

Chapter 4

The FARC-EP and Consequential Marxism in Colombia

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Abstract

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) has maintained its base among small-holders including coca farmers and expanded its struggle through a local interpretation of Marxism and Leninism. This chapter reviews current accounts of its history and contemporary presence. The author then provides his own analysis of their strategy, namely that they have successfully pursued a gradual expansion of a separate power base and economy from that of the state and its capitalist economy, a situation that Lenin described as 'dual power', or, as Gramsci elaborated, a challenge to the hegemony of the ruling bloc. His visits and interviews and two recent documentary films in the FARC-EP areas show that the economy under FARC leadership, while taxing and controlling the processing and selling of coca, is still one of private small-holders. Many farmers grow coca as their main crop but all to some extent diversify into subsistence crops. This is a successful preparation for eventual state power of a completely different kind under which the economy will be socialised.

For a half century the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas-Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP) have played a key role in organising, sustaining, and leading revolutionary activity within the Latin American country of Colombia. Displaying a unique application of Marxism-Leninism this insurgency has demonstrated the capacity to achieve power throughout various sectors of the country due, in part, to the movement's distinct commitment toward radical societal change. Dating back to the 1960s, the FARC-EP, in conjunction with the Colombian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Colombiano, PCC), began working with several thousand rural civilians to organise networks of cooperation and security in response to expanding capitalist interests and state-induced repression. In the face of extreme political and military coercion,¹ the movement established

itself as a goal-orientated defence-based peasant collective across the southern departments of Tolima, Huila, and Cauca and critiqued imperialist interference in Colombia while putting in place strategies addressing agrarian reform and alternative modes of development via worker-peasant alliances (Peace and Socialism 1966: 12-18). In those early days, attempts were made to construct an uncorrupted stable society based on local control and a new approach to countering repressive centralised state power through the construction of self-defence communities in various rural areas of the southwest.²

While many romantic accounts of these peasant-based communities exist, virtually all fall short of recognising the movement's militant construction and political goal. Describing her recollection of the self-defence groups, Maria Ovidia Díaz stated, 'the campesino self-defence groups were an organization that sought to address the daily needs of the farmers. In its origins these campesino self-defence groups were organized to protect the well-being of the community' (as quoted in Obando and Velásquez 2004). Far from docile these sociopolitical collectives sought a peace-filled existence through mechanisms that would defend their alternative development projects from reaction. Rather than existing as autonomous non-violent social organisations, as some have suggested,³ the self-defence groups understood the need for objective security in response to dominant class-interests. Alberto Gomez (1972: 253), in particular, documented how in addition to establishing programmes of human development the collectives had an 'overall policy of preparing for guerrilla action' (a policy subsequently pursued in other zones as well).⁴ The success of said communities led sectors of the dominant class to see 'a threat in the existence of the self-defence zones. It realized that they were not a sign of relative equilibrium in the class balance, but a manifestation of class struggle' (Gomez 1972: 251; see also Sánchez and Meertens 2001: 178-184). Their formation signified a growing peril for the rural elite and a potential time bomb for the state,⁵ as the communities – arranged in a localised *dual strategy* of socioeconomic political-cultural development *and* defensive measures to sustain alternatives erected – did not promote a non-militant individualised existence but rather demonstrated an organised Communist ideology that was part of a larger struggle vying for a revolutionary shift in the social relations of production.

A Unique Praxis

Officially formed in 1964, the FARC-EP is one of the longest established insurgencies in the world. One of the most distinct features of this insurgency is that it has been shaped, organised, and remains prominently led by the peasantry.⁶ Outside the FARC-EP, there has never been a peasant-founded, structured, sustained, or directed revolutionary organisation within Central and South American society (Richani 2002: 60; Veltmeyer and Petras 2002: 82; Wickham-Crowley 1992: 18, 26). This is not to imply that peasants have been uninvolved in past attempts of self-emancipation within Latin American struggles, of which there have been many. Nor does it suggest that Colombia's middle and upper economic strata, urban-based unionists, liberation-theologians or others sectors of society are not in the ranks of, or associated with, the guerrillas – for they most assuredly are. What the above does signify is that the FARC-EP depicts an alternative example of a Latin American insurgency via leadership, tactical ambition, and ideology application(s). For example, the guerrilla's organisational structure is based on a hierarchical chain of command made up of a multi-person leadership deeply connected to the countryside. The highest level of leadership is the Secretariat of the Central High Command, composed of seven members (Pastor Alape, Bertulfo Álvarez, Pablo Catatumbo, Joaquín Gómez, Mauricio Jaramillo, Timoleón Jiménez, and Iván Márquez).⁷ Of those within the Secretariat each has some personal tie to the countryside, as do 'most of the commanders of the fronts and columns' (Weinstein 2007: 289).⁸ The rank-and-file also deviate from many guerrilla groups in the region (including others in Colombia), as the majority, at all levels, have some historic and contemporary connection to a bucolic territory (Weinstein 2007: 289; de la Peña 1998: 353). This is not to say that the FARC-EP remains confined to the countryside, however.⁹ The past four decades have seen significant changes for Colombian society due to the political-economic climate and so too has the guerrilla army developed into a complex and organised movement far outside rurality.¹⁰ Today, membership has grown to incorporate indigenous populations, afro-Colombians, the displaced, landless rural-labourers, intellectuals, unionists, teachers, professionals, doctors, lawyers, priests, and sectors of the urban workforce (Brittain 2010b).

Roughly 65% continue to come from the countryside or rural-based municipalities – 12% to 13% composed of various indigenous groups¹¹ – and the remaining 35% from urban sectors.¹²

Steeped in Communist ideology, the FARC-EP has held onto a Marxist-Leninist strategy to procure revolution that distinguishes it from other socialist powers in history both regionally and globally. Regionally, the FARC-EP was one of the only Latin America insurgencies that did not support a Cuban model of *foco* theory for the Colombian situation.¹³ Apart from following any form of *foco* theory that H. Michael Erisman and John M. Kirk (2006: 162) presented, the FARC-EP has, in fact, never been strongly influenced by Havana at all (see also Maullin 1973; Gott 1970). They have rather opted to follow a model by which local power is amassed through the establishment of broad support over long periods. According to Alfredo Schulte-Bockholt (2006: 111), ‘the FARC doctrine proclaimed that revolutionary conditions developed over time,’ not, as dictated through a Guevara-derived model where the guerrillas would induce or create such revolutionary conditions in and of themselves. For James Petras (1999: 30), the FARC-EP ‘has built its power base patiently over time with a precise strategic plan: the accumulation of local power.’¹⁴ Globally, the FARC-EP objectively and subjectively disassociated itself from the USSR well before its collapse (see FARC-EP 1999: 47-48). Maintaining a distinct domestic ambition and peasant-based leadership – which depicts a revolutionary dual power strategy from below – may offer answers as to how the FARC-EP, unlike other Latin American insurgencies, did not derive any significant material loss upon the fall of Soviet communism.¹⁵ Abiding by a contextual interpretation of Marxist-Leninist revolution ‘saved us when the Berlin Wall fell,’ according to one Comandante (as quoted in Lévy 2004: 80). After interviewing Iván Ríos, a former member of the Secretariat, and other members of the insurgency, philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy (2004: 82) noted the distinctiveness of the FARC-EP’s political ideology: ‘[T]here is something in this Marxism-Leninism that, despite its irreproachable rhetoric, resembles nothing I have ever heard or seen elsewhere ... this is an impeccable Communism; along with Cuba, this is the last Communism in Latin America and, certainly, the most powerful.’ Hugh O’Shaughnessy and Sue Branford (2005: 25) have also concluded that the FARC-EP is shaped by a unique ‘form

of Marxism-Leninism' (see also Cala 2000: 59).

Unlike 'new' social movements or post-modern 'insurgencies,' the FARC-EP have committed themselves to a more classically-orientated yet contemporary Marxism-Leninism (see Goff 2004: 39-41). It has even been suggested that the FARC-EP not only has the potential to be victorious but that they are, in some aspects, succeeding in their revolutionary struggle¹⁶ so that the FARC-EP may be 'the first leftist guerrilla movement to achieve success in the post-cold war era' (Cala 2000: 56).¹⁷

Continuity in Power and Form

The last twenty years have witnessed the guerrilla movement expand social, economic, political, and cultural programs while escalating security measures against state reactionism (Brittain 2010a). The FARC-EP has been able to do this since it has become 'more sophisticated, shifting from small guerrilla units using hit and run tactics to "mobile warfare," employing a large number of combatants (battalion-strength) and targeting well-armed garrisons in peripheral cities' (Richani 2005: 84, 95). In these areas, the FARC-EP has moved beyond mere guerrilla combat and matured to a place of partial politico-military control over select territories (González, Bolívar, and Vázquez 2002: 54).¹⁸ Even with severe blows experienced in recent years, the insurgency has been able not only to stabilise campaigns toward designated targets but to increase activities on an annual basis.

For much of the 2000s the FARC-EP modestly amplified armed campaigns (949 [2004], 1,008 [2005], 1,026 [2006], 1,057 [2007]) against state forces. Subsequent years, however, witnessed a considerable jump in operations. In 2008, claimed by the state as a year of decline for the FARC-EP, the guerrilla deployed a total of 1,353 attacks, while 2009 saw the number of military attacks engaged by the insurgency average over five per day [1,614] (Ávila Martínez 2010). It is no surprise, when one examines this data, that journalist Adriaan Alsema (2009) concluded, 'despite nearly eight years of an aggressive military offensive against the guerrillas, the FARC are far

from beaten but appear to be on the rebound. According to [one] report, the guerrillas increased their military attacks by 30% in 2009.’ By 2010 significant events transpired that led many to believe the FARC-EP may be ‘on the ropes’ with the death of long-time Comandante (and military mastermind) Jorge Briceño. Nevertheless, attacks increased. While some estimated these campaigns at 1,800,¹⁹ the actual numbers by the end of the year exceeded 1,947 (Valencia and Ávila Martínez 2011; Valencia 2011). Not only was the greatest number of insurgent-based attacks against state forces in fifteen years mounted, but 2010 bore witness to the highest number of casualties suffered by state forces in a decade. Tensions increased in 2011 with the death of the guerrilla’s Commander-in-Chief Alfonso Cano in a state-led operation. Far from discouraged, the guerrillas bettered their military conquests as FARC-EP attacks showed more than a 10% increase when compared to the preceding year (Valencia and Ávila Martínez 2011; Mannon 2011). Conservative estimates suggested insurgent campaigns would likely add up to between 2,000 and 2,200 by the year’s end (Valencia and Ávila Martínez 2011; Semana 2011; El Pais 2011). These assessments proved accurate when final reports highlighted the greatest expression of FARC-EP politico-military power in history, as 2,148 attacks were successfully waged throughout the nation (Alsema 2012b). Such accounts not only highlight the insurgency’s capacity to sustain tactics but it emphasises renewed consolidation of control over various sections of the country.

With 2011 witnessing an average of seven campaigns per day, 2012 had an even more devastating effect on the state’s control of the country. During the first 20 days of 2012 alone, the FARC-EP deployed over 132 attacks against security forces in a plethora of locations across the country (Radio Caracol 2012). As the year went on, the guerrillas demonstrated a capacity to fully consolidate control over of territory in numerous departments (Putumayo, Caquetá, Choco, etc.) thereby preventing multinational resource production and extraction, trade and intervention (Barrett 2012; Leonard 2012; Parkinson 2012). Apart from the scope of force being raised, so too had the numerical scale of campaigns grown. Attacks were noted to last longer and include larger numbers of armed guerrillas when compared to the ‘hit and run strategy’ earlier (Alsema 2012a). By the middle of the year, the FARC-EP was launching, on average, three hundred politico-

military campaigns per month (Pettersson 2013c, 2013d).

Recognizing the insecure realities ahead, the administration of Juan Manuel Santos Calderón [2010-2014] agreed to begin an arduous series of peace negotiations with the FARC-EP to reduce the insurgency's momentum.²⁰ During the catalytic phase of the peace talks in September 2012, FARC-EP attacks dropped precipitously by seventy percent with an overall decrease of eighty percent once negotiations had begun, thus illustrating the fluid communications and manoeuvring of the insurgency's chain of command throughout the country (Pettersson 2013b, 2013d, 2013e).²¹ While some measure of stability has occurred, it must be understood within the context of the civil war; a precarious political moment of negotiation when the insurgency has chosen to reserve operations outside the normalcy of national violence. Acknowledgment of this insecurity is shown by the fact that in the first quarter of 2013 the FARC-EP averaged fifty-seven political-military campaigns per month – in departments all over the country (Pettersson 2013a).

Not witnessed since the mid-1990s, the FARC-EP has amassed power not simply in the historic enclaves of its traditional support but in regions thought to have no guerrilla influence. While areas such as Caquetá, Cauca, Huila, Nariño, Tolima, Putumayo, and Meta are largely predisposed, it has been noted widely that the departments of Antioquia, Arauca, and Norte de Santander now have adequate levels of support for the FARC-EP (Valencia and Ávila Martínez 2011; *The Economist* 2011). This illustrates the guerrillas' revolutionary vitality, commitment, and broad support to respond even during periods of tribulation such as the loss of significant leaders (Chernick 2007: 69).

Theorising The FARC-EP's Revolutionary Strategy

In *Dual Power*, Lenin (1964: 38-39) demonstrated that a true revolution does not occur from above through the consolidation of power via pre-existing sociopolitical class structures but rather from below through an alternative class-based construct (both governing and militarily prepared), which exists beyond the conventional system. Some have tried to define dual power as

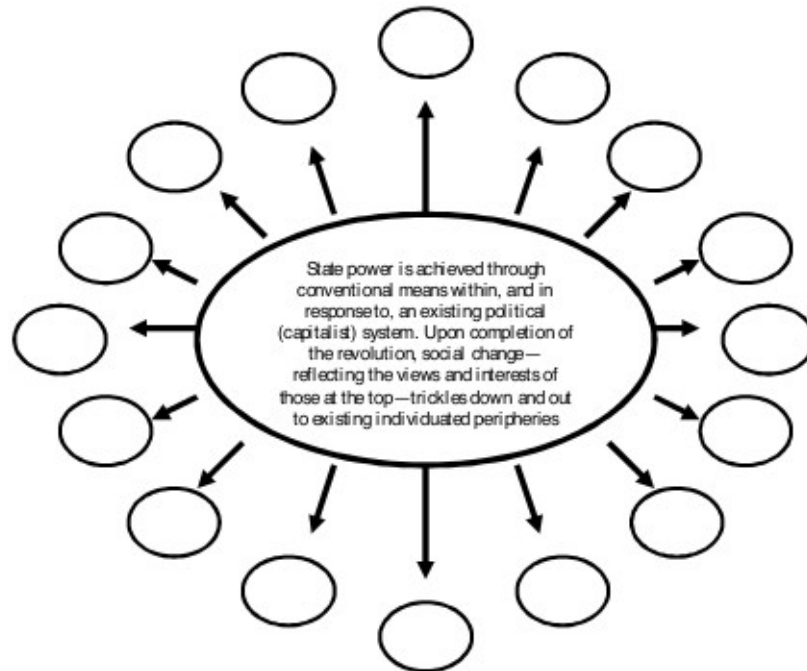
the existence of ‘two or more political blocs (including, typically, extant state officials and their allies), both or all of which claim to be the legitimate state, and both or all of which may possess significant means of coercion’ (Goodwin 2001: 12). According to Charles Tilly (1978: 191-193), the situation of dual power, or what he labels ‘multiple sovereignty,’ occurs when contending groups vie for authority over a given population, thereby weakening one ‘state’ power in favour of another.²² However, this is not what Lenin was pointing to. He argued that an alternative state must exist in dismissal of, not competition with, the existing model. In such a situation people ‘set up their own organized power without having achieved political independence’ (Lenin 1969: 401). Dual power then promotes a provisional state formed from and supported by the most exploited (in arms) through an entirely different form of self-governance whereby the people emancipate themselves and their class apart from the capitalist model (Lenin 1964: 38-40). Ernest Mandel (1994: 194 [italics added]) offered a more recent account of dual power as ‘reflecting a territorial division of the country into liberated zones, in which a new state is *emerging,*’ while other segments of the country remain entangled in the structure of the old (see also Bookchin 1996: 9-10). In time, new states consolidate more of the population as the once exploited establish additional zones apart from the previous system (see Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 155).

For Lenin, dual power does not come from those at the bottom *joining* external political groups that compete against the conventional political-economic order but rather *construct their own* alternative sociopolitical, economic, and culturally distinct state. This dual power is not continuity of competition between those seeking power but an evolutionary progression within distinct regions whereby emancipatory conditions have been *made by those from below* and *outside* the capitalist political-economic model.²³ The provisional state refrains from claiming legitimacy beside the capitalist state, for that which exists from below does not regard, nor does it associate with, the conventions of a capitalist system. Those from below grasp their newly emancipated provisional state (and actions) as an evolved sociopolitical, economic, and cultural formation existing apart from capitalism, not in competition with it. Created outside pre-existing elite control the new state alters class-dynamics of sociopolitical and economic relations (Petras

and Veltmeyer 2005: 224). This form of revolution repudiates reassigning power through capitalist politics but substantively takes power from below.

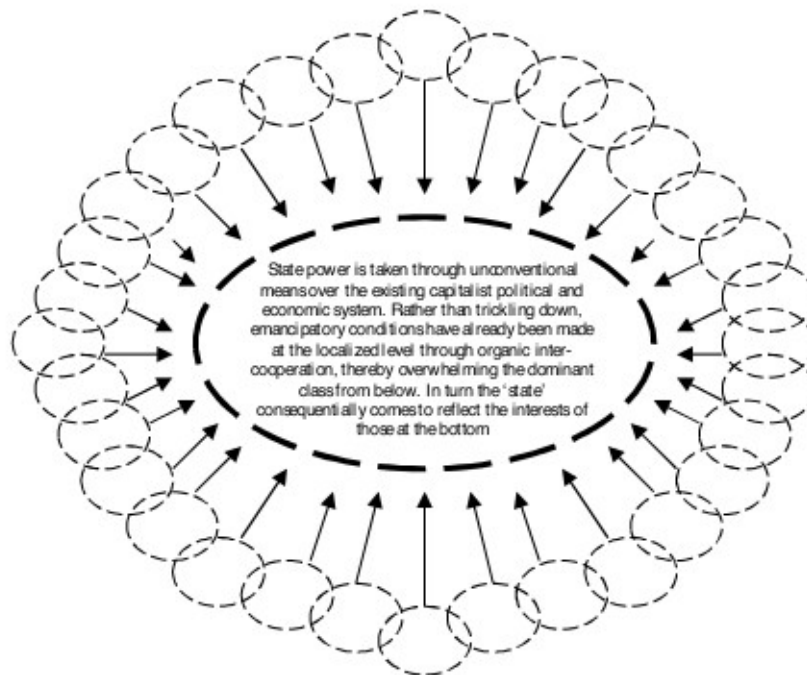
Taking power is not only imperative for emancipation from inequitable social conditions but it is the most realistic method through which social change can remain a consistent reality in a given country. Yet, the taking of state power and the creation of a revolution can, and arguably must, assume different forms from those offered in popular approaches. Rather than utilising imposed models that emphasise the existing state structure as the ideal primary trajectory for change, via existing political processes (i.e., electoral politics), or more extreme strategies by which power is taken from existing governing bodies (i.e., *coup d'état*) (see Diagram 1), dual power facilitates revolution 'from below.' Instead of creating changes from the top-down, a change can begin through the creation of a war of position while the emancipation of localised conditions remain ongoing. This strategy can facilitate a situation of dual power created at levels of local support and territory. Conventional state structures become inundated as more and more municipalities *take power over the state rather than through existing conventional structures* (See Diagram 2). Such a strategy creates a noose-like effect that strangles the existing capitalist (political-economic) power structure from outside, consequently taking state power.

Diagram 1: Top-Down (State-Centred) Approach



Social change from below is important for it looks at revolution beyond the confines of politics. The crumbling of a political form, in and of itself, does not, in fact, constitute a revolution but rather a window of opportunity for the next most dominant political faction to usurp power. Understanding this, Marxists are not overly concerned with the ‘conception of the state, as such, but the relation between this conception and Marx’s attitude to the proletariat (or, rather, to “the poor” ...)’ (Löwy 2005a: 29). Revolutions, by their very nature, cannot come through those already empowered but are made real only through the conscious and organised action of the disempowered. Hence, revolutions can best be defined by the extent to which those exploited under the dominant paradigm of capitalism are emancipated (Löwy 2005b: 24). Marxism-Leninism then emphasises the potential power of the powerless to respond to the contradictory social relations of productions as *the* important factor concerning revolution.

Diagram 2: From Below (Dual Power)



For going on two decades, the FARC-EP demonstrated a tangible change in political-military positioning when it ‘began to move away from the rigid top-down bureaucracy to one more dependent on a system of regional blocs and fronts operating throughout the country’ (Murillo and Avirama 2004: 75). Emphasising a ‘local power’ strategy of regional linkages increased acceptance and support in various localities (both rural and urban). In these regions – most of which were/are impoverished – various socio-political, economic, and cultural alternatives were grounded. One explicit alternative strategy through which dual power can be expressed is through the FARC-EP’s (pre)revolutionary tactics toward coca (the principle ingredient related to the processing and production of cocaine).

Coca and the FARC-EP

Countless state-based reports, scholastic papers, popular media scripts, and even some subscribing to a 'progressive' social justice mentality have, to a point of uninformed acceptance, highlighted the FARC-EP's direct involvement with Colombia's coca-industry. This observation is sadly fascinating since it has materialised without any kernel of evidence from critical academic inquiry, field research, participant observation, and so on. Ironically, those of us who have engaged in such fieldwork have found that, rather than displaying any direct involvement (i.e., cultivation, processing, production, trafficking, etc.), the FARC-EP has created strategies to strengthen sociopolitical and economic conditions for people in Colombia's peripheries, weakening the industry's stronghold over them.

The FARC-EP has never promoted the production of coca. For decades the guerrillas have sought alternative development strategies to alleviate small producers' dependence on coca (see Coghlan 2004: 207; Livingstone 2003: 130; Richani 2002: 99; Gamboa 2001: 100; Ruiz 2001: 62). They have worked tirelessly to discourage farmers, *campesinos*, semi-proletarians, etc. from succumbing to coca cultivation and/or to limit the narco-economy from completely taking over rural sections of the country (Holmes, Amin Gutiérrez de Piñeres and Curtin 2006; Glenn, 2003; Stokes 2002). Historically, they did this by fighting land concentration and the political sway of emerging primary drug cartels (Camacho Guizado and López Restrepo 2007: 80; Labrousse 2005: 177; Felbab-Brown 2005: 113; Dudley 2004: 57, 102; Gutiérrez Sanín 2004: 282; Rochlin 2003: 107; Clawson and Lee III 1998: 52, 58, 180). Several years ago, the insurgency even worked alongside the United Nations (UN) in a series of projects related to crop substitution in zones under their control (Labrousse 2005: 175; see also Ahmad 2006; Schulte-Bockholt 2006; Labrousse 2005; Glenn 2003).

Realising that an anti-coca position could be interpreted as anti-peasant – thereby eroding their support-base – the FARC-EP shifted its policy during the early-mid 1990s. In short, as a revolutionary movement, the guerrillas opted to stand beside those marginalised and was 'compelled to accept the peasants' shift to illicit crop plantations as a supplementary income' (Richani 2002: 71; see also Molano 2005: 32).²⁴ Rather than dictating and remaining in

ideological opposition to those marginalised under capitalistic material conditions, the ‘People’s Army’ chose to ‘accept’ the peasantries’ need to grow coca as a means of survival. This acceptance was not, however, on the basis of directly becoming involved in the industry but rather indirectly through a complex class-based model of taxation of specific sectors of the rural economy (which included the coca-industry).

For over a decade the FARC-EP has established a series of tax platforms for select persons and corporations throughout regions where they hold power.²⁵ The levies imposed by the insurgency are based on a person’s relation to the means of production. The FARC-EP’s class-based taxation model imposes an intricate system of levies and tariffs on sectors of the coca industry, as it does on much corporate or economic activity in the periphery (i.e., oil production, lumber, bananas, or any other commodity/service). The taxes obtained are collected but not spent by the FARC-EP. In many cases, they are forwarded to a locally elected neighbourhood council, which implements social programmes such as education centres, health-care provisions and/or services, and infrastructure. Such activities show how the FARC-EP is not aligned with the drug economy but rather heavily involved in overseeing *all* aspects of class-based production in areas under their control (see Kirk 2003: 227-228). In other words ‘the guerrillas do not constitute another “cartel.” Their role in the drug trade is in extorting a percentage of the commercial transaction of coca and coca paste, just as they do with many other commercial products in the areas which they operate, be it cattle, petroleum, or coffee’ (Chernick 1996).

The class-based taxation model has created off-shoots that have enabled the peasantry to secure ‘a stable economic base for the colonos and small peasants by regulating the market relations and prices and by providing financial and technical assistance to the peasants and protection of the colonos’ (Richani 2002: 70; see also Kenney 2007: 230). Exempting the producers from any form of levy, the guerrilla has forced the middle and upper-echelons of the industry consistently to pay peasants and rural wage-labourers the going market price for coca leaves, coupled by an additional expense for labour power spent by the workers (Rochlin 2003: 136; Richani 2002: 70). The FARC-EP regulates what an equitable and fair return would be and makes certain that middlemen abide by the set wage (Peceny and Durnan 2006: 107; Labrousse 2005: 172; Stokes

2005: 86). As the insurgency ensures that the buyers pay the coca growers a fair price, the class-based taxation model has translated into better wages for peasants in FARC-EP-controlled areas (International Action Center 2001: 3). There is proof of this: 'areas in which the guerrillas' presence is weak or nonexistent, the price of labor is lower than in areas where it has a strong military presence' (Richani 2002: 110; see also Felbab-Brown 2005: 109). While this in no way suggests an economic boom for the peasants, it does provide them a guaranteed income that is not based on speculation, as traditional crops would be, but on guaranteed returns (Castaño 2006; Felbab-Brown 2005: 108; Villalón 2004a, 2004b).

Through this strategy the insurgency has proven its credibility not only by supporting local rural populations' efforts to benefit themselves and their community but also by legitimising the guerrillas' capacity to act within an ethical economic framework. O'Shaughnessy and Branford (2005: 27-28) acknowledge that 'although large sums of money are involved, there is little personal corruption' in the FARC-EP, on any level. 'There is no evidence,' according to Marc Chernick (2007: 73) 'that leaders or fighters in the FARC are accumulating individual wealth.' Very much ideologically-based in their actions, the insurgency has demonstrated collective versus individual motivation, especially concerning the tremendous sums obtained (Gutiérrez Sanín 2004: 268-269; see also Weinstein, 2007: 292, 294). Supporting such a claim, Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín (2008: 13) has noted that 'looting for individual benefit is nearly inconceivable.' After reviewing hundreds of cases of guerrillas in several separate databases, he found that cases of corruption are 'relatively rare, especially taking into account the magnitude of the sums handled by the guerrillas' and 'indeed, I am not aware of any reports of individualistic looting by the FARC; all the goods coming from military or illegal economic activities go to the organization' (Gutiérrez Sanín 2008: 13-14). He added that no evidence suggests Comandantes are involved in personal enrichment (Gutiérrez Sanín 2004: 268-269). Such untarnished practices have more than 'facilitated the accountability of the FARC' (Stokes 2005: 86).²⁶

Regardless of the paradigm that a nation finds for itself, monocrop production leads to an unsustainable arrangement and outcome for a given society. As Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost (2006: 153) noted, 'by making the entire economy dependent on one primary product,

the nation's economic health becomes heavily tied to the fortunes of that product on the international market. Devastating busts often follow boom periods.' In light of this, the FARC-EP has shown opposition toward monoculture while supporting crop substitution and the restoration of cultural traditions using agricultural practices. Yet, if all sectors in FARC-EP territory supported and maintained a simple systemic formula of crop substitution, moving to the next most lucrative crop, then a cyclical effect would occur due to the nature of capitalist expansionism. Such a reality is important for it exemplifies how mere reformist measures cannot be sustained over extended periods in a profit-driven environment. Even if a peasant successfully replaced their illegal product with another that is legal, it would be only a matter of time before the restrictions of capital drove the commodity to be devalued domestically and globally. In short, the primary problem facing rural Colombia(ns) is the capitalist model itself.

While substituting legal crops for illegal ones is important it does not address the negative consequences specifically resulting from the domestic capitalist framework. For the greater part of the past twenty years, three specific outcomes have resulted for peasants who moved away from coca cultivation. First, as numerous peasants adopted crop substitution an influx of a few specific crops arose in the same region, thus driving down prices of produced goods. This subsequently caused a cyclical effect of poverty. Once more rural producers fell back into the coca-industry as a means of survival. The second dilemma saw peasants, who agreed to state-imposed crop substitution, not receive promised incomes from the state, development agencies, or NGOs. Suffering from a lack of capital, producers were forced to return to coca, as no other means of subsistence was available. Lastly, peasants who once refrained from growing coca saw legal crops sprayed with poisonous defoliant during Colombian/US anti-narcotic campaigns. This left many peasants with little option but to leave for the city or ironically move to coca to cover their losses (O'Shaughnessy and Branford 2005: 13-14, 112).²⁷ These are some of the common realities that have been witnessed throughout Colombia as a result of so-called alternative crop substitution projects within the confines of a capitalist paradigm. To relieve such quandaries, the FARC-EP has prepared a more efficient program to slowly transform an

individuated capitalist model to a socialised system.

An interesting policy concerning coca in insurgent-held territory is one whereby the FARC-EP ‘urges peasants to dedicate parts of their parcels for foodstuff production and to retain only a part for coca growing’ (Richani 2002: 70; see also Schulte-Bockholt 2006: 133-134; Pearce 1990: 33). Although it is not well known, a cultivation programme was established whereby peasants, who chose to grow coca, devoted a certain percentage of lands for alternative crop production (Brittain 2007; see also Villalón 2004a, 2004b; Labrousse 2005: 172; Leech 2000).

In consultation with small producers and local community-based political councils, the FARC-EP’s program has seen producers allocate a percentage of their cultivation to agriculture, be it in the form of 1) subsistence crops; 2) traditional Colombian harvests; or 3) crops for regional barter. As I witnessed on two different occasions with a peasant-based coca-cultivator and a FARC-EP member, the mission aims to prepare the rural sector for a smoother transition from a capitalist mode of production to one based on socialised cooperatives. The method behind this process has been in the works for over two decades in selected regions under FARC-EP control but has been increasingly implemented across much of the insurgency’s territory. Dating back to the 1980s, ‘the FARC guerrillas ... encouraged the peasants in the coca growing areas they control to grow food crops as well as coca’ (Pearce 1990: 33). This strategy continued throughout the 1990s when the FARC-EP compelled ‘farmers to grow foodstuffs in addition to coca’ (Schulte-Bockholt 2006: 133-134). In 2004, Carlos Villalón, made a documentary film entitled *Cocaine Country*, which recognized how the FARC-EP has increasingly instituted this programme. Within regions visited by Villalón (2004b), all peasants who chose to grow coca were required to devote a minimum of 3 acres of land to alternative crop production in proportion to every 7 acres of coca. In 2005, much higher percentages were seen by Alain Labrousse, who documented how the FARC-EP encouraged a 75% share of subsistence crops with only a quarter of the harvest allotted for coca (2005: 172). During discussions with both FARC-EP members and civilians it was noted that the alternative crop ratio programme anticipates future crop substitution strategies in the event of the insurgency seizing central state

power.

The political-economic reality of coca cultivation and production is a by-product of necessity. The peasant's sole purpose for harvesting coca is because it is the only means by which they can procure some level of stability. In recognition of this, the drug industry is directly correlated with the deteriorated economy. If a large-scale socialised economy were provided – education, health-care, redistribution of land, etc. – peasants, having their social requirements met, would have little need for individual wealth. Consequently, vast segments of the rural sector could then dismiss coca cultivation because necessities were satisfied. This potentially results in a large proportion of the rural population, once dependent on growing coca, working with the FARC-EP to shift production to traditional agriculture, providing growth in caloric intake and nutritional sustenance for the population.

Another benefit from the alternative crop ratio model can be seen through a sociological examination of rural Colombia in the context of neoliberalism. By the 1970s, subsistence-based agriculture was largely abandoned in the south. At this time the cartels slowly started to gain momentum. With the 'opening' of the Colombian economy in the 1980s and full neoliberal policies being implemented during the 1990s, many in the south shifted to coca cultivation as a means of survival. The sociological result is that contemporary southern Colombia has a second and third generation of coca growers. Yet, unlike those that came out of the 1950s-1970s, present generations have never known an alternative model of agricultural production. The elder generation, once experienced in traditional crop production (coffee, yucca, lemons, maize, etc.), were forced to turn to coca as a result of land centralisation, state-based coercion, and neoliberal economic policies. The current generation does not share this cultural history nor do they relate to another model of crop production. Many of the rural producers I interviewed under the age of thirty-four acknowledged that they had little experience of crop diversification. They did, however, have considerable knowledge concerning highly advanced methods of cultivating coca – such as genetically modified strands of coca resistant to aerial fumigation. The ratio-programme helps them to become reacquainted with classical crop cultivation and production

that will be much needed in the event of a FARC-EP victory.

Continuing to support a nationally-applied model of partial/complete crop substitution coupled with the class-based taxation system, the FARC-EP is actively involved in de-linking capitalist processes in sectors of Colombian society. If the insurgency is to assist the creation of a socialist society, based on Marxist-Leninist principles, then they must dissociate trade from profit-based models. This will not be sudden, but by using strategies that assist human development a structure can begin to acquaint Colombians with the benefits of an alternative non-capitalist method of subsistence, communal models that reinvigorate cultural methods of production, and socialist practices that confer domestic benefits. The above demonstrates how the FARC-EP are preparing to act as a legitimate government within a socialist Colombia not only for themselves but they are readying the population for a post-capitalist society not dependent monetarily on the coca-industry. Such conditions are disconcerting to the higher levels of the drug-trade, which derive extensive profits from the informal economy. More troubling to these individuals is the evidence of a clear pre-revolutionary project implemented from below that has been and continues to be successful in select areas of the country.

Conclusion

There cannot then be a *rigid* blueprint for socialist transformation based on the scale of various conditions that will, and must, lead to alternative corresponding relations of emancipation. A variety of revolutionary identities are to be realised in the conscious and active deconstruction of (pre)existing domestic conditions of oppression, as those in struggle begin to establish roots for social transformation (see Harnecker 1986: 128). Concretely, no revolution can be copied from elsewhere, since radical social change is based on immediate sociopolitical and economic conditions, not on an encoded or symmetrical outline. In lieu of this, the FARC-EP has avoided taking central state power through an immediate win over the governing apparatus or a series of revolutionary pushes aimed at the capital. By extending its influence through a slow, realistic, ideologically motivated programme, the FARC-EP continues to create a distinct counter-

hegemony via ‘the accumulation of local power’ (Petras 1999: 30). While largely in (but not excluded to) rural territories, the guerrillas have erected a ‘system of dual power in several regions of the country’ by offering an alternative to conventional state power (Petras 2003: 25). This reflects the reality of socialism as a process -- an intermediate and evolving series of developments for the betterment of a given society; a ‘continuous and systematic revolution of a people,’ not merely based on taking state power but ‘a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria,’ always in response to the societal conditions of a revolutionary epoch (Gramsci 1977: 55, 1971: 182).²⁸ I have provided a glimpse of how the FARC-EP continues to contribute theoretically to conditions of revolutionary social change in Colombia through, of, and with those from below. Creating a platform on which radical measures are being created alongside concurrent revolutionary projects throughout parts of the country, the FARC-EP’s unique Marxist-Leninist approach towards substantive change demonstrates how an insurgency can work closely with local communities to create a dual power revolutionary perspective. The insurgency has employed a model of transformation that not only obstructs the conventional state without taking central power but also continues to hamper existing pillars of capitalist political economy from further exploitation. Only time will tell if this will lead to an all-encompassing revolutionary transformation for the country and peoples of Colombia coming to fruition or if further shifts in response to internal conditions will be necessary.

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relevance of classical social theory in contemporary geopolitics, and alternative forms of international development. He is the author of *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The origin and direction of the FARC-EP* (Pluto Press 2010). While his current academic research has turned to evaluating class-consciousness and escape within North American societies, Brittain remains strongly attached to the struggles for social justice and emancipation within the majority world. His e-mail address is james.brittain@acadiu.ca.

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Notes

1 While the military was directly involved in coercive activity against the rural population the government was virtually inactive in providing the majority of the populace with a lengthy list of social services such as education and healthcare.

2 The progression and expansion of these networks was rampant, with over sixteen being established by 1964.

3 See LeGrand (1986: 163); Walton (1984: 94, 99); Feder (1971: 189).

4 It has been suggested that the struggle for change in the countryside left few options than organizing into 'self-defence units by the Communist Party ... to avoid extermination' (Simons 2004: 41).

5 See Crandall (2008: 53).

6 This proves an exception to (accurate) assessments that numerous Latin American guerrilla leaders came from the middle economic strata (Castañeda 1994: 78; Calvert 1999: 112). The FARC-EP differs from many movements that were, are, or appear to be 'fundamentally the creation of' a singular person, military officer, or post-secondary educated individual (Castañeda 1994: 127).

7 Other essential figures associated with the Secretariat over the past quarter-century include Jacobo Arenas, Jorge Briceño, Alfonso Cano, Efraín Guzmán, Manuel Marulanda Vélez, Raúl Reyes, and Iván Ríos.

8 See also Richani (2007: 414-415, 2002: 63); Wickham-Crowley (1992: 331); CISLAC (2001).

9 There are essentially two distinct periods of importance concerning the FARC-EP's historical development; the post-1964 period, when a movement of militant subsistence agriculturists lived in relatively underdeveloped regions of the southwest and a post-1982 period when the *Ejército del Pueblo* (People's Army) was organized.

10 Both Admiral Edgar Cely and president Juan Manuel Santos Calderón [2010-2014] have acknowledged the FARC-EP's powerbase in numerous cities (Alsema 2011; Heyden 2011).

11 This is a substantial number when we consider the size of Colombia's indigenous population. Mario A. Murillo and Jesus Rey Avirama (2004: 41) believed that indigenous people represented roughly 5% of the domestic populace; however, it is more accurate to say that Colombia's indigenous peoples constitute less than 2% (Palacios 2006: 251; Lakshmanan 2004; Livingstone 2003: 124). The large percentage of indigenous members could be due to several factors: the systemic assaults waged against native populations and their lands or possibly a growing shift in class-consciousness and revolutionary class struggle rather than politics of identity and autonomy (Brittain 2005). It is also important to note that 69% of the country's eighty-four indigenous groups exist within the department of Putumayo alone (Flounders 2003: 84). With the Putumayo being one of the FARC-EP's strongest areas, the above percentage suggests that a great deal of the indigenous groups within this department may support the FARC-EP.

12 With respect to leadership, the movement has paid particular attention to gender equality (Gibbs 2011; Botero 2006). While women such as Miryam Narváez and Judith Grisales have been

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instrumental in the guerrilla movement since its inception, currently 50% of the membership is female with 30% to 55% of Comandantes being women, depending on the region (Gutiérrez Sanín 2008: 10; O'Shaughnessy and Branford 2005: 27; Galdos 2004; Richani 2002: 62). In the two Fronts the author studied, women actually outnumbered men in areas of mid-level leadership by 2:1. One of the most powerful military Fronts, formerly headed by Comandante Mono Jojoy (Jorge Briceño), is currently led by Tanja Nijmeijer (Snyder 2011).

13 Closely associated with Ché Guevara (2006), *foco* theory is largely a strategy generated by Régis Debray's belief that small groups could themselves create revolutionary conditions (Debray 1967).

14 Such insight is doubly important as the idea that guerrilla ideology is easily shaped in time and space by dominant or charismatic authorities (see Wilkinson 1971: 139) is over-generalised, yet the FARC-EP has never displayed these characteristics (Gott 2008; Hylton 2008).

15 For context refer to Castañeda (1994: 240-241).

16 See Brittain (2010a); Goff (2004: 44, 47); Petra and Veltmeyer (2005: 126); Röhl (2004: 2).

17 In recognition of the above, some have demonstrated a lack of political and social theory or knowledge of the insurgency by stating that the FARC-EP 'espouse a dogmatic Marxist ideology' (Sweig and McCarthy 2005: 18).

18 This does not, however, suggest that the insurgency refrains from such methods, as it frequently adapt 'its military to offset the government's air power advantage by re-employing guerrilla warfare tactics, moving in small units, and dispersing its forces into larger areas' (Richani 2005: 89).

19 See Leech (2011).

20 Immediately, a divergence in military operations aimed at state and multinational targets occurred. This is a most compelling expression of the FARC-EP's continued power, for they displayed a uniform capacity to cease (or implement) politico-military campaigns when the peace process arose.

21 In the midst of this calm, the guerrillas were still very much operative and capable to reengage operations. During a brief period following a bilateral cease-fire, the FARC-EP responded to state aggression by carrying out forty-eight campaigns throughout the country in the last ten days of January 2013 alone (Pettersson, 2013d).

22 For Tilly, those from below do not directly construct authority but come to be a part of it through their external support. In reference to the Colombian situation (see Wickham-Crowley 1991: 39).

23 Examples closer to this account of dual power can be recognised in Bookchin's work (1998: 114-115, 217).

24 While extended throughout the country only a minority of regions under FARC-EP control house a vibrant coca-industry (Rochlin 2003: 100, 137; Clawson and Lee III 1998: 179). Furthermore, numerous analysts have detailed how a clear number of Comandantes have tangibly rejected the coca-industry and refuse to have anything to do with its activities (Holmes, Amin Gutiérrez de Piñeres and

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Curtin 2006: 167; Rangel Suárez 1998; Craig 1987: 29).

25 The model has been incredibly effective and able to withstand state attempts to disrupt it. Even in areas where the FARC-EP was temporarily expelled by state or paramilitary forces, the tax system stayed intact due to the insurgency's counter-hegemony. MNCs and individuals knew the insurgency would in time retake the territory and re-implement the tax and/or respond to those who periodically stopped payment (see Ortiz 2006: 216-217).

26 Making sure funds are used for their intended social purpose local officials are contacted by the FARC-EP via secret meetings and 'are lectured and threatened for stealing community funds and for other forms of corruption' (Taussig 2004: 143; see also FARC-EP 2000).

27 One US official admitted the goal of fumigation was to displace peasants structurally in order to increase cheap labour in the cities while privately centralising rural resources (Barstow and Driver 2003).

28 Gramsci approached revolutionary change as a constant evolution and progression, not as a simple reality when the proletariat seizes power (see also Lebowitz 2011).