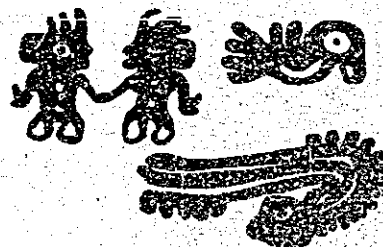


Guatemalan Revolutionaries Speak



DOMINGO HERNANDEZ IZTOY

QUICHE INDIAN, FOUNDER OF THE COMMITTEE
OF PEASANT UNITY OF GUATEMALA

MANUELA SAQUIC

A 17-YEAR-OLD IXIL INDIAN FROM EL QUICHE,
A MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE OF PEASANT UNITY

RIGOBERTA MENCHU

QUICHE INDIAN, MEMBER OF THE VICENTE
MENCHU CHRISTIAN REVOLUTIONARIES AND
THE GUATEMALAN COMMITTEE OF PATRIOTIC UNITY

NICOLAS BALAM

CAKCHIQUEL INDIAN, MEMBER OF THE
PEASANT COMMITTEE OF THE ALTIPLANO

and

• **Committee of Solidarity with the People of Guatemala**

• **The Peasant Dimension in Latin America**

by Michael Connolly, member National
Editorial Board, News and Letters Committees

• **The 1954 Guatemalan Coup**

-- from the Marxist-Humanist Archives

by Raya Dunayevskaya, chairwoman of
News and Letters Committees

REPRINTED FROM

NEWS & LETTERS
59 E. VAN BUREN ST.
SUITE 707
CHICAGO, IL 60605



2832 Grand Blvd. Detroit, MI 48211

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Guatemala: the dimension of Indian peasants, Indian women

Editor's Note: The struggles for liberation in Guatemala have brought to the fore the dimension of Indian men and women as fighters and thinkers. Domingo Hernandez Iztoy, founder of the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC) of Guatemala and a member of the directorate of the 31st of January Popular Front spoke recently at U. of Illinois — Chicago. Manuela Saquic, a 17-year old Ixil Indian from El Quiché is also a member of the CUC. She spoke under News & Letters sponsorship at California State University at Los Angeles. Below we bring excerpts from their speeches, translated from Spanish.

Domingo Hernandez Iztoy

When I was six, my parents used to tell us kids stories from the past. They did this as the tamales were being cooked and in this way related to us the sufferings of our ancestors and what people were going through at that time as well. We lived in such conditions of poverty that it is very difficult for people in this country to understand. As I watched my parents, I realized at the age of ten that I would have to leave my family and make my own way so that there would be less of a burden on them. So I went to the city and there I realized that the city people too lived in terrible conditions. I became aware that the situation of exploitation was one against an entire people.

And so it came to me at the age of 14 that I had to do something — that I had to work something out so I could work for my people. But being so young, many people would not listen to me or to my friends who thought as I did. What could we do against such forces? And I carried this with me, this feeling of wanting to do something for my people and rising against all that was against us. When I reached the age of 19, I was able to talk to people and thus began the work.

BIRTH OF COMMITTEE OF PEASANT UNITY

We started by talking with my cousins and people close to us. Little by little we had some success; first in our home province of Quiché. By 1978, there was some strength in three areas of the country and on the 1st of May, 1978, we formed our Committee of Peasant Unity. This was the first time in the history of Guatemala that an organization had been formed under the direct leadership of peasants. It should be pointed out that of the 7.5 million people in Guatemala, 5 million are peasants.

Most of the Indian population does not know how to read or write. But those of us who do have been teaching the others. When I left my town the people didn't have blackboards, chalk or anything like that, so we used the ground and a stick to teach people how to read and write. A large number of my comrades can now write their name even though they can't totally read and write. Increasingly it is the women and children who must plant the crops on which we live because the men are either dead or working in some other place.

In addition, many many women have left their towns and directly involved themselves and their children into the armed struggle. And also the children had a growing consciousness that we are involved in a crucial struggle. One day we were sleeping in a ditch and one of the children woke up and said that he was hungry. And his mother said not to cry because the military were coming and they will hear us and from that moment on the child did not cry. He endured his hunger and the cold in silence. By the time the children are eight years old they begin to play very important roles in the struggle. They

serve as couriers and are organized into groups. When they observe something about the military, they form a line and pass the word so that the last child in line can take the message into the village.

And so our appearance at this time was a blow to the government. Especially since never before had the most exploited sector of the country, the peasant class, joined together to voice their concerns. Another point that should be made is that it was very frightening to the government that on the first of May, we appeared in demonstrations — Indians and Ladino workers — side by side. Because for a long time, one method for continuing the system of exploitation was to use divisions between Indian and Ladino peoples.

In 1979, the government began a systematic series of massacres in Quiché. When Montt replaces Lucas, the repression gets worse — a scorched earth policy that destroys entire towns, establishes strategic hamlets which are living hells, poisons the rivers and burns crops, kills and tortures the people.

We realize that these are acts of desperation because they can't destroy our organizations, nor the level of struggle of the people. We have been unifying all organizations. After the massacre at the Spanish Embassy, our organization began to unite the mass groups. Now all four major armed organizations are involved. We never wanted to have a war. But the response of the government has created a war. For the future, we want a government that will respect all people. This must be a government that includes Indians. It is the people who are now involved in the struggle — Indians, peasants, workers — from which a new government will come.

Manuela Saquic



For many years now we the Indian people have been exploited and oppressed in Guatemala; and we are more than 70 percent of the country's population. In the rural areas we don't have sanitary water, roads or schools.

The young boys are forcibly taken away to military barracks to serve in the army. Many people have to migrate to the coastal plantations to work in coffee, cotton, and sugar cane. They are so poorly paid that when they come back they have nothing.

In my village, my father was president of Catholic Action, and every Sunday people would get together and talk. Out of these meetings there came other meetings to talk about village problems, the formation of co-ops, and the distribution of food.

THE RICH VERSUS THE INDIANS

As the people met, the question of land ownership came up, the fact that few people had access to any land. Out of this came the formation of the Committee for Peasant Unity (CUC). As people participated in the development of CUC, they became more aware of the rich and what they were doing to us.

Continued

Manuela Saquic

Continued

The rich have always treated us Indians as people who are crazy, who can't think. They think of Indians as animals, who don't have the capacity to learn and the capacity to become conscious. But we've demonstrated in practice that we can organize and do things and we're not crazy like they say.

And it's not just we Indians who are suffering exploitation and oppression. It's also the majority of the Ladinos (non-Indians) who are poor and suffer. For example, the slum dwellers in Guatemala City live in houses made of cardboard, and have no running water and no electricity. Thus we Indians are struggling alongside the Ladinos in Guatemala, against the rich.

We knew there were also guerrilla forces who were struggling with arms. And on the big coastal farms, thousands of agricultural workers were organizing demonstrations and strikes, while in Guatemala City, student and union organizations were beginning to get strong. So it wasn't just in one place that people were organizing. It was all over Guatemala, in all sectors.

The more we organized, the more the government replied with massacres. You'd find dead bodies in gorges and valleys and alongside of roads.

WOMEN ORGANIZED

At first the army used to persecute only men. They never paid any attention to the women; they thought we were invisible. But when the men would leave the village, the army noticed that we still had organizations and protests. They discovered that the women were organized too.

For example, in one town, women were making explosives out of fruit cans, with gasoline inside. When the army came in and saw that there were only women there, they started to laugh — but when the women threw the explosives the soldiers started to cry! And these women held off the army long enough to allow the rest of the village to escape.

In May of this year, thirteen of us from the group FP31, including myself, decided to take over the Brazilian Embassy, because that was the only way of forcing the attention of the world press on the massacres in the rural areas. When we occupied the Embassy, the government said that under no circumstances would they negotiate with us. They said they would burn us alive, like what had happened two years before in the Spanish Embassy.

We are asking for the broadest possible solidarity to stop the U.S. from sending arms to Guatemala. The Reagan Administration is sending military aid to Rios Montt. The helicopter parts the American government sends are for the same helicopters that bomb our towns.

The government is massacring us because we're organizing and rising up. They have massacred a lot of people, but there are still many people left. The strength of the movement is that both the mass organizations are united and the four guerrilla organizations are united. We have great hope that we will arrive in power and create a new Guatemala.

NEWS & LETTERS July, 1982

Guatemala

Central America's revolutionary women

Editor's Note: Following are excerpts from a News & Letters interview of Rigoberta Menchu, a 23-year-old Quiche Indian from Guatemala, a leader of the Vicente Menchu Revolutionary Christians and member of the Guatemalan Patriotic Unity Committee. She is currently in exile after her parents and brother were assassinated by the military, her father being one of the 39 peasants who died in the Spanish Embassy fire two years ago.

Definitely, our revolutionary process learned a lot from the decade of the '60s, when there was no massive support from the Guatemalan people, and the movement had not gained the trust of the Indians who are the majority of the country. We are 22 distinct peoples in 22 territories, who speak and dress differently and form 74 percent of the population. And today it is precisely the indigenous peoples who have in a majority joined the popular war.

It was always said, "Poor Indians, they cannot speak for themselves so we will speak for them." This is a lie, as now in practice we Indians have a voice, we know how to criticize and how to think.

We know that Indians have our Mayan science in which our ancestors passed on to us their love of nature; we have our beliefs and no one can take these away. We defend them both now when we are at war, and later when we are in a new society.

The assassinations of our parents and grandparents endangers our culture. Now even the indigenous children are being kidnapped, and they are our future. We are alive today only because we know how to eat roots and leaves, because there is never even corn to last the year. They massacre us now with bombardments and assassinations, but they have always massacred us with starvation.

Therefore one of our demands is that we have land, that the majority of the fertile land not be in the hands of landlords and generals as it is now. Nor do we believe that the change will be made on a specific date, for you can put neither time nor date on a war, and we are dealing with a profound change. And when we do seize power, that will not be the total change. That will be only a step in the change we want to create in a new Guatemala.

—Rigoberta Menchu

Guatemala: the struggle continues

Editor's Note: The Reagan Administration has just announced the decision to supply helicopter parts to the Guatemalan armed forces, claiming improvements in the human rights situation. It is a prelude to a decision to resume full military aid to the government of Rios Montt. Below we print an interview with Nicolas Balam, a Guatemalan active in opposition to the military rulers.

My name is Nicolas Balam. I am an indigenous peasant of the Cakchiquel people, from the municipality of San Martin Jilotepeque in the province of Chimaltenango, Guatemala. I am a member of the Peasant Committees of the Altiplano.

Our committee is a mass organization, the vast majority of whose members are indigenous peasants of the Altiplano, that part of western Guatemala where most of the agricultural laborers are and where the small plots of land are really unfit for cultivation.

PEASANT COMMITTEE OF ALTIPLANO

This organization arose as a result of the government repression, and it reflects the popular organizations that previously existed, such as peasant leagues, cooperatives, associations of small farmers, village improvement committees, as well as the groups of catechists. The repression came down hard on the leaders, and organizing in the open became impossible, but the consciousness and education remained with the masses of peasants, and so the form of working changed. The Committee was organized precisely because the army's offensive of November and December, 1981 prevented us from even reaping our crops or leaving to find work elsewhere. So at first we did not even know the form it would take, only that we had to organize to denounce the repression and for solidarity.

Our principal objectives are: to organize the peasantry, both indigenous and Ladino, into the on-going struggle in our country; to join our peasant force with the great mass of workers, since we are the two forces that create the country's economic production and are the most exploited and marginalized; and to work for unity among the masses to contribute to the popular democratic unity, since the rank-and-file is fundamental.

Our basic demands at this time are for the struggle for life, land and work; for freedom of organization and free expression of the peasantry; for freedom of travel; for an end to the repression and the immediate withdrawal of the army from the countryside; and for the independence and sovereignty of our country.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW SOCIETY

We work through various committees such as self-defense, supplies (food and medicine), popular education and communication committees. For example the entire village participates and uses their creativity in the self-defense committees. There are groups for vigilance, for delaying the army, for communication and for evacuation of children, pregnant women, the sick and the elderly.

The delaying group uses bird-hunting guns home-made from water tubing, and cherry bombs and firecrackers to distract the army and to warn the village.

We also make booby traps with sharpened stakes, so that when the army comes shooting and chasing the people they won't dare follow into the forest. Some say we copied this from the Vietnamese, but that's not so. Right in the Popol Vuh, the sacred text of the Maya, are written the different ways of our ancestors fought off Chivalva, the house of hell. And our grandfathers used those traps to hunt deer and raccoon.

It is this same indigenous, peasant people, who are the great majority (not forgetting our Ladino brothers), who must search for a new society, one where human life is respected, where there is an end to the exploitation of man by man, where there is a real freedom, real democracy, where we can all express ourselves, and where we all have rights as well as obligations.

We believe that our indigenous culture had many positive aspects. Though every culture also has its weaknesses, we must develop the positive parts, to bring about a new society for the good of humanity.

The positive aspects of indigenous culture are its form of organization, its unity, its agricultural traditions, and its science. Our Maya priests, who were contemptuously called "sorcerers," had to use their knowledge of medicine and astronomy practically clandestinely.

The indigenous form of agricultural work was communal until 1871, when with the supposed revolution they started to divide up our lands, leaving only a piece of communal land in each hamlet. But among the families this tradition was never forgotten. Even now at planting time one family goes to work with another, and when they're finished they pass on to help another. We call this Cuchubal. Work for pay is practically unknown among indigenous peoples.

THE ARMY OF RIOS MONTT

They have tried many ways to undo this type of organization. But the repression, far from destroying it, has made us go back to it more. Now the army of Rios Montt is building strategic hamlets under the name "model villages," trying to end our whole way of working the land and our traditions.

The army is now exterminating especially the indigenous peasantry, because the large landowners of the southern coast can now mechanize their crops and no longer need our labor. So they don't care if they wipe out the entire indigenous population. Neither does the U.S., which is directly interested in our infertile lands because of the discovery of oil and nickel.

The Guatemalan people know that we face a hard struggle. But we are confident that we will win sooner or later because the whole people is involved. This is not a race struggle. It is a class struggle of the dispossessed majority against the tiny minority that possesses everything.

For Guatemalan solidarity work in your area contact:
 NATIONAL NETWORK IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF
 GUATEMALA (NISGUA), 930 F St. NW, Suite 720,
 Washington, DC 20004

The people of Guatemala

by Committee of Solidarity with the People of Guatemala

Today in Guatemala the policy of president Rios Montt is the extermination of the indigenous peoples. Now he is not fighting against the guerrilla, because he knows very well that the guerrilla is not isolated, but is part of the people. Rios Montt is not only following the old scorched earth policies of his predecessor Lucas Garcia. Now, when they bombard a village they also burn the surrounding mountains, the crops, the animals, they burn everything, so that the few survivors will have no place to hide, no food to eat. It is much more terrible now.

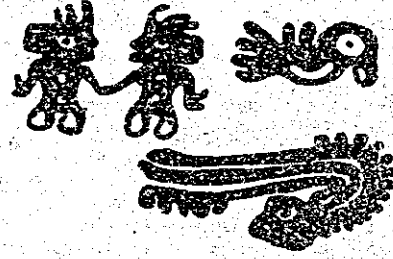
—Rigoberta Menchu, Quiche Indian, member of the Vicente Menchu Christian Revolutionaries and the Guatemalan Committee of Patriotic Unity

That is the reality of Guatemala today, where some 5,000 have been killed since the March 23, 1982 coup that resulted in General Efraim Rios Montt usurping the presidency. He promised reforms and an end to repression. Instead, this reactionary fundamentalist Christian who believes himself "called by God" to rule, has imposed a state of siege, press censorship and prohibition of all political activity while calling to active duty all former soldiers.

Because of human rights violations, U.S. military aid was suspended in 1977 to the regime of General Lucas Garcia. The recent coup was supposed to change the image of the government so the U. S. Congress would be able to resume military aid. Instead Rios Montt has intensified the genocide. Several Catholic priests have reported recent massacres in the countryside, where reporters cannot go.

Guatemala is Central America's most populous country: Over 70 percent of its people are Indian, forming 22 distinct peoples with their own languages and customs. The non-Indians are called Ladinos. The living conditions of the people have been sharply worsening under the economic crisis since the mid-70s: malnutrition affects 82 percent of the children under five, illiteracy is 53 percent, and in this most unequal of societies, the top 5 percent of the population receives fully 60 percent of the national income, while the poorest 50 percent receives only 7 percent of the national income.

The new today in Guatemala is the multiplicity of genuine, mass organizations that have sprung up since the late '70s. Peasant leagues, cooperatives, labor unions, student associations, Christian-base communities and neighborhood committees are all forms this movement has taken. It is in response to these movements that the massacres have increased.



Drawings from Guatemala's Indian nations

Now is also that we see for the first time that the majority of the guerrilla-freedom fighters are Indians, fully half are women, and even the children are involved. It is a very different kind of guerrilla, fully supported by a people who know from their daily experiences that this is the only way open to them if they and their culture are to survive and who have a unique vision of the kind of society they are fighting for.

The fact that a new unity is being forged between Indian and Ladino for the first time, and that with the success of the revolution in Guatemala it would be the first nation in the Americas where a majority indigenous people who have preserved their own culture against all odds would finally have power over their own lives, also makes Guatemala's a very unique struggle.

It is imperative therefore that this multi-faceted freedom movement is allowed to survive and develop, both for itself and for a new stage of freedom for the world.

The most immediate task is to stop the Reagan Administration from resuming direct military aid to Guatemala's generals. The Administration now has before Congress a request for \$250,000 for military training. If this trial balloon passes it will only mean more massacres.

Solidarity is not a one-way road. Let us also listen to the voice of this new Guatemala striving to be born, that it may help us to transform our society too into a more human one. It is precisely this spread of the ideas of freedom that the Reagan Administration fears, both in Central America and at home.

We are open to all who want to work with us in aiding the freedom movements in Guatemala. Share with us whatever time you can, share your ideas.

Committee of Solidarity with the People of Guatemala
19 West 21st Street, 2nd floor
New York, N.Y. 10010.

The peasant dimension in Latin America: its test of the relation of theory to organization

by Michael Connolly

The present world crisis, be it as seen in Latin America, or in the USA, in East Asia or West Europe, in Russia or in Southern Africa, demands that we turn seriously, objectively, and with a vision of a new society, to the peasant dimension as subject of revolution, a dimension that has again and again shaken every part of the world in our era. Today it is a subject that is in revolt all over Latin America.

The peasant strikes, demonstrations and land invasions throughout the hemisphere have created an entirely new stage in the freedom struggles, and nowhere more so than in today's Guatemala. The dialectic of events in that movement against the military dictatorship of Gen. Romeo Lucas Garcia and his U.S. imperialist backers reveals what a simple listing of the oppressive realities cannot: the emergence of the peasantry in revolt, en masse, and with the added character of caste and color.

I GUATEMALA: THE DIALECTICS OF EVENTS

Central to the origins of the current uprising is the ferment of what might be called an "Indian consciousness movement," as it thrust itself into the Guatemalan scene in the mid-1970s. It began with a challenge on the part of Indian intellectuals to the racism that divides all aspects of Guatemalan society into "Ladino," or those with Spanish heritage, and "Indio," a term uttered by Ladinos with great contempt. Stressing the recovery of Indian culture at its Mayan roots, writers such as Antonio Pop Casal denounced those who "dreamed of being Ladino," and insisted instead that the 22 Indian nations "take consciousness of their own identity."

By May, 1978, Kekchi people in the town of Panzós protested the seizure of their lands by rich Ladinos. Led by an Indian woman, they presented a petition to the Mayor, only to be met with a hail of automatic weapons fire from the army. In what was called "Guatemala's My Lai," 114 died.

One month later, Lucas Garcia took power in a supposed "reform" move, ruling a country where a two percent elite owns 70 percent of all arable land, while 200,000 peasants own no land at all. For a half-million



Guatemalan Indian fighters in the Guerrilla Army of the Poor

Indian peasants, each year means a migration from their tiny plot on the altiplano to the hot, humid south coast, where from October to February they work huge coffee, sugar cane and cotton plantations at pittance wages.

Now, however, Lucas Garcia's regime was faced with the explosive growth of mass organizations — the Committee for Campesino (Peasant) Unity and the National Committee for Trade Union Unity. Again and again the peasantry challenged the government in new ways, including the January, 1980 seizure of the Spanish embassy by Quiche peasants. The whole world saw how the army burned 39 alive there, including the Spanish hostages. What received far less notice was the response of the peasants laboring on the south coast plantations. They launched a 17-day strike of some 50,000, occupying sugar mills and plantations.

Suddenly, every protest became a threat to the government, every Indian meeting a conspiracy. Ixil Indian women were massacred in the Nebaj town square in March, 1980, forcing the Catholic bishop of El Quiché to denounce the government campaign of terror.

Now, a peasant congress met secretly, and present were representatives of Ixil, Quiche, Cakchiquel, Kekchi and others — 17 nationalities in all. Now, the government was forced to kidnap Indian youth, "conscripting" them into an army two-thirds Indian, yet officered nearly entirely by Ladinos. Now, a flood of Indian peasants began joining the guerrilla forces, especially the Guerrilla Army of the Poor. No other development has so transformed the situation in Guatemala, and sent such shock waves into the war councils of the Lucas Romero regime in Guatemala City and their Pentagon "counter-insurgency" advisors.

Despite the fact that the government and its two private ultra-right death squad armies have murdered some 5,000 persons since Lucas Romero took power, no end to the uprising is anywhere in sight. And far from the guerrilla opponents being Left adherents to theories of "focoism,"¹ mostly from the Ladino population, as they had been in the 1960s, now the peasant dimension in arms poses all questions anew.

The peasant as a subject of revolution has, in our age, not only confronted again and again the feudal oligarchy and the capitalist bourgeoisie, but demanded from the revolutionary Left a profound reorganization in thought and action. What 20th century revolution, whether African, as in Algeria or Zimbabwe; Asian, as in China, Vietnam or Iran; or the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, has not seen the peasantry burst onto the center stage as a principal actor in the drama?

In Latin America especially, every revolution from Mexico through Bolivia to Cuba and Nicaragua, has revealed the peasant dimension in Latin America's quest for liberation, and underscored that dimension's test of Marxists' understanding of the relationship of theory to revolution. Let's return, however briefly, to the beginning, with Marx's own concept of the peasantry as revolutionary subject.

II MARX'S CONCEPT OF THE PEASANTRY

There is hardly any part of Marx's writing on which more debris has been piled, with academics fondly quoting Marx's comment on "rural idioecy" as though that

Continued

1. For a discussion of focoism by a "participant-observer," see "Guerrilla Inflation: the foco theory as a theory for failure" in *Revolution in the Third World*, by Gerard Chaliand. On the tragic death of Che Guevara in Bolivia, see Editorial in *N&L*, November, 1967. Also see Raya Dunayevskaya's critique of Dabray's Resolution in the Revolution in *N&L*, March and April, 1968.

The peasant dimension in Latin America

Continued

were the beginning and end of the question. Far from Marx's conception of the peasantry being either one of contempt or one of undifferentiated enthusiasm, his work carefully traces the peasant dimension from the 1848 revolutions to his study of the Russian commune in the very last years of his life.

In the midst of the 1848 Revolutions, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* looks to the East for allies, and concludes: "The merit of the Poles lay in the fact that they first recognized and announced that the liberation of all Slavic nations could be achieved only through agrarian democracy." And it is precisely in Marx's greatest "summing up" of 1848, the 1850 Address to the Communist League, that he precedes his call for "revolution in permanence" with the singling out of the "rural proletariat" as the natural allies of the workers.

Out of 1848 and its experience came both Engels' great work on the 16th century Peasant War in Germany, and Marx's own study of the peasantry, not alone in Europe, but extending as well to Asia. In the *Grundrisse*, he dug into pre-capitalist economic formations, while he fixed his eye on the Taiping Rebellion in China. The agrarian question became for him a world question. Nor were these studies ever separated from the question of revolution. As he put it in an 1856 letter to Engels: "The whole matter in Germany will depend on the possibility of supporting the proletarian revolution with a sort of second edition of the peasant war. Then the thing will be excellent."

His expression stands in starkest contrast to that of Lassalle, who, unfortunately, was to anticipate a full century of misunderstanding of the peasant question. Looking back on the German peasant war Lassalle explained: "The peasants killed the nobles and burned their castles, or . . . made them run the gauntlet. However, notwithstanding this revolutionary appearance, the movement was, in substance and principle, reactionary."

Not only was that worlds apart from Marx's view in the 1850s, but it was to the agrarian question that Marx was to return in his last years, in his studies on the Oriental, especially Russian, commune. Here, what is crucial to see, and not alone for Marx's time, is that Marx's elucidation of the sharp duality within the peasant commune and its response to pressures from the capitalist world without, pinpointed the source of its revolutionary potential—a potential that could have an ever greater impact in the future. By Marx's 1862 Preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, the Russian commune was seen as a locale for new revolutionary forces, if they were not isolated from the revolutionary forces within capitalism, especially the urban proletariat.

The fact is, however, that what was clear to Marx was not at all clear to Marxists who followed. It was to take two Russian revolutions and the defeat of the German revolution of 1919, before Lenin was to declare: "If not through Berlin, then through Peking," and thus focus attention on the world revolutionary potential of the peasantry in the era of colonial revolutions. For Lenin, the path to full revolution in the Russian civil war 1918-19 lay in part through the tremendous self-activity of the peasantry, their land invasions, their driving out of the nobles from the rural areas. Bolshevism's slogan was: "Go and take the land for yourselves!"



Miguel A. Sague, Bolivian artist

III THE BOLIVIAN REVOLUTION, 1952-53

Even though the more than 60 years since the Russian Revolution have been marked by the explosive participation of the peasantry in all revolutions, they have been characterized as well by a non-comprehension of that role on the part of Marxists as different as Trotsky and Mao.² Leon Trotsky knew first-hand what the participation of the peasantry on the side of the revolution had meant in the Russian civil war. Yet as late as 1936, writing on China, he was still clinging to his life-long position that the peasantry cannot play "an independent role, and even less a leading one." And in his last year, 1940, he was repeating: "The peasantry is incapable even of formulating its own interests."

In the Bolivian Revolution of 1952-53 — a deep and genuine national and social revolution, both in the mines and on the land — Trotskyism had its chance to participate in a full sense in an ongoing Latin American revolution. The Revolutionary Workers' Party (POR) in Bolivia had actually gained wide support before the revolution, not only among miners, but to some extent among peasants, following its *Pulacayo Thesis* of 1946. That thesis, supported by the miners, called for proletarian revolution in alliance with the peasantry.

Ironically, what allowed the Trotskyists in Latin America to formulate a position like the *Pulacayo Thesis* was their total concentration on Trotsky's 1938 "Transitional Program of the Fourth International" rather than Trotsky's theory on the non-revolutionary nature of the peasantry. And the fact is that that Program called for a "workers and farmers" government — this at the same period where Trotsky was repeating that the peasantry was "incapable of formulating its own interests."³

Continued

2. Mao is never charged with "underestimating" the peasantry. Yet what Mao's history in power underlines is the truth that the only peasant he was for, was the peasant Army, under military discipline, and under the direction of Army and Party leadership. For a tracing of Mao's position on the peasantry, see "The Challenge of Mao Tse-tung" in *Marxism and Freedom*, by Raya Dunayevskaya.

3. In the Peruvian peasant struggles of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Trotskyism again played a major role, even if a revolutionary stage was not reached. For a study of that period by its greatest figure, Hugo Blanco, see the book, *Land or Death: The Peasant Struggle in Peru*. The whole question of Trotskyism's share of the responsibility for the unfinished nature of Latin America's revolutions is best seen in "Latin America's Unfinished Revolutions," a Political-Philosophic Letter by Raya Dunayevskaya.

The peasant dimension in Latin America

Continued

The armed insurrection that broke out on April 9, 1952 quickly revealed its difference from Bolivia's scores of coups and counter-coups of the past. In two days of fighting, the rebel troops were joined in the center of La Paz by the Indian market women — who also ventured into the garrisons and seized the weapons from Indian recruits. A detachment of armed miners from Oruro dismantled the batteries on the rim overlooking the capital.

From the moment the revolution succeeded, it became clear how little the categories of "proletarian" and "peasant," in the narrow economist interpretation of the Left, including POR, anticipated the Bolivian revolutionary reality. Miners seized the mines and won their expropriation from the foreign corporations, suddenly entering into the national life in a way that no Indian group had been able to achieve since the conquest of the Inca empire. And since Bolivian miners and peasants are not two different peoples, the self-mobilization of the mining districts quickly challenged the basis of feudal land relations, as the miners and miners' wives talked to their families in their home villages. What followed was the most massive peasant self-organization in Latin American history.

While the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) government and its Left allies (including POR) argued over whether land reform should or shouldn't compensate the hacienda owners, the peasantry began to seize the land. Rapidly, the land invasions spread across the country, involving hundreds of thousands of Indian campesinos. The first response of the MNR government was to send police to stop the land invasions, and arrest POR members who were aiding the peasants. Even then, with only mild criticism, POR supported the government land policies, hardly recognizing the stark divide that was sweeping through the altiplano and the valleys. Indians, only months ago the dominated huge majority, stripped for centuries of their communal lands, now forced the white elite and their functionaries to flee to the cities. Spring, 1953, saw them as masters of much of the land.

By the time the MNR government signed the Agrarian Reform Decree, fifteen months after the Revolution, the land had already been largely seized, 200,000 campesinos, one-third of them with weapons, attended the signing ceremony. The truth is that the Decree was conceived as part of a way to halt the invasions, and re-establish, slowly, the control by the party apparatus over the direction of the peasant struggle. Yet it was to be more than another year before the Trotskyists, then split into several groups, broke with the reformist MNR government. By then, the bureaucratization of the revolution on the land was well advanced, with the re-establishment of a new peasant leader-elite, tied to the party.⁴

By 1964 the bureaucratized revolution was overthrown by the right-wing general Barrientos. What re-

4. Of the many books on the history of the Bolivian Revolution and Trotskyism's role there, two of the more important are by Robert J. Alexander: *The Bolivian National Revolution*, and *Trotskyism in Latin America*. Alexander's account of the campesino land invasions there, however, should be supplemented by other sources closer to the peasantry.

mained, still largely unheard by the Left, were the continually emerging voices from that supposedly "silent enigma." Listen to the Tiahuanacu Manifesto of 1973. "In Bolivia there exists a pyramid of domination, and we have remained at the lowest and most exploited level of that pyramid. . . . We refuse to believe in the rhetoric of those parties which, claiming to be Leftist, do not recognize the campesinos as the makers of their own destiny."

In focusing on the revolutionary dimension of the Latin American peasantry and its test of the relationship of theory to revolution, light is shed also on the "domino theories" of Reagan-Haig, whatever the name under which they are peddling them this week. Their fantastic insistence that the current freedom struggles in El Salvador — and all of Latin America — are Cuban-Russian conspiracies is an attempt to hide the fact that, ever since Guatemala 1954, they have been the ones who played the domino game.

In the "Southern Cone" Reagan and his ultra-right friends ruling Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Uruguay are playing it still. Having now installed the brutal Garcia Meza regime in Bolivia, the Southern Cone juntas are attempting to spread that brand of terror further north on the continent.

What we North Americans have to do now is to begin to see the real revolutionary relationships in Latin America, beginning with the fact that the Latin American peasant has always been a "city person" as well. In today's struggles, that means being a "country and city guerrilla," whether working in the sweatshops, or unemployed in the shantytown barrios, whether on the the huge plantations, or toiling to make a living from a tiny plot.

They are opening new roads to solidarity with a second, revolutionary, North America. And we, in turn — and not only because we have Latinos within this country — are learning not to get brainwashed by the U.S. ruling class. Thus we can begin to extend our hand in solidarity, practically as well as theoretically.

"The press is the ruthless language and manifest image of the historical spirit of the people . . ."

— Karl Marx

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MARXIST HUMANIST ARCHIVES

July, 1954

The U.S. and Guatemala

Editor's Note—With this issue we initiate a new feature in News & Letters, "Marxist-Humanist Archives". We hope to present not generally available Marxist-Humanist writings which will help to clarify today's political-revolutionary questions. We begin with a 1954 Editorial written just after a U.S.-sponsored coup in Guatemala, justified by "supposed" Communist domination of the Guatemalan government.

Readers' Views this issue carries a discussion between two workers on U.S. foreign policy in which one says: "The U.S. sticks its nose into too many other people's affairs," and the other answers, "Every time a fight breaks out we accuse the Russians of starting it—but the Russians seem, once in a while, to get themselves on the side that's fighting for independence. Why can't the U.S. get on that side for once?"

We disagree that Russia is ever on the side of the people fighting for independence—except where it happens to suit its foreign policy of fighting the United States for world domination. But it is most certainly true that the State Department is never on the side of the people fighting for national independence—except, again, where it suits its policy of fighting Russia for world mastery. In fact, it has just engineered a quickie—a "liberation" in true Moscow style.

THE UNITED FRUIT COMPANY RULE

To Europe, McCarthyism stands for the "American way of life." To Latin America, the United Fruit Co. does. To the Guatemalans this has meant a century of earning three cents a day, with no security beyond that day of "pay," a hovel that could not be called a home, no matter how you stretched the meaning of that word, no union and no vote. This they summed up in one phrase, "Yankee Imperialism." For 105 years the people have struggled through revolution after revolution without any measurable degree of success. In 1944 they succeeded in throwing over the dictator and good friend of the United Fruit Co., Gen. Jorge Ubico.

The 1944 revolution put an end to "the good old days" when the United Fruit Co. had nothing to worry about for it always had enough dictators in its power and enough money to buy other politicians who would approve its "labor policy." People began to take things into their own hands. President Arbenz, who has just been forced out of office, is as much of a Communist as American Ambassador Peurifoy who engineered the revolt. Arbenz is a rich landlord. But he was President and the hunger of the peasants for land had to be assuaged.

AGRARIAN REFORM AND THE COMMUNISTS

An agrarian reform law went into effect under his regime. The first land to be distributed under this reform came from national *fincas* taken over by the Government from German owners during World War II. The next expropriation affected the native landlords and the United Fruit Co.

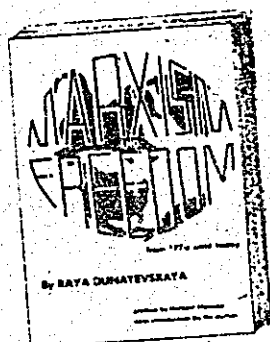
This mild expropriation was a long cry from "land to the peasants." The average wage still is below \$100 a year. But about one out of every ten peasants did receive land of one acre per person and those have reached \$800 a year income. The United Fruit Co. does pay two dollars a day, unions are legal, and so is the Communist Party.

But the Communist Party has no more than 2,000 members; only three out of 58 seats in the Government were held by Communists. If the Communists played any role at all in this revolution, it was to suppress its natural movement toward "land to the peasants." They saw to it that peasants and workers did not take things into their own hands, did not form committees outside Government channels, nor arm themselves to defend their few gains. . . .

The truth is that the decade between 1944 and 1954 was a decade in which war ended but peace was not achieved. The end of World War II is only an interlude to prepare for the next holocaust. No country today is free to decide its own destiny without being pulled into one or another of the two camps fighting for world mastery. That is what is new. . . .

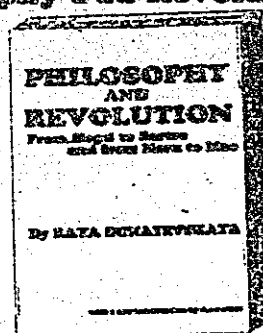
Raya Dunayevskaya's Trilogy of Revolution

Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution



Marxism and Freedom

Philosophy and Revolution



Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution

On Luxemburg — "What Marx is tracing in the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation is what results from the disintegration of capitalism: 'From that moment new forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society . . . Luxemburg's failure to see that, in what she was trying to trace with imperialism's rise, is the fatal flaw of her work. Luxemburg the revolutionary, tried to save Luxemburg the theoretician, by adding that 'long before' capitalism's downfall because of the absence of noncapitalist lands, the proletariat would overthrow it . . ."

On Engels — "To what extent is Marx's 'spirit' reflected in Engel's own work, The Origin of the Family, which he had likewise considered a 'bequest' of Marx? Now that we finally have a transcription of Marx's Ethnological Notebooks, we can see for ourselves . . . (There are) sharp differences between Engels' Origin of the Family and Marx's Notebooks whether these relate to primitive communism, the Man/Woman relationship . . ."

Marxism and Freedom

On Trotsky — "Trotsky was compelled to create identification between workers' state and sanctified property that did violence to the very concept of socialism. Abstractions have ever been the refuge of ultra-leftists as for idealists. As a result, they can no more penetrate the dialectic in action than they can penetrate it in thought."

Philosophy and Revolution

On Lenin — "There is not a trace of partyness in the Philosophic Notebooks, not even the old concept of 'the party of idealism' or the 'party of materialism.' What we are concerned with is not the monstrous myth of partyness in philosophy, but rather, the duality of the philosophic heritage. Far from publicly proclaiming his philosophic past, Lenin advised Soviet youth to study 'everything Plekhanov wrote on Philosophy . . . and he reprinted his own Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.'"

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