FDR-FMLN (Doc. 9) offers a political analysis of the conflict and formulates proposals to achieve peace and establish a democratic system. The diary of an FMLN combatant (Doc. 10) gives an unusual perspective on life in a Salvadoran guerrilla camp. After 1989 the FMLN softened its position and made substantial political concessions. The army also became more willing to talk, thus opening the possibilities for a political solution for the civil war, which culminated in the signing of a peace treaty in January 1992. In Guatemala and Honduras the struggle continued to take its toll in human lives, suffering, and dislocation.

In the early 1990s all Central American countries are headed by conservative presidents, and U.S. security concerns in the region are vanishing with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, years of protracted war did not result in a clear military victory for either side, thus raising some fundamental questions about the prospects and viability of revolutionary movements or the effectiveness of the army in winning the war. Under these circumstances, political negotiation and diplomacy became the most effective means to end the cycle of violence and war and bring peace to the region. The disarmament of the guerrillas and their incorporation into political and economic life pose some difficult problems, such as allocation of land and other forms of aid and training for the former combatants. The restructuring of the police and the reduction in the size of armies also require some difficult adjustments. But the most difficult challenges of the postwar period will be building mutual trust and a real commitment to democratic institutions, along with the implementation of economic and social policies that promote economic development and a more fair distribution of wealth. Until social and economic transformations occur, the underlying causes of revolution in Central America will remain.

1. General Principles of Guerrilla Fighting ◆ Ernesto “Che” Guevara

Ernesto Guevara, born in Argentina in 1928 and killed while trying to organize a guerrilla movement in Bolivia in 1967, was one of the most influential and inspiring revolutionary figures in Latin America in the 1960s. His ideas and example had great impact in Cuba and in the rest of the region. Guerrilla Warfare, published in 1960, condenses the experiences learned in Cuba and offers practical advice to revolutionaries. This extract is from the section, “Essence.”

The armed victory of the Cuban people over the Batista dictatorship has been recognized throughout the world as an epic triumph. It has revised old dogmas about the behavior of Latin American masses and has proved the people’s ability to free themselves from an oppressive government through guerrilla warfare.

We believe that the Cuban revolution revealed three fundamental conclusions about armed revolution in the Americas:

I) Popular forces can win a war against an army.
II) One does not necessarily have to wait for a revolutionary situation to arise; it can be created.
III) In the underdeveloped countries of the Americas, rural areas are the best battlegrounds for revolution.

The first two conclusions refute the do-nothing attitude of those pseudo revolutionaries who procrastinate under the pretext that nothing can be done against a professional army. They also refute those who feel the need to wait until, in some perfect way, all the required objective and subjective conditions are brought about through their own efforts. These undeniable truths were discussed in Cuba and are probably being discussed in Latin America now. Of course, not all the prerequisites for a revolution are going to be created solely by guerrillas. Certain minimum preconditions are needed to kindle the first spark. The people must be shown that social wrongs are not going to be redressed by civil means alone. And it is desirable to have the oppressor, whimsically or not, break the peace first.

Under these conditions, popular discontent assumes increasingly positive forms, creating a state of resistance that, provoked by the attitude of the authorities, can easily lead to an outbreak of fighting.

If a government has come to power through some form of popular vote, whether fraudulent or not, and if that government maintains at least the appearance of constitutional law, a guerrilla uprising cannot be brought about until all possible avenues of legal procedure have been exhausted.

The third conclusion is strategic, to convince those who want to center the revolution on urban masses not to overlook the tremendous role of rural people in underdeveloped America. We do not wish to underestimate the importance of armed resistance conducted by organized workers, but in the cities, armed revolt can all too easily be smothered when customary civil liberties are suspended or ignored, thus forcing resistance movements to act clandestinely, without arms, and against enormous dangers. This does not
hold true in rural areas where guerrillas and inhabitants cooperate closely, beyond the reach of oppressor forces.

We place the above-mentioned three conclusions at the head of this work despite the detailed analysis to follow, for they constitute the basic contribution of the Cuban experience.

Guerrilla warfare, the basis of the people's fight for liberation, has many different characteristics and facets. It is obvious—and all who have written about it concur—that war is subject to certain strategic laws, and those who violate these laws will be defeated. Guerrilla warfare, a phase of general warfare, must be governed by all these laws; but in addition it has its own laws, and this unique set of rules must be followed if it is to succeed. Of course, different geographic and social factors in individual countries may call for different methods and forms of guerrilla warfare, but the basic laws apply to all guerrilla campaigns.

It is our task here to present these basic considerations, to develop a theory, to define and draw conclusions from our experience for the benefit of other peoples fighting for freedom.

Who are the combatants in guerrilla warfare? On one side, we have the oppressive oligarchy with its agent, the professional army, well armed and disciplined and frequently the recipient of foreign aid. Allied with the army are pampered bureaucracies. On the other side stand the people of the nation or region concerned. Guerrilla warfare is a fight of the masses, with the guerrilla band as the armed nucleus. The bands need not be considered inferior to the opposing army. Rather, the contrary is true: One resorts to guerrilla warfare when oppressed by superior numbers and arms. For the individual guerrilla warrior, then, wholehearted help from the local population is the basis on which to start. Popular support is indispensable. Let us consider the example of robber bands that roam a certain region. They possess all the characteristics of a guerrilla band—homogeneity, respect for their leader, bravery, familiarity with the terrain, and frequently even thorough understanding of tactics. They lack only one thing: the support of the people. And inevitably, these bands are caught and wiped out by police forces.

Why does the guerrilla fight? He is a social reformer. He takes up arms in response to widespread popular protest against an oppressor, impetuously hurling himself with all his might against anything that symbolizes the established order. . . .

When we analyze the tactics of guerrilla warfare, we see that the guerrilla must possess a highly developed knowledge of the terrain on which he operates, avenues of access and escape, possibilities for rapid maneuver, popular support, and hiding places. All this favors rural areas. Moreover, here the guerrilla can represent the desires of the great mass of poor farmers to possess their own land, animals, and all that makes up their life from cradle to grave. In other words, the guerrilla is—above all else—an agrarian revolutionary. So, for an up-to-date understanding of guerrilla warfare, what we are interested in is an armed group that fights the existing government, whether colonial or not, that acts on its own initiative, is rural in character, and economically is based on the desire to hold land. Mao Tse-tung's China began as workers' uprisings that were defeated and almost wiped out. It recovered only when it took root in rural areas and adopted the cause of agrarian reform. Ho Chi-minh's victory in Indochina was based on poor rice farmers oppressed by French colonists. In Algeria, Arab nationalism is bolstered by oppressive conditions of sharecropping imposed by French colonists. In Puerto Rico, special conditions so far have prevented a guerrilla outbreak, but nationalism is arising because the poor farmers want their land back from the Yankee invader. This same craving drove the farmers of Eastern Cuba to fight, ever since Batista first came to power thirty years ago, for the right to hold land.

This type of hostility feeds on itself, and eventually transforms guerrilla warfare into positional warfare as the strength and number of fighting units increase. The possibility for such transformation is as great as the chance to destroy the enemy whenever encountered. Therefore, never undertake any fight that cannot be won.

There is a saying: "The guerrilla is the maverick of war." He practices deception, treachery, surprise, and night operations. Thus, circumstances and the will to win often oblige him to forget romantic and sportsmanlike concepts. Military strategy and tactics represent the way the group conceives its objectives of taking full advantage of the enemy's weak points. Individual combat is much the same in guerrilla warfare as at the squad level in conventional warfare. When trickery does not work, it's only because the enemy is alert and cannot be caught off guard. However, because the guerrilla band commands itself and because the enemy cannot forever guard all areas, surprise is always possible. It is the guerrilla's duty to exploit it!

Some disparaging people call this "hit and run." That is exactly what it is! Hit and run, wait, stalk the enemy, hit him again and run, do it all again and again, giving no rest to the enemy. Perhaps this smacks of not facing up to the enemy. Nevertheless, it serves the goal of guerrilla warfare: to conquer and destroy the enemy.

It is obvious that guerrilla warfare is a preliminary step, unable to win a war all by itself. What happens is that the guerrilla army swells in size until it becomes a regular army. Only then will it be ready to deliver a knock-out blow.

Just as a division commander no longer has to sacrifice himself out front leading his troops, the guerrillas—one each his own commander—do
not have to sacrifice themselves in battle. A guerrilla is willing to give his life to realize an ideal, not merely to defend it.

Thus, the essence of guerrilla warfare is the miracle by which a small nucleus of men—looking beyond the immediate tactical objective—becomes the vanguard of a mass movement, achieving its ideals, establishing a new society, ending the ways of the old, and winning social justice. Considered in this light, guerrilla warfare takes on a true greatness, a sense of destiny, without the need for further rhetoric. Likewise, an unflinching will to fight and persistence against immense obstacles are the greatness of the guerrilla.

2. General Declaration of the First Conference • Organization of Latin American Solidarity

The first OLAS Conference, held in Havana in 1967, was an important event in the history of those Latin American leftist parties and movements that thought a continental revolution was possible. Armed struggle as a means to achieve revolutionary change, the relentless fight against imperialism, and solidarity with the Cuban Revolution were among the main topics of analysis and discussion. (Ernesto “Che” Guevara did not attend; he was in Bolivia trying to spark revolution.) On August 10 the OLAS proclaimed the following:

1. That making the Revolution constitutes a right and a duty of the peoples of Latin America.

2. That the Revolution in Latin America has its deepest historical roots in the liberation movement against European colonialism of the 19th century and against imperialism of this century. The epic of the peoples of America and the great class battles that our peoples have carried out against imperialism in earlier decades constitute the source of historical inspiration of the Latin American revolutionary movement.

3. That the essential content of the Revolution in Latin America is to be found in its confrontation with imperialism and the bourgeois and landowner oligarchies. Consequently, the character of the Revolution is the struggle for national independence, emancipation from the oligarchies, and the socialist road for its complete economic and social development.

4. That the principles of Marxism-Leninism guide the revolutionary movement of Latin America.