

MEXICO, 31 March 1979. (CAA)

*Efforts at cooperation by South American revolutionary movements appear to owe something to Guevara's strategic thinking. They also underline the setbacks suffered by individual guerrilla groups.*

Extremist revolutionary movements in four neighbouring South American countries have formed a joint command to promote a continental revolutionary strategy based on guerrilla warfare. In a communique distributed in Argentina in mid-February, 1974, the Argentine *Liberación Revolucionaria del Pueblo* (LRP), the Uruguayan " Tupamaros " of *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (MLN), the Bolivian *Liberación de Liberación Nacional* (LLN) and the Chilean *Movimiento de Liberación Revolucionaria* (MLR) announced that they were setting up a " Junta of Revolutionary Coordination ... under the banner and example of Commander Che Guevara " and urged Latin American workers, peasants, students, intellectuals and revolutionary Christians to " take up arms decisively " in the struggle for socialism.

This initiative may be little more than the formal consolidation of links already known to exist between the groups, but it exemplifies the renewed attempts being made at coordination following the failure in the late 1960s of bodies like the Afro-Asian-Latin American Peoples' Solidarity Organisation (ASLASO) and the Latin American Solidarity Organisation (LASO), despite strong Cuban support. The new efforts may be more effective because of their less ambitious regional basis and the relative cohesiveness of the organisations involved (whereas LASO, for example, included several national Communist Parties opposed in practice to armed struggle). Evidence existed as early as mid-1970 of contacts between the Tupamaros and the MLN, which were publicly channelled then for their cooperation in a communique published by the Cuban party organ *Proceso* (August 1, 1970). In 1972, Tupamaro documents seized by Uruguayan security forces provided new information about MLN links abroad, particularly in Argentina where a working relationship had been developed with the ERP. Under the Allende administration, Chile became an important centre for voices from neighbouring countries, several of them former guerrillas who were able to make contact among themselves and with the Chilean MLR quite freely. Two ERP leaders told the Chilean extreme left-wing journal *Revista Nueva*, in an interview published on August 29, 1972, that a common front of revolutionary organisations was essential if " US imperialism " was to be defeated and that they were trying to " group our forces together in this continental war of the Latin American peoples ".

(8)

The guerrillas' new coordinating body also recalls the strategic thinking behind Guevara's ill-fated venture in Bolivia in 1966-67. In a new book, *La Guerrilla de Che* (Editions de Seuil, 1974), the French Marxist writer Régis Debray, who helped to prepare the campaign and had a front line view of it until his arrest, reveals that Guevara's intention (though he never made it explicit) in placing his largely Cuban team in the unpromising and virtually uninhabited Bolivian jungle had nothing to do with local conditions but was to create a "Latin American politico-military semi-gauche". Detachments would spread out to neighboring countries to form an "international network ... composed of politico-military national organizations with a common structure, that of a guerrilla army, a single military doctrine, Che's, a politically coherent general staff, and a global political vision". In his enthusiasm for Guevara's leadership and his faith in eventual revolutionary success, Debray shows little concern for the disapproval of this grandiose plan by the dissenters that were the guerrillas' lot.

#### Lack of Impact

In following Guevara's recipe, the founders of the new "guerrilla international" presumably hope for brighter prospects. At present, however, both the Tupamaros and the ERP, which has been sporadically revived after Guevara's defeat, are attempting to recover from serious defeats inflicted by the security forces of their respective countries. They have had little impact on the national scene for over a year. In Chile, the MIR failed to forestall and thereafter prevent the rapid completion of the military coup which overthrew President Allende on September 11, 1973, but almost all of its leaders escaped arrest and its structure may have survived largely intact. Under Allende the MIR's role was principally that of an extreme left-wing ginger group goading the governing coalition on to more drastic measures, but against the present military junta it is likely to deploy for the first time its full potential for armed struggle which it has always believed could be an essential in Chile as elsewhere.

In Argentina, however, the ERP has for over three years waged an urban terrorist campaign which was maintained and even increased when the military regime gave way to the democratically-elected Peronist administration in May, 1973. The ERP, which was formally founded in July, 1970, as the armed wing of the Trotskyite Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT) but which now favors an eclectic revolutionary activism rather than Trotskyite dogma, was probably the main stimulus behind the "Juntas of Revolutionary Coordination", and is the best placed of its members to provide support and facilities for its operation. The ERP's leader is Roberto Santucho, an admirer of Castro and Guevara who has had several links with the Cubans.

The ERP's continuing violence brought it into head on conflict with the Peronist government (led by General Perón himself since October, 1973) which now assigns a high priority to its elimination. After issuing a statement in April, 1973, on "Why the ERP will not end the struggle", it has continued to make business firms, particularly "exploiting" foreign companies, and the armed forces its main targets. Within 11 hours at the end of February, the ERP kidnaped a meat-packing company executive and a retired navy man, raising to five the number of victims said by the guerrillas to be held in their "people's prisons", an idea devised by the Tupamaros to challenge the established system of justice. Most of the ERP's kidnap victims have been held for ransoms, the amounts demanded often being spectacularly large. Le Monde (Paris) of January 9 said that \$25.2 millions had been paid for the life of the

(over)

Swiss manager in Buenos Aires who was released in December, 1973, after over a month in captivity, while it has been reported that the ERP are demanding \$250 million for the release of a US oil company executive kidnapped in December - partly in the form of food, clothing and construction materials for the poor. An ERP communiqué claimed that this would help to redress the Argentine people for "exploits riches extracted by the company in long years of imperialist exploitation".

#### Industrial and military targets

Besides kidnappings and other multi-target actions, the ERP has mounted guerrilla operations against industrial and military installations, and it was the raid on a munitions store at the army medical headquarters in Buenos Aires in September, 1973, that led the government to ban the organization and brought the first direct attacks on the guerrillas from Peronist leaders. Their anger was increased by the discovery that some of the guerrillas captured in this attack had benefited from the general amnesty granted to all guerrilla detainees on the inauguration of the first Peronist administration the previous May. On January 28, the ERP launched a force of 60-70 men against an army tank regiment garrisoned at Azul, 120 miles south of Buenos Aires. The guerrillas were beaten off after a long battle in which the tank commander and his wife, among others, were killed and a number of soldiers and guerrillas wounded. The attackers captured a captain and later announced that he was to be a "people's prisoner"; there, he joined another army captain kidnapped in December, 1973, to be put on "trial" for "collaboration" with the United States, according to an ERP communiqué. (The ERP threatened to kill the hostages from Azul unless it received news of the fate of two guerrillas allegedly captured during the raid, but later accepted assurances that the men were not being held.)

The ERP declared the Azul operation to have been a failure, but many observers, noting the timing just before congressional consideration of a government Bill reforming the penal code to allow much stiffer penalties for subversion and terrorism - one of several causes of conflict within the Peronist movement between the official leadership and its radical left wing-attributed a broader strategic objective to the assault. The ERP's principal aim may have been to provoke a domestic reaction from President Perón which would accelerate the alienation of the Peronist revolutionary left and bring it closer to an alliance with the ERP.

After the Azul raid, President Perón accused the guerrillas of trying to create chaos. The raid did, however, have immediate repercussions within the Peronist movement, where it lent impetus to the campaign for a purge of alleged Marxist infiltrators and direct confrontation with the extreme left wing. Eight left-wing Peronist deputies were expelled from the movement when they resigned their seats in Congress rather than vote for amendments to the penal code to counter terrorism. The President's criticisms of the local administration in Buenos Aires province, where Azul is located, for negligence in security matters, forced the resignation of the left-wing governor. Peronism increased against other provincial governments, especially in Córdoba, the scene of several conflicts, where the local administration was toppled by a police revolt at the end of February. There was a wave of violence and harassment against radical Peronist leaders, officers and publications, and an acceleration of the internal Peronist conflicts which have characterized Argentine politics since Perón's return to Argentina in June, 1973.

The radical Peronists on the extreme left have become increasingly disillusioned as leaders they backed have been edged out of positions of importance, and the government has adopted policies they oppose in such matters as internal security, the reform of trade union and university laws and the reorganization of the Peronist movement itself. Official efforts to give this moribund body an institutional framework and disciplined structure include a purge of "Marxist infiltration", a policy authorized by Perón himself after the assassination in September, 1973, of the Peronist labour leader José Roca.

#### The Peronist Revolutionaries

The principal organizations of revolutionary Peronists are the Juveniles Peronistas (JP) and its numerous auxiliary groups, and the Montoneros guerrillas, a body which now includes the ideologically similar Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) following a merger in October, 1973. In their common opposition to the military régime the Peronist guerrillas cooperated with the ERP, but unlike the latter they largely suspended violence after the Peronist electoral victory, while remaining active in internal Peronist conflicts. Although they object to many aspects of government policy, the Montoneros continue to profess loyalty to President Perón himself. The organization attempted to clarify its position on the latest events in a statement (reported by the Cuban agency Prensa Latina on January 12) which quoted the Argentine leader's old maxim that "violence from above engenders violence from below". The allegation that "violence from above" no longer existed under a democratically-elected government was only a half-truth, it claimed, "because there are contradictory elements within the popular government". The statement condemned both the proposed toughening of the penal code and the dual raid, which "shows how the ultra-left as well as the ultra-right seek to provoke repetition".

These comments suggest that the Montoneros, and possibly other extremist Peronist groups, may see the ERP's attempts to act as a catalyst in deepening Peronist divisions as a cynical manoeuvre designed to put them under pressure and strain their loyalties still further. The success of ERP policies in this is the balance. The Montoneros' leader, Mario Firmenich, and certain JP leaders, later boycotted post-war leaders' meetings with President Perón, who denounced "extremists" and appealed for order and stability. Another well-known Montonero, Roberto Quirós, was reported on February 17 to have been arrested for forging official documents.

Other guerrilla groups besides the ERP and Montoneros are currently active in Argentina. The self-styled Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR), which split into two factions in 1973, assassinated a US businessman in Córdoba in November, 1973, threatened violence against Ford executives in Argentina, and kidnapped an Argentine industrialist for ransom in early January. Another group, the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (FAL) claimed responsibility for kidnapping a general in December, 1973, releasing him after he had been "tried" for supplying arms to "Fascist" groups. Finally, an apparently new group, the Comandos Populares de Liberación (CPL) admitted responsibility for an unsuccessful attempt to sabotage the railway line to Chile in January. According to a communique sent to the Press, the group was trying to block the supply of arms from Argentina to Chile.

1620/74/100