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THEORIES OF REVOLUTION: A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

A THESIS
The Honors Program
College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

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by
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**Theories of Revolution:
A Latin American Perspective**

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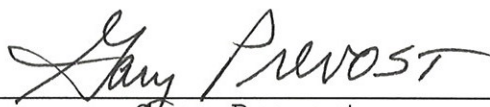
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	1
II. Marxist Theory and Its Revisions	5
III. The Appeal of Marxism in Latin America	23
IV. The FSLN: A New Approach to Socialism	48
V. El Salvador: A Negotiated Revolution?	69
VI. Epilogue	86

I. Introduction

Violent uprisings by the European working classes in the mid-1800's led to a new body of social thought on class relations. With the release of The Communist Manifesto in 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels challenged the existing social and economic conditions. They suggested that capitalism in its basic nature exploited workers, and this injustice would eventually lead the working class or proletariat to revolt. According to Marx and Engels, the proletariat would in fact be the only social group to overthrow capitalism and institute a new social structure. The work of Marx and Engels has become a starting point for much discussion about capitalism and possibilities for changing the existing social and economic structures.

The theories put forth by Marx and Engels have since been challenged by other philosophers but especially by the events of 20th century history. Successful socialist

revolutions in countries such as China, Vietnam, and Cuba have demanded reexamination of classical Marxist theory on the nature of revolution. Particularly, these experiences challenge the notion that the proletariat is the only group with the potential to succeed at socialist revolution. Also, many developed capitalist countries with a large working class such as the United States have not followed the revolutionary process as suggested by Marx and Engels.

These contemporary problems of the Marxist theory of revolution do not render it untrue or useless. Rather, classical revolutionary theory has been and continues to be reexamined, modified, and sometimes created by the changing experience of revolution. Thinkers such V.I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Mao Zedong have significantly developed the body of knowledge on revolution.

The need for reexamination of existing theories continues with the present revolutionary trend in Latin America. While attributing their roots to Marxism, the actions of these revolutionaries reveal the discrepancies between Marxist theory and their revolutionary practice. The successful Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro in 1959 stimulated revolutionary activity in countries throughout Central and South America. The movements inspired by Castro which emerged in the 1960's were largely defeated by 1970. But in the late 1970's a new upsurge began, led by developments in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. By

1990 these movements had run their course, creating new challenges for revolution in the 1990's.

Revolution in Latin America demands particular attention in the study of revolution for several reasons. First, Marx's critique of capitalism applies there today as in few other places in the world. Second, revolutionary thinkers such as Fidel Castro and Che Guevara have made contributions to classical revolutionary theory which challenge some of its most basic and fundamental assumptions. And third (and perhaps most importantly), revolutionary struggles in Latin America are not something in the historic past: they are part of its tumultuous present and will likely be part of its immediate future.

This essay will demonstrate that despite the ongoing theoretical debates (and Marx's original intention), Marxist revolutionary theory remains useful in Latin America. A number of questions will be helpful in illustrating this point. In general, how is classic revolutionary theory reshaped by the revolutionary experiences of Latin America in the late twentieth century? Do the experiences of Latin America validate or invalidate Marxist revolutionary theory and its revisions? Who are the revolutionary participants in Latin America? How have social and economic factors influenced revolutionary movements? With the end of the Cold War, what new challenges and/or opportunities arise for future revolutionaries? What can future revolutionaries

learn from the successes/failures of groups in Latin America?

To answer these questions, this work will be divided into three parts: the first, a theoretical discussion of Marxist theory and its applicable revisions; the second, an analysis of the appeal of Marxism in Latin America, including the effects of the Cuban Revolution and its theorists; and third, an in-depth examination of these theories at work in the revolutionary experiences of Nicaragua and El Salvador.

II. Marxist Theory and Its Revisions

The task of defining what one means by the term "revolution" has led scholars to a variety of interpretations. Debate and confusion abound regarding what exactly constitutes a revolution. Because the revolutionary organizations examined here utilize Marxist ideology (or that of his interpreters), it seems logical to draw a definition from Marx's own understanding of revolution. Marx and Engels have described revolution as "the most radical rupture with traditional property relations."¹ But revolution for Marx and Engels involves more than a disintegration of feudal or capitalist modes of production. In the last paragraphs of The Communist Manifesto, Marx articulates his vision of a Communist revolution:

In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. . .they openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of *all* existing social conditions.²

Revolution according to Marx is obviously more than a change of political power as some social scientists would define it (Brinton, Dunn). The sociopolitical relations and the nature of the change involved define the character of revolution according to Marx. As Hal Draper notes, "From Marx's standpoint, what made his theory revolutionary was that it looked to a literal *overturning*: not simply an

overthrow, the deposition of established power, but a turning-over of the social corpus itself."³

Social scientists have redefined Marx's ideas on what constitutes a revolution. Because it compliments Marx's own definition, revolution in this paper will be understood using the definition given by Mark Hagopian:

A revolution is an acute, prolonged crisis in one or more of the traditional systems of stratification [economic, political, social] of a political community, which involves a purposive, elite-directed attempt to abolish or to reconstruct one or more of the said systems by means of an intensification of political power and recourse to violence.⁴

In other words, revolutions are serious and intend a complete transformation of society. They are headed by a group of committed leaders and take place after a lengthy and difficult struggle. Most revolutions include some type of violence because few regimes are willing to concede political, economic, and social power without defending themselves in every method possible. Although recent events in Eastern Europe challenge the necessity of violence to achieve revolutionary change, the political reorganization and economic privatization in Eastern Europe should be differentiated from attempting a socialist revolution in a capitalist society. Non-violent revolutionary change has yet to occur in Latin America.

To parallel more closely with how Marx viewed revolution, I would revise Hagopian's definition to include a transformation in two or more (and usually in all three)

of the systems of stratification (economic, political, social). It is difficult to imagine a revolution as described by Marx that reconstructs an economic system without simultaneously redefining the social system and the political system as well. Transforming only one of these systems (e.g. a change of political power) would not constitute revolution according to this definition.

The key factor distinguishing revolution from other forms of social change is its goal of transforming society. Revolutions confront the illegitimacy of the old regime, but in addition, they suggest the possibility of a more just society (although not always explicitly laid out). Ideology gives a sense of direction and purpose to revolution that coups, revolts, and successions lack.⁵ As summarized by John Dunn, "the only revolutionary achievement is the creation of a new order."⁶

Before any analysis of the significance of Marxist theory in Latin America, one must understand the theory itself, a theory oftentimes misinterpreted. Dunn describes Marxism as "a theory of how to make a better sort of history, a theory of the conditions of revolutionary possibility."⁷ According to The Communist Manifesto, society will reach a point in its economic development when it must transform itself or face barbarism.⁸ In classical Marxism, all social relationships are analyzed primarily by examining history. Marx and Engels state:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles . . . [oppressor and oppressed] stood in constant opposition to one another . . . a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-construction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes . . .⁹

Socialism would evolve in a two-step process: first, the nation's bourgeoisie (merchants, artisans, professionals) would revolt from the feudal system and develop a modern capitalist nation; second, the proletariat would lead a socialist revolution that would transform the economic production of capital. According to V.I. Lenin, the bourgeois revolution is in the interest of the proletariat because a strong bourgeois revolution will lead to a more stable socialism when implemented. The danger in a bourgeois revolution lies in the possibility of it not quickly eroding the remains of the feudal system. Lenin describes the intent of a bourgeois revolution:

In countries like Russia, the working class suffers not so much from capitalism as from the lack of capitalist development. . . . The bourgeois revolution is precisely a revolution which most resolutely sweeps away the survivals of the past, the remnants of serfdom (which include not only autocracy but monarchy as well); it is a revolution which most fully guarantees the widest, freest, and speediest development of capitalism.¹⁰

Marx expected that the transformation to socialism (and eventually communism) would first occur in industrialized countries with a highly developed system of capitalism. Revolution should occur in these countries first because an abundance of capital would be needed to create an efficient and comfortable socialist society. World-wide revolution

would guarantee the success of socialism, as the earlier socialist countries could aid those making the economic transformation. Marx dates modern capitalism from the sixteenth century onward (the period of the conquest of Latin America). From this epoch forward, Marx viewed the evolving international division of labor as a consequence of capitalism.¹¹

Marx argued that the development of the capitalist production (similar to the feudal system before it) would create a conflict between the [urban] industrial working class--the proletariat--and the ruling capitalist class. At the point when capitalism exhausted its productive capacity, the majority of society would violently overthrow the existing order. This feature of freeing one-self from more powerful interests would resound loudly in the experience of Latin America a century later.

The proletariat would form the base of support for the revolution for several reasons. The working class formed the majority of society in most of Europe, which fulfilled the Marxist condition of needing majority support to achieve revolution. The proletariat were the most exploited group of the industrial era (e.g. poor working conditions, low wages, long hours) and were in fact in a better position to organize than any other group (e.g. peasants). Not only did the working class spend most of their day together in a

enclosed space, but they also tended to live within close proximity of each other.

As capitalism failed to satisfy the needs of the proletariat, the working class would initiate class struggle to further their interests. In its demands for social responsibility, the proletariat would have the least concern for the costs to private capitalists. Marx and Engels often referred to the superior ability of the proletariat as a revolutionary class:

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. . . The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existences as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative.¹²

The interests of the proletariat coincided with the interests of society in general; thus, any struggle by this class would, by its nature, lead to an alternative to capitalism.¹³

Marx also cited the need for the proletariat to become conscious of their exploited condition (his purpose in writing the Communist Manifesto) and the ability to envision a better future than the existing social order. This required both a certain level of education, which children of the working class were able to obtain, and a group of leaders to provide a vision. Contrary to popular belief, Marx and Engels did not propose that revolutions simply happened without leadership and careful planning.

Twentieth century revolutions throughout the world have not followed the pattern as described by Marx, and few of them have been fully socialist in a Marxist sense. Yet neither have the social and economic conditions of nineteenth century Europe which Marx addressed remained the same. Marx did not propose that his specific projections be applicable for all time; his works were written as a critique of the economic relations he witnessed during the nineteenth century. Marxism as a methodology, however, continues to be used as a way of analyzing social relations in contemporary times. When Marxism is taken not as a dogma but rather as a way of looking at the world, it remains valuable today. By examining class relations, domination, and how to free oneself from this exploitation based on the existing conditions, one can apply Marxism to places of the "Third World" such as Latin America.

Although many twentieth century revolutionaries claim to have Marxist roots, they have operated in conditions very different from those anticipated by Marx. Considering both *who* are the majority of participants in revolution and at *what stage* of economic development revolution would occur, trends have indicated a greater role by the peasantry taking place in countries lacking a large capital base. The theorists who have contributed to revising Marxist theory in light of twentieth century history are numerous and varied. The revisions of three theorists, V.I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky,

and Mao Zedong, are especially applicable to Latin America. Their experiences in the Russian and Chinese Revolution were crucial in the evolution of Marxist theory to its appeal in Latin America.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 became a sort of "proof" of Marxist revolutionary theory, although it did not quite follow Marx's predictions. The Bolshevik Revolution gave authority to a limited interpretation of Marx, the Marxist-Leninist model of revolution. The Bolshevik Revolution was viewed as being Marxist-Leninist because it represented the wishes of the proletariat (and incorporated the ideas of Lenin); the social revolution was seen as the product of the popular will. The degeneration of the Russian Revolution into Stalinism and the lack of global revolution to give Russia needed support ultimately led to its failure.¹⁴

V.I. Lenin, among other key leaders of the Russian Revolution, added his own interpretation to Marxist theory. He accounted for the differences between Marxist theory and Russia's situation regarding *who* should take part in revolution and *at what stage* of development this should occur. It was Lenin who essentially "opened the way for the implementation of Marx's ideas in the Third World."¹⁵

Lenin contended that the majority of the peasants, with the leadership and vision of the working class, could become genuine supporters of the revolution. Although Marx saw the peasant as a possible revolutionary participant, he felt

that the peasantry would never be able to appreciate the scope of revolution and would participate only because of short-term material benefits to themselves. Lenin, though agreeing with Marx in the backwardness of the peasantry, saw significant potential in the peasantry of less advanced capitalist nations. Lenin's concept of a worker-peasant alliance as necessary to achieving victory would become central to the Latin American experience. Adding the fact that the rural peasants would benefit from the revolution's proposed land reforms, one can understand Lenin's position that an extremely frustrated peasantry would collaborate with the proletariat in revolution.

In contrast to Marx, Lenin viewed the historic stage of economic development as secondary to the nature of the political organization in determining revolutionary potential. Because the Russian bourgeoisie were not willing to lead even the initial bourgeois-democratic revolution, Lenin thought that the proletariat could be the class to lead this stage of revolution, in addition to leading the second stage of socialist revolution. By allowing the proletariat to direct the first phase of revolution, Marxist theory became more accessible to Latin America where a distinct bourgeois-democratic revolution seemed unlikely. In addition, Lenin predicted that a military, once instilled with revolutionary fervor, could become the political arm

and bearer of revolution (as later became the case in Cuba).¹⁶

Also crucial to revolution in Latin America is Lenin's understanding of imperialism, which contradicted Marx's prediction that the industrialized capitalist societies would be the first to experience a transformation to socialism. Russia's rather underdeveloped capitalism in the early twentieth century fell far short of the conditions envisioned by Marx. Lenin claimed that an imperialist power, using access to immense areas of land and labor power in the underdeveloped country to accumulate wealth, would use some of the profits to benefit the conditions of its own working class. For example, with the generous capital return from abroad, private investors could meet more of the wage and working condition demands of their national employees. The overall wealth of the nation would increase, allowing for additional public spending and a higher living standard. Lenin thus concluded that revolution would first occur in less-developed societies under foreign domination and would be supported by both the very small working class and the peasantry.

While the Bolsheviks recognized the difficulties of industrializing after achieving socialism instead of previous to revolution, they counted on support from the industrialized nations who would shortly experience the international spread of revolution. The predicted

international revolution in developed nations did not follow, leading to debate over the necessity of international versus national revolution and even of revolution itself.

Marxism, before Lenin, had a fundamentally international character. Marx viewed the class structure as powerful enough to unite people beyond geographic boundaries and suggested that economic interdependence lessened national differences:

The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they haven't got. . . . In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.¹⁷

Lenin, by recognizing the divisions between nations created by imperialism, and from his experience in the multinational Russian Empire, was forced to consider nationalism as a factor in revolution. As stated by Mark Hagopian, "Lenin gave nationalism a sort of revolutionary respectability it had previously lacked."¹⁸ Nationalism as a factor in revolution would become important in the Chinese and Cuban Revolutions and later for revolutionary organizations around the world.

Another leader of the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky, made significant contributions to revolutionary theory. Trotsky reformulated Marx's idea of Permanent Revolution, describing it as "a revolution whose every successive stage

is rooted in the preceding one and which can end only in complete liquidation of class society."¹⁹ This meant that the two stages of revolution, bourgeois-democratic and socialist, could be accomplished in a short period of time; they did not have to be two separate processes.

By the first Russian Revolution of 1905-6, Trotsky was unique in suggesting that Russia could undergo socialist (as opposed to bourgeois) revolution. Lenin and his followers, in light of the bourgeoisie's unwillingness to lead the revolutionary movement, had reasoned that the working class with the support of a rebellious peasantry would have to direct the revolutionary efforts. Yet the question remained as to how a revolution led against bourgeois opposition could result in a capitalist system, necessary for developing the capital to establish an adequate socialist society.

Trotsky answered this question by contending that an underdeveloped Russia could initiate socialist revolution, but that global revolution would need to follow. He cites three concepts that unite to form the theory of Permanent Revolution. First, the periods of democracy and socialism are interrelated and need not be separated by long periods of time; rather, "there arises between the democratic revolution and the socialist transformation of society a permanency of revolutionary development."²⁰ This idea reflects the historic origins of Permanent Revolution.

Second, Trotsky noted that all social relations are continually changing, maintaining a constant revolutionary development. He illustrates, "Revolutions in economy, technique, science, and the family, morals, and [everyday life] develop in complicated reciprocal action and do not allow society to achieve equilibrium."²¹ This feature of social transformation would be critical in the Latin American experience.

And third, he viewed the international spread of revolution as essential to the survival of socialist revolution in non-industrialized societies. Trotsky cites the interdependence of the global economy and the social structure of humanity as requiring international revolution. He notes:

Internationalism is no abstract principle but a theoretical and political reflection of the character of world economy, of the world development of productive forces, and of the world scale of the class struggle. The socialist revolution begins on national grounds--but cannot be completed on these grounds [alone].²²

Although classical Marxism had given attention to the international division of labor and to the need for global revolution, Trotsky revived the idea and gave it emphasis.²³

In addition, Trotsky stressed the need for controlling bureaucracy which tended to take power away from the masses. In the early 1920's, he was highly critical of the bureaucratic nature that the Communist Party had acquired in Russia. He warned that by their attempt to increase the

ideological level of the party, in actuality they had promoted factions and unrest. Trotsky contends that "Bureaucratism of the apparatus is precisely one of the principal sources of factionalism."²⁴ Through democratic participation the old and new generations of communists could criticize (and thus improve) themselves effectively.

The Chinese Revolution of 1949 led by Mao Zedong further challenged Marxist revolutionary theory. His appeal to humanism shifted the focus from the intellectuals to the populace when deciding about revolution. Mao adapted Marx to a non-industrial society, supporting Lenin's belief that Marxism can be molded to historical conditions, and further, that it should adopt an individual national form before the theory can become practice.²⁵ In China, this meant thinking differently about the role of the peasantry and the countryside.

In Mao's analysis of class relations and revolutionary potential, he claimed (following Lenin) that only an alliance between the peasantry and the proletariat could lead to victory. He differentiated between the rich, middle, and poor peasants, noting that only the middle and poor peasants are usually revolutionary. Despite the elevated role of the peasantry in the Chinese revolution, Mao cites the proletariat as necessary for providing leadership to the peasants. In Mao's words, "Only under the leadership of the proletariat can the poor and middle

peasants achieve their liberation, and only by forming a firm alliance with the poor and middle peasants can the proletariat lead the revolution to victory. Otherwise neither is possible."²⁶ He noted that in addition to being the most revolutionary class (subject to imperialist, bourgeois, and feudal oppression) and having a high level of political consciousness, the proletariat had natural ties to the Chinese peasantry "because the Chinese proletariat by origin [was] largely made of up [sic] bankrupted peasants" ²⁷

China, a country even less developed than Russia, was similarly populated with a peasant majority. Because the cities were strongholds for anti-communist support and the rebels had physically been forced into the countryside, Mao reasoned that revolution should be transported from the countryside to the cities rather than the other way around as Lenin had theorized. Mao explains why revolution should be fought in the countryside while recognizing the challenges to this approach:

. . . victory in the Chinese revolution can be won first in the rural areas, and this is possible because China's economic development is uneven (her economy not being a unified capitalist economy), because her territory is extensive (which gives the revolutionary forces room to manoeuvre), because the counter-revolutionary camp is disunited and full of contradictions, and because the struggle of the peasants who are the main force in the revolution is led by the Communist Party, the party of the proletariat; but on the other hand, these very circumstances make the revolution uneven and render the task of winning complete victory protracted and arduous.²⁸

Contrary to the ignorance which Marx had attributed to the peasantry, Mao's theory of revolution depended on the peasants' ability to integrate revolutionary ideology with their traditional forms of revolt. Mao also thought that the revolution's leadership, if dedicated enough, could create the necessary conditions for revolution. He states, "We . . . declare openly that we are striving hard to create the very conditions which will bring about [the extinction of classes, state power and parties]." ²⁹ Compare this statement to Marx's original assumption that revolution was only possible given certain historical conditions. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given, and transmitted from the past." ³⁰ Mao made a significant leap in assessing when revolution could occur.

The Chinese Revolution was characterized by nationalism as a unifying and motivating factor in the revolution, in addition to classism as proposed by Marx. Mao saw no significant contradiction between the question of nationalism and internationalism. He viewed that normally hostile classes in dependent societies would be united by their common desire to end foreign exploitation. Although nationalism itself cannot be considered an ideology, by definition focusing on a sense of self-identity, it plays an important role when infused within revolutionary ideologies.

Not only was the Chinese revolution caused by the desire to end the misery of capitalism, but it was founded on the base of regaining national destiny and pride.

Since the Opium Wars of the 1830's, China had been dominated by Western imperialism and suffered through a "Century of Humiliation." Foreign investors capitalized on China's feudal system with the cooperation of the landowners and economic elite, thus creating two foes to be battled in revolution: the foreign imperialists and the national bourgeoisie. The bourgeois revolution was to be against an external force, with an internal socialist revolution to follow. Whereas later Latin American Marxists (such as Regis DeBray) would see socialist revolution as of primary importance, Mao attributed more value in ridding his nation first of imperialism and then of capitalism.

Unquestionably, the main tasks [of the Chinese Revolution] are to strike at these two enemies, to carry out a national revolution to overthrow foreign imperialist oppression and a democratic revolution to overthrow the feudal landlord oppression, the primary and foremost task being the national revolution to overthrow imperialism.²¹

He viewed ending imperialist rule and overthrowing the feudal landlord class as interrelated. Ridding China of its feudal class could not be done without terminating imperialism which was its chief support. At the same time, imperialism would continue unless the peasants were aided in their struggle against the landlord class. In Mao's

opinion, the national revolution and the democratic revolution were "at once distinct and united."³²

Each of these theorists, V.I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Mao Zedong, molded their understanding of Marx to their particular revolutionary experience. Not only did they make theoretical revisions that would later apply to Latin America, but they used theory as a tool or guide, fundamentally making decisions based on their particular situation. This practice would become of utmost importance when Latin American thinkers faced the task of applying European theories about revolution to their unique blend of histories and cultures.

III. The Appeal of Marxism in Latin America

"No school of thought. . . has been more pervasive among intellectuals in Latin America than Marxism."³³ Latin America, colonized in the late fifteenth century by Spaniards and Portuguese seeking to increase the wealth of their mother countries, is characterized by conditions well-suited to Marxist analysis. Capitalism has relieved none of the region's social, political, and economic problems, and neither have attempts at reform. The appeal of Marxism has developed as an alternative to the capitalism which continues to exploit the natural and human resources of Latin America. Its utopia offers hope to those with little faith in the present system. To understand this appeal, an introductory look at Latin America's economic development is essential.

Since the "conquista" of the Americas, Latin America has suffered a development very different from that of its European colonizers. The Spanish and Portuguese settlers exported huge amounts of raw materials to satisfy Europe's growing demands, especially in mining and agriculture. Primary-product export economies developed, extremely vulnerable to market fluctuation and demand. As noted by Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "The economic cycles of colonial Latin America were determined, in large part, by the economic cycles of the Western world."³⁴ The profits from these

enterprises, made possible by exploiting native and African labor, was not reinvested in the region, except as to facilitate easier production of exports (e.g. railroads to transport raw materials).

The independence movements in the nineteenth century were motivated by local elites who desired the profits available to the Europeans. Official independence from the mother countries did not lead to economic independence; in fact, in the first half-century of independence, Latin America fell behind the economic position it held at independence.³⁵ Lenin referred to the countries in Latin America as "dependent countries . . . which, officially are politically independent, but which are in fact enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence."³⁶

In the past few decades, dependency theorists (e.g. Andre Gunder Frank) have argued that world capitalism needed the economic dependency of Latin America in order to develop. The term "underdeveloped" is misleading because it implies that parts of the world like Latin America have yet to develop (as compared to more industrialized nations). Latin America *developed* as completely as the United States, and improving her economic situation cannot be simplified to catching up to the "developed" nations. Rather, the region's "growth" was thwarted by colonial and neocolonial relationships, the development of some nations at the

expense of the "underdevelopment" of others. Peter and Susan Calvert summarize this notion of development:

It was increasingly argued that . . . the very fact of development of Europe and North America had so affected the Latin American economies that they had been distorted into a condition of dependency and their potential for autonomous growth had been stunted. Dependency meant that these countries were not in the economic sense free to choose their own way; they were in effect forced by the terms of the world market to product low-value primary products for export, while at the same time their economies were invaded by large multinational corporations (MNCs) which prevented capital formation by remitting their profits abroad.³⁷

In the twentieth century, an unofficial neocolonialism developed when the United States came to occupy the position that Europe left behind. The influence of the United States was not only seen economically, but politically and militarily, beginning in 1823 with the Monroe Doctrine, essentially warning the rest of the world to keep their hands off of Latin America. A period known as the filibuster era followed the Monroe Doctrine, in which American privateers conquered land for private companies. From the mid-1800's through 1933, the United States participated in direct military intervention throughout Latin America.

Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 opted for a "good neighbor policy", focusing on heavy economic investment instead of military intervention. Yet this policy and those to follow did not have Latin American interests at heart. By 1950 the United States controlled 70% of Latin American raw materials and 50% of its gross national product. This

trend continued, so that by the year 1969, the U.S. managed 85% of the continent's raw materials. As an example, the United Fruit Company at this time profited from over 50% of the foreign earnings of 6 countries. And in the first six years of the Alliance for Progress initiated by John F. Kennedy, U.S. investors brought home \$5 billion in profits while investing less than \$2 billion.³⁸ John Gerassi accurately describes U.S. hegemony and its ensuing effects:

Not only does the U.S. control Latin America's sources of raw material, not only does it control its markets for American manufactured goods, but it also controls the internal money economy altogether. Karl Marx once warned that the first revolutionary wave in an imperialized country will come about as the result of frustration on the part of the national bourgeois, which will have reached a development stage where it will have accumulated enough capital to want to become competitive with the imperializing corporations. This was not allowed to happen in Latin America.³⁹

The world depression of 1929 shattered any illusion that relying upon primary-product exports would lead to economic development. After 1930, some nations attempted industrialization as a method of reducing their vulnerability. Despite their impressive achievements in the next 40 years, a new sort of dependence came with the industrialization. Latin America was forced to import capital, technology, and raw materials from abroad to finance their industries. According to Gary Wynia, "In a curious way, industrialization made [Latin American countries] even more dependent since it required both the import of capital and technology and the continued sale of

primary products to earn the foreign exchange that was required to make such purchases."⁴⁰

During the 1970's the region as a whole began a dramatic trend of urbanization, and the cities were not at all prepared to absorb the influx of workers (Seventy percent of Latin Americans now live in cities).⁴¹ The effects of Latin America's development came to a peak in the 1980's, known as "*la década perdida*" (the lost decade). The statistics of this period reflect both historical and present challenges in the economic development of Latin America.

- In 1990, the average income per person was 10% less than that of 1980.

- From 1980-85, the number of Latin Americans below the poverty line increased by 50 million.

- In 1950, Latin America accounted for 12.4% of total world exports and 10.1 of imports. By 1990, it made up only 3.9% of exports and 3.2% of imports.

- Foreign investment is concentrated in few countries, Mexico and Brazil receiving 70% in 1991.

- Latin America's foreign debt reached \$400 billion in 1986; about a third of export income is used to pay the interest.

- In the 1980's, the number of televisions per person increased by 40% while the average salary decreased by 40%.⁴²

Evidence abounds to support the serious character of Latin America's economic situation. The economic appeal of Marxist style socialism is not difficult to understand in a region which has one of the most dramatic inequalities of wealth on the planet.

Although Marx was never overly concerned with Latin America, he viewed the conquest as part of the process of

capital accumulation. Marx thought colonialism fundamental in the transition from feudal to capitalist mode of production as it affected Europe (rather than its Latin American consequences). At the time of Marx's death in 1883, Marxist thought was not yet popular in Latin America. Thinkers of the nineteenth century still had faith in progressive, evolutionary reform.

European immigrants in the early twentieth century brought with them new ideas, including Marxism. The failure to solve the area's problems caused an increasing interest in radical reform and organized socialist revolution. The influence of the Russian Revolution and its leaders further heightened the interest in Marxist thought.

Moscow in 1919 took an active role in world revolution with the formation of the Third or Communist International (Comintern). In the following decades, this event would lead to an important split among Latin American Marxists: those who followed Russian orthodoxy, and those who adhered to a national type of socialism aiming for a utopia distinct from the Stalinism that developed in Russia. The pre-Comintern Marxists of Latin America tended to be more reform oriented than revolutionary. They justified this approach by citing the need to develop the bourgeois-democratic revolution before the socialist one. The Communist Parties in Latin America generally had poor ties with the peasantry

and the working class, allying themselves with the bourgeois "social democrats."

As communist parties around the globe began breaking from the rigid orthodoxy of Moscow (especially the Sino-Soviet split), Marxists began exploring socialism in a way that was more adaptable to the reality of their countries. Some Latin American Marxists had already started to apply Marxist analysis to their historic conditions. For example, thinkers such as J.C. Mariategui (1895-1930) of Peru began writing and organizing workers from a concrete understanding of Peruvian reality, placing less importance on the Russian version of socialism. A member of Chile's Communist Party states "that in the brilliance of the October Revolution [Mariategui] was the first to attempt a serious analysis of the situation in his own country and in Latin America. That was a feat of creativity."⁴³

Most Marxists agree that the Mexican Revolution of 1910, although achieving radical land reform and a certain degree of social change, was not Marxist in content. Neither of its key leaders followed Marxist principles. Lázaro Cárdenas advanced Mexico's national independence (e.g. nationalization of oil) and the position of the bourgeoisie but did not move the nation close to socialism. Emiliano Zapata led a peasant revolt, demanding agrarian reform but lacking a socialist vision of transforming society. Despite the inherent capitalism of the document,

Mexico's constitution of 1917 set an example of a formal government embodying political democracy, social justice, and economic independence.⁴⁴

Since the Mexican Revolution, movements in Latin America emerged which were committed to bettering the condition of those marginalized from society. In general the continent moved very slowly towards the goals suggested by Mexico's constitution and sometimes moved not at all. As cited by Thomas Wright, "the power and resilience of Latin America's elite, U.S. opposition to change, and ingrained attitudes of obedience and resignation among the masses combined repeatedly to thwart the forces of progress."⁴⁵

Incorporating Marxism into Latin American thought faced certain cultural obstacles. For the impoverished masses and their leaders (the probable actors in a revolutionary effort), satisfying immediate material needs usually took priority when it came to making social change. Pursuing abstract thought was a luxury few could afford. The population most receptive to Marxism has not been the proletariat; rather, students, professors, journalists, professionals, and artists have received Marxism most openly. Literary figures of the twentieth century such as Jorge Amado, Julio Cortazar, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Pablo Neruda have given Marxism additional respectability in Latin American cultures.

In addition, the Catholic religion played a significant role in forming the population's attitudes on the nature of their condition (as Liberation Theology would later influence their empowerment to make change). Roman Catholic Orthodoxy in Latin America (sometimes in collaboration with the wealthy oligarchies) emphasized to the working masses the rewards they would receive in heaven for their toils. They were taught to accept their role in society and forgive those who wronged them.

These cultural considerations are critical when evaluating the motivations to participate in revolution. Despite the seemingly ripe setting for revolution in many areas of the third world, wide-spread armed struggle has taken place in relatively few countries. Peter Worsley offers one explanation:

The way people think is equally a condition of action, and the physical facts are always subjectively interpreted, according to the mental set, cultural assumptions, predispositions, degree of politicization, social experience, and ideological exposure of the actors.⁴⁶

Latin American Marxists, although rooted in a Marxist perspective, do not necessarily reflect Marx's original intentions. Only through varied interpretations by both Latin American and European thinkers did Marxism gain respect in Latin America. As noted by Sheldon Liss, "Marxism came to Latin America not as a mature and practical native doctrine but in a piecemeal fashion as an ideology absorbed slowly by young workers and intellectuals."⁴⁷

Marxism was not directed towards regions like Latin America, whose economic development fundamentally differed from that of Europe, thus skewing the applicability of Marxism when considering who are the revolutionary participants and at what economic stage of development they would make revolution.

When social scientists discuss the participants in a Marxist-based revolution, the population is defined by its relation to the modes of production, by economic class. The terms peasantry, proletariat, and bourgeois have connotations stemming from Marx's experience in Germany. These social relations in Latin America (as in many developing nations), however, are far more complex and require careful analysis when judging who constitutes the important revolutionary participants.

The nature of economic classes in Latin America differs from that in Europe because the various stages of capitalism (as noted earlier) have not been equal. Carlos M. Vilas argues that problems created by monopoly capitalism and the transnationalization of capital had not been experienced in Marx's era. He explains that these contemporary economic relations generate a more complex class profile. The classic Marxist analysis had maintained that the proletariat be the revolutionary vanguard in developed capitalist formations, and Lenin had articulated that a worker-peasant alliance was necessary in a backward capitalist country such

as Russia. In comparison to these theories, new considerations develop in dependent colonial and neocolonial societies that have yet to be weighed. Vilas notes, ". . . the question arises of the 'intermediate factions': the nonsalaried workers, small merchants, and professional, technical, and intellectual petty bourgeois, and their incorporation into the struggle for national liberation and social transformation."⁴⁸

Vilas calls attention to the narrow manner in which proletariat is usually defined, and he suggests that the proletariat in Latin America can include more than industrialized urban workers. For example, the seasonal workers in agricultural export, by their salaries, are proletarian in their relation to capital. The seasonality of this type of work doesn't change the proletarian relationship.

Furthermore, one cannot simply reduce the populace or masses of Latin America to their class base (or their relation to capital). Even in Germany and the rest of Europe in the nineteenth century, the term proletariat included artisans and tradespeople, and did not refer to factory workers or even wage earners in a strict sense.⁴⁹ Vilas asserts that we must reject the tendency to define the proletariat of much of Latin America with the same attributes as those of Europe and the more industrialized nations:

The small size of the working class and its marginal differentiation from the artisans and peasantry helps to explain how what is frequently called the proletariat in these first stages of capitalist development in many cases has more points of contact with the urban and rural poor than with the industrial or even agricultural workers--what have been called in previous epochs the lower classes. In these formations the characterization of the proletariat usually rests on features that are not properly proletarian from the perspective of the sphere of production, although they are from the general context of their condition as classes oppressed and exploited by the dominant classes--in the traditional and permanent sense of dispossessed classes.⁵⁰

Because of the nature of imperialism, even the not fully proletarianized working masses become subjected to the dominant classes. Therefore, the notion of *pueblo* can include all those who long for a more just country and better living conditions. This blurred picture of class relations has both mandated and facilitated building national alliances in revolutionary movements such as the FMLN and the FSLN. Yet it is this very alliance in the leadership of revolution which can lead to contradicting political goals and factionalism within the organizations. A coalition of Marxist revolutionaries and non-revolutionary supporters of the opposition movement will rarely agree on economic policy, for example, once the old regime has been replaced. The debate over plurality and democracy within revolutionary movements will be exemplified in the case studies to follow.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 can be seen as the catalyst to revolutionary activity in Latin America,

unleashing a buildup of political and social tensions. Its ramifications for Latin America were far greater than those of any past movements. Cuba became the most successful country of the continent in breaking from U.S. domination, in addition to undergoing the most thorough social transformation in Latin America. Its dynamic and charismatic leader, Fidel Castro, became a revolutionary symbol throughout the hemisphere; because of modern communication and effective publicity, even the most marginalized masses heard about Cuba's revolution and its leaders. "The Cuban Revolution owes its vast influence in Latin America to the fact that--most evidently in its early years--it embodied the aspirations and captured the imaginations of Latin America's masses as no other political movement had ever done."⁵¹

Cuba was the first country to successfully challenge what had been previously understood as revolutionary legitimacy, achieving a genuine socialist revolution made by non-communists (not affiliated with the official Communist Party). Although the revolution later included the Moscow backed Popular Socialist Party, the July 26th Movement (the vanguard party of the revolution) had no ties to Moscow and adapted their strategy to native circumstances. The Cuban Revolution underlined the theoretical differences among the Latin American left about how and when revolution should be achieved. Steven Palmer perceptively states that

". . . Castro's route to power and his implementation of direct social reform exposed the sterility of traditional Marxist parties and proffered new hope to alternatives for autonomous national rebellion."⁵²

Although initially the Cuban revolution promoted relatively little ideology and found its strength in nationalism, it shortly claimed to be a sort of model for other countries as its ideology became more coherent. As Cuba's revolution evolved through the past thirty-five years, her leadership and experience has influenced other nations in their revolutionary struggles. Sheldon Liss describes the importance of the Cuban Revolution for other Marxists:

How Cuba's revolution defeated a government supported by the United States and established a socialist state so close to the world's most powerful capitalist nation is extremely important to Marxist thinkers throughout the world who view Cuba as a model for other underdeveloped nations and admit that Cuban socialism, although different from that envisioned by Marx, perhaps has greater applicability today than the ideas of the German scholar.⁵³

The Cuban Revolution's effects on revolutionary theory in Latin America and the new debates which it created can be traced largely to the contributions of two men: Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

As the foremost leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro built a revolutionary movement without defining himself as a socialist, and much debate has centered around when he decided socialism should be implemented. The

contention that Castro has always been a socialist has never been substantiated.⁵⁴ Until Castro gained control of Cuba in 1959, he had not publicly proclaimed to be a socialist. While the official Communist Parties in Latin America continued to advocate reform, the goals of nationalists like Castro were more radical in scope than those who proclaimed themselves socialist in this era.

Although leading the July 26th Movement without proclaiming Marxism or any defined ideology, Castro is nevertheless viewed by Latin Americans as a kind of pragmatic philosopher. The ideology of Castroism or *Fidelismo* is a mixture of Marxist-Leninist themes and Castro's personalized interpretation of the meaning of Cuba's revolution. *Fidelismo* was formed from Castro's desire for radical social and economic change as well as from his desire that Cubans control their national destiny. José Martí, the Cuban national hero of its independence wars, greatly influenced Castro in his thoughts about antiimperialism and the national elements at work in revolution. "[Castro] saw no contradictions between Martí's dream of a just society free of foreign domination, racism, and the power of the propertied interests and the socioeconomic teachings of Marx."⁵⁵

Like other twentieth century revolutionaries, Fidel's interpretation of Marxism comes from his own experience. He regards the peasantry as a revolutionary class who, because

of its geographic isolation and lack of education, needs the direction and leadership of the urban workers and the intellectuals. At the same time, Castro recognizes that Marx never anticipated full social transformation in an underdeveloped nation like Cuba. Because of the strong emphasis on revolutionary practice and the lack of intellectuals in the revolution, critics of the Cuban Revolution have said that the Cubans have used action as a way of building theory instead of the other way around. Yet Castro contends, "Whoever stops to wait for ideas to triumph among the majority of the masses before initiating revolutionary action will never be a revolutionary."⁵⁶

Castro counts among the Cuban revolutionaries the unemployed, the seasonal farm laborers, industrial workers (the traditionally defined proletariat), landless peasants, and also the bourgeois teachers, businesspeople, and professionals. The Cuban revolution triumphed because of an alliance of all of these groups in their efforts to overthrow Batista. Yet Castro clearly feels that the support of the peasantry was the crucial factor in attaining victory. He goes so far to say that, "The rural people won the Independence [the 1959 revolution]."⁵⁷

Fidel's leadership and his political decisions since revolutionary victory have greatly influenced the revolutionary debate in Latin America. The choices made in Cuba, including the achievements and the failures, have

determined the way other revolutionaries evaluate their chances at success. A knowledge of the key turning points in Cuba's revolutionary development is helpful to understand the current questions surrounding Latin American revolution.

Following the 1959 victory, Cuba aimed at liberating herself from economic dependence. The economy which had developed in Cuba was based primarily on one product--sugar. Because of the scarce resources available and the United States' embargo, dependence on world market continued as Cuba searched for other solutions to her economic woes. Castro in 1970 launched a massive sugar campaign, hoping to create enough capital to fund alternative agriculture and industry. When Cuba fell short of the projected goal of 10 million tons of sugar, many Cubans (including Castro) began reevaluating the revolution. In order to survive economically, Cuba looked to the markets of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The realization that Cuba would continue its economic dependence for years to come affected the way in which they thought about continent-wide revolution. By the early 1970's, the Cubans were instead discussing normalization of relationships with Latin American countries.

Cuba suffered a series of setbacks in the 1980's which contributed to the changes in her revolutionary outlook. In the Caribbean and in Central America, defeats (electoral or armed) in Jamaica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Grenada

tempered Cuba's hopes that a successful revolutionary trend was growing regionally. In contrast to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union's growing experimentation with market economies, Cuba from 1987 to 1990 embarked on a "rectification" plan, which reemphasized a commitment to socialist principles. A policy of moral incentives was reintroduced as part of this reform program.⁵⁸

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War have profound consequences for Cuba, especially in the economic arena. Trade agreements that Cuba had become dependent upon (e.g. Cuban sugar for Soviet fuel) are now invalid, and although Cuba will seek diversified trade agreements, the switch to hard currency exchange provides less stability for Cuba's troubled economy. Not only did Cuba lose her primary trading partner, but Cuba lost an anti-capitalist ally. Internationally, the legitimacy of socialism is being challenged, and Cuba's economic hardships only seem to underscore the difficulties of attempting socialism in a global economy of capitalism. These world events significantly hinder Cuba's ability to aid other potential revolutionaries, economically because of her own domestic woes, and politically because Cuba (in her need to diversify trade) cannot afford to isolate herself further by "exporting" revolution.

Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the second major theoretical contributor to the Cuban Revolution, has today become a

legendary martyr of revolution in Latin America. He first joined forces with Fidel and his brother Raul in Mexico and sailed with them in the now famous Granma to participate in the initial encounter with Batista's army. After the July 26th Movement gained power in Cuba, Che was actively involved in supporting revolutionary activity throughout the hemisphere. He published *Guerrilla Warfare* in 1960, in which he announced to the regimes of Latin America that they would soon be defeated. Che proposed that this could be accomplished through guerrilla tactics (principally influenced by Mao Zedong) and by using Cuba as a vanguard force to lead the movement.

Guevara's bold assertion that he intended to export Cuba's revolution, while inspiring much of the revolutionary movements of the 1960's and 1970's, would also lead to his 1967 death in Bolivia at the hands of U.S.-trained Bolivian soldiers. The mystification of his life and death have produced a sort of mythology surrounding Guevara; his fame throughout Latin America has been more a consequence of his inspiration and example than the literary and theoretical contributions he gave to revolution.

Guerrilla Warfare by Che Guevara may at first appear to be merely a handbook on how to proceed in guerrilla warfare tactics. It includes practical directions about how to organize, equip, train, and lead guerrilla operations. Yet this publication is far more significant than a guidebook on

warfare: it calls on revolutionaries to intensify and create the revolutionary opportunity. The conditions which needed to be developed by the revolutionaries were a consciousness among the masses and the confidence that victory could be achieved. The objective features for revolution were already in place, including an accumulation of capital in the hands of the few; the pressure on the land; the growth of population; urban explosion; massive unemployment; politico-military repression; degenerating terms of trade; and foreign (United States) economic and political intervention, whether direct or in a more subtle form.⁵⁹

Although Che originally intended the tactic of guerrilla warfare for use against authoritarian regimes which lacked any sense of legitimacy, he eventually proposed that guerrilla tactics be used everywhere in Latin America, even in those places where a formal democracy existed. "Democracy" in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century did not constitute the kind of democracy we envision in the United States. Elections were usually fraudulent and political expression severely limited by fear of the governments' repressive armed forces.

By 1961 Che contended that all of Latin America had the objective conditions for revolution, only that the majority needed to achieve the subjective condition of realization that victory over imperialism was indeed possible. The *foco*--the small band of guerrilleros fighting in the

countryside--would create this condition and be the catalyst to set off rural-based revolution. Che's notion of the *foco* echoed the Chinese and Vietnamese commitment to a prolonged people's war. The revolutionary struggle would be a lengthy war fought in the rural areas, with the small group of guerrillas working to stimulate the revolutionary opportunity.

Guevara stimulated several theoretical issues for Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries in Latin America: 1)the role of the vanguard party, if any, and its relationship to the guerrilla *foco*; 2)relative emphasis on the various forms of class struggle (mass organizations, labor conflict, general strikes, armed struggle, etc.); 3)comparative importance of rural and urban political and armed struggle, that is, the best "strategic terrain"; 4)relationships between revolutionary forces, bourgeois political parties, and the traditional Communist parties in Latin America; and 5)alternative conceptions of the "continental war of liberation."⁶⁰

Guevara's works, as well as his personal involvement in Latin American and African liberation movements, precipitated sharp debates among the Latin American left. Although Che's intent was one of providing direction on how to defeat imperialism and of pushing revolutionaries to "make the revolution", the left disagreed on correct tactics to be used in particular nations. Not

only did these theoretical arguments fragment movements within individual nations, but they also splintered the continental revolutionary forces.

Critics of Guevara are varied and from diverse political/theoretical lines. Some groups cited his lack of a central role for both a vanguard party and any political organizing. Others such as the old-line Communists pointed to the possibilities of losing control of the *foco* and the danger of repressive reactions from the existing regimes. The ideological and tactical divisions within revolutionary parties led to significant party splits in several countries (e.g. the Venezuelan Communist Party, the Guatemalan Communist Party).⁶¹ Despite Guevara's own insistence that his work was not meant as a bible,⁶² and that the point was to make the revolution, the revolutionaries of Latin America continued to divide over tactical differences. And with even greater consequences, revolutionaries of the 1960's and 1970's became less tolerant of anything but commitment to the armed struggle.

Because Che believed that socialism could be realized only with the destruction of the existing oppressing regimes, the question for him was one of means rather than ends. The lack of political vision in Che's theory was a primary weakness. The considerations facing the July 26th Movement in 1959 were not the same as those facing other revolutionary movements following the Cuban Revolution. For

example, the Cuban Revolution was aided by an element of surprise and Batista's role as a common enemy, not to mention that Cubans were unaware of the type of government Castro would implement. The region also became increasingly important to the United States in the Cold War, altering the perceived chances of success by potential revolutionary participants.

The *foco* organizations following Che's theory never resurfaced after the period of his death. Castro's victory in less than three years of armed struggle led to an overestimation of the continent's readiness for revolution and an underestimation of the individuality of Cuba's experience. Hopes ran high among the Latin American revolutionaries that victory could be attained, yet they proved to be false. The ineffectiveness of the *foco* theory was demonstrated by experiences in Nicaragua (the FSLN in 1963 and 1967), Paraguay (Movement of "14 May 1959"), Columbia (Workers-Students-Peasants Movement, MOEC in 1961), Ecuador (Revolutionary Union of Ecuadorian Youth in 1962), and several other countries in the 1960's.⁶³ Recently trained in counterinsurgency techniques by the United States military, Latin American armed forces of this era successfully contained the guerrilla movements.

Despite the failure of the *foco* theory, the legend of "Che" and his belief in ultimate triumph by the revolutionaries continues to encourage Latin Americans even

today. In recent years, Che's writings are being reevaluated as groups like Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru tread the path of militant revolutionaries. As noted by Loveman and Davies, "in a very real sense Che vive--Che lives--wherever guerrilla movements oppose the incumbent regimes in Latin America."⁶⁴

Case Studies: Nicaragua and El Salvador

The following section of this essay will examine the ways in which two revolutionary groups in Latin America have used theory in their attempts at revolution. The organizations included in this analysis are Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN, Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) and El Salvador's Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN, Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional).

These particular groups were chosen because they demonstrate the danger in making generalizations about revolution, within the region of Central America and in Latin America as a whole, and they illustrate the complexity of revolutionary theory at work. Using different ideological interpretations in their efforts, each of these groups has participated in a distinctive national attempt at revolution. This section will be comprised of: a description of each revolutionary organization and their endeavor; followed by an examination of the major theoretical roots and debates within the organization; and finally, an analysis of how the theoretical foundations of the organizations have affected their individual successes/failures.

IV. The FSLN: A New Approach to Socialism

Since the Cuban Revolution of 1959, no other historical event in Latin America has affected the revolution debate like the victory of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and the eleven years they held power. The Somoza family dynasty, put into power by the United States when the Marines pulled out in 1933, had ruled Nicaragua for three generations marked by extreme corruption and ruthlessness. With the support of the United States and the National Guard (the Nicaraguan armed forces), the Somoza dictatorship amassed a personal fortune estimated at \$400-\$500 million in 1979⁶⁵, built by controlling elements of the economy and by restricting social spending for the Nicaraguan people.

The price paid by the Nicaraguan masses during this period was great, as exemplified by the following data. Under Somoza rule, for example, one-third of children in poor neighborhoods died before age one. Life expectancy was 50 years, and half the population could not read or write. In the capital city of Managua, only 20 percent of homes counted running water. The situation in rural areas fared no better. The poorest 50 percent of farmers controlled less than 4 percent of the land while half of all arable land was owned by a scant 2 percent of the population.⁶⁶ From these conditions grew what would become an alliance of opposition led by the FSLN to overthrow the Somoza regime.

The roots of the Nicaraguan resistance, however, date to before the Somoza dictatorship. The legacy of Augusto César Sandino, who from 1927-1933 headed a rebel army against the U.S. Marines occupying Nicaragua, remains prominent today in Sandinista propaganda. Sandino, for whom the organization was named, serves as the Nicaraguan national hero whose opposition to imperialism and neocolonialism continues to inspire Nicaraguan revolutionaries.

Sandino's thoughts and social perspective were not revolutionary in the sense of orthodox Marxism during this period. Yet this is not to say Sandino did not hold revolutionary ideals: he demanded domestic social transformation and an end to foreign domination. While some scholars like John Booth contend that Sandino "never manifested a doctrinaire ideological strain of any sort,"⁶⁷ an extensive study by Donald Hodges suggests that Sandino blended anarchist and communist ideas with his experiences from Mexican Freemasonry and Spiritualism.⁶⁸

In relationship to the FSLN, Sandino is a symbol of past revolutionary efforts in Nicaragua. The symbolism provided by Sandino has been adopted by the FSLN to encourage national support for their program. In addition to functioning as a sort of revolutionary idol, Sandino's commitment to popular participation is reflected in FSLN beliefs. Sandino contended that only a people's government

could strengthen national sovereignty and improve the lives of workers and peasants, which would later be reflected in the FSLN's attitudes towards democratic representation. As Hodges notes:

Sandino's ideology was fundamentally eclectic. It combined diverse political currents to suit different purposes and also added to his anarchism a theosophical dimension. In this capacity it became not only a forerunner, but also a model for the ideological pluralism of later Sandinistas.⁶⁹

The FSLN first originated in the anti-Somoza student movements of 1944-48 and 1959-61, which produced the activists who would later found the FSLN. A student member in the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), Carlos Fonseca Amador would become the intellectual thrust behind the FSLN's early years. Fonseca, impressed with Cuba's revolution, believed that the Cuban experience offered prospects for Nicaragua as well. Fonseca left the PSN when its leadership (following the conservative Moscow line) rejected this possibility.

In 1961, Fonseca, along with his fellow student activist Tomás Borge and Silvio Mayorga, founded the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front). They considered themselves a revolutionary vanguard, completely separate from the historic Liberal-Conservative controversy of Nicaraguan politics. The guerrilla strategy employed by Sandino (and verified by Castro's success in Cuba) provided a method for ousting the Somoza regime. Among the first initiatives of the organization was the recruitment of

several retired members of Sandino's army, including Colonel Santos López.⁷⁰

In the early 1960's, the FSLN remained in the rural areas of Nicaragua, avoiding the National Guard because they were numerically weak (fewer than twenty guerrillas) and still unorganized. They worked developing rural and urban support throughout the 1960's, which would become a major advantage for the FSLN as the insurrection escalated. In the years 1963 and 1967 the FSLN endured major military setbacks in which their ranks suffered severe depletion. Only in 1970 did they launch a military initiative in which the guerrillas had enough rural support, tactical strength, and organization to consider the operation a success. After the military actions of 1970, the National Guard treated the FSLN as a more serious threat. In response to the FSLN's improved ties with the peasantry, the National Guard initiated massive repression. The random torture and murder of this period actually aided the revolutionaries, creating more hostility towards the Somoza regime.⁷¹

Ideology

The FSLN has provided a more coherent program than Sandino, as its founders accepted the basic premises of Marx as revised by Lenin. Yet the Sandinista's development has been marked by theoretical division, differences which are evolving even more significant since the end of the contra

war. The ideology and program of the FSLN changed substantially from 1961 to 1979 due to their development from a small conspiracy anticipating a long struggle to a major contender for power that needed the backing of other opposition groups. The Marxist-Leninist faith at first aided the guerrillas in the most trying years, but eventually these references were dropped from the program in hopes of attracting all those victimized by Somoza. To understand the development of the Sandinista's ideology, one must examine the historic development of the FSLN.

The founders of the FSLN, based on their historic experience and the repression that characterized the Somoza dynasty, reasoned that the ruling classes of Nicaragua would not relinquish their power without bold and fierce resistance. From their early days, the Sandinistas rejected the notion that the armed struggle should be postponed while the masses matured politically; they proposed instead the need to combine mass participation and politicization simultaneously with armed struggle.

Until the mid-1970's, the Marxist-Leninist strain dominated the FSLN, and the platforms of the organization reflected their commitment to Marxist-Leninist principles. In the early years of the FSLN, the leadership advocated organizing and accumulating strength in the rural mountainous regions of Nicaragua. The principal enemy during this period was imperialism, not the Somoza dynasty

(which would later become the principal target). The revolutionaries were to prepare for war with any non-socialist regime, thus eliminating the possibility of coalitions with non-revolutionary organizations.

The first split within the FSLN originated in 1975 under the leadership of Jaime Wheelock, known as the proletarian tendency (or the *Proletarios*). He contended that a large portion of the peasantry had become proletarianized since World War II. Because of socio-economic changes such as the increase in communication within the rural peasantry (e.g. radio, television, improved transportation), Wheelock argued that this new class of peasantry, in addition to the urban proletariat, constituted more fertile recruiting grounds for the revolution than did Nicaragua's remote rural areas.⁷²

The proletarian tendency viewed the Nicaraguan conflict from a traditional Marxist-Leninist perspective, as a contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The *Proletarios* defined the proletariat in the classical terms of urban industrial workers, with the addition of the proletarianized peasantry. Their revolutionary strategy was linked more to European Marxism than to the contributions of people like Che Guevara. Wheelock also proposed that the principal enemy of the FSLN should be identified as the Somoza dictatorship. According to Wheelock, the imperialism

of the United States as the immediate enemy was too abstract and intangible to mobilize the masses to revolution.

The *Proletarios* were primarily led by intellectuals, academics, and the student group JRN (Nicaraguan Revolutionary Youth). This faction sought to broaden their support by organizing and propagandizing in factories and poor neighborhoods. The rival factions within the FSLN criticized the proletarian wing for too much propagandizing and for adherence to a traditional Marxist view of the proletariat that didn't apply in Nicaragua.⁷³ The proletarian tendency as late as 1978 considered itself the only group of the FSLN faithful to Marx, referring to the other factions as "petit bourgeoisie."

The members of the FSLN following the original ideology assumed the name GPP or Prolonged People's War. The leaders of the GPP included Carlos Fonseca, Tomás Borge and Henry Ruiz. This faction adhered to Maoist principles, focusing their activities in rural Nicaragua and spending less time doing political work in the cities. Although some scholars suggest that this group had progressed beyond the *foco* theories of the 1960's (Vanden and Prevost), elements of the FSLN continued to view the GPP as following this line. The *Proletarios* criticize:

The GPP is a continuation of the "foci" approach . . . inspired by the guerrilla experience in Vietnam, it laid out a series of guidelines . . . which conceived of the revolutionary process as the preparation of social and technical conditions for carrying on guerrilla warfare throughout the entire country-- mountains, countryside, and city.⁷⁴

The GPP faction preferred the cautious strategy of accumulating forces rather than err by foregoing the necessary political mobilization and military power needed to achieve revolutionary victory. They were viewed within the FSLN as being too cautious militarily, and were seen as prone to isolation from the masses.⁷⁵

Carlos Fonseca, in what is known as his "Last Testament" of March 1976 (from his final political document before his death by Somoza's army), responded to Jaime Wheelock and Humberto Ortega (who would form the *Tercerista* faction one year later), saying they had "taken positions . . . lacking in revolutionary consistency".⁷⁶ He admitted that the FSLN had serious problems but criticized them for evaluating the situation from the exterior (both Wheelock and Ortega were abroad when these splits occurred). Fonseca suggested that Wheelock's criticism of the FSLN showed disrespect for those fighting. He goes so far as to accuse Wheelock of evading his responsibility as a guerrilla. In defense of the FSLN, Fonseca argues, "Of course, ideological rectification is worthless without corresponding practical behavior, yet without a Marxist ideological orientation positive practical behavior is insufficient".⁷⁷

A third group known as the *Terceristas* (or Insurrectionalists) materialized by 1977 under the direction of Daniel and Humberto Ortega, including Edén Pastora and Víctor Tirado. The *Terceristas* aimed to reunify the GPP faction with the *Proletarios* by suggesting a combined strategy of rural and urban guerrilla warfare alongside an alliance of anti-Somoza groups. They did not have a new theory per se, different from that of the GPP; rather, the *Terceristas* differed in strategy, feeling that the conditions were ready for revolutionary civil war and placed the need for an alliance at the center of their work.

Reflecting Lenin's influence, Nicaragua's proletariat was not seen as the primary revolutionary subject in a country developed under neocolonialism. The *Terceristas* feared that the existing objective conditions for revolution were being undermined by foreign cultural imperialism and capitalist economic development (thus rendering the more classical proletarian approach unsuitable for Nicaragua's reality). Although the *Terceristas* echoed Che Guevara's notion that the insurrection can help create the revolutionary conditions, they rejected the *foco* theory. The *Terceristas* believed that the vanguard needed some sort of historic opportunity in order to achieve victory (disagreeing with the GPP's contention that a prolonged people's war would create the revolutionary setting).

The *Terceristas* minimized the rhetoric of their Marxist roots, feeling that the language of orthodox Marxism (addressing a narrowly defined proletariat) excluded the majority of Nicaraguan workers. In contrast to the strategy of the *Proletarios* who devoted their organizing to urban factory workers, the *Terceristas* wanted to strengthen support from all sectors of society and capitalize on the growing opposition to Somoza.

Somoza's behavior had become so appalling by 1977 that a growing number of Nicaraguans from varied economic sectors opposed his regime. Humberto Ortega, seeing that the Carter government favored disposing of Somoza and establishing a moderate regime of reformists, advocated a multi-class alliance as a strategic necessity to overthrowing Somoza. Although scholars such as John Booth conclude "that much of this reduction of Marxist-Leninist principles was truly substantive and not merely cosmetic,"⁷⁸ others contend that the Sandinistas maintained their original revolutionary goals.

In effect, the non-socialist alliances that were established reflected the *Terceristas'* opinion that the time was ripe for victory, and that an alliance tactic would be needed to overthrow Somoza. Hodges cites this strategy as leading to incorrectly equating the Insurreccionalist tendency with "its social democratic allies . . . Thus the FSLN mistakenly became identified with a noncapitalist,

noncommunist, and nonaligned 'third position' in domestic and foreign policy."⁷⁹ Vanden and Prevost concur that the FSLN "never compromised its fundamental revolutionary position . . . While the exact form of that reconstruction, particularly its overtly socialist content, may have been unclear, the desire of the Sandinistas to make a clean sweep of the old order was clear."⁸⁰

With the Cuban experience as a reminder of the possible repercussions from implementing socialism in a "developing" nation, the *Terceristas* proposed a different economic plan. Because Nicaragua's economy was still dependent on other nations and lacked the industry necessary to become self-sufficient, this group opted for a transition period (allowing industrialization and production of capital) before socialism could be implemented. Therefore, they were able to rapidly increase relations with social democratic, social Christian, and bourgeois recruits. Tactically much bolder, the *Terceristas* were criticized by the other FSLN factions for adventurism and a lack of ideological purity.

Of considerable influence in the reunification process were the popular demonstrations that erupted following the murder of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, editor of *La Prensa* and the leader of UDEL (Democratic Union for Liberation, a middle-class and bourgeois opposition party). The surprising strength of the mass uprisings (going beyond the FSLN leadership), especially in the demonstrations of

Monomibo in 1978, confirmed for the *Terceristas* that the time was ripe for mounting insurrection and that broad support from Nicaraguan society would be necessary for a FSLN victory.

By 1977, the *Terceristas* controlled the National Directorate of the revolutionary forces. In addition to being the most effective group militarily and politically, they were in the numerical majority when the events previously mentioned prompted the revolutionaries to reunite. They launched insurrections in October of 1977 and in September of 1978, despite the GPP's criticism that the minimum conditions for military victory were not in place.⁸¹

On 3 March 1979, a united political-military command was established between the three tendencies. Rather than erasing the earlier differences however, the formal unification served to push the conflicting ideologies aside temporarily. This notion is supported by the fact that each of these three factions held an equal number of positions in government and party committees after the FSLN took power. Both the GPP and the *Proletarios*, however, chose to follow the *Tercerista* lead in working within an alliance that was broad enough to encompass their own goals.⁸²

The relationship between the FSLN and the Nicaraguan population was modified during different points of revolutionary struggle. In the early stages of the revolutionary process, the armed vanguard was of the

greatest significance, both militarily and politically, building a base of support in both rural and urban areas. Students, workers, and peasants eventually came to occupy the principal adversarial role in the last few years of the revolution, as exemplified by the uprisings in 1977-78. Yet the high participation of the masses in the wake of victory would not have been possible without the two decades of struggle of the vanguard FSLN. The FSLN as a vanguard, despite their ideological divisions, gave structure and direction to the mass struggle, legitimated by two decades of organizing.

Students made up the largest percentage of FSLN participants, and they played a critical role in the overthrow of the Somoza regime (Vilas, Booth). Historically, student activists participated in a variety of political parties, and most of the student revolutionaries have come from a middle class background. The severe repression with which Somoza responded to nonviolent criticism radicalized the student movement and helped to create some of the most prominent foes of the regime (e.g. Carlos Fonseca, Tomás Borge, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro).

Following the students, tradespeople and other members of the petty-bourgeoisie constituted the next largest revolutionary participant (numerically). Members of the petty-bourgeoisie own their means of production (e.g. a small shop or plot of land) but are part of the middle and

lower classes. This group included artisans, small farmers, and the self-employed.

The actual proletariat of Nicaragua did not constitute a quantitatively determinant force. However, their presence in the insurrection was twice that of their representation in the urban work force. This high participation level did not hold true for the self-employed or those owning small property.⁸³

In the final stretch, the struggle had a popular character, in the broad sense of working masses, rather than proletarian in the narrow sense. "Proletarian components were interwoven within a broad spectrum of generalized and acute poverty, of *real* more than *formal* subordination to capital, and of instability and insecurity in all dimensions of life--consistent with the type of capitalism that was developing in the country".⁸⁴ The subject of the revolution reflected the type of capitalism which had developed in Nicaragua: the working masses were the product and central protagonist of an economic system developed under the influence of foreign capital.

Only in the final years of the insurrection did the bourgeoisie lend support to the FSLN. The bourgeois opposition to Somoza was comprised by the middle bourgeoisie rather than the large capitalists. The capitalist split between those pro-Somoza and anti-Somoza originated in whether the capital was local or foreign. Several events

contributed to the changing attitude of the bourgeoisie. The first of these was the 1972 earthquake, demolishing most of Managua, after which Somoza pocketed much of international aid donated to Nicaragua. The regime's corruption and negligence in reconstruction deepened the contradictions between *Somocismo* and the bourgeoisie, yet the conflict was confined to the economic arena.

Second, in October of 1977, twelve nationally and internationally respected members of the upper and middle classes published an add in *La Prensa*, demanding Somoza's resignation and stating their support of the FSLN. *Los Doce*, as they were known, were the first of the bourgeoisie to openly take the side of the revolutionaries. The larger part of the bourgeoisie, however, continued to call for national dialogue and advocated a reformist strategy.

Third, the murder of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro signified an end of possibility of change within the existing system. His death demonstrated that no one was immune to the repression of the dictatorship and prompted increased popular demonstrations that would continue through the end of the uprising. In May of 1978, a coalition of the bourgeoisie and other recent opposition parties (including the Nicaraguan Socialist Party) joined forces as the Broad Opposition Front (FAO). This alliance tended to accept U.S. policy towards Nicaragua and competed with the FSLN for domestic and external support. Only on June 24 of 1979

(twenty-five days before the FSLN took power) did the FAO offer support to the FSLN's proposed Government Junta of National Reconstruction, seeking a share of power in the new political system.

Theory in Practice

The FSLN's leadership described their program for Nicaragua based on three principles: a mixed economy, nonalignment, and political pluralism. Their plan for transforming Nicaraguan society differed significantly from that of Cuba and offered a pragmatic policy designed specifically to meet Nicaragua's situation. The FSLN proposed a mixed economy as a permanent policy, not simply a stage to accumulate the necessary capital for socialism. The Sandinistas received much criticism for their efforts, which escalated in the second half of the 1980's. Despite the external and internal challenges facing the Sandinistas, they tried to maintain these principles throughout their years in power, at least to a certain degree. Although a detailed examination of the years in power is beyond the scope of this paper, a summary of the Sandinista rule is helpful in understanding how the FSLN contributed to the discussion on revolutionary theory.

When the Sandinistas took power in July of 1979, they found a scant \$3.5 million in the national treasury that Somoza had left behind. They faced the double task of

reconstructing the damage from the insurrection and of transforming an historically dependent economy to one of self-sustenance. Although not embracing capitalism, the FSLN felt that full socialism was not practical given the enormous tasks at hand. Borge notes that

Unfortunately, [Nicaragua has] a backward capitalist class . . . We could have taken away all their businesses and we would not have been overthrown . . . But what is most conducive to the economic development of the country is what is best for Nicaraguan people.⁸⁵

The government regulated the import/export trade, but over half of Nicaragua's economy remained in private hands.⁸⁶

During the first few years of power, the FSLN depended on foreign aid, with \$1.6 million in financing and almost \$260 million in grants flowing into Nicaragua. The country's economic growth was more modest than originally anticipated. Four years after the revolution, the economy still hadn't reached growth levels of 1977 (except in agriculture).⁸⁷ The nation's bourgeoisie who hadn't fled the country put extreme pressure on the Sandinista government, fearing the possibility of a growing socialist orientation. The United States also pressured the young government by withholding loans in 1981, and by 1985 the United States had imposed a complete economic embargo. As a result of the continuing economic strife and decreased aid from Western nations, Nicaragua increased its economic relations with the Soviet Bloc.

In any analysis of the Sandinista's economic policy, ample attention must be given to the role of the U.S.-sponsored *Contra* (counter-revolutionary) War. In comparison with the United State's economic aid to Nicaragua, \$50 million was spent in covert military assistance in fiscal year 1982-83 alone.⁸⁸ Before completing the tasks of national reconstruction, the Sandinista government faced civil war sponsored by the world's wealthiest military (as well as a continual threat of invasion).

The *contra* war actually served to minimize the theoretical differences between the competing faction of the FSLN, all of course agreeing that the United States and Somocismo were enemies of the revolution. Furthermore, the *contra* war intensified the need to consolidate the power of the FSLN. The necessity of overcoming party factions to defeat their common enemies became essential to the survival of the revolution, taking preeminence over the differences.

The costs of the *Contra* War (1982-88) are difficult to asses because its effects reached into every area of the FSLN's governing efforts. Human and economic resources desperately needed in areas of management, health, and social services were poured into defense. Thirty-thousand Nicaraguans died in the war, and the battle resulted in an estimated \$12 billion in economic losses.⁸⁹

By 1988, the economic demands on the government cumulated in extreme inflation which slashed the wages of

workers and peasants. In the last two years of state power, the FSLN removed many of the subsidies and price controls that had tried to protect Nicaragua poor. The 1988-89 crisis was rooted in an increased demand for finance, primarily but not solely caused by spending on the contra war. Joseph Ricciardi cites another source of the 1988 crisis:

It was also the costly result of state efforts to manage the policy 'knife edge' of the mixed economy: to advance the social welfare goals of the revolution through a state controlled by workers and peasants and simultaneously preserve the allegiance of the medium and large private agroexport producers who controlled a lion's share of vital foreign exchange-generating production and who typically refused to accept popular control of the state . . . the state paid dearly to induce this powerful group of capitalists to invest their resources and stimulate production. The results were dismal.⁹⁰

One of the FSLN's most important contributions to the debate on revolution was its commitment to political pluralism. Popular participation was central to the two earlier decades of struggle by the FSLN and still is today. However, the term "political pluralism" for the Sandinistas is more complex than electoral democracy. The FSLN's reluctance to hold national elections immediately following victory stemmed from Nicaragua's experience with "democracy." In the entire history of the country there existed no precedent as an example to be followed. In fact, Western-style elections have been mistrusted by the Nicaraguan population and were seen by many as a counter-

revolutionary demand. The FSLN describes its vision of democracy and defends its position regarding elections

(August 1980):

For the Sandinista Front, democracy is not measured only in political terms, nor is it confined merely to a participation in elections . . . it means PARTICIPATION by the people in political, economic, social and cultural affairs. . . democracy begins in the economic order, when social inequalities begin to weaken, when workers and peasants improve their standard of living. This is the beginning of true democracy--and never before . . . Our elections will not be those elections imposed by the American gringos . . . Remember that *they are elections to improve the power of the revolution, but they are not a raffle to see who has power, because the people have the power through their vanguard, the Sandinista National Liberation Front and its National Directorate . . .*⁹¹

Although the Sandinistas did not achieve full political pluralism, they made significant gains in areas where other revolutionaries (e.g. Cuba) did not. In the early 1980's, the FSLN carried out its definition of democracy by giving direct government representation to mass organizations on the Council of State until its termination in 1984. Non-Sandinistas were represented in the Governing Junta of 1979, the drafting of the constitution, and the National Assembly (ruled by proportionate representation). Nicaragua counts twenty-five registered political parties⁹² who run candidates in local and national elections.

In 1990, the FSLN held the nation's second election free from fraud and repression (the first was held in 1984). Their commitment to political pluralism could not be better exemplified than by the peaceful transition of power which

occurred in the 1990 electoral defeat. Violeta Chamorro, candidate of the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO, a coalition of fourteen parties) won the presidency with 54.7 percent of the vote.⁹³ Although the reasons for the 1990 electoral defeat are varied, most scholars concur that the masses may have voted for Chamorro because a vote for the FSLN would likely have meant a continuation of economic hardships and of the *Contra* War.

V. El Salvador: A Negotiated Revolution?

The smallest country in Latin America, El Salvador is little studied in comparison to other nations of the region. It is important to note that few scholars have studied the revolutionary movement in El Salvador from a theoretical perspective of the revolutionaries (although much attention has been given to Salvadoran human rights violations and the role of the church). To understand the individuality of the Salvadoran struggle (especially as it differs from that of Nicaragua), one should note the distinct features of the historical context.

El Salvador's dense population has produced both additional challenges and advantages for the revolutionary struggle. The population is more industrialized with a larger worker class than in Nicaragua, and they have historically participated in political activism and trade unionism. The degree of class-consciousness in the countryside is also higher than that in other nations. In comparison to countries like Nicaragua where remote areas at least give the individual farmer a chance at self-sustenance, patron-client relations characterize the small Salvadoran territory. Although the Salvadorans are more accustomed to organizing and more radical than in neighboring countries, Salvadoran society has been characteristically more violent. In addition, there exists

few remote areas for guerrilla organization and operation free from peasant or government notice.⁹⁴

For the purpose of examining the FMLN, the peasant rebellion of 1932 is the most relevant starting point in the Salvadoran history of revolt because it introduces Marxist ideology into the struggle. When the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) gained victories in the municipal elections of January 1932, General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez annulled this first round and cancelled the second round of elections.⁹⁵ In addition to the general strikes called by the well-organized peasants in coffee-growing regions, the peasantry responded a summon by the PCS for open revolt on 22 January of 1932. This rebellion resulted in the massacre "*la matanza*" of over 30,000 peasants (including urban workers and students) by state military and private landowners' forces. Anjali Sundaram and George Gelber describe the long-term effects of this slaughter on the Salvadoran masses:

This response was unprecedented in Salvadoran history: never before had the Indian rebellions of the last century been met with such indiscriminate violence. The *matanza* so deeply scarred the collective memory of the peasantry that they virtually abandoned Indian custom and dress and did not attempt to organise themselves again for three decades.⁹⁶

In contrast to the FSLN's enemy of the Somoza dictatorship (relatively easy to identify), the Salvadorans faced a string of military dictatorships and their accompanying death squads. Since the 1930's, the power of

the military in El Salvador increased dramatically, especially during the "modernization" period following World War II. As described by Liisa North, "[Military officers] became the manager and directors of many semi-autonomous state agencies, such as the Central Reserve Bank, the Salvandorean Social Security Institute, the national airline and the census bureau . . ."⁹⁷ The power and the economic benefits of the military created a system which prospered by extreme corruption at all levels.

By the early 1970's, successful organizing that had taken place by unions, students, peasants, and the Catholic Church, all making demands that included agrarian reform. The Salvadoran oligarchy reacted to these growing tensions when in 1972 it fraudulently declared its own candidate the victor of the presidential election. Following a failed coup by the Christian Democratic Party, the government again unleashed repressive measures against a growing opposition, ending any hopes of change through legitimate channels of reform.

Ideology

The Communist Party of El Salvador never achieved legal status because of its involvement in the 1932 rebellion. From 1932 until 1979, the PCS (like most communist parties of Latin America in this period) pursued a policy of alliances with moderate reformist parties (the PCS

opted for a revolutionary strategy only after the failure of the 15 October Junta in 1979). In the 1960's, long-time PCS member, General Cayetano Carpio led a debate within the party about whether the time had come for armed struggle.

Carpio, believing the moment was ripe, left the PCS to form the Popular Forces of Liberation-Farabundo Martí (FPL-FM) in 1970. The FPL drew its membership from radicalized labor sectors and university movements. Like the *Proletarios* faction of the FSLN, they identified the primary enemy or adversary of the people as the economic elite of El Salvador and ORDEN (the para-military force responsible for much of the violent repression in the sixties and seventies). Although the FPL recognized the need for political-military strategy, for several years they regarded the political factor as secondary to the military struggle.

The FPL resembled the GPP (Prolonged Popular War) faction of the FSLN, considering the peasantry key to revolutionary success and rejecting the notion of a broad coalition. In 1978, the FPL identified its first three strategic tasks as the following:

1. Develop and deepen the people's prolonged war, toward achieving radical proletarian revolutionary triumph.
2. Combine the armed struggle with other struggle tactics (legal, illegal, peaceful, violent, etc) as tactical and strategic measures toward the development of a people's war.
3. Organize and orient politically the industrial and farming proletariat, the farmer population--especially the poor or semi-proletariat--and other popular sectors that have been prey of capitalist exploitation and oppression.⁹⁸

The FPL also maintained close links with Havana and Managua during the formative years of the FMLN.⁹⁹ The FPL, like each of the military organizations which would later form the FMLN, collaborated with a political organization that shared its interests and philosophy. In 1975, the FPL joined forces with the Popular Revolutionary Bloc or BPR. Members of the BPR thought about the revolution in terms of a prolonged effort, in which all actions were directed towards the overthrow of the regime.

A second group splintered from the PCS in 1971, of a broader composition than the FPL. The Popular Revolutionary Army (ERP) was founded in 1971 by the Young Communists and radical Christians of various economic backgrounds. A large portion of the ERP's membership came from militant university students who had been members of the Christian Democratic Party. Like the FPL, the ERP had a strong militaristic conception of the revolutionary struggle. For almost a decade, the ERP believed that only the armed struggle was the path to revolution. The adversary was identified as the members of the government security forces. The coordinating popular organization of the ERP formed in 1977, the 28th of February or LP-28.

The ERP shared some theoretical similarities with the *Tercerista* faction of the FSLN. They favored alliances with workers, peasants, middle class, and even democratic army officers. Critical of both the Cuban and Nicaraguan

influence in El Salvador, the ERP tended to be fervently nationalistic. Again, like the *Terceristas*, the ERP received similar criticism from its rival factions as being opportunistic and lacking ideology. The FPL, for example, asserted that the ERP

. . . did not achieve the cohesion of one ideology, one theory, and one practice. It attempted to convert itself into a multi-ideology front--a spectrum of the new left made up of diverse groups that at times only seemed to share their hate for communist parties.¹⁰⁰

A faction within the ERP known as the National Resistance (RN) developed in the early seventies, contending that political action would also be necessary for revolution. The RN discreetly promoted the formation of FAPU, a popular organization of peasant, trade union, teacher, and student organizations, along with radicalized clergy and members of the PCS, the FPL, and the ERP.

When news of this encouragement broke out, ERP commander Joaquín Villalobos accused Roque Dalton (RN member, also El Salvador's leading contemporary poet) of being both a Cuban and a CIA agent. Dalton was subsequently tried and executed by the ERP, fueling the antagonism within the ERP about the proper role of the military struggle in relation to the political one. The revolutionary organizations outside the ERP also participated in the debate surrounding Dalton's death. The FPL, although agreeing that Dalton's interrogation by the CIA and a mysterious absence along with other incidence "[warranted]

investigation," maintained that his execution was "a political ideological error."¹⁰¹

The ERP's harsh response to those challenging their emphasis on a military struggle consequentially split the ERP in two. The RN faction saw Dalton's execution as a "[maneuver] by which they might obstruct or take over the mechanism of ideological struggle."¹⁰² The RN faction quickly formed their own military organization in 1975, FARN (Armed Forces of Popular Resistance). Following the Dalton affair, FARN issued statements highly critical of the ERP, referring to them as a "militarist clique" that, "having violated all Leninist principles, lacks the moral and revolutionary viability to continue in positions of leadership within our organization."¹⁰³

The FARN later collected considerable amounts of money and acquired international notoriety through abductions of international businesspeople. Its popular organization FAPU (United Popular Action Front), had already been created in 1974. The FAPU itself, formed of a split within the ERP, contained its own divisions, with part of the organization more aligned with the FPL and the other with the RN. The FPL sympathizers broke with FAPU in 1975 to create the BPR, the mass organization allied with FPL.

The following table depicts the various military-political organizations that would form the FMLN:¹⁰⁴

Political/military organization	Mass organization	Armed Forces
Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL-1970)	Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR-1975)	Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL-1970)
National Resistance (RN-1975)	United Popular Action Front (FAPU-1974)	Armed Forces of National Resistance FARN-1975)
Party of the Salvadorean Revolution (PRS-1977)	28th of February Popular Leagues (LP-28-1978)	Popular Revolutionary Army (ERP-1971)
Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS-1930)	Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN-1967)	Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL-1979)
Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC-1976)	Popular Liberation Movement (MLP-1979)	Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC-1976)

The theoretical disagreements between the FAPU and the BPR are important to understand, as much of the FAPU's philosophy (under direction of the RN) later became the official policy of the FMLN. These differences, as noted by Tommie Sue Montgomery, were political, strategic, and tactical.¹⁰⁵ Whereas the BPR directed its efforts toward the final victory over the regime (*la lucha prolongada*), the FAPU acted according to each current development and viewed the struggle in the short term as well as the long term.

The BPR and FAPU both considered the peasants an critical part of the struggle, yet their allied

organizations (the FPL and the RN, respectively) divided on how to build popular organizations. The FPL (following the prolonged people's war strategy) emphasized the role of *campesinos*, while the RN felt that their organizing should be done among unions. The FPL and the RN also differed on the role of alliances with other sectors of Salvadoran society. The FPL rejected any possibility of alliances with the military and deemphasized the necessity of including the middle class. The RN, on the other hand, worked to develop alliances with them.¹⁰⁶ In 1975, the FAPU (allied with the RN and FARN) responded to criticisms about their focus on an allied approach:

. . . [the FPL] maintain that unity must be "pure" and only at the revolutionary level. . . If they were consistent, they would call on all revolutionary sectors to form a party, in which the various groups would dissolve and abide by one strategy, one tactic, one code of discipline. . . Their statement shows a lack of understanding of concrete conditions that make necessary the consolidation of the masses . . . To think that the popular front is formed only by revolutionaries is a leftist utopia.¹⁰⁷

Tactically, the FAPU attempted to build support through its political schools, and they stressed the important of democracy within the revolutionary effort. Also vying for hegemony in the unions, the FPL took the approach of seeking support through union leadership. The BPR's emphasis on organization in the rural areas limited the scope of their urban work.¹⁰⁸ Although by 1980 the FAPU's membership was only half that of the BPR, it had gained prestige for its

theoretical publications (a major influence on the unified program of 1980).

The final organization which would become part of the FMLN formed in early 1976¹⁰⁹, the PRTC (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers). Many of its members were involved in the 1972 ERP, and others originated from the labor unions under PCS influence. The PRTC viewed the revolutionary struggle as a regional one, based on the historical experience of Central America. Its popular organization, founded in 1979, is the MLP (Popular Liberation Movement).

Like the elections of 1972, those of 1977 were also fraudulent, characterized by arrests, murders, and a miscounting of votes. The "victor" of these elections was General Carlos Humberto Romero, who continued the gross human rights violations against trade and union leaders that had become common in the seventies. Despite the growing demonstrations by the political-military organizations, it was not the opposition that overthrew the Romero government. Rather, a group of young military officers, frustrated with the corruption of the electoral system and the social and economic injustices in their country, staged a coup on October 15, 1979, and took control of the Salvadoran government. Montgomery notes that the FSLN's victory in Nicaragua and the flight of ex-members of the National Guard into El Salvador greatly influenced the officers' decision

to revolt. The El Salvadorans envisioned a similar fate unless they were the creators of social change.

The five member military-civilian junta established by the young military attempted to pacify both the right and left extremist forces. Yet not all of its members were convinced that the projected program were in their interests. One of the two military members, Colonel Jaime Abdul Gutierrez, and his defense minister, Colonel José Guillermo García, proceeded with an attack on the LP-28 and undermined any public trust that the junta could control the military. Furthermore, repression by government security forces escalated, as "more people died in the first three weeks after the coup than had died in any equivalent period during the Romero regime."¹¹⁰

Internal disagreements within the junta on just how far reforms should go and the failure to remove politics from the armed forces led to the eventual resignation of the junta members in January of 1980. Despite the genuine intentions of the majority of the junta, they demonstrated considerable political naivete in hoping that a new government could control an army long accustomed to political power and excessive force against the masses.¹¹¹ Government repression continued to increase in early 1980, and "more than 2,000 people were now dying every month in this new *matanza*."¹¹² The armed struggle seemed more and more like the only remaining avenue for change.

The consolidation process of the political-military organizations initiated with the formation of the United Revolutionary Direction (DRU) in May, 1980. Basically, the DRU served as structure for creating a unified command between the organizations. On 10 October, 1980, the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) was officially formed and adopted democratic centralism as an operating principle, meaning that all members would be required to abide by a majority vote. The FMLN then began preparing for a general offensive in January of 1981, marking the beginning of what would become an eleven-year civil war.

Theory in Practice

The FMLN's program for transforming Salvadoran society was similar to that being implemented by the FSLN, including a nonaligned foreign policy, a mixed economy, and political pluralism. Unlike the FSLN, however, the Salvadoran revolutionaries would not have a chance to test their program. While the FSLN was able to capitalize upon an opportunity for victory (and the United States refused to defend Somoza), their success ironically contributed to the challenges facing the FMLN. The example set by the Sandinistas fostered the United States' tendency to view relations with Central America in a Cold War context. Consequently, the role of the United States, although of considerable importance in the developments of the

Nicaraguan revolution, weighed even more heavily in El Salvador's struggle. Ultimately the earlier ideology of the FMLN would become more and more discounted, as surviving civil war took precedence over planning for a revolutionary society.

Following the unsuccessful insurrection of 1981, the FMLN retreated to the countryside and began constructing a sophisticated revolutionary army, simultaneously working to establish control zones in rural areas. In the years 1982-83, the FMLN launched a series of large-scale attacks on the army, but by 1984 the FMLN was functioning in smaller units and pursuing hit-and-run tactics more characteristic to guerrilla struggle. Although in the pre-1984 years the FMLN was able to cultivate better ties with the peasantry and consolidate its governing structures, new problems arose which would set the stage for the rest of the decade. A FMLN member characterizes the year 1984 as a critical point the war:

. . . Until 1983 there was no social limit to growth; the problem was instead lack of arms and time to train military units. This process had reached a limit by 1984. The social reserve was exhausted. In just three years, the FMLN had converted a guerrilla nucleus and a radical mass movement into a large, almost professional revolutionary army, which had brought the Armed Forces to the point of collapse. But the Armed Forces enjoyed the advantage of limitless resources. And when they did not collapse, this advantage suddenly became decisive.¹¹³

The military aid from the United States escalated from \$35.5 million in 1981 to \$196.55 million in 1984, yet the

war had reached a stalemate. By 1984, an estimated 45,000 Salvadorans had died in the war, and "the great majority of victims were non-combatant civilians assassinated, massacred, mutilated and tortured by government forces."¹¹⁴ President José Napoleón Duarte invited the FMLN to a dialogue in 1984, but the expectations raised at this discussion were dashed by the end of the year.¹¹⁵

The FMLN reevaluated its strategy in 1984 and focused on building the political movement alongside the military struggle. They worked in smaller groups (both politically and militarily) in a more clandestine form. Thus, by the end of 1986, the FMLN felt it had accumulated needed support and began looking forward to a 1988 strategic counter-offensive. In the last years of the decade, the FMLN further developed its strategy of irregular conflict. The revolutionary struggle was viewed more as a process, and involving participants of varied levels of military instruction.

As early as 1981, the FMLN had proposed peace talks with the Salvadoran government, yet they considered this approach still an effective method to transform Salvadoran society. The objective of the proposed talks was "to put an end to the war and establish a new *political and economic order*."¹¹⁶ In June of 1983, the FMLN again pointed to their willingness to have dialogue with the Salvadoran and United States' government. In their "Five Points Program," the

FMLN suggest "direct dialogue, without pre-conditions among the parties to the conflict, in which all the problems our society confronts can be discussed comprehensively

. . . "117

The nature of the Salvadoran struggle changed in January of 1989 when the FMLN offered to participate in the presidential elections if they were postponed in order to guarantee security and register voters.¹¹⁸ Although their proposal was refused, this event pointed to the FMLN's willingness to compromise. The insurrection was seen as compatible with a negotiated solution, a unique approach to gaining revolutionary victory.

Joaquín Villalobos justifies the FMLN's reasoning behind a negotiated settlement in a 1989 article appearing in Foreign Policy. Although he does not deny the influence of Marxism and Leninism on the FMLN, he says that they understand Marxism-Leninism "as a scientific discipline for analyzing reality and as an organizational theory for struggle."¹¹⁹ He also points out that the FMLN's approach takes into account the reality that a counterrevolutionary war would be a possible response by the United States if they attempted too "radical" of changes. To make any realistic change, the FMLN cannot afford to isolate itself from domestic and national support. Villalobos cites the military as the true power-holders in El Salvador, and reasons that social change can only begin when the military

balance does. According to Villalobos, "The best solution, therefore, is a reconstruction of the military component in society that will neither destroy the army nor disarm the FMLN."¹²⁰

The writings and statements of the late 1980's reflect a substantial change in the revolutionary position of the FMLN. Leaders of the FMLN flatly declared that they were no longer discussing socialism because El Salvador's political and economical development were unprepared for such a transition. Although their reasoning sounds like that of the FSLN, there existed a key difference between these similar perceptions about the feasibility of socialism in Central America: formal state power. The FSLN's revolutionary concessions came in the last stages of the insurrection, and once in power they regulated the social and economic changes through mass organizations and the military (controlled by the Sandinistas). In retrospect, the FMLN seems to have made these adjustments too soon and without enough guarantees that their program would be carried through.

In January of 1992, the FMLN and the Salvadoran government reached an historic peace accord, which on paper did call for significant changes in Salvadoran society. For example, the National Guard was to be disbanded and a new Civil Police trained under civilian control. An agrarian reform law was to be implemented and a economic plan

developed with the input from all sectors of society. However, the vague (and sometimes contradictory) language of the socioeconomic reforms reflect the ambiguities that permeate the document. And as George Vickers notes, "The accords do not . . . *guarantee* a new social and economic order for El Salvador."¹²¹

Since the signing of the peace accords, none of the agreements have been fully implemented as planned. The FMLN has gained a degree of political space in which to further their aims of revolutionizing Salvadoran society, but they have yet to achieve the kind of transformation described in my definition of "revolution." The continuation of political repression (especially against FMLN leadership) points to the difficulty in stripping the military of its power. Ultimately, the global context from the early years of the struggle influenced the tide of the FMLN's attempt at revolution. Their failure to gain state power or secure revolutionary change indicate that the trend away from Cuban-style socialism does not necessitate a trade-off for economic, social, or political gains.

VI. Epilogue

The experiences of Nicaragua's FSLN and El Salvador's FMLN suggest several lessons that should be considered by other organizations seeking revolutionary change in Latin America. Although both of these parties began as a militant group of revolutionaries committed to Marxist ideology, they later opted for more social democratic principles. Yet the departure from fully socialist goals did not secure even their more modest aims. Although it is easy to attribute the revolutionary setbacks of these organizations only to the outside role of the United States, decisions made within each group about revolutionary theory played an important role as well.

During the eleven years the FSLN held state power, they made significant compromises based on the alliances formed in order to overthrow Somoza. Although the magnitude of social change achieved by the Sandinistas should not be underestimated (and I would say that these changes fit my definition of "revolutionary"), their electoral defeat in 1990 points to the problematic nature of these compromises. With very limited funds, the FSLN tried to fulfill the social promises made to the masses who were the base of their support during the insurrection. At the same time, they needed to appease the Nicaraguan capitalists whose investment was essential to improving the national economy.

By the late 1980's, the needs of the people were becoming subordinated to attempts to generate more capital in the private sector. The peasants and working class also had little representation at the national level and were left out of the decision making process. Their frustration with a vanguard party that did not seem to represent their interests (and whose leadership nevertheless compelled the United States to pursue economic and military war with Nicaragua) led to a loss of support for the FSLN as reflected in the 1990 elections. This experience suggests that entering bourgeois alliances and furthering their interests (even for the long-term good of the revolution) is no substitute for maintaining close working relationships with the masses.

Despite these shortcomings and the FSLN's loss of power, the Sandinistas explored an approach to transforming society that gives future revolutionaries many new ideas to consider. The FSLN had no experience to draw upon when they formulated their policies of a mixed economy and political pluralism, and they were forced to design an original program in the midst of a civil war under the threat of invasion by the United States. The Sandinista approach was not necessarily *defeated* because they were voted from power. Future revolutionaries can learn much from the Sandinista program, and their policies may emerge again in modified forms.

The experience of the FMLN also leads to some lessons for future revolutionaries. In comparison to the FSLN, however, the permissive world context had a larger role in determining the outcome of the FMLN's insurrection. The military aid from the United States permitted the Salvadoran armed forces to hold out when the FMLN otherwise could have emerged victorious. The enormous losses suffered by the Salvadoran people as a result of the war (and the unlikelihood of defeating an army with limitless resources) led to the reduction of the FMLN's revolutionary goals.

Yet the FMLN made their own decision to accept the peace accord in a form leaving the military basically intact and without any guaranteed implementation. The war-wearied guerrillas, in their attempt to give the population a respite from a devastating war, seriously underestimated the power of the Salvadoran military and overestimated the elite's commitment to make change. The liberal economic elite of El Salvador supported the accord to encourage a more fertile site for investment and to permit the economy to return to some sort of normalcy. A negotiated stance by the FMLN has achieved neither the reforms outlined in the peace accord nor the termination of government repression.

The challenges to the FSLN and the FMLN now lie in the political arena. The FSLN looks to the 1996 elections as an opportunity to regain power, yet they must focus on rebuilding their social base of support in order to do so.

The Sandinistas also are experiencing internal division over whether to ally themselves with Chamorro (to prevent the political right from gaining power) or to maintain themselves as a party distinct from centrist policies.

The FMLN faces the task of becoming effective as a political party instead of an armed force. Their recent defeat in the March 1994 (fraudulent) elections by the conservative ARENA party leaves the FMLN with much work to do. Like the FSLN, they must try to regroup as a political force and generate popular support. Within the context of repression that still operates in El Salvador, this task promises to be very difficult.

The end of the Cold War presents new challenges and opportunities for revolutionaries in Latin America. Although capitalism appears to be the "victor" and is gaining more supporters, its effects on the "Third World" grow more exploitative. Therefore, future struggles although not necessarily socialist oriented (e.g. the Chiapas uprising) seem certain to occur. Because of the effects of the disintegration of the Soviet Union on Cuba, future revolutionaries cannot depend on material support from this ideological ally. On the other hand, the United States now has less justification to intervene with revolutionary attempts, which may give the left a certain degree of political opening.

Ultimately, the future of Latin American revolution will be determined by the people of Latin America. Their perception of the best methods to make social change will lead to different political (and possibly military) strategies. The New World Order envisioned by George Bush does not seem to account for the growing inequalities caused by capitalism and especially their effects on regions like Latin America. As long as people continue to be exploited and oppressed, there will be a future for Marxist analysis and a future for revolution.

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