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OCLAE

By Lionel Martin

Danilo Fernandez, a young Dominican student, rolled up his sleeve to show me the cause of his paralyzed hand. A chunk of bone and flesh had been gouged out of his forearm.

"In a way," he said in his characteristically quiet manner, "that exploding rocket sealed in blood the unity of Latin American students with the Vietnamese people. We were symbols of OCLAE's determination to militantly support the struggle of all peoples against American imperialism."

The OCLAE (pronounced OCLIGH) to which Danilo referred is the Continental Organization of Latin American Students which celebrated its first anniversary in August. Danilo is the representative of the Federation of Dominican Students (FED) on the permanent secretariat of the OCLAE here in Havana.

The rocket he mentioned was launched by an American Phantom Jet on April 18, 1967, against a small group of students visiting Vietnam who were on their way to an elementary school in the The Xuan district. It included Enrique Velazco of the Federation of University Students of Cuba, Jose Varona of the Federation of Pro-Independence University Students of Puerto Rico, and Danilo of the Dominican Republic, all members of the secretariat of the OCLAE.

In the attack, during which four rockets were fired against the obviously non-military target, their guide, Nguyen An Hoa of the Union of Vietnamese Students, was killed. Fernandez and Varona were wounded. Varona, victim of a head injury, still lies moribund in a Moscow hospital four months after the attack.

The OCLAE, which sent this delegation to Vietnam in compliance to a Resolution passed by its founding Congress, has its headquarters in Havana in a mansion formerly owned by one of Cuba's ex-oligarchs. According to knowledgeable analysts, the creation of the Continental Organization of Latin-American Students is of transcendental importance to the future of the revolutionary movement in this hemisphere. Traditionally, Latin American students of the universities and even secondary schools have played a dynamic and progressive role in the struggle for democratic rights within their own countries, dating back to the Reform Movement of Cordova (Argentina) in 1918. [Such anti-imperialist fighters as Ponce of Argentina, Mariategui of Peru, Mella of Cuba, came out of the student movements in the first quarter of this century and went on to found the Communist parties of their respective countries. Fidel Castro was a leader in the student struggles at the University of Havana after World War II. Leaders of present-day Latin American guerrilla movements like Douglas Bravo in Venezuela and Cesar Montes in

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Guatemala were also renowned student leaders. J X

As rebellious, radical, and at times even effective, as the student movements within the Latin American countries have been, there was never more than a very superficial continental-wide coordination or a very vague continental strategy.

In 1959, year of victory of Cuba's revolution, the CLAE held its third congress in Caracas, Venezuela. This III CLAE reflected the growing restlessness and anti-imperialist spirit of the Latin American students. However, in the ensuing years, little was done to unite the efforts of the student organizations ~~into~~ an organized and efficacious continental movement. 7 X

More than five years later the need for ~~an~~ effective unity among Latin American students was being felt with irresistible urgency. In November 1965, on the occasion of the Seminar of Latin American Social and Economic Integration held in Montevideo, Uruguay, which went on record against the economic boycott of Cuba and U.S. ^{imperialist} penetration in Latin America, the representatives of student organizations met and elected a preparatory committee to organize the IV CLAE. J

The Preparatory Committee was composed of the Bolivian, Dominican, Uruguayan, Cuban and Chilean student organizations. The Progressive Youth Organization of British Guayana and the

and for genuine national liberation. Although the need to use all forms of struggle was recognized, the IV CLAE declared that the armed struggle is the most effective continental strategy for combatting imperialism in Latin America. (In August of this year the Organization of Latin American Solidarity -- OLAS -- also went on record for armed struggle as the principal means of defeating imperialism in Latin America.)

The General Resolution of the IV CLAE summed up its program when it spoke of the "brutal, systematic and daily violence" perpetrated by U.S. imperialism in Latin America:

"Violence against all those who dare protest, against those who denounce the infra-human existence of the popular masses in our countries, against all those who fight for their rights and try to achieve a dignified and independent life. To the violence of the enemy we should answer with revolutionary violence. To systematic abuse and repression we should reply with armed struggle, with a direct confrontation like that of the glorious guerrillas in the mountains of ^{Latin} America, with the ever growing activities of the masses, including the students, intensifying the tenacious actions that extend from the mountains to the plains. This is what the Cuban revolution teaches us! This is what is indicated by the valiant combatants who have taken up arms to utterly destroy imperialist exploitation."

Without doubt, the most significant Resolution of the IV CLAE was that which established a permanent organization, the OCLAE. The Federation of Cuban University Students (FEU) was elected president of the Permanent Secretariat. The other six members of the Secretariat are the student organizations of Venezuela (FCU), Puerto Rico (FUPI), Dominican Republic (FED), Guadalupe (AGEG), Uruguay (FEUU), and Panama (FEP).

During its one year of life, the OCLAE has tried to act as a clearing house and coordinating center for Latin American student organizations. In October 1966 it organized a Week of continental student solidarity with Vietnam. In July 1967 it sponsored a meeting in Montevideo Against Imperialist Penetration, and in the same month, on the 14th anniversary of the attack led by Fidel Castro on Moncada Fortress, a week of solidarity with Cuba. A call by the OCLAE in conjunction with two Mexican student organizations --- The National Federation of Technical Students (FNET) and the National Center of Democratic Students (CNET) --- has been sent out for the Latin American Seminar for the Reform and Democratization of Education to be held in Mexico from the 13th to the 17th of November of this year.

One of the major fronts of battle of the OCLAE has been the struggle against activities and ideas that dilute and divert the

militant capacity of the Latin American student organizations. This struggle has been sharpened since the disclosures of CIA penetration in international and national student organizations. For this reason, so much stress has been put on the ideological confrontation with the Chilean UFUCH in Latin America ^{as a corollary,} and within the International Union of Students.

The officials of the OCLAE with whom I talked expressed interest in establishing contact with American student groups. Danilo Fernandez, the Dominican victim of the American rocket attack in Vietnam, said: that:

"The American people are victims also. Sooner or later, they will awaken to see that their government is trying to subjugate peoples all over the world. They don't see the truth now, but they will wake up."