

The Developing Nations
What Path to Modernization
by Frank Tachau

21. THE TRANSFORMATION OF MORAL IDEALISM INTO VIOLENT REVOLUTION

Sanche de Gramont

SANCHE DE GRAMONT, a Frenchman who is now living in Tangier, is a distinguished journalist who won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on North Africa for the *New York Herald Tribune*. He has written articles that have appeared in magazines both here and abroad. His books include *The Secret War*, *The Age of Magnificence*, *Epitaph for Kings*, *The French*, and a novel, *Libes to Give*.

There had been showers in the afternoon, but winds off the sea blew the clouds away and the evening was cool and pleasant for São Paulo in March, with the reflection of the downtown neon against the sky casting a heavy pink pallor over the city at twilight. Breezes shook the palm fronds on the square where the four men waited, some of them reading newspapers, others gazing at the sky.

The men knew that at 6 o'clock on this evening of March 5, 1970, as on other weekday evenings, a black, chauffeur-driven Oldsmobile belonging to the Japanese consul would slowly turn a corner into the square, carrying the consul home from work. They had been studying the consul's route for several weeks, and it never varied. He was a man of punctual habits.

They had chosen the Japanese consul, a short, dumpy man in his 50's named Nobuo Okuchi, for three reasons. First, Mr. Okuchi is an important man in São Paulo, which boasts a Japanese colony of several hundred thousand. Second, the considerable Japanese investments in Brazilian industry are concentrated in the São Paulo area. Third, a Nisei named Shizuo who belonged to the same organization as the men waiting on the square, the Popular Revolutionary Vanguard (V.P.R.), had been arrested by the political police, and information had reached them that he was being tortured and would probably be executed.

At two minutes past 6, the black Oldsmobile turned slowly into the square. A Simca drove out of a side street to block its passage, and another car moved up behind it, immobilizing the consul's car. Two of the men ran to the second car, pulled a machine gun from the back seat, and set it up on the square so that its field of fire covered the street from which the consul's car had emerged. The two others opened the back door of the Oldsmobile and invited Mr. Okuchi to get out. The chauffeur was nervous. His fingers tapped the steering wheel as if he found it hard to resist blowing the horn. One of the men told him: "Stay quiet. This is a political kidnapping."

"I have no intention of resisting," the consul said. "Is this like what happened to the American Ambassador?" The man nodded. Passers-by strolling on the square quickly changed sidewalks when they saw the three cars in the street. The consul accompanied three of the men to the Simca and drove away with them. The other men put the machine gun back in the second car and drove off in a different direction. The operation had taken roughly five minutes. . . .

The kidnapping of the Japanese consul was not an isolated act, but part of a program of urban guerrilla warfare which has been adopted in the last three years by several Brazilian opposition groups. The 1964 military coup against President João Goulart's reform-minded Government apparently convinced these groups that social change in Brazil could not

come about through peaceful means. Constitutional rights were suspended in 1964, and since then Brazil has been ruled by a succession of three generals. Gen. Humberto Castelo Branco died in 1967 and was replaced by Gen. Arturo da Costa e Silva, who died in office and was succeeded by his former secret police chief, Gen. Emílio Garrastazu Médici, who was elected to the office of president by a majority of Brazil's 230 generals.

Today, political opposition to the ruling junta can be divided between those movements that continue to believe in conventional methods like strikes, demonstrations, pamphlets and opposition candidates in national and local elections, and those who argue that since the regime will not tolerate conventional methods of protest, armed action has become the only way.

Perhaps the first opposition leader to decide upon armed action was Carlos Marighella, the veteran militant who joined the Brazilian Communist party at the age of 16, in 1928. The son of a black Brazilian woman and an Italian immigrant, Marighella was dubbed "the ebony giant" by the penny press. He was proud of the fact that his grandmother was a slave. He was first jailed in 1936. After World War II, the Communist party was allowed to surface and he was elected a deputy. He was very active in the Brazilian house of representatives, and made 195 speeches in less than two years.

In 1947, however, Brazil broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the Communists were again outlawed, and Marighella again went underground, this time for good. As Communist leader of São Paulo, a sprawling, mushrooming metropolitan area which today has six million inhabitants, his action then consisted largely of organizing the masses: contacts with labor leaders, speeches supporting the demands of the workers, posters and pamphlets.

Under Brazil's last constitutional Government, that of João Goulart, who governed from September, 1961 to April, 1964, Marighella was not actively hunted by the police, for the Communist strategy at that time was to cooperate with the Government and hope eventually to take power through an alliance with the middle class. But just as Goulart was about to embark on a program of reforms, including a law that would have limited to 10 per cent of invested capital the percentage of profits that foreign investors could take out of the country, and an agrarian reform that would have expropriated and redistributed about a million and a half acres (or roughly 3 per cent of the country's privately owned land), he was overthrown by an army putsch backed by a coalition of large landowners and conservative politicians.

The police began looking for Marighella in earnest and found him one April evening in a Rio de Janeiro movie theater. He resisted arrest and was shot three times in the stomach. He escaped while recovering from

his wounds in a prison infirmary. It was then that Marighella began to contest the Communist party's strategy of peaceful resistance. In 1967 he broke with the party and went to Cuba in August to attend the first Conference of Latin-American Solidarity. There, disavowed by the Brazilian Communists, he made his first speech calling for armed action. "The only way to unite Brazilian revolutionaries and to give power to the people is through guerrilla warfare," he said.

Returning clandestinely to Brazil at the end of 1967, Marighella began to form small action groups and outline his new revolutionary program. He formulated two basic principles: first, that the political and military branches of the movement should be one and the same. In this, he was arguing against the so-called *brazo armado* (armed branch) theory according to which revolutionary action can be waged on two complementary fronts, one political and the other military. Marighella had come to believe that only through military action could political results be obtained.

The second basic principle was a refutation of the so-called *foco* (focus) theory of Regis Debray, the French revolutionary who was arrested in Bolivia with Che Guevara, and whose book, "Revolution in the Revolution," has had a wide audience among third-world opposition groups. The *foco* theory gave priority to the rural over the urban guerrilla, and called for guerrilla bands to settle and operate in hard-to-reach rural areas. Their action, supported by the local peasantry, would serve as a focal point of the revolution and as an example for the formation of similar guerrilla centers throughout the country. It was while applying the *foco* theory to the Bolivian hinterland that Debray and Guevara were captured in October 1967. "The trouble with Che Guevara," a Brazilian revolutionary told me, "is that he was known by the wrong people. Everybody all over the world knew him, except the Bolivian peasants."

In the pronunciamiento launching his new movement, the A.L.N. (Action for National Liberation), Marighella said: "We are not interested in sending armed men to a certain spot in Brazil and in waiting for other groups to spring up in other parts of the territory. This would be a fatal error." As he began recruiting his first armed groups, he drafted a "Manual for the Urban *Guerrilheiro*," which is a practical handbook of the how-to-do-it variety, full of rather obvious precepts and advice on the order of: "The urban *guerrilheiro* must know how to live amid the people; he must dress in such a manner as not to attract attention; he must use light weapons, which are easy to replace; he must learn to be a good shot; he must attack the enemy by surprise; he must have a strong political motivation and a good technical preparation."

From the fall of 1968, Brazilians were witness to spectacular guerrilla military actions carried out in the heart of their largest cities. More than

a hundred banks were robbed by Marighella's A.L.N. and by several smaller, independent groups that formed in his wake. An American Army captain named Charles Chandler was shot and killed as he left his São Paulo apartment building. The *guerrilheiros* said he was a C.I.A. agent. Marighella's men dynamited army barracks and warehouses owned by American companies, they occupied radio stations to broadcast revolutionary proclamations, they freed a group of jailed comrades from a prison in Rio. Another group, the Revolutionary Movement of Oct. 8, kidnapped U.S. Ambassador Charles Burke Elbrick in broad daylight in downtown Rio, and exchanged him for 15 political prisoners.

The large-circulation Brazilian dailies like O Globo called Marighella and his men thieves, bandits and assassins. At the same time they fed the legend of a Brazilian Pimpernel with a charmed life, whom the police were unable to catch. But as Marighella's group grew larger, the risk of capture increased. With the arrests of two Dominican fathers in October, 1969 (Marighella may have been a Marxist-Leninist, but he was hardly sectarian about recruitment), the police were able to dismantle the network. On Nov. 4, 80 policemen laid an ambush for Marighella on a street in São Paulo and killed him in a south-of-the-border version of the shooting of Bonnie and Clyde.

The organization has survived its leader and continues today to carry out armed coups in Brazil's cities. Two other groups that have modeled their action on Marighella's thinking are the M.R.-8, which kidnapped Elbrick, and the V.P.R., whose kidnapping of the Japanese consul has already been described. As Ladislav Dowbor, the 29-year-old economist who became one of the leaders of the V.P.R., explained the process, the decision to deal exclusively in armed actions was not impetuous or improvised, but the result of a careful political analysis.

I met Dowbor . . . in Algiers, where he arrived in June [1970] with 39 other Brazilian political prisoners who had been released in exchange for the kidnapped West German ambassador. The political police had arrested him only seven weeks before his release. But during that time he had been frequently tortured. His ankles were covered with dark blue bruises made by electrodes, and one third-degree burn on his left leg had failed to heal after months of treatment. Despite what he has been through he is already making arrangements to return to Brazil clandestinely and resume his activities.

Algiers, which has earned a reputation as a center for revolutionary exiles, had never received so many all at once. Quarters were found for the 40 Brazilians in a hotel school vacated for the summer holidays, in the suburb of Ben Aknoun. It was in this pleasant compound, with two-room and three-room bungalows scattered around a main building that served as a dining room and lounge, that I found Dowbor, recuperating

We must rely on the repercussions of our actions. If it is a violent action, it will appeal to those parts of the population that are sensitive to violence—that is, the marginal masses, the unemployed, the *favelados*.

“Tactically, when you perform an armed action, you don’t limit yourself to the interests of one class. You are reaching the masses not through political cells or speeches or pamphlets, but through the *fait accompli* of violent action. We are not telling them, look, it’s better for you to organize a strike against your oppressors, we are saying, here is what we have done against the system. This makes us a mobilization movement, not an organizational movement.

“Now, these marginal classes, which represent an ever-growing percentage of the Brazilian population, are themselves in a state of permanent violence because of police harassment, the usurpation of their land, the loss of their jobs, and the endemic criminality they are forced into when they move to the cities. Those people are highly sensitive to our form of action.

“Another advantage of small, radical military groups is that it solves the Leninist problem of how to remain in the vanguard, ahead of the masses. Classical Communist parties run the risk of being outflanked by their own rank and file, but we remain far ahead of the masses by the very nature of our struggle. With us, it is not the masses that fight, but the political élite.

“We run the risk of isolating ourselves from the masses, since we are fighting and they are not. That is why we do not attempt political education. We do not lecture on socialism or other theories the masses won’t understand. Our attacks against the visible enemy are immediately understood. We start with the hated foreman and his private police. The foreman works for an invisible boss, he is not at the root of the system. But the peasants would not understand if we attacked the boss, whom they never see. So we kill the foreman, and the boss reacts, and the peasant discovers that behind the foreman there is another enemy. Another example: it’s not interesting for us to kill a police torturer unless he is widely known as a torturer, because what the population will see is a front-page photograph of the President handing a check to the widow in mourning in front of her weeping children.

“We orient our armed actions in such a way as to make them politically profitable. For instance, the kidnapping of a foreign diplomat creates political problems for the regime. Either the regime agrees with the Minister of Interior not to give in and allows the diplomat to be killed—which creates difficulties with the foreign power the diplomat represents, and with which the regime has economic ties—or the regime meets the demands of the kidnapers and the diplomat is set free; then the army and the police criticize the leniency of the Government, and that creates

THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVES

from his imprisonment. He is a man of middle height with a broad Slavic face (his parents are of Polish origin), large, ingenuous gray eyes, and ash-blond hair combed straight back from a somewhat bulging forehead. He is scholarly in manner. He never raises his voice. He makes no pretense at toughness or *machismo*. As I saw from his dealings with the other political prisoners, he has the quiet authority of the natural leader. He gives the impression of being a theoretician, who although lacking any aptitude or liking for violent action, has willed himself to participate in the operations of armed groups because they conform with his analysis of the situation in Brazil.

“You cannot build the revolutionary consciousness of a population through political explanations,” Dowbor said. “But military actions can create this consciousness. In Brazil, there are deep feelings of discontent. People feel the pressures of the system, but they direct their feelings against their visible enemies—the farm overseer, or the shop foreman, or the landowner who throws squatters off his land. They have not yet reached the stage of holding the system responsible.

“We attack the targets they consciously identify, which provokes a reaction of the system. When we invest a factory and force the manager who is two weeks late with salaries to pay his men, we provoke the army, the police, the press and the clergy into taking positions against us and in support of the visible enemy. It is then that the workers are able to identify the system as an enemy.

“For instance, in Rio de Janeiro, we heard about a machine tool plant where the boss had built a kind of throne where late-comers had to eat their lunch separately from the other workers. We invested the factory with a machine gun-mounted jeep. When the boss arrived in his big red American car, our men burned it, burned the throne and gave him a beating in front of his workers. The result for our group is that it is accepted by the population in that part of Rio.

“The police are caught in a contradiction: if they do nothing, the bourgeoisie says ‘you don’t protect us.’ They have to organize the repression to show they are doing their job. The workers see the police and the army and the press working together and come to recognize that the enemy is not individual but social. And that is already a form of class consciousness.

“Now, this method of creating class consciousness through armed action is very different from the methods that Lenin developed for the creation of a workers’ party. If you are mainly concerned with organizing the masses, you address yourself to those classes that are most capable of being organized, like labor, large groups of men with identical interests who are easy to reach. But armed action, which means living in small, clandestine cells, reduces the possibility of contact with the population.

dissension within the regime. In our case, we only carried out kidnappings when we were fairly sure our demands would be met. We chose diplomats from countries on which Brazil is dependent and we knew the Minister of Interior was not in a position to adopt a tough stance.

"We believe that by spreading armed action we create among the masses a higher level of understanding of the struggle. We will reach our next phase when we are able to recruit enough men under arms so that we can deploy groups in every region of Brazil. Our class analysis is based on the expected growth of the marginal class, those who are outside the system and can expect nothing from it and are its natural enemies.

"The population of Brazil today is estimated at 90 million, but no one knows what the rate of unemployment is. Everyone knows there are two Brazils, an industrial Brazil inside an underdeveloped Brazil. In the south, which includes the industrial triangle of Rio-São Paulo-Belo Horizonte, 60 per cent of the population lives on 20 per cent of the land and earns 80 per cent of the national income.

"You see, capitalism in Brazil did not follow the usual development. It was financed by foreign capital, first mainly English and now mainly American. It superimposed itself on the old structures of a colonial economy based on the culture of sugar and coffee, so that today there are two parallel economies, one modern and the other archaic.

"In the modern sector, you find beautiful, gleaming factories where the investment is so great that it's not productive to underpay the worker. But less workers are needed, and the percentage of salaries in the cost of the product drops. Reasonable salaries are paid to fewer workers.

"The development of this modern sector places traditional industries in a state of crisis. They cannot sustain the competition. They cannot pay workers comparable salaries. They have to modernize or call it quits. Thus, the trend is that part of the working class is gradually expelled from the process of production into the marginal class, leaving a smaller, better-paid, relatively content working class, which is of no use in carrying out the revolution. This is a perfect example of what Lenin called the corruption of the proletariat. Brazil has become a country where it is impossible to evaluate the rate of unemployment, because today a large part of the active population remains outside the system of production. It is commonplace to see one fellow who works and supports his cousins and uncles and brothers-in-law.

"With the latifundia, or big plantations that produce coffee, sugar, cotton and cocoa, and raise cattle, the situation is similar. Hit by the international devaluation of raw materials and various forms of competition (like synthetic fibers for cotton), the landowners have to modernize their methods and expel workers. These expelled workers can either move

deeper into the forests where they will find land (only 30 per cent of Brazil's total surface is inhabited), or become migrant workers moving from crop to crop. The mobility of the Brazilian population is fantastic. The third solution, and by far the most popular, is migration to the cities. This creates an imbalance. You have overpopulated cities and a deserted countryside. The marginal masses flock to the cities and create a slum population.

"In Rio and São Paulo, one finds a vast aggregate of unemployed and illiterate people with marginal occupations: they sell oranges, they shine shoes, they wash cars, they become petty thieves and prostitutes and they constitute a social danger to the system. In São Paulo, less than half the population is registered. That means millions of uncontrolled persons, with no documents, no official identity, no address. They live in shacks. You ask someone on the street in São Paulo where he is living, and chances are he will say something like, 'I don't know, last week I was staying at my uncle's, but he threw me out. I'm looking for a place.' An enormous floating population living expediently helps make São Paulo a perfect place for revolutionaries to hide."

I should confess at this point that I have never been to Brazil, I am merely passing along the analysis of a 29-year-old economist who has spent the last three years of his life trying to overthrow the government there, which he considers dictatorial. My own knowledge of Brazil is limited to a small number of elementary and probably erroneous ideas. My Brazil is the land of the Rio carnival, Amazon serpents, alligator hunters, malignant fevers, strong coffee, underfed Indians, and botched revolutions. My Brazil is a tempting but remote El Dorado, beckoning all those with childhood dreams of overnight fortunes, a country of unlimited possibilities and unknown hardships. My Brazil is a former colony founded on slavery, which, miraculously, did not become racist, and where today a white man is a man with a drop of white blood, whereas in some countries a black man is a man with a drop of black blood.

My concern here is less with Brazil, however, than with the mysterious process by which a pleasant, scholarly young man from a middle-class background is transformed into a revolutionary ready to carry out reckless actions such as kidnappings and armed robberies and bombings. I came to realize from my talks with Dowbor that he was dangerous, not because he carried a gun and was willing to use it, but because he is one of those rare persons who carry the notion of moral consistency to its logical outcome.

Most of us are eroded by the practice of compromise. We live in the heart of inconsistency between our beliefs and our behavior. What priest and what doctor can afford to live according to the Gospels or the Hippocratic oath? . . .

THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVES

206

Most of us are caught in a web of daily obligations that make it impossible for us to live out our convictions. We inhabit a no man's land between the principles we cherish and the demands that are made upon us to violate or ignore them. We think the war in Vietnam is wrong but we pay taxes to support it. We are against pollution but we use cars and air conditioners that contribute to it. We survive by virtue of arrangements. In this perspective, the man who decides to align his behavior with his beliefs is the truly dangerous one.

Ladislav Dowbor's parents, as we have said, came from Poland. His father is a metallurgical engineer. His mother is a doctor. Fleeing a disintegrating Europe, they reached Brazil in 1940, and he was born in São Paulo. His parents are both practicing Catholics, with the kind of militant faith that once earned the name Belt of High Observance for the part of the world they came from. The four Dowbor children, of whom Ladislav is the youngest, had a very traditional, very morally demanding upbringing, stressing—rather than the small disciplinary matters such as wiping your feet before you come into the house, or how to hold your fork—how to be honest in your ideas and what it means to have a sense of justice.

"My sister is morally conservative," says Dowbor, "but she has the same respect for moral coherence." Moral coherence . . . a phrase few people are in a position to use, and which keeps recurring, with perhaps the slightest touch of smugness, in Dowbor's conversation.

He attended Jesuit schools in São Paulo, and was subjected to their combative brand of Catholicism (the Jesuits still think of themselves, in the light of their founder, Ignatius of Loyola, as soldiers of Christ). He found a Jesuit education propitious for the adoption of extreme viewpoints. "With the Jesuits," he says, "you either become a fascist or a revolutionary. Some of my classmates are in the political police. Their vision of the world is Manichaistic. There are forces of light and forces of darkness."

When Dowbor graduated from high school, he was not sure he wanted to continue his education. He was more interested in confronting practical economic problems. In 1960, his father gave him the money to buy a share in a chicken farm in the province of Campinas. He found that the individual chicken farmer was totally dependent on the wholesaler, who bought from 30 or 40 small farms.

"The wholesaler signed a contract to buy your chickens at a given price," he says. "But when the time came to pick up the chickens, he couldn't be reached. I had to get rid of the chickens, I had new chickens hatching. I went to see the wholesaler, and he said O.K., we'll come for your chickens, but we can't pay the original price, the market has collapsed. Then I'd get behind in my corn payments—corn is the biggest

expense—and I'd have to borrow money at 10 per cent interest. We tried to break the circle by selling directly to restaurants, but we were too small to guarantee them a steady supply, and the wholesaler threatened to cut them off if they bought from us. They couldn't take the risk."

Dowbor sold the chicken farm at a loss after a year and joined his father, who was then working in the northern coastal city of Recife. He found a job on the Journal of Commerce and joined the Movement of Popular Culture, which was devoted to teaching *campesinos* how to read in the backward rural areas of Pernambuco province, where the illiteracy rate reaches 90 per cent. Dowbor had seen poverty, but never like this. "It was about this part of Brazil," he says, "that Josue de Castro wrote 'The Cycle of the Crab.' People settle in the swamps, they are pushed off the good land, and they build their houses on poles. They drop their offal in the mud, and the crabs eat it, and then the people eat the crabs. People find it hard to believe that the average life span in Pernambuco province is 27 years."

As Dowbor continued to teach peasants to read ("For them, it was a matter of dignity, it made them part of society"), he came to understand why they were incapable of revolt. One day he saw a farm overseer tongue-lash a peasant because of work left unfinished. "My baby died yesterday," the peasant said, "and I took the day off." "I realized," Dowbor says, "that the worker felt a sense of guilt at having been absent, rather than a sense of outrage at being reprimanded on a day of great sorrow. I saw that these men are in a psychological and physiological state that precludes political action, they are caught in a cycle of birth, work and death."

Dowbor also found that thanks to his involvement in the literacy program, he had come to the attention of army authorities. He was summoned to an army barracks in Recife for questioning by two officers. The first officer said: "Don't you know the Movement for Popular Culture is financed by the Communists?"

"It was founded by the governor of the province," Dowbor reminded them.

The first officer turned to the second officer and said: "One of these days we are going to get this son of a whore."

"Gradually," Dowbor says, "I began to feel a need to make my life consistent with my ideas. You don't wake up one morning and look into the mirror and announce: I am a revolutionary. You become a revolutionary imperceptibly, by asking yourself questions, by breaking down the structure of power in your head, by a sense of outrage combined with the conviction that certain problems must have solutions. At that point my feelings were still linked to my Catholic upbringing. My reasoning was of the utmost simplicity. My father invited me to a good restaurant and

I refused. As a Catholic, when you see children dying of hunger, either you refuse a meal that could feed five children, or you abandon your Christianity."

In Recife, however, Dowbor's revolutionary aspirations became detached from his notions of Catholic morality. He was living in a beach house that had been loaned to him by a German engineer who was away most of the time. Every two weeks the engineer returned from the bush for a wild weekend with two or three prostitutes in the beach house. In the morning, the prostitutes would chat with Dowbor as they waited for the engineer to rouse from his slumber.

In a typical instance, a girl asked Dowbor: "Can you wake him up? I haven't been paid, and I have to go home and take care of my children."

"How do you manage to do the work you do and take care of your children as well?" Dowbor asked.

"I have to," the girl said. "My husband worked on the docks, but he's been laid off."

"I realized that there was no moral problem for them," Dowbor says. "There was sufficient misery in Recife for morality not to exist. Before, as a result of my Jesuit education, I had divided women into good and bad, and a prostitute was a bad woman. But when I saw a woman who convinced me that she was prostituting herself to feed her children, my values lost their absolute character."

"I worked myself up into a state of moral crisis. I had believed so strongly in the Christian values I had practiced that I now had to replace them with something else equally valid. I could not resolve the contradiction between the morality I had been taught and what I saw around me. It is what the French call *la conscience malheureuse*. I was 20 years old and I will never let anyone tell me it was the happiest time of my life."

"I decided at that time that social change was necessary and that it could only come about through organized group activity. I decided that instead of devoting myself to my own career, to my own life, I would become a social activist. I had wanted to study psychology; I decided economics would be more useful. I put some money aside and went to Switzerland, working as a truck driver during the day, and studying at night at the University of Lausanne, from 1964 until 1967."

Dowbor then found a teaching position in a small American college in the lakeside town of Leysin, near Lausanne. He taught a course in the history and formation of the Common Market. "The students there were the children of diplomats and businessmen," he recalls; "they owned sports cars and patronized the Montreux casino. They had strong feelings about their privileges. They would say things like: 'Peasants live in filth because they don't deserve anything better.' To that I would reply, 'That is not an argument; it is a philosophical position about man.'"

Dowbor decided that he must return to Brazil and take up armed action to overthrow the regime. "I felt it was absurd to hold a pacifist position and encourage the *campesinos* to organize," he says, "for once organized, and at the first test, the army would fire on them. Objectively, by working as a pacifist, one provokes violence. And if one provokes violence, one must assume it. A regime will not leave power by itself. It is hypocrisy to keep your hands clean and say you are a revolutionary but that you are not ready for armed action."

Dowbor left for Paris, where he made contact with several young Brazilians in the process of founding the V.P.R. One of them became his sponsor, and he was assigned to an action group. He returned to Brazil in June, 1968 without telling his family he was back, took a room in a boarding house in São Paulo, and met the leader of the new movement, a black ex-army sergeant named Onofre Pinto. He was given the *nom de guerre* Nelson and told that the first objective of his five-man action group would be to find money to finance its activities.

"We decided to get our money from the banks," Dowbor says. "That seemed normal in that the money in the banks rightly belongs to the workers. We thought we were entering a temporary phase to obtain the means to continue our action. We had not yet grasped the enormous political advantage of conducting armed actions in the large cities."

To hold up banks, they needed cars, and Dowbor became an experienced car thief. He and one of his colleagues would cruise the main boulevards of São Paulo between 5 and 6 in the evening, during the rush hour, pick out a car, and follow it. When the driver parked in front of his home and got out with his keys in his hand, they relieved him of the keys and drove off with the car after telling the owner: "Your car is going to be used in a revolutionary action. Tell the police it was stolen or you will be arrested as an accomplice. In a few days we will call and tell you where you can pick it up."

"We always returned the cars with a tank full of gas," Dowbor says. Within a month of his return, he was holding up his first bank, the Banco Mercantil, a gleaming, two-story steel and glass structure on Brigadier Luiz Antonio Avenue, in downtown São Paulo. . . .

But . . . in August, 1968, after only two months of revolutionary activity, he found out that it was just as simple to be caught. He was cruising through a residential section at night with two other members of the group, looking for a car to steal. His car was stopped by the police, who found a gun on the back seat. The police were not sure whether they were common thieves or political activists.

Dowbor and his friends were turned over to the State Department of Criminal Investigation (D.E.I.C.) for questioning, which in Brazil has become a euphemism for torture. Dowbor was introduced to the parrot's

perch, an iron crossbar hanging from the ceiling, from which a suspect is suspended with his hands tied over his knees. While in this helpless position, electric shocks are applied to various parts of the body. At the end of eight days of beatings and the parrot's perch, Dowbor was in bad shape, with several broken ribs.

"You would hear yelling all day long there [at D.E.I.C. headquarters]," he recalls. "There was always someone being tortured. I realized that the Brazilian police had given up all investigative techniques except torture. A police investigator in Brazil is by definition a torturer. The chief investigator was a police inspector known as Geladeira [refrigerator] because he never betrayed any emotion while doing his work.

"The terrible thing is that they become accustomed to torture. Decent young men from good families who have joined the police from the highest motives are told to torture suspects. The first time they vomit in disgust, and then they get used to it."

Dowbor's lawyer managed to have him visited by a doctor. The lawyer took the doctor's report to a police commissioner, and threatened to have it published. Thanks to this threat and a bribe, the lawyer obtained the release of Dowbor and his two friends, who were never formally charged. Dowbor explains this peculiar turnaround by saying: "You must realize that in an underdeveloped country the repression, too, is undeveloped. The police are underpaid and undermotivated. Once I was stopped in a stolen car. The registration was not in my name. I offered them 50 cruzeiros. They wanted 100. We settled on 70."

Once released, Dowbor became more careful. He rented three separate *cuartos de empregado* (top-floor maid's rooms), using a different name for each, and moved from one to the other, like the mythical king who, fearing assassination, changed bedrooms each night. He continued robbing banks and stealing cars. One day in March, 1969, he saw his own photograph on a wanted poster. The posters were up on street corners, in gas stations and in cafes.

"WANTED," the posters said—"LADISLAS DOWBOR, KNOWN AS NELSON, ONE OF THE HEAVYWEIGHTS OF THE TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, A DANGEROUS COMMUNIST ASSASSIN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF MANY HEADS OF FAMILIES. HELP US PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN. WARN A POLICEMAN AS SOON AS YOU NOTICE HIS PRESENCE."

"It gives you a funny sensation to see yourself on every city wall," Dowbor says. "I remember buying meat at a butcher's and watching him wrap it up in a newspaper with my photograph on it." In retaliation, the V.P.R. distributed posters with the photograph of the Brazilian President, Costa e Silva, which said: "WANTED BY THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS, FOR TORTURE, COLLECTIVE MURDER AND OFFICIAL ROBBERY."

The appearance of the posters, however, was coupled with a police crackdown. At the end of March, 1969, the leader of the V.P.R., Onofre Pinto, was caught.

A month earlier, a respected army officer named Capt. Carlos Lamarca had deserted the Fourth Infantry Regiment with 70 light machine guns and joined the ranks of the V.P.R. Lamarca was known as the best shot in the army, and had been picked by the government to teach bank tellers to fire the guns they were now going to be issued, as a preventive measure to halt the wave of holdups. A widely distributed poster showed the dashing Captain Lamarca instructing a young lady how to fire a revolver. In any case, after Onofre Pinto was caught, Lamarca became the head of the V.P.R., a position he holds to this day. He is also at the head of the Brazilian police's most wanted list.

In April, Dowbor and Lamarca and 10 others attacked a military police barracks in the factory district of São Caetano do Sul. "We wanted their submachine guns and grenades," Dowbor says, "and we also wanted the workers to see the M.P.'s in their gray uniforms and white helmets standing outside their own barracks with their hands up. It may seem strange that we would risk the lives of important leaders in this type of action. But that is proof of total involvement. However important you are, you must do your share of menial jobs like stealing cars or renting hideouts for less experienced companions. People told us they were staying out of our movement because they were political, or that they were going into exile because they were too important to remain in Brazil. That had no meaning for us. Instead of making speeches from foreign countries, we were getting the job done."

On April 21, at 8:30 P.M., Dowbor was on his way to an apartment in the Paraiso section to meet a girl agent when he turned a corner and found himself surrounded by police. The girl had been arrested and had given away the address of the meeting under torture. Dowbor pulled out the Luger he was carrying that day and fired, but it jammed. His only thought as the police slipped handcuffs over his wrists was: Lugers aren't supposed to jam.

He was taken to the interrogation center run by the counterterrorist army squads, who had launched what they called "Operation Bandeirantes," or OBAN, named after the 18th-century adventurers who came to Brazil to hunt for gold and diamonds. The center is a modern, three-story, yellow-and-white house behind a police station on Tutoya Street. Over the door to the room where the torture takes place are the words: *Aqui nao ha Deus nem direitos humanos* (Here there is neither God nor human rights).

Three teams of 10 men commanded by an army captain work eight-

hour shifts around the clock in the torture center. . . . The torture room is called the special operations room, or the *sala roxa* (violet room), because the walls are hung with violet cloth.

As soon as he was arrested, Dowbor was taken to the *sala roxa* and questioned for 48 consecutive hours. He tried to talk about things the police already knew, like the bank holdups. One of his interrogators said: "You steal money from the banks; why don't you get it from the crooked politicians instead?"

"Why do you torture prisoners?" Dowbor asked by way of a reply.

"If we don't torture you, you won't talk," the interrogator said. "What can we do?"

"That is up to you. When a regime is forced to stay in power by such means, it has no real validity. For each one of us you torture you create 10 kamikazes and then you will weep about violence in Brazil."

The fatherly, understanding interrogator, who offered coffee and cigarettes, alternated with the ugly interrogator, who applied the electrodes. The nice one said: "We want to talk to you from one soldier to another. You are militants of subversion, we are militants of repression. You are a foolish young idealist. You could help Brazil—instead, you are trying to wreck it. What are you after?"

To gain time, Dowbor explained what his aims were, he talked about Brazil's alienated masses, he discussed the degree of foreign investment in the Brazilian economy. He felt like the concubine in "Thousand and One Nights" whose life was safe as long as she kept talking. The torturers joined in, as though they liked nothing better than a lively political discussion.

"Your methods are wrong," one interrogator said. "Violence will not help. Why are you giving up a comfortable existence for a lost cause?"

At one point, the soldier who was typing Dowbor's statement turned to one of his colleagues and said: "You know, Tiradentes (a famous 18th-century Brazilian hero commonly known as Toothpuller, whose head was shown in a public square in Rio after he was put to death), he fought for independence and had his head cut off and now he's a national hero. Do you suppose someday these people will be the same?"

Dowbor came to the end of his statement by saying: "An honest man who wants to walk with his head up should take up arms nowadays." This was too much for the ugly interrogator, who strapped him to the parrot's perch and applied the electrodes, calling him a "son of a bitch Pole." Later, when Dowbor was in his cell trying to rest his mistreated body, this same interrogator came to apologize, not for having tortured him, but for having made a slurring remark about his national origin.

Dowbor was considered an important catch. He was loaned out by one security organization to the others. "In the following month," he says,

"I was tortured by the São Paulo army, the political police, the Rio de Janeiro army, naval intelligence and the army secret service. It did not matter whether I talked or not. Each new team of interrogators decided the others had not been able to break me because they did not know their job. They made it a point of professional honor to do better."

After several weeks of this treatment, Dowbor had third-degree burns on his legs and sprained back muscles and was unable to walk. He was sent to an ultramodern medical center operated by the DOPS (Department of Order, Political and Social). A team of doctors there is specialized in patching up political prisoners so they can be tortured some more, like ringside attendants who stanch a boxer's cuts so he can keep fighting.

"That was almost worse than being tortured," Dowbor says. Pleasant young doctors in clean white smocks took notes as they asked, with the same impersonal tone as if they were inquiring about a sinus headache: "What was it? Electric shock? What voltage?" They took his temperature, tapped his chest as they listened with a stethoscope, treated his burns, and X-rayed him. "With treatment like that you start to lose your mind," Dowbor says. The doctors pronounced him fit enough to be returned to his interrogators.

"I finally talked," he says. "I had to give away the general aspects of the organization." When he said he did not know where Lamarca was hiding (which was true), one of the interrogators said: "You are lying, but the day will come when you will wish for others to be imprisoned because of you."

Dowbor had been passed along from one security service to the other for roughly six weeks when word filtered down to him that the West German ambassador in Rio de Janeiro had been kidnapped by the V.P.R., which was asking for 40 prisoners in exchange for his release. "I was in my cell in the DOPS," he recalls, "when a policeman whispered to me: 'You're in luck, your people have kidnapped von Holleben [the German ambassador]'. That day they stopped torturing me. I could not be sure I was on the list of the 40. The lists are made up according to one's behavior in prison. The next day the names came out and I was on it. The guards started calling me *Senhor*."

On June 14, Dowbor and others on the list were taken under heavy guard to the military airport in São Paulo. They were flown to Rio de Janeiro, where they were put by twos in cells in the air force prison. The next morning, all the 40 were herded together in the same room. "It was a very joyous scene," says Dowbor. "We found companions whom we thought were dead or whom we had not seen in years." Twenty-seven of the 40 were members of Dowbor's group, the V.P.R., which had carried out the kidnapping. "At midday we boarded the plane for Algiers. We had changed handcuffs three times, because each police organization had

its own. The political police had turned us over to the federal police at São Paulo airport. The federal police had turned us over to the air force police in Rio, and on the plane we were back in the hands of the federal police. We remained handcuffed during the flight."

The plane arrived at Maison-Carrée airport in Algiers at 1 A.M. on June 15. A Brazilian policeman stood at the door, at the spot where the smiling air hostess usually wishes passengers farewell, and unsnapped the handcuffs from each disembarking passenger. Dowbor walked down the gangplank, shook his wrists and gazed up at the clear, star-filled North African sky.