

Books

The Guerrilleros

By Paul E. Sigmund

RICHARD GOTT: *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*. London, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1970; and New York, Doubleday, 1971.

THIS IS A LARGE, expensive, handsomely printed and illustrated account of the unsuccessful guerrilla movements in Latin America over the decade that followed the victory of Fidel Castro in 1959. It concentrates primarily on five countries: Guatemala, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia; and it begins and ends with a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the death of Ernesto (Che) Guevara in October 1967. It is the result of several years of research by the author, an English journalist who spent 1967-69 working on the book at the Institute of International Studies of the University of Chile.

From the opening discussion of the sinister role of a CIA agent "with sunken piggy eyes and little hair" in Bolivia to the assertion on the last page that the 1968 student rebellions in Paris and Mexico City were the result of a "chain reaction" from the Latin American guerrilla movements, it is clear where the author's sympathies lie. Yet unlike many writers of similar persuasion, Mr. Gott is not optimistic about the future of these movements in Latin

America. A central purpose of the book is to explain why they have had so little success.

Mr. Gott advances two principal reasons. (1) The United States, which "controls Latin America as absolutely as any metropolitan power in its relations with its empire" (in Peru?, in Chile?), has employed its vast resources, principally through the CIA and the military aid program, to destroy the guerrilla movements. (2) The US effort would not have been as successful as it was if it had not been for the divisions in the Marxist Left of Latin America, especially the increasing friction between the (mostly Castroite) revolutionaries and the orthodox (Moscow-oriented) Communist parties. In developing these theses, particularly the latter, the author presents detailed accounts of ideological and military developments in the five countries he has chosen and includes extensive documentary material and many photographs which have not hitherto appeared.

He does not, however, really prove his theses—not even with respect to Bolivia, where United States military advisers established a special camp to train Bolivian Rangers in anti-guerrilla tactics, and where we have evidence from Guevara's diary of the lack of support from the Bolivian

Communist parties (one oriented toward Moscow, the other toward Peking). For, as Mr. Gott's narrative itself reveals, a crucial factor in Che's defeat was the fact that the peasantry and local residents quickly informed the Bolivian military of the movements of the guerrillas; thus the military was able to encircle the Guevara group in short order and effectively cut it off from possible outside help. Moreover, the guerrilla movement was already isolated and close to defeat by the time the US-trained Bolivian Rangers entered the combat just two weeks prior to Guevara's capture and death.

Mr. Gott's account of Guevara's failure demonstrates that guerrilla efforts against governments considered legitimate by the general population (as distinct from the intellectuals and students) are likely to fail. The defeat of the guerrillas and Castro's victory both really prove what Guevara once called Cuba's "exceptionalism." Batista's nearly total loss of legitimacy in Cuba was not replicated in the cases that the author explores, where, as he admits, neither the peasants nor the urban masses supported the revolutionaries. As events in Southeast Asia have demonstrated, military power is impotent against a well-organized guerrilla movement

which has a popular following, but in the cases examined in this volume, such support was almost completely lacking. In Bolivia, René Barrientos Ortuno had proclaimed himself successor to the ideals of the 1952 revolution and had built up a genuine peasant following—a fact of which Guevara was apparently unaware. In Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela, the governments possessed the legitimacy born of constitutional democracy—in Venezuela's case, Romulo Betancourt succeeded in establishing a lasting framework of constitutionalism where no other elected president in the history of the country had ever lasted out his term in office.

Yet in Mr. Gott's view, President Betancourt was guilty of "betrayal of the popular movement"; President Barrientos "tried to bring back the pre-1952 men"; and the Peruvian Apristas, who had once "enjoyed the support of the working classes" because they were anti-imperialist and anti-American, later "ran out of revolutionary steam . . . [and] began to think that the United States provided most of the answers to the problems of the country." The last statement is of course the tip-off on the author's attitude toward the democratic reformers. Because they were willing to work with the United States, they could not, by definition, be true supporters of "the popular movement." It is ironic that Mr. Gott's account reveals just how little popular support his revolutionaries received from the people they claimed to represent.

The same kind of anti-American doublethink operates in reverse in Mr. Gott's comments on the case of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla of Colombia. Because the *Alianza Nacional*

Popular (ANAPO), Rojas' political movement in Colombia today, attacks United States domination, Mr. Gott imputes "distinct leftist leanings" (unspecified) to Rojas' rightwing dictatorship of the 1950's and attributes his overthrow by the Liberals and Conservatives to his leftism. This interpretation will come as a surprise to students, workers, and intellectuals whom Rojas persecuted and imprisoned between 1953 and 1957 and who participated in his overthrow.

Yet if its fanatical anti-Americanism is discounted, this book is useful for students of the Latin American Left. It documents—in detail that is not available elsewhere—the internecine struggles among the various Marxist groups in the countries analyzed. Castro's polemic with the Venezuelan Communist Party is treated thoroughly (although his subsequent falling-out with the guerrilla leader, Douglas Bravo, who was the occasion of the controversy, is not mentioned), and so is the often-confusing ideological evolution of the Guatemalan revolutionary movement. The difficulties in luring the urban intellectuals and students into actual combat, and their notorious lack of success when they became involved, are covered in depth. And the attention paid to ideological and organizational divergences between Trotskyites, Maoists, Castroites, and orthodox Communists makes the volume a highly worthwhile source book for scholars—particularly since it gives lengthy extracts from the documents and declarations that the various revolutionary movements have issued and draws on Latin American secondary accounts which are not generally available outside their countries of publication.

The book also shows how far the Latin American revolutionaries have moved away, both in theory and in practice, from the theses propounded by Régis Debray in his *Revolution in the Revolution?* Since the death of Guevara, we have not seen any new guerrilla *focos* established in the Latin American countryside, while the city has become the center of sporadic terrorist outbursts, pioneered by the Uruguayan Tupamaros. However, the author only alludes to this development in his epilogue, and his book is essentially an historical examination of the failure of an earlier stage in the Latin American revolutionary movement.

While Mr. Gott makes no predictions about the future, his conclusions are predominantly pessimistic. In his opinion, the only lasting result of the Latin American guerrilla movements of the 1960's has been to create in the person of Che Guevara "a political symbol with a worldwide application." Thus far, that symbol has served principally to provide, in the words of another pro-Guevara writer, "a big-brotherly sponsor of shoplifting, smoking pot, passing bad checks, and breaking windows"¹ and to line the pockets of the manufacturers of Guevara posters and banners. It has done little to relieve the human misery or promote social justice in Latin America, and recent events in Peru and Chile seem to have demonstrated that there are more effective ways of achieving those goals than taking to the hills in imitation of Che. For the story of those who did so and an account of their failure, this book is a prime source.

¹ John Womack, Jr., " 'El Che' Guevara," *New York Review of Books*, Jan. 28, 1971, p. 8.

Moscow and Peking in Latin America

By Yale H. Ferguson

J. GREGORY OSWALD and ANTHONY J. STROVER, Eds.: *The Soviet Union and Latin America*. New York, Praeger Publishers, 1970.

STEPHEN CLISSOLD, Ed.: *Soviet Relations with Latin America, 1918-68: A Documentary Survey*. London, Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1970.

ROBERT G. CARLTON, Ed.: *Soviet Image of Contemporary Latin America: A Documentary History, 1960-1968*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1970.

CECIL JOHNSON: *Communist China and Latin America, 1959-1967*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1970.

THESE FOUR VOLUMES, all published in 1970, are useful additions to the scholarly literature on Soviet and Chinese Communist involvement in Latin America. Happily, they complement one another nicely. The first is an anthology of papers presented in Munich in May 1968 at an international symposium sponsored by the Institute for the Study of the USSR. The second is a collection of some 200 speeches, communiques, press reports, etc.—about one-fourth dated prior to World War II—which the editor, Stephen Clissold, has gleaned from numerous Soviet and Latin American sources and put into perspec-

tive with a comprehensive introduction. The third, issued under the auspices of the Conference on Latin American History, offers a cross-section of recent writings by Soviet specialists on various aspects of Latin American affairs. The fourth analyzes Maoist ideology as a framework for Chinese activities in the Western hemisphere and also examines in detail Sino-Cuban relations and the evolution of pro-Chinese parties throughout Latin America.

The Oswald-Strover, Clissold, and Johnson volumes will be of interest both to students of the USSR and Communist China and to Latin Americanists, not least because of their in-depth treatment of Cuban policy as a largely independent phenomenon. Indeed, in view of the amount of attention that they devote to the Castro regime, they might better have been titled something like "The Soviet Union (or Communist China), Cuba, and Latin America." The Carlton collection, however, will be of utility primarily to specialists in Soviet affairs. Regrettably, his skimpy editorial commentary fails to identify clearly the Soviet writers to whom he refers or to establish the exact relationship between their views and those of the USSR's political leadership; hence, the book will be of most value to readers knowledgeable enough to do so for themselves.

Clissold's introduction to his own collection and his essay in

Oswald and Strover (hereafter referred to as O & S) do not contain any startling new insights, but they do provide a helpful historical survey of Soviet policies. Soviet leaders, he maintains, have generally regarded Latin America as firmly within the United States' sphere of influence and therefore as a region of relatively low priority for the USSR. Nevertheless, recognizing that "even a limited extension of [Soviet] influence in this sensitive area—the proverbial 'backyard' of the United States—might have telling effects," they have not been prepared to write Latin America off entirely.

Clissold reminds us that efforts to extend Soviet influence in Latin America began as early as 1919 and over the years have involved: (a) attempts to establish a pattern of friendly relations—including formal diplomatic ties, cultural exchanges, and trade—with at least some existing governments; and (b) moral and material support for—and ideological dictation to—Moscow-oriented Communist parties. As he points out, the Kremlin's efforts on these two essentially different levels proved incompatible during the interwar period, when (except for a brief "popular front" interlude in the late 1930's, which ended with the 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact) Latin American Communists were directed to promote violent revolution in strict isolation from nationalist and reformist groups.