

New Left's Philosopher-Hero

Régis Debray

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PARIS, Dec. 24—Responding at last to appeals by Charles de Gaulle, Pope Paul VI and thousands of others, the Bolivian Government has restored to freedom one of the world's most redoubtable intellectual foes of established order.

In his cell at Camiri, Régis Debray was remarkably suited

Man in the News to his role as a hero of the New Left. At large, many consider

him well suited to fulfill a role as its leading philosopher.

Like many of the new militants, the 30-year-old Mr. Debray is the scion of a "good" family, conservative, Roman Catholic and wealthy, whose influence helped persuade the French Government and the Vatican to intervene in his favor.

Also, like the new militants, he rejected Communist orthodoxy. His pamphlet, "Revolution in the Revolution?" is a challenge to the Soviet and even Chinese models in favor of a romantic approach to guerrilla warfare. Some young Americans have used it as a philosophical justification of the resort to terror.

Student of Philosophers

A brilliant young student of the philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Althusser, with degrees from the elite Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Sorbonne, son of a lawyer-industrialist and a leading Paris Councilwoman, Mr. Debray seemed destined for a comfortable and perhaps distinguished career as an academic philosopher. But as a teen-ager he was deeply affected by the Algerian war against French colonial rule and his outlook was transformed by a long visit to Cuba in 1961.

Other trips to Latin America, a year of teaching at the University of Havana and frequent talks with Fidel Castro resulted in his writing of "Revolution in the Revolution?" and his departure in early 1967 for the guerrilla camp of Ernesto Che Guevara in Bolivia to observe his theories in practice.

According to the main

branch of Communism—which finds its inspiration in Marx, Lenin and the Russian Revolution—the proletariat is the natural leader of the movement. Debray denies "the natural goodness of the workers" and says orthodox Communist parties and trade unions develop vested interests in the status quo and so cannot lead revolutions.

Each country, he wrote, must find its own way. The Chinese model, based on clandestine work among the peasantry leading to guerrilla warfare that envelops the cities only in the final stages, is not suited to conditions in Latin America.

There, he said, the revolutionary could not survive long enough to agitate the peasants unless he had a gun in his hands and kept on the run. Contrary to the Maoist precept, he wrote, "armed propaganda follows military action but does not precede it."

Although he denied proposing any model, his thesis of course followed the example of Fidel Castro, the Cuban student of good family who led a small band into the maquis and ultimately took power. It worked in Cuba; hence its appeal for a certain romantic revolutionary youth. It did not work in Bolivia, where Mr. Debray was captured in April, 1967, and Mr. Guevara was killed the following October.

Glamorous Figure

The left does not lack theoreticians, but few in the West have achieved glamour such as that bestowed on Mr. Debray by that ill-fated visit to Mr. Guevara. One of those affected was an intellectual and one-time revolutionary, André Malraux, who signed a joint appeal for Mr. Debray with Jean-Paul Sartre and François Mauriac a year ago. In a rare and remarkable television interview, Mr. Malraux explained:

"The Western world is full of people who spend their time making speeches of which they never draw the consequences. As for Régis Debray, he tried his best to draw the consequences of what he thought. He took a risk, the risk of death."



Associated Press

A romantic approach to guerrilla warfare.

(Asked whether, if he were Mr. Debray's age) he would do the same, Mr. Malraux—who fought on the Republican side in Spain—replied, "I did." He went on to state his total disagreement with "the way taken by Guevara and Debray.")

Mr. Debray's glamour among radicals has been tarnished by reports such as that he betrayed Mr. Guevara's whereabouts to the Bolivian military and by moody and contradictory comments attributed to him by interviewers who had reached his solitary cell in Camiri.

On the other hand, the diaries of Mr. Guevara and another guerrilla show a warm regard for the French intellectual and indicate that he was sent away to organize support abroad.

Mr. Debray himself told his captors he had visited the guerrillas only as a journalist, but at his trial, which followed Mr. Guevara's death, he declared: "I affirm my political and moral responsibility in the acts of my comrades which motivate the present trial."

The statement was said to have assured him a stiff sentence. He drew 30 years.

Debray Is Due to Meet Chilean Leader Today

SANTIAGO, Chile, Dec. 24 (Reuters) — Régis Debray, the French Marxist writer who was freed by the Bolivian Government yesterday after serving 44 months of a 30-year prison sentence for guerrilla activities, is to meet tomorrow with Chile's President Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens, also a Marxist.

Mr. Debray, who is 30 years old, and five fellow prisoners were flown to the northern Chilean port of Iquique yesterday in a Bolivian Air Force plane from southeastern Bolivia.

Mr. Debray was sentenced by a military court in 1967 for his alleged part in the Bolivian guerrilla movement led by Ernesto Che Guevara.

After the six men reached Iquique, apparently in good health, Mr. Debray said "In Santiago, I am personally going to visit President Allende."

Dr. Allende's left-wing Government, which includes Communists and militant Socialists, last night hailed Mr. Debray's release as a progressive and democratic act by the Bolivian military government.