that the bourgeoisie in capitalist countries prevented the proletarian revolution only by subsidizing their workers out of the profits gained through colonial exploitation. Hence, the struggle must be directed against the bourgeois State power by means of an alliance of peasants and workers, directed by the latter, but conducted in the backlands.

By turning to Debray's piece in the New Left Review, "Latin America: The Long March,"⁴² we see that the matter of the revolution in Latin America being either bourgeois-democratic or socialist, a question which naturally arises from the preceding discussion, is given attention by Debray. We quote his words:

⁴¹Ibid., p. 256.

⁴²September-October, 1965, Issue #33.

The nub of the problem lies not in the initial programme of the revolution but in its ability to resolve in practice the problem of State power before bourgeois-democratic stage, and not after.... In short, it seems evident that in South America the bourgeois-democratic stage presupposes the destruction of the bourgeois State apparatus.⁴³ (emphasis added)

What Debray is driving at is that the situation in Latin America, unlike conditions in Asia and Africa, presents a unique and original challenge to Marxists. Where in Asia and Africa the struggle against imperialism takes the form of a front against foreign occupation, the liberation struggle in Latin America has been preceded by a period of "political independence." The struggles in Latin America proceed largely as civil wars and, as Debray points out, "the social base is therefore narrower, and the ideology consequently better defined and less mixed with bourgeois influence...."⁴⁴ However, as a result of the phenomenon, it has become necessary, according to Debray, to repudiate and replace existing institutions rather than participate in their function. It has been just this refusal to participate in a protracted guerrilla struggle designed to awaken

⁴³ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

mass consciousness of the need to replace State institutions which has characterized the Latin American revolution as a coup d'etat, even when conducted in the name of the masses. Such "putsches", observes Debray, are compelled to base themselves on existing institutions (established economic institutions, the army, etc.) in order to win the quick support of the expectant people. Asks Debray,

Since the masses lack political consciousness or organization--things which can only be acquired in a long and difficult revolutionary experience--on whom can the government base itself? How can it ask for the sacrifices which a real policy of national independence would demand, if the peasantry and above all the working-class are not convinced of the need for them?⁴⁵

The answer, of course, is the revolutionary foco, which awakens the masses as it struggles to seize power from the existing State, contains the revolutionary State--a counter-State--in embryo, and engages in praxis upon which to develop for implementation a new program for society. The foco must disregard the national bourgeoisie, since this strata is now well aware of the process it would unleash by engaging in a genuine bourgeois-democratic revolution to free the peasantry, and proceed to do the revolution--an event unavoidably

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

socialist at its termination. As Debray makes explicit in his second New Left Review essay, "Marxist Strategy in Latin America":⁴⁶

To say that it has fallen to the proletariat and the peasants to accomplish the historic tasks of the bourgeoisie is to say that the alternative today is not between (peaceful) bourgeois revolution and (violent) socialist revolution as the promoters of the Alliance for Progress claimed, in agreement with the reformists, but between revolution tout court and counter-revolution....⁴⁷ (emphasis by author)

Debray points out that to do otherwise, to "play" at revolution, is to fall victim of a dilemma which grants two ways of losing to the unaware revolutionary: he is either a victim of a military coup during which he is jailed, exiled, or buried; or he ascends to power, and by virtue of existing conditions and institutions, becomes an "armed demagogue, charged with sending revolutionaries to prison, exile, or the grave (demo-bourgeois fascism)."⁴⁸

Up to now, we have examined Regis Debray's importance. We have discovered, and to a degree discussed, his "nitch" within the Marxist construct. Discussion has purposely been devoid of value judgments, since such discernment is

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

unnecessary for an exploratory examination. What we now have is background substantial enough to provide historical perspective and insight, and objective enough to prevent blurred vision. We know Debray is important to socialist circles, for his foundation is undeniably Marxist while his challenge is surely crucial to revolutionology in Latin America. What must follow at this juncture is a look into Debray's relevance to friend and foe, philosophically speaking.

To preface this next segment, I will briefly mention the points I consider as most urgent to Debray's uniqueness as a revolutionary within the revolution. By no mere coincidence, it is these points which receive the brunt of his detractors' critiques. Fundamentally, I perceive two issues serving as the crux to the message of Régis Debray. One, Debray's emphasis upon praxis, and it as a source of theory in Latin America, within the unit of theory and practice concept; and, two, his affirmation that the revolution in Latin America is to be socialist in nature rather than bourgeois-democratic or national-revolutionary, the latter being the name Lenin agreed to in deference to Roy during the Second Comintern Congress.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Lenin Selected Works, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 457.

The question of orthodoxy is, of course, begged throughout an examination of this sort. After all is said and done, however, it is fruitless to proclaim a definitive value judgment regarding Debray's loyalty to the conceptual entity named Marxism-Leninism, supposedly the contemporary measuring stick for determining orthodoxy. The reason is simple: there can be no clear and final answer. For example, where Debray and Lenin agree on the feasibility of "skipping" the capitalist stage of development by successful revolutionary countries, they disagree as to the role of the party. Does disagreement on the latter subject preclude agreement on the former? We know that Lenin, speaking of the revolution omitting the capitalist stage, admitted that "The necessary means for this cannot be indicated in advance, these will be prompted by practical experience."⁵⁰ But, would he have allowed "practical experience" to discredit the role of the Party? These are impossible questions. Being that this inability to contrast and blend Marxism-Leninism with Debray has largely come about due to something unforeseen by Lenin and uncontrolled by Debray, it becomes near-absurdity to try

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 460.

dictum Romanus on the question of orthodoxy---yes or no---
concerning Regis Debray.

What is of value is an examination of the "something" mentioned above, which happens to be capitalism and, especially, its influence and control over lesser developed and non-industrialized countries. Hence, before striking out upon a discourse of the points already identified as crucial to Debray (praxis and the exclusion of a bourgeois revolution), I will prepare the discussion with a glance at the unpredictable actor of this political scenario, imperialism.

It would be disastrous to view Marxism, especially from the period of the Comintern's theses on the colonial question on up to Debray's Revolution in the Revolution?, as a revolutionary doctrine developing in some sort of socio-political vacuum. The fact is, Marxist revolutionology has a history of "adjusting" to changes made by its antagonist, the capitalist order--even to the point of evoking questions by such men as C. Wright Mills as to whether or not there still exists a warm body qualified to be called an authentic

Marxist.⁵¹ Indeed, Lenin himself found it necessary to produce a "Marxist response" to capitalism's unexpected "moribund" stage by writing his treatise, Imperialism, The Highest State of Capitalism. In fact, it was the insight of a new era of capitalist expansion claimed by Lenin⁵² which provided the Comintern (Third International), and especially the Second Congress, with its raison d'etre. Thus, it is not surprising that Debray, in both of his New Left Review essays speaks of another effect upon the struggle caused by the United States' change of tact, a change of tact brought on by the Cuban success. Although the "change" Debray comments on is somewhat less profound than that which Lenin observed, in that Debray's is more an increase in the weight of oppression within the exploited region, whereas Lenin perceived a geographical move of the focus of capitalist exploitation from

⁵¹"Later thinkers and actors have used, revised, elaborated his Marx's ideas, and set forth quite new doctrines, theories, and strategies. In one way or another, these are indeed 'Based Upon Marx,' although they can be identified with classical Marxism only by those who feel they must distort intellectual and political history for their un-Marxist need for certainty through orthodoxy." See, C. Wright Mills, The Marxists (New York: Dell, 1962), p. 131.

⁵²The concept had, in fact, been first pursued by a non-Marxist British Economist, J. A. Jobson, Some Fifteen Years Before Lenin, not to forget Rosa Luxemburg's discussion of it three years before Lenin.

the European cities to the "backward" countries, both men accept the axiom that revolutionary Marxism must adjust accordingly to changes in the capitalist system.

Debray alludes to two facts: first, that Latin America has suffered less of a colonial oppression and more of a capitalist imperialism than other territories. As I pointed out earlier, Debray holds that this historical situation has served to narrow the revolutionary base and anti-foreigner element of the revolution. Secondly, the effect of the Cuban success has been an increased awareness and determination on the part of the United States to suppress similar revolutions in the future. Stating the axiom, "A socialist revolution also revolutionizes counter-revolution,"⁵³ Debray goes on to reveal that the Cuban success has "condemned to failure any mechanical attempt to repeat the experience of the Sierra Maestra,"⁵⁴ The pulse of Debray's two facts is that Latin America has historically confronted an unusual imperialism, is presently facing a revised challenge and, in general, is the primary victim of a new imperialism.

⁵³New Left Review, Issue #45, p. 21.

⁵⁴Ibid.

Despite Debray's apparent accuracy on this matter, he can not be credited with discussing this "new imperialism" to any great depth. And being that the imperialist challenge seems to be the hidden prime mover, as it was likewise in Lenin's time, in determining the tactical manifestations of the revolutionology preached by Debray, a closer look at imperialism is certainly in order before taking up the observations and conclusions made by Debray.

An essay in Monthly Review by economist Harry Magdoff entitled "The Age of Imperialism"⁵⁵ provides us with an incisive Marxist analysis of contemporary capitalist imperialism. Says Magdoff:

The imperialism of today has several distinctly new features. These are, in our opinion: (1) the shift of the main emphasis from rivalry in carving up the world to the struggle against contraction of the imperialist system; (2) the new role of the United States as organizer and leader of the world imperialist system; and (3) the rise of technology which is international in character.⁵⁶

It is well worth my mentioning that in his essay Magdoff marks the Russian revolution in 1917 as the beginning of the new phase of imperialism. The chief result of Russia's revolution was to introduce into the world capitalist system

⁵⁵ June, 1968, pp. 11-54.

⁵⁶ibid., p. 24.

"the urge to reconquer that part of the world which had opted out of the imperialist network." As Magdoff puts it, the break up of colonial empires following World War II served to intensify the struggle, for although the colonies were released, they had been interwoven into the prevailing capitalist arrangement. The task now of the United States, concludes Magdoff, is to prevent these former colonial possessions, e.g., Viet Nam, from leaving the established system.

On the matter of the United States becoming the major organizer and leader of the imperialist network, we are able to see how the increasing technological lead of the United States corresponded to its increasing responsibility for "enforcing" the arrangement. Mr. Magdoff, wishing to illustrate the extent of United States military commitment, reveals that the United States has its armed forces represented ("through distribution of military assistance and the direction of military training of foreign armies") in a total of sixty-four countries, as compared to three during the 1920's and thirty-nine during World War II.⁵⁷ Quite significantly, so Mr. Magdoff tells us, was the corresponding

increase in the quality and global nature of post-World War II technology. Increased research, atomic energy, space satellites, etc., all joined to improve technology and, coincidentally, the manner of capitalist oppression.

Without becoming excessively entangled at this time in Mr. Magdoff's fascinating analysis, I do wish to capture the essence of his message, which is that,

The internationalization of capital among the great firms although there are more rival countries now, the power has shifted into the hands of a relative small number of integrated industrial and financial firms is of a much higher order today than was the case fifty years ago when Lenin wrote his work on imperialism.⁵⁸

With Harry Magdoff's analysis of "new imperialism" having been reviewed, even though in the most briefest fashion, we can better discern the whole of which Debray speaks only partially. The zeal with which capitalism, i.e., the United States, has fought to maintain the politico-economic status quo in Latin America, and especially in light of Fidel Castro's success in Cuba, is actually part of a changing imperialism.

Schafik Handal, member of the Communist Party of Salvador, makes this pertinent and supplementary observation:

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 46.

"A few years ago the continental tactics of U.S. imperialism vacillated between organizing armed coups and supporting military dictatorships ... and encouraging reformism and 'representative democracy'."⁵⁹ These opposing approaches would alternate in periods of ascendancy, being given the name of the statesman in charge, e.g., Roosevelt, Dulles, Kennedy and Mann. But, this exchanging of opposing methods has ended and, as Handel continues to observe, "Today, the imperialists pursue a flexible policy in which both methods are employed either in turn or simultaneously, depending on the situation."⁶⁰

We are now prepared to return to the first of two significant points regarding Regis Debray, his emphasis upon praxis. And there is no better way to begin than to present Debray's own words on this important and controversial subject:

Thus ends a divorce of several decades' duration between Marxist theory and revolutionary practice. As tentative and tenuous as the reconciliation may appear, it is the guerrilla movement--master of its own political leadership--that embodies it, this handful of men "with no other alternative but death or victory, at moments.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

⁵⁹ World Marxist Review, April, 1968, p. 54.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

when death was a concept a thousand times more real, and victory a myth that only a revolutionary can dream of." (Che) These men may die, but others will replace them. Risks must be taken. The union of theory and practice is not an inevitability but a battle, and no battle is won in advance. If this is not achieved there, it will not be achieved anywhere.⁶¹

There are two obvious statements contained in the above excerpt: (1) there has existed a "divorce" between Marxist theory and revolutionary practice in Latin America; and (2) such a "union" is possible, and the guerrilla unit embodies the union of theory and practice (for Latin America).

As I have stated earlier, The Marxist theory-practice concept is at the core of the Debray philosophy. It is from this essential pivot that subsequent ideas about the foco make sense. However, it is on this aspect of his work that Debray receives considerable criticism. For example, we have Andre G. Frank and S. A. Shah, writing in Monthly Review,⁶² who state unequivocally that "Debray divorces, or fails to marry, revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice." This is, of course, in sharp contrast to Debray's own words.

Actually, the matter is quite uncomplicated. The controversy is rooted in differing interpretations of where Latin America is in the dialectical process. In fact, this

⁶¹Debray, Revolution, op. cit., p.107.

controversy is similar to what engaged in between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks during the pre-revolutionary years in Russia.⁶³ Where during the early years of the 1900's the Mensheviks believed Russia was following the dialectic by embarking upon a bourgeois-democratic capitalism, which required their "legal" participation, Lenin held that it was the task of the revolutionary vanguard of the preletarian, i.e., Lenin's Bolshevik Party, to gain ascendancy over the bourgeois-democratic revolution by activist means. Both camps sought, roughly speaking, the Marxist-socialist revolution, but Lenin "re-defined" the course of the dialectic had taken. Hence, in a similar fashion do Debray and his critics compete. Believing as did Russia's "legalists" (later, Mensheviks) that armed confrontation would primarily be a result of (a) an intensification of the objective conditions by the dialectical process within a developing Russian capitalism, and (b) an increased class consciousness (the subjective conditions) brought about by essentially non-armed tactics,

⁶³I purposely discount controversy with the Social Revolutionary Party (Founded in 1901, and considered the successor of the Narodnik left-wing) as being relevant because although the SRP urged peasant militancy, its concept of the Revolution was openly outside a Marxist context.

much of today's "left" strenuously opposes Debray's suggestion that the armed struggle by a foco becomes the means of prompting the subjective conditions in Latin America. As I have shown, Debray is accused of divorcing theory from practice and, secondarily, of not proving that the objective conditions are matured in Latin America. Of the second accusation Debray is vulnerable. But then again, and assuming Debray's defense, how does one "prove" the status of the objective conditions? Even Lenin in The Development of Capitalism in Russia, his only work approximating an analytical commentary on the question of objective conditions, aimed not so much at "proving" the actual existence of objective conditions, as much as he did aim at convincing the rural-oriented Narodniks that Marxism, with its vanguard of the urban proletariat, was applicable to Russia. For Lenin, the major clue that the objective conditions were in operation, aside from his own faith, was the occurrence of worker strikes during the 1890's which, subsequently, provided the basis for his early theoretical work on the Party, What Is To Be Done. We can also observe the impact on Lenin of the Russian insurrection of 1905 by reading the following paragraph taken from his "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution:"

The real education of the masses can never be separated from their independent political, and especially revolutionary, struggle. Only struggle educates the exploited class. Only struggle discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizons, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will. That is why even reactionaries had to admit that the year 1905, the year of struggle, the "mad year," definitely buried patriarchal Russia.⁶⁴

Hence, Lenin's way to theory, aside from the "guiding light" provided by Karl Marx, was through praxis. And so it is with Regis Debray and his supposed "inversion" of theory and practice.

Debray, particularly in his piece Marxist Strategy in Latin America,⁶⁵ has noticed that the failure of social and political revolutionary movements is due to (a) the unusual political situation of Latin America, already discussed; and (b) the failure of Latin America's left to look to their own praxis for theoretical inspiration. So, as Debray has drawn the theory of the foco from the unique Latin American past and experience with the hope of attacking imperialism's efforts (e.g., Peace Corps, Alliance for Progress) to squelch a rising social awareness of the objective conditions by attacking the State structures, which

⁶⁴ Lenin Selected Works, Vol. 1, p. 792.

⁶⁵ New Left Review, #45.

have made fascist-demo regimes and reformist tendencies unavoidable occurrences, his critics see him as ignoring theory. The reason is simple: the "theory" held by those critical of Debray is textbook or Menshevik-like Marxism, which may have some claim to orthodoxy in a scholarly-debative sense, but is looked upon by many contemporary revolutionaries as being morte. Hence, as Lenin broke with the Mensheviks and as Mao Tse Tung took to the countryside with a four-class alliance philosophy, Debray has, so to speak, taken to the mountains with a theory that has been drawn not from the Russian, Chinese, or Vietnamese experiences, but from that which has taken place in Cuba and seems true for the rest of Latin America. In essence, where Debray believes that Latin America has suffered under a bourgeoisie unable to complete the bourgeois-democratic revolution (precisely the argument forwarded by Lenin in defending the Bolshevik's need to seize power from the floundering bourgeoisie), his critics insist that he prove objective conditions will not bring on an era during which the existing Party approach will become relevant and effective. Debray is stating: the link between imperialism and the Latin American State is such that an "aberrated" bourgeois situation exists requiring the seizure

of State power by the best means possible, which to Debray is a mass movement initiated and led by the uncorruptable guerrilla foco. To those critics who charge him with divorcing theory from practice, e.g., Frank and Shah, Sweezy, Silva,⁶⁶ Debray presumably would say that the current situation in Latin America is one in which the unity of theory and practice is actually inept theory wedded to foreign practice. That is, it is theory drawn from outside the unique Latin American situation, distilled into activities which, despite their bringing some class awareness (much like the trade unionist struggle Lenin praised, but regarded as insufficient, in What Is To Be Done), succeed chiefly in perpetuating the State which the movement ostensibly opposes.

To Debray, the unity of theory and practice means an indigenous revolutionary theory (the foco) based on Marx's guide lines which, put into practice, is at once an improvement of earlier ideas and, by means of praxis, a creator of new and higher insight. The doctrinal aura, although differing in particularities, is Leninist by inclination. We might say that Debray's claim as a Marxist is as real as is

⁶⁶ All appear in Monthly Review, July, 1968.

Lenin's Marx-ist authenticity--a point of continuing polemics. If the evidence presented thus far is insufficient to show Debray's Leninist roots on the matter of praxis, we have these revealing words by Regis:

The theory of the foco /author's emphasis/ can be best situated among the current political concepts, by relating it to the Leninist theory of the weakest link, which it merely re-interprets in different conditions.⁶⁷ (emphasis added)

The second point of significance I listed earlier regarding the work of Debray is his handling of the traditional question within the "backward" countries: Is the revolution to be socialist or national-democratic? By way of preface, I would like to add that Robin Blackburn and Perry Anderson, editors of New Left Review, declare Debray's answer as an "enormous liberation" from "the traditional and paralyzing debates on the continent over the 'stages' of the revolution...."⁶⁸ Debray's answer, that it must be socialist, and for the reasons discussed earlier, is an excellent example of his allegiance--for better or for worse--to an emphasis on praxis and, consequently, the Bolshevik-styled perception of

⁶⁷ New Left Review, #33, pp. 29, 30.

⁶⁸ Monthly Review, July, 1968, p. 65.

the revolution. His answer on this matter is clearly a product of a particular predisposition regarding the unity of theory and practice. In content, his answer states: "It seems evident that in South America the bourgeois-democratic stage presupposes the destruction of the bourgeois State apparatus."⁶⁹ In actuality, the answer is more a conclusion than a "formulation," the term given to it by supporters of Debray, Blackburn and Anderson. For, it comes only after Debray tells us in Latin America: The Long March how Latin American experience at, for example electoral participation (Chile), at urban guerrilla movements (Venezuela), and military putschism has been founded on foreign Marxist theory or on no theory at all, and has achieved its success in making his philosophy a matter of utmost urgency, or so Debray implies.

In order to fully understand the content of this conclusion we must progress to Debray's thoughts on nationalism. And here again, Debray stresses the extraordinary situation experienced by Latin America. Calling attention to the fact that Latin America's struggle is not one towards freedom from colonial oppression, but primarily one towards ending neo-colonialism, i.e., the internal influence and

⁶⁹ New Left Review, #33, p. 51.

external grip of economically inspired and maintained imperialism. This creates a certain path for the revolution. Writing in his earlier essay, Latin America: The Long March, and referring to his prime source of inspiration, Cuba, Debray explains this revolutionary course:

There is a ... a reason why Fidelism lays a greater stress on revolutionary practice, when it is honest and sincere, than on ideological labels: this is the belief that, in the special conditions of South America, the dynamism of nationalist struggles brings them to a conscious adoption of Marxism.⁷⁰ (emphasis added)

We are prompted to ask what is the basis of Debray's belief that "a genuine nationalism in Latin America implies the final overthrow of the semi-colonial State, the destruction of its army, and the installation of Socialism."⁷¹

(emphasis added) The answer lies in, as expected, past experience. Debray points out that, traditionally, the Latin American national State has received the bulk of national discontentment. Owing to the unique and overwhelming influence and staying power of imperialism, and the ancestral possession of political power by indigenous groups, the primary political struggle has been between factions within the dominant class (exporters and industrialists). The result,

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 54.

as seen by Debray, has been a distortion of the real contradiction between Nation and Imperialism. Thus, Debray's warning, "One must, therefore, always specify at what level opposition is situated: anti-governmental or anti-imperialist," reflects the essence of the problem: to awaken the uninvolved masses and destroy the State form which is irrevocably bound to dependence upon imperialism.

In his review of Latin American nationalism, Regis Debray resorts to the same technique as used by him to survey past actions of the Left--recapitulation of errors--to present us with the background for his beliefs. Seeking to define his "model" Fidelism, also named revolutionary nationalism, Debray tells us first what it is not: an ideological "ism". It is distinct from bourgeois nationalism, which demands industrial and commercial protectionism in pursuance of a national State founded on industrial development (e.g., Frigerio in Argentina, Jaraguilia in Brazil); and is distinct from the nationalist and democratic government sought by most communist parties in Latin America because it,

... is organically linked to a socialist programme and it aims at the transformation of State power by means of its conquest and the destruction of the bourgeois form.... It thus considers as illusory and ineffectual the partial demands, the transactions or the conciliations

of an eventual 'national government' which works for a revolution which would advance in small steps.⁷²

Debray also takes up what he identifies as the two most historically important forms of nationalism in Latin America: Bonapartist nationalism and populism. Both of which sought to unite the proletariat and the bourgeoisie under the leadership of the latter.

In the case of populism as symbolized by Vargas of Brazil, an attempt at unity is made by utilizing anti-Yankeeism. But, as Debray laments, such a tact eventually capitulates to United States influence because, not being led by a socialist proletariat, the dominant bourgeoisie is in a position "to come to an 'understanding' with U.S. imperialism."

With Bonapartist nationalism, attempts are made at structural reforms from above. Lacking are changes in State power and a conscious movement of the masses. The result, reports Debray, is something considerably less than meaningful change due to bourgeois-institutional resistance to substantial alterations.

⁷²
Ibid., pp. 55-56.

Again and again, we are compelled to confront the weight of Debray's allegiance to praxis-inspired philosophy. In discussing these nationalisms we must meet face to face Debray's contention that the existing State, an aberrated bourgeois power structure, does in fact rule and, in reality, poses as the major obstacle to a socialist movement.

We also see that Debray's program contains a puzzling allusion to nationalism via socialism. Unfortunately for academic inquiry, he fails to spell out precisely the nature of "revolutionary nationalism." We have only indications, such as the following statement:

Fidelism revolutionary nationalism is not a special qualification, a constituted vanguard, a part of a band of conspirators linked to Cuba. Fidelism is only the concrete process of the regeneration of Marxism and Leninism in Latin American conditions and according to the historical tradition of each country. It will never be the same from one country to the next; it can only conquer through originality. Let us hope that even the word disappears.⁷³

Hence, the revolutionary nationalism of which Regis Debray speaks, appears to allude to the mood and reason under which the people of Latin America are to move towards

⁷³ Ibid., p. 58.

revolution. Rather than being both the motive and the goal of certain human-political activities, Debray allows it to be solely a motive. In this way, he is telling us that due to the presence of bourgeois-States, the oppression of imperialism is most directly perceived by the oppressed within a nation-state context. The revolutionary surge is directed at ending the undesired effects already described and considered residual to the variations of classical nationalism. Debray's nationalism is in effect, anti-nationalism; or as he terms it, revolutionary nationalism. With this in mind we are better able to understand Debray's remark:

_ A summary dialectic would thus make of Fidelism /revolutionary nationalism/ an a posteriori synthesis of two currents, national and international, nationalist and communist.⁷⁴ (author's emphasis)

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

SECTION II

We know Regis Debray was apprehended in a village of Bolivia late in 1967 while returning from some time spent with Che Guevara. Although having engaged in one year of guerrilla activities, Guevara's lack of initial success was a fact. Confirmed by his recently published diary,¹ increasing army expertise and, most significantly, peasant apathy were the hurdles Guevara was unable to leap. For instance, we see Guevara lamenting over worsening conditions in a monthly summary (September, 1967): "...now the army is showing more effectiveness in action, and the mass of peasants does not help us at all and have become informers."² The pertinence of this stems from the fact that Che Guevara, aside from having in large measure inspired the foco theory as a revolutionary in Cuba, was proceeding upon the foco technique in Bolivia. In a real sense, Regis Debray and

¹See, Ramparts, July, 1968.

²Ibid., p. 68.

Che Guevara were complementary: Debray, the revolutionary advocate; Guevara, the revolutionary practitioner. Therefore, Che Guevara's failure to spark the revolution in Bolivia must cast the shadow of failure upon Debray and his work. To paraphrase Lenin, false theory will produce unsuccessful practice, and it certainly appears to have done so in the Bolivian episode.

The first and most obvious question asks: Is the foco concept erroneous? Almost spontaneously, we are inclined to conclude "yes". For if Che Guevara's failure in Bolivia is not sufficient evidence, the apparent failures of the focos in Guatemala, Venezuela, Peru, and Colombia³ tend to provide overwhelming support for those who would disavow the foco theory. These numerous failures make us first recall Debray's remark about revolution revolutionizing the counter-revolution, and then wonder if perhaps Debray had unknowingly uttered in advance the reason for his doctrine's failure in Bolivia. Perhaps Guevara's notations about the increasingly effective Bolivian army were belated reminders

³See, Dissent, May-June, 1968. "The Myth of The Guerrilla," Luis Mercier Vega, pp. 210-215.

of an underestimation of the degree to which the counter-revolution has been revolutionized.

There is still the problem of an apathetic and un-trustworthy peasantry. Such a condition could be the result of more than one factor. Besides government attempts to improve their lot, there exists, for example, the peasants' dislike for "outsiders"; their vulnerability to government propaganda or monetary inducements; and, last, their actual contentment. But all these points, in the final analysis, become quite secondary. Perhaps the peasantry should be approached in some fashion other than solely through "example by military confrontation." That is, maybe there exists a tactical middle-ground between Debray's organizational suggestion, and the concept of "armed propaganda," so hated by Debray. I repeat, these are secondary points which bear chiefly on tactics. When all is said and done, no one can be certain if the foco technique, especially in Bolivia, has met with failure because it was accompanied by improper tactics (e.g., severely limited contact with peasants, lack of substantial indigenous rural representation in the

foco,⁴ etc.), or if the Marxist prognosis, at least as it is defined by Debray, is fantasy from the start. Thus, to discourse on such details would be fruitless for the purposes of this study. And at this ambiguous juncture in Latin American revolutionology--represented by such men as Regis Debray on the left, Schafik Handal in the center, and Luis Sanchez on the right--it is impossible to be definitive in labeling a philosophy's status. For the time being, I prefer to confine myself to interpreting the effects of the most immediate condition of Debray's philosophy, especially as it is affected by Che Guevara's failure, rather than being foolish enough to assume the future by pronouncing sentence.

In place of evaluation, I choose to submit and pursue the issue of relevance. And actually, is this not the realistic thing to do? What historian, as he glances back through the years, concentrates on determining the rightness or wrongness of a philosopher? What is of interest, surely, is a man's relevance to his past, present, and future. The failure, even if momentary, of a man's ideas can be, and often are, the reason for his increased relevance at a later time. Let us recall such diverse men as Socrates, Jesus,

⁴As Vega points out, most Latin American guerrillas are students, professionals and other non-peasant people.

Luther and Galileo.

Returning to Debray, we may begin an examination of his relevance by turning to his impact upon established Marxist governments. The first problem we encounter is defining "established Marxist governments." This entire issue is one of great proportions, but I shall become arbitrarily academic by limiting this description to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Despite the so-called polycentrism of the communist movement within this area, the fact that these countries possess a long national tradition as nations, are actively engaged in indigenously supported industrialism, and are relatively strong participants in international political-economic intercourse makes them peculiar to a common category.

The characteristic most noteworthy within this category is a preponderance of "nation-state-ism". I have purposely omitted the term "nationalism" simply because it fails to stress the effects of the State in the nationalism of nation-states. Not wishing to go into great lengths, I do want to draw attention to the fact that the nation-state arrangement has produced little discomfort for capitalist oriented States. Moreover, the arrangement is often beneficial in making profits, expansion, and order possible. Conversely,

the sovereign, nation-state organization of human societies has presented itself as an enigma to especially the Soviet Union. Being the first to leave the capitalist community of states, the Soviet Union had the job of coming to ideological grips with the fact that it would exist surrounded for some time by capitalist states. As I mentioned earlier, Lenin's law of unequal and uneven development and Trotsky's "permanent revolution" were both attempts to face this reality. It is not necessary to investigate these concepts or socialist expansion, for the point I wish to make concerns the degree to which the Soviet Union, despite its foundation of Marxist internationalism, was forced by the nation-state arrangement to behave as a State. This tendency of course, reached its highest expression in Stalin's "socialism in one country." It is needless to go into depth on the matter in order to establish the point. The Soviet Union's participation in World War II, or its attempt to place offensive missiles in Cuba,⁵ are just two examples of the unavoidable effects of the

⁵ It matters not why one plays the game, but only that one plays. Hence, that the Soviet Union's actions may have been "defensive" does not totally discharge the fact she is participating.

nation-state arrangement upon Marxism hopelessly encased within a nation-state.

Having become obvious participants in nation-state affairs, the established Marxist governments must look at an ardent revolutionary such as Regis Debray with something more than purely fraternal eyes. Because they have witnessed first hand the inability of a shared belief in the Marxian message to maintain solidarity, the Soviets and the nations of eastern Europe must regard Debray as a factor in the power struggle among States. The Soviets have only to remind themselves of maverick Cuba, not forgetting that it is Debray's source of inspiration, to realize the repelling qualities of nation-state-ism, even within internationalist Marxism.

That Regis Debray virtually reads the Communist Party out of Latin American revolutionary affairs serves only to intensify his relevance to the established Marxist governments. According to Lenin and the Third International, the revolution in the backward regions can only occur when the class struggle is taken to the countryside and "the rural working masses are united about the Communist Party of the

⁶Lenin Selected Works, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 429.

urban proletariat."⁶ To the extent that Debray threatens the Soviet State, and its arm the Communist Party, by his belief that "there is ... no metaphysical equation in which vanguard - Marxist-Leninist Party,"⁷ Debray is something less than a favorable element in the Soviet Union's already uncertain status regarding State influence in the developing countries. And as a nation-state intimately committed to, and dependent on, the "communist way," the polycentrism of the Party, coupled with the Debray overture to revolutionaries outside the already questioning Party, makes for a precarious power-political situation as far as established Marxist governments are concerned.

Regis Debray's relevance to contemporary Marxist revolutionaries has already been hinted at in this study. In essence, Debray, aside from the actual performance of his philosophy, has served as a provocateur of new thought. His influence continues today, for one can now detect a new sense of urgency in the Marxist mood within Latin America. Writing in support of theoretical works, Schafik Handal concedes that:

⁶Lenin Selected Works, Vol. 3, op. cit., p. 429.

⁷Debray, Revolution, p. 98.

The call for a new kind of discussion, for joint efforts in theory, should not be interpreted as a proposal to discontinue all action for the duration of the debate and the elaboration of theory. Quite the reverse. Revolutionary action must develop in scope and theory, because, among other things, it is action and practice that will resolve the controversial issues.⁸ (emphasis added)

Clearly, the writings of Regis Debray have given impetus to a Marxist approach in Latin America best described as "impatient revolution." And depending upon one's political-philosophical predisposition, Debray's call to arms can be given one of the following perspectives:

(1) correct, because Debray's belief that objective conditions are ripe in Latin America, the foco technique will eventually prove to be best, and the revolution can be carried off without the Communist Party;

(2) incorrect, because Debray's assumptions, as stated in #1, are not acceptable; or

(3) incorrect, because the Marxist analysis is erroneous (dialectical materialism, the inevitability of class struggle and revolution, etc.).

Regarding number one, very little can be added to what has already been presented. The revolutionology of Regis Debray is openly based on the idea that Latin America is ready for revolt, and that the main obstacle to revolution is the lack of consciousness. Viewed by Debray, the Latin American scene shows that it has been the army, serving as the

oppressive arm of the bourgeois regimes in power, and the impotent and reformist measures by existing Marxist-Leninist parties unable to progress because of unusual conditions in Latin America, which have combined to prevent the classical revolutionary awareness and, consequently, an effective agency to make the revolution.

Criticism of Debray by his Marxist peers, the objective of perspective number two, has covered every aspect of Debray's work. To be sure, they have disputed his interpretation of the objective conditions, his opinion of the Party, and his use of the foco. However, after close analysis, it appears that much of the criticism levelled at Debray arises from an "over-reading" of his thoughts or intentions. For example, when speaking of the position taken by Debray concerning the objective conditions in Latin America, his critics seem to miss the full meaning of Debray's allusion to the foco as the "small motor". What Debray implies throughout his writings--perhaps his greatest fault (not having had the benefit of hindsight) is found in his failure to stress this aspect explicitly--is the notion that the readiness of the objective conditions cannot be contingent upon academic analysis or dissertation, but only upon action. And while

testing the objective conditions through activity, guerrilla action coincidentally serves to hasten along the development of the subjective conditions, ie., the social awareness of the masses. After the "take-off stage" has been achieved, and the foco is gaining participants and awakening the consciousness of the population, the struggle is to move forward with the foco being only one factor, albeit the central one, among many diverse elements, e.g., students, trade unions, peasant leagues, etc.⁹ Hence, Debray critic, Donald McKelvey, provides us with a worthwhile observation when he remarks:

Revolution in the Revolution? Is in fact a very narrow book, for it concentrates on a very limited period of time in the revolutionary process. This does not make it bad or worthless--quite the contrary. But it is a vast mistake, an historical aberration, to attempt to apply universally the truths and lessons of that limited period.¹⁰ (author's emphasis)

It is with McKelvey's final point about the error of universally applying certain truths that Debray's work is challenged. Perhaps only by default (in that Debray concentrated on merely the take-off stage of the revolution, failed to stress the fact sufficiently, and was imprisoned before he

⁹See, Monthly Review, July-August, 1968, p. 68.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 92-93.

could issue sequels) does Debray become vulnerable to this attack. But the fact is, Debray does seem ambiguous as to boundaries to which he foresees revolutionaries in Latin America being able to wander while they draw from the Cuban experience, Debray's "model." The weight of the implication one draws from reading Debray is that he suggests a virtual one to one situation. However, there appears from time to time on the pages of Debray's work rather strong signals that a one to one lesson is not at all what he has in mind. Writing in "Marxist Strategy in Latin America," for example, Debray encloses in his concluding paragraph the sentence, "It Fidelism is no way a closed model; assimilated and recreated by Latin American masses, it is the guide to the first step towards a continental revolution."¹¹

Therefore, the only conclusion we can safely forward is that Debray's conclusion on this issue is based largely upon an individuals' interpretation of the Debrayan theme. Perhaps future writing on his part will serve to clarify this partially clouded question. While he will need to elaborate on the subject of "universality," Debray would

¹¹ New Left Review, #45, p. 41.

be well advised to amplify on his judgments pertaining to the overall effects in Latin America of earlier struggles by the Communist Party. It is true, the thrust of his writings ostracize the Party and ignore any contributions it may have made. But, there appears in "Latin America: The Long March" the following warning: "We should not overlook the debt of revolutionary nationalism to the action and propaganda of Communist Parties, which were the pioneers of reasoned anti-imperialism...."¹² The implication of this statement is, of course, that Debray is cognizant of the effects produced by even the supposedly "ineffectual" Communist Parties of Latin America. And since a substantial portion of the criticism delivered at Debray, especially that of Cuban revolutionaries, Simon Torres and Julio Aronde, and Brazilian author Clea Siva,¹³ challenges Debray's perception of the need for some degree of non-guerrilla preparation. Debray seems to have erred in not making his precise sentiments on this matter clear.

¹² New Left Review, #33, p. 57.

¹³ See, Monthly Review, July-August, 1968.

I believe there is considerable validity to a suggestion that Debray receives much of his criticism as a result of what he appears to imply, rather than strictly on the contents of his work. His ambiguity on the two issues presented above illustrate the source of confusion which Debray inadvertently embodied in his published material. Again I repeat, only the future can clear the air of these questions.

While speaking of the future, I might add that although one may say in light of Che Guevara's failure that an examination of Debray's Castro-inspired foco theory has become irrelevant and purely academic, the fact is: revolution is far from being defunct in Latin America. And to the extent that the foco theory espoused by Debray, as put into practice by Guevara, has provided a lesson from which to learn, his ideas are relevant to affairs in Latin America.

Advancing to the third perspective from which Regis Debray may be viewed, which considers him just another victim of "Marx's fantasy", we can take note of a criticism of Debray voiced by "reformist" Marxists and non-Marxists alike. Luis Sanchez of Nicaragua's Socialist Party, who may be placed in the former category, states in obvious reference to the foco theory: "We were guided and continue to be guided by Leninist

thesis that Marxism recognizes all form of struggle, that it does not invent the forms and that it draws conclusions from experience gained."¹⁴ Such a charge by Sanchez closely parallels a charge of "Blanquism" by non-Marxists. It is indeed paradoxical that both Lenin and Debray were moved to directly respond to identical charges of Blanquism.

Lenin's response was contained in a letter to the Central Committee during September of 1917, and it is characterized by his own matchless polemical approach. For instance, at the outset of his letter Lenin notes that, "Bernstein /Eduard Bernstein/, the leader of opportunism, has already earned himself unfortunate fame by accusing Marxism of Blanquism...."¹⁵ Lenin's entire letter is aimed at explaining and justifying the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks. Below is a key paragraph from the letter:

To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point, Insurrection must rely upon a revolutionary upsurge of the people. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that turning-point in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its

¹⁴ World Marxist Review, February, 1965, p. 35.

¹⁵ Lenin Selected Works, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 365.

height, and when the vacillations in the ranks of the enemy and in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution are strongest. What is the third point. And these three conditions for raising the question of insurrection distinguishing Marxism from Blanquism.¹⁶ (author's emphasis)

The point Lenin strives to make is that the insurrection, although manifested by the Bolsheviks, must be a product of a "revolutionary upsurge of the people" prompted by events and conditions. Later in his letter Lenin states that insurrection during July 3-4 (1917), as opposed to "the September days", would have been in error because: (1) the Bolsheviks lacked the support of the workers; (2) there was no countrywide revolt at the time; and (3) there was no "vacillation" among the enemies and the petty-bourgeoisie.

Contained within his essay, "Latin America: The Long March," Debray makes a reply to the issue of Blanquism in strikingly similar fashion. His discussion of the entire matter revolves around two points: (1) although the foco starts as a small group aspiring to the seizure of power, it is a minority whose plane, "unlike the Blanquist minority of activists, aims to win over the masses before and not after the

seizure of power, and which makes this the essential condition of the final conquest of power;"¹⁷ and (2) unlike Blanquism which sought rapid success and functioned within the elite working-class of the craft industries, the foco seeks not to gain power by war or through military defeat of the oppressor, but through the action of the masses, i.e., the poor and medium peasants, as well as the workers. Quite obviously the emphasis by Debray, as it was with Lenin, is on the awakening of the masses by agitation designed to evoke increased repression and intensification of the class contradictions, and their subsequent participation in removing the existing government.

What is of concern here to the non-Marxist is whether or not Marxism is proving itself viable. On the one hand, Debray charges the existing "Parties" in Latin America with reformism. While on the other hand, the so-called reformists suggest Debray is promoting a Blanquist-like movement, which is an activity shunned even by the communists. This usually implicit charge is shown in the words of Luis Mercier Vaga, cited earlier as a critic of the foco theory:

¹⁷
New Left Review, #33, p. 27.

In this period of great transformations that confront almost all Latin-American countries, the crudity of guerrilla methods, their romanticism, their adolescent courage, but also their taste for total power and their oligarchic contempt for the masses whom they judge incapable of achieving their own emancipation will doubtless be replaced by a less exalted but no less difficult search for a revolution that would start from below; a revolution made by nonprofessionals, a revolution that starts from--and returns to--the people.¹⁸

The interested observer is left puzzled, to say the least.

To the non-Marxist, an impression is given that revolutionary Marxism is in the throes of its own evolutionary disintegration. If there are any valid grievances to be heard (poverty, economic domination, oppressive government, etc.), the non-Marxist's perception of them is often and easily befuddled as his attention is drawn to what appears to be a band of guerrillas seeking to cause "unnecessary trouble" in the name of a deceased doctrine named Marxism.

All that remains now is to examine Regis Debray's relevance to non-Marxist governments, and especially the United States. In the final analysis, however, for the United States to regard Debray on simply the basis of what he says is robbing ourselves of his meaning. As far as we are concerned, Regis Debray is not to be found in a floundering set of tactics; in a comparative analysis of Bolivia and Russia's

insurrection in 1905 or Lenin's Bolsheviks of 1917, or in Mao Tse Tung's Chinese experience. Rather, Debray has importance because he symbolizes a challenge, one which has the structure of a question. And to the degree that Debray is passionately seeking an answer to this question, which also confronts us, Debray is relevant.

As we might expect, the question is not altogether simple, and an answer appears difficult. Nevertheless, the question must proceed. It is a question with three general facets:

- (1) It asks about freedom and tyranny;
- (2) It asks about the immense economic abundance and influence in the hands of the advanced industrial States, and most especially the United States; and
- (3) It asks, although only implicitly, about nation-states.

Regarding the first point, Debray, perhaps not so much in words as in general direction, expresses an impatient desire of many in Latin America to flee the tyranny of injustice, especially the economic kind. In the words of James Reston, "The contrast between the rich and the poor from Los Angeles to Biafra is hard to justify."¹⁹

¹⁹ Chicago's American, August 17, 1965.

But, this is not to say that Debray or others like him, in their zeal, are not capable of creating "tyrannies of the left." Unquestionably, this is a distinct possibility when political hopes meet harsh realities. And if we are to believe Crane Brinton's Anatomy of Revolution, this is a possibility not totally unexpected of revolutionaries. However, this speculative question is irrelevant to this study, for my aim at this point is merely to avoid the placing of the "Debrayan Quest" within an irrevocably tyrannical movement or sentiment. A passage from Hannah Arendt's On Revolution has pertinence here:

His Marx's most explosive and indeed most original contribution to the cause of revolution was that he interpreted the compelling needs of mass poverty in political terms as an uprising, not for the sake of bread or wealth, but for the sake of freedom as well.²⁰

The point here is that the challenge of deprivation in the world is too awesome for even the sturdiest of national boundaries--the hindrances they can be--to suppress the moral message which is seeking expression, even though sometimes imperfectly, in the call to revolution. And in as much as the

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 56.

status quo "belongs" to the advanced industrial nations in general, this era of revolution is of primary concern to the United States and its non-industrialized, non-Marxist allies, e.g., the countries of Latin America, in particular.

All "acceptable" explanatory reasons notwithstanding, the dominant industrial countries (the U.S., U.S.S.R., Japan, and Europe) present themselves in varying degrees as villages of prosperity surrounded by parched earth. Much of Asia, Africa, the Near East, and Latin America are, at best, second class participants in a foreign prosperity-producing arrangement. And, at worst, they are spectators standing far afield while the game is being partially played in their own back yard. Assuming the worst, Regis Debray then becomes a person who has been impelled to voice concern for the alienated spectators along the sidelines. That his ideas are perhaps unfavorable, even erroneous vis-a-vis acceptable thought within non-Marxist governmental circles, is decidedly unimportant. For at this moment, Debray's possible error does not erase the challenge or the question. And, that the United States fails to comprehend the positive effects of Regis Debray--his amplifying the urgency with which a meaningful answer (meaning that it produces tangible results) to cyclical poverty and oppression

is being sought--is, however, highly important. As Arendt observes, our past record is not much better:

Fear of revolution has been the hidden leitmotif of post war American foreign policy in its desperate attempts at stabilization of the status quo, with the result that American power and prestige were used and misused to support obsolete and corrupt political regimes that long since had become objects of hatred and contempt among their own citizens.²¹

Regis Debray is, of course, a revolutionary. For this reason he is inimical to the politics of those States seeking to preserve the status quo. But, the plain fact is: the impulse for freedom is very much alive in today's world, and the events surrounding the American blacks, the Czechs, and the Vietnamese proclaim that men now declare poverty and slavery intolerable, and domination invalid: As Reston adds, "The spirit of equality is challenging the old spirit of domination in every continent of the globe. Established institutions, creeds, and hierarchies are under attack in the communist and socialist and tribal as well as in the capitalist worlds..."²² And that Debray has arrived at the conclusion that the oppression is due to capitalist, and especially United States' economic motives is certainly not discouraged

²²Chicago's American, loc. cit.

by actions on the part of the United States. Clearly, "We have acted as though we too believed that it was wealth and abundance which were at stake in the postwar conflict between the 'revolutionary' countries in the East and West."²³

The United States, however, is not alone. The Soviet Union is properly included in this discussion. Anyone who has observed the Soviet Union's difficulties in the Third World, especially in relation to China and Cuba, will realize that the tension between the advancing industrial States and the smaller or lesser developed countries is prompted, at least in part, by a factor other than purely capitalist economic exploitation. This factor is the nation-state arrangement.

If only indirectly, Regis Debray, as a representative voice of oppressed people within a section of the Third World, challenges the possibility that economic justice and freedom are able to emerge from the existing nation-state organization of the world. In a true sense, a universal morality based primarily on justice and freedom is coming into view, despite

²³ Arendt, loc. cit.

Hans Morgenthau's conclusion that such an occurrence would require "almost super-human morale strength"²⁴ on the part of persons accustomed to national morality. "A vitality of a moral system is put to its crucial test when its control of the consciences and actions of men is challenged by another system of morality."²⁵ Stating this accurate premise, Morgenthau, writing this soon after World War II, properly observed the stability of national morality. Today, however, this stability is threatened and the nation-states it justifies, by a tendency on the part of many persons to apply a universal code of evaluation-- a sort of man to man analysis-- to problems of War, Peace, Justice, Poverty, and Freedom. Almost as if to corroborate Hegel's thesis, a newer sense of Right is arriving and gaining in influence. The net effect of this change in moral perception is an increasing irrelevance for those nationalistic aspirations and fears which heretofore guided moral selectivity. Their irrelevance is to the same extent they interfere, so to speak,

²⁴ Hans Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, 3rd Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 255.

²⁵ Ibid.

with the Sermon on the Mount.

It should not be implied from this study that I regard Regis Debray as the purveyor of the Answer. The fact is he is more a re-affirmation of the question. The answer, the complex and multi-facted thing it must be, lies in a profound readjustment of national and international institutions in order to meet the dramatic changes in human moral perspectives. Barbara Ward's suggestion²⁶ that Western nations, and the United States in particular, must re-examine the moral message of the "revolution of liberty" in order to insure the safe transference of liberty is advice deserving immediate attention and requiring a courageous response. Will we do so? One thing certain is that the force generated by people in political motions is simply too great for institutions of the past to withstand. Change is inevitable.

Regis Debray, then, becomes relevant to us as an expression of our task. Questions this study provoked,

²⁶ Barbara Ward, The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations, (New York: Norton, 1962), p. 159.

even the unanswered or unanswerable ones, are part of the relevance Debray has for us. He is not so much a philosophical and political adversary as he is a pang of conscience and a reminder of responsibility. But, naturally, a pang of conscience requires cognizance of Right, and we shall express our moral position only as we seek to answer the challenges by the "spectators far afield." The answer, although not entirely defineable now, is definite only in its inevitableness. Our need to act wisely and justly is unavoidable, for the moment we fail to seek answers is the minute we surely fail.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Salvatore J. Ferrera has been read and approved by the director of the thesis.

Furthermore, the final copies have been examined by the director and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

June 13, 1969
Date

Joseph Small Jr.
Signature of Advisor