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Socialist Project

Socialist Interventions Pamphlet Series

Marta Harnecker

Ideas for the Struggle

Socialist Interventions Pamphlet Series

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Ideas for the Struggle

Organizing for Socialism in the 21st century

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Ideas for the struggle #1

INSURRECTIONS OR REVOLUTIONS? THE ROLE OF THE POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

1. The recent popular uprisings at the turn of the 21st century that have rocked numerous countries such as Argentina and Bolivia – and, more generally, the history of the multiple social explosions that have occurred in Latin America and the rest of the world – have undoubtedly demonstrated **that the initiative of the masses, in and of itself, is not enough to defeat ruling regimes**.

2. Impoverished urban and rural masses, lacking a well defined plan, have risen up, seized highways, towns and neighbourhoods, ransacked stores and stormed parliaments, but despite achieving the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of people, **neither the size nor their combativeness have been enough to develop from popular insurrection into revolution**. They have overthrown presidents, but they haven't been able to conquer power and initiate a process of deep social transformations.

3. On the other hand, the history of triumphant revolutions clearly demonstrates what can be achieved when there is **a political instrument capable of raising an alternative national program that unifies the struggles of diverse social actors behind a common goal**; that helps to cohere them and elaborate a path forward for these actors based on an analysis of the existent balance of forces. Only in this manner can actions be carried out at the right place and right time, always seeking out the weakest link in the enemy's chain.

4. This political instrument is like a steam engine that compresses a piston at the decisive moment and – without wasting any energy – converts it into a powerful force.

5. In order for political action to be effective, so that protests, resistance and struggles are really able to change things, **to convert insurrections into revolutions, a political instrument capable of overcoming the dispersion and fragmentation of the exploited and the oppressed is required.** An instrument that can create spaces to bring together those who, in spite of their differences, have a common enemy; that is able to strengthen existing struggles and promote others by orientating their actions according to a thorough analysis of the political situation; that can act as an instrument for uniting the many expressions of resistance and struggle.

6. We are aware that there are a number of apprehensions toward such ideas. There are many who are not even willing to discuss them. Such positions are adopted because they associate this idea with the anti-democratic, authoritarian, bureaucratic and manipulating political practices that have characterized many left parties.

7. I believe **it is fundamental that we overcome this subjective barrier and understand** that when we refer to a political instrument, **we are not thinking of just any political instrument**, we are dealing with political instrument adjusted to the new times, an instrument that we must build together.

8. However, in order to create or remodel this new political instrument, **the left has to change its political culture** and its vision of politics. This cannot be reduced to institutional political disputes for control over parliament or local governments; to approving laws or winning elections. In this conception of politics, the popular sectors and their struggles are completely ignored. Neither can politics be limited to the art of what is possible.

9. For the left, politics must be the art of making possible the impossible. And we are not talking about a voluntarist declaration. We are talking about **understanding politics as the art of constructing a social and political force capable of changing the balance of forces in favour of the popular movement, so as to make possible in the future that which today appears impossible**.

10. We have to think of politics as the art of constructing forces. We have to overcome the old and deeply-rooted mistake of trying to build a political force without building a social force.

11. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of revolutionary phasemongering among our militants; too much radicalism in their statements. I am convinced that **the only way to radicalize a given situation is through the construction of forces.** Those whose words are filled with demands for radicalization must answer the following question: What are you doing to construct the political and social forces necessary to push the process forward?

12. But this **construction of forces cannot occur spontaneously**, only popular uprisings happen spontaneously. **It needs a protagonist**.

13. And I envisage this political instrument as an organization capable of raising a national project that can unify and act as a compass for all those sectors that oppose neoliberalism. As a space that directs itself toward the rest of society, that respects the autonomy of the social movements instead of manipulating them, and whose militants and leaders are true popular pedagogues, capable of stimulating the knowledge that exists within the people – derived from their cultural traditions, as well as acquired in their daily struggles for survival – through the fusion of this knowledge with the most all-encompassing knowledge that the political organization can offer. An instrument that orients and unites – at the service of the social movements.

Ideas for the struggle #2

CONVINCE, NOT IMPOSE

1. Popular movements and, more generally, the different social protagonists who today are engaged in the struggle against neoliberal globalization both at the international and national levels **reject, with good reason, attitudes that aim to impose hegemony or control over movements**. They don't accept the steamroller policy that some political and social organizations tended to use that, taking advantage of their position of strength and monopolizing political positions, attempt to manipulate the movement. **They don't accept the authoritarian imposition of a leadership from above**; they don't accept attempts made to lead movements by simply giving orders, no matter how correct they are.

2. Such attitudes, instead of bringing forces together, have the opposite effect. On the one hand, it creates discontent in the other organizations; they feel manipulated and obligated to accept decisions in which they've had no participation; and on the other hand, it reduces the number of potential allies, given that an organization that assumes such positions is incapable of representing the real interests of all sectors of the population and often provokes mistrust and scepticism among them.

3. But **to fight against positions that seek to impose hegemony does not mean renouncing the fight to win hegemony**, which is nothing else but attempting to win over, to persuade others of the correctness of our criteria and the validity of our proposals.

4. **To win hegemony doesn't require having many people in the beginning**, a few is enough. The hegemony reached by *Movimiento 26 de Julio* (July 26 Movement) led by Fidel Castro in Cuba, seems to us to be a sufficiently convincing example of this.

5. More important than creating a powerful party with a large number of militants is to raise a political project that reflects the population's most deeply felt aspirations, and thus win their minds and hearts. **What is important is that its politics succeed in procuring the support of the masses and consensus in the majority of society**.

6. **Some parties** boast about the large numbers of militants they have, but, in fact, **they only lead their members**. The key is not whether the party is large or small; what matters is that the people feel they identify with its proposals.

7. **Instead of imposing and manipulating, what is necessary is convincing and uniting** all those who feel attracted to the project to be implemented. And you can only unite people if the others are respected, if you are willing to share responsibilities with other forces.

8. Today, important sectors of the left have come to understand that their hegemony will be greater when they succeed in bringing more people behind their proposals, even if they may not do so under their banner. We have to abandon the old-fashioned and mistaken practice of demanding intellectual property rights over organizations that dare to hoist their own banner.

9. If an important number of grassroots leaders are won over to these ideas, then it is assured that these ideas will more effectively reach the different popular movements. It is also important to win over distinguished national personalities to the project, because they are public opinion makers and will be effective for promoting the proposals and winning over new supporters.

10. We believe that a good way to measure hegemony obtained by an organization is to examine the **number of natural leaders and personalities that have taken up its ideas** and, in general, the number of people who identify with them.

11. The level of hegemony obtained by a political organization cannot be measured by the number of political positions that have been won. What is fundamental is that those who occupy leading positions in diverse movements and organizations take up as their own and **implement the proposals elaborated by the organization, despite not belonging to it**.

12. A test for any political organization that declares itself as not wanting to impose hegemony or control is still **being capable of proposing the best people for different positions**, whether they are members of that very party, are independent or are members of other parties. The credibility among the people of a project will depend a great deal on the figures that the left raises.

13. Of course this is easier said than done. Frequently, when an organization is strong, it tends to underestimate the contribution that other organizations may have to offer and tend to impose its ideas. It is easier to do this than to take the risk of rising to the challenge to winning people over. While more political positions are obtained, the more careful we have to be of not falling into the desire to impose hegemony or control.

14. Moreover, the concept of hegemony is a dynamic one, **since hegemony is not established once and for all. To maintain it requires a process of permanently re-winning it**. Life follows its course, new problems arise, and with them new challenges.

Ideas for the struggle #3

TO BE AT THE SERVICE OF POPULAR MOVEMENTS, NOT TO DISPLACE THEM

1. We have previously stated that politics is the art of constructing a social and political force capable of changing the balance of forces in order to make possible tomorrow that which today appears to be impossible. But, to be able to construct a social force it **is necessary for political organizations to demonstrate a great respect for grassroots movements; to contribute to their autonomous development, leaving behind all attempts at manipulation**. They must take as their starting point that they aren't the only ones with ideas and proposals and, on the contrary, grassroots movements have much to offer us, because through their daily struggles they have also learned things, discovered new paths, found solutions and invented methods which can be of great value.

2. Political organizations have to get rid of the idea that they are the only ones capable of generating creative, new, revolutionary and transformative ideas. And that therefore, their role is not only to echo the demands of the social movements, but to also be willing to gather ideas and concepts from these movements to enrich its own conceptual arsenal.

3. Political and social leaders **should leave behind the method of pre-established schemas**. We have to struggle to **eliminate all verticalism that stifles the initiative of the people**. The role of a leader must be one of contributing with ideas and experiences in order to help grow and strengthen the movement, and not displace the masses.

4. Their role is to push the mass movement forward, or perhaps more than push, facilitate the conditions necessary so that the movement can unleash its capacity to confront those that exploit and oppress them. But **helping to push forward is only possible if we fight shoulder to shoulder** in local, regional, national and international struggles.

5. The relationship of political organizations with grassroots movements should therefore be a two way circuit: from the political organization to the social movement and from the social movement to the political organization. Unfortunately, the tendency continues to be that it only functions in the first direction.

6. It is important to **learn to listen** and to engage in dialogue with the people; it is necessary to **listen carefully to the solutions proposed by the people themselves** to defend their conquests or struggle for their demands and, with all the information collected, we must be capable of correctly diagnosing their mood and synthesise that which could unite them and generate political action, and at the same time tackle pessimistic and defeatist ideas they may hold.

7. Wherever possible, **we must involve the grassroots in the process of decision-making**, that is to say, we have to open up new spaces for people's participation, but **people's participation is not something that can be decreed from above**. Only by taking as our starting point the true motivations of the people, only if one helps them to discover the necessity of carrying out certain task for themselves, and only by winning over their hearts and minds, will they be willing to fully commit themselves to the actions proposed.

8. This is the only way to ensure that efforts made to help orient the movement are not felt as orders coming from outside the movement and to help create an organizational process capable of involving, if not all, then at least an important part of the people into the struggle and, little by little, win over the more backward and pessimistic sectors. When these latter sectors understand that, as Che Guevara said, the aims we are fighting for are **not only necessary but possible**, they too will choose to join the struggle.

9. When the people realize that their own ideas and initiatives are being put into practice, **they will see themselves as the protagonists of change and their capacity to struggle will enormously increase**.

10. Taking all that has been said above into consideration, it becomes clear that the type of activists we need **cannot be drillmasters** – today, it is not about leading an army, which is not to say that at some critical junctures this may and should be the case, **nor that of a demagogic populist** – because it is not about leading a flock of sheep; political cadre **should fundamentally be teachers**, capable of fostering the ideas and initiatives that emerge from within the grassroots movements.

11. Unfortunately, many of the current leaders have been educated in the school of leading the people by issuing orders, and that is not something that can be changed overnight. Thus, I do not want to create an impression of excessive optimism here. Achieving a correct relationship with the social movements is still a long way off.

Ideas for the struggle #4

SHOULD WE REJECT BUREAUCRATIC CENTRALISM AND SIMPLY USE CONSENSUS?

1. For a long time, left-wing parties operated along authoritarian lines. The usual practice was that of **bureaucratic centralism**, influenced by the experiences of Soviet socialism. **All decisions regarding criterion, tasks, initiatives, and the course of political action to take were restricted to the party elite, without the participation or debate of the membership**, who were limited to following orders that they never got to discuss and in many cases did not understand. For most people, such practices are increasingly intolerable.

2. But in challenging bureaucratic centralization, it is important to avoid falling into the excesses of **ultra-democracy**, which results in more time being used for discussion than action, since **everything, even the most minor points, are the subject of rigorous debates that frequently impede any concrete action**.

3. In criticizing bureaucratic centralization, the recent tendency has been to reject all forms of centralized leadership.

4. There is a lot of talk about organizing groups at all levels of society, and that these groups must apply a strict internal democracy, ideas that we obviously share. What we don't agree with is the idea that no effort needs to be put in the direction of giving them a common organic link. **In defending democracy, flexibility and the desire to fight on many different fronts, what is rejected are efforts to determine strategic priorities and attempt to unify actions**.

5. For some, the one and only acceptable method is **consensus**. They argue that by utilising consensus they are aiming not to impose decisions but instead interpret the will of all. But the consensus method, which seeks the agreement of all and appears to be a more democratic method, can in practice be something profoundly anti-democratic, because it grants the **power of veto to a minority**, to such an extreme that a single person can block the implementation of an agreement that may be supported by an overwhelming majority.

6. Moreover, the complexity of problems, the size of the organizations and political timing that compels us to make quick decisions at specific junctures make it almost impossible to use the consensus model on many occasions, even if we leave aside the manipulating uses of the consensus model.

7. I believe that **there cannot be political efficacy without a unified leadership** that determines the course of action to follow at different moments in the struggle and to

achieve this goal it is vital that a broad ranging discussion occurs, where everyone can raise their opinions and where, in the end, positions are adopted and everyone respects them.

8. For the sake of a unified course of action, lower levels of the organization should respect the decisions made by the higher bodies, and those who have ended up in the minority should accept whatever course of action emerges triumphant, carrying out the task together with all the other members.

9. A political movement that seriously aspires to transform society cannot afford the luxury of **allowing undisciplined members to disrupt its unity, without which it is impossible to succeed**.

10. This combination of single **centralized leadership and democratic debate** at different levels of the organization is called democratic centralism. It is a dialectic combination: in complicated political periods, of revolutionary fervour or war, there is no other alternative than to lean toward centralization; in periods of calm, when the rhythm of events is slower, the democratic character should be emphasized.

11. Personally, I do not see how one can conceive of successful political action if unified action is not achieved, and for that reason I do not think that another method exists other than democratic centralism, if consensus has not been reached.

12. A **correct combination of centralism and democracy motivates** the leaders and, above all, the members. Only creative action at every level of the political or social organization will ensure the triumph of our struggle. An insufficient democratic life impedes the unleashing of the creative initiative of all the militants, with its subsequent negative impact on their participation. In practice, this motivation manifests itself in the sense of responsibility, dedication to work, courage and aptitude for problem solving, as well as in the capacity to express opinions, to criticise defects and exercise control over the higher up bodies in the organizations.

13. Only a correct combination of centralism and democracy can ensure that agreements are efficient, because **having engaged in the discussion and the decision-making process, one feels more committed to carry out the decisions**.

14. When applying democratic centralism **we must avoid attempts to use narrow majorities to try and crush the minority**. The more mature social and political movements believe that it is pointless imposing a decision adopted by a narrow majority. They believe that **if the large majority of militants are not convinced of the course of action to take, it is better to hold off until the militants are won over politically** and become convinced themselves that such action is correct. This will help us avoid the disastrous internal divisions that have plagued movements and left parties, and avoid the possibility of making big mistakes.

Ideas for the struggle #5

MINORITIES CAN BE RIGHT

1. Democratic centralism implies not only the subordination of the minority to the majority, but also **the respect of the majority toward the minority**.

2. Minorities should not be crushed or marginalized; they should be respected. Nor should the minority be required to completely subordinate itself to the majority. The minority must **carry out the tasks** proposed by the majority at each concrete political junction, **but they should not have to renounce their political, theoretical and ideological convictions**. On the contrary, it is the minority's duty to continue fighting to defend their ideas until the others are convinced or they themselves become convinced of the other's ideas.

3. Why should the minority continue defending its positions and not submit to the position of the majority? Because **the minority may be right**; their analysis of reality might be more accurate if they have been capable of discovering the true motivations of specific social forces. That is why those who hold minority positions at a determined moment should not only have the right, but the duty, to hold their positions and fight to convince the maximum amount of other militants of their positions through internal debate.

4. Moreover, **if the majority is convinced that their propositions are correct, then they have nothing to fear in debating ideas**. On the contrary, they should encourage it and try to convince the minority group. If the majority fears a confrontation of positions it is probably a sign of political weakness.

5. Is this not the case if we look at some of the left parties and social movements in Latin America? **How many splits could have been avoided if the minority view had been respected**? Instead, on many occasions, the entire weight of the bureaucratic apparatus has been used to crush them, leaving them with no choice but to split. Sometimes minorities are accused of being divisive for the simple reason that they want their ideas to be respected and be given space to debate them. Could it be that the true splitters are those who provoke the division by leaving the minority with no other option than to split if they hope to continue their struggle against positions they believe to be wrong?

6. The topic of majorities and minorities also has to do with the disjunction or **non correspondence between representatives and the represented**. This phenomenon may occur for different reasons, including: the organic incapacity of those who represent the real majority to achieve better representation in the mass organizations; the bureaucratic manoeuvres of a formal majority to keep itself in positions of power; the rapid change in political consciousness of those who elected these representatives due

to developments in the revolutionary process itself. Those who only days before truly represented the majority may today simply represent a formal majority because the revolutionary situation has demonstrated to the masses that the position of the minority was correct.

7. The new culture of the left should also be reflected in a different approach toward the composition of leadership bodies in political organizations. For a long time it was believed that if a certain tendency or sector of the party won the internal elections by a majority, all leadership positions would be filled by cadres from that tendency. In a certain sense, the prevailing idea was that the more homogenous the leadership, the easier it would be to lead the organization. Today different criteria tend to prevail: **a leadership that better reflects the internal balance of forces seems to work better, as it helps to get all party members, and not only those of the majority current, feeling more involved in the implementation of tasks proposed by the leadership**.

8. But a plural leadership, along the lines that we are proposing, can only be effective if **the organization has a truly democratic culture**, because if that is not the case, then such an approach will produce a wave of unrest and render the organization ungovernable.

9. Moreover, a real democratization of the political organization demands more effective participation by party members in the election of their leaders: they should be elected according to their ideological and political positions rather than personality. That is why it's important that the different positions are well known among the party membership via internal publications. It's also very important to ensure a more democratic formulation of candidates and to safeguard the secret vote.

10. Finally, it is essential to remember that the internal democratic culture of a political organization is the public face it offers to the social movements with which it wants to work. **If it demonstrates, on the one hand, that its internal decision-making process occurs according to a democratic procedure based on tolerance and, on the other hand, that it carries out its work in a unitary manner, it can offer the social movements a model for successful action**.

Ideas for the struggle #6

THE NEED TO UNITE THE PARTY LEFT AND THE SOCIAL LEFT

1. **The rejection by a majority of the people of the globalization model imposed on our continent intensifies each day** given its inability to solve the most pressing problems of our people. Neoliberal policies implemented by large transnational financial capital, which is backed by a large military and media power, and whose hegemonic headquarters can be found in the United States, **have not only been unable to resolve these problems but, on the contrary, have dramatically increased misery and social exclusion**, while concentrating wealth in increasingly fewer hands.

2. Among those who have suffered most as a result of the economic consequences of neoliberalism are the traditional sectors of the urban and rural working classes. But its disastrous effects have also affected many other social sectors, such as the poor and marginalized, impoverished middle-class sectors, the constellation of small and medium-sized businesses, the informal sector, medium and small-scale rural producers, the majority of professionals, the legions of unemployed, workers in cooperatives, pensioners, the police and the subordinate cadres of the army (junior officers). Moreover, **we should not only keep in mind those who are affected economically**, but also all those who are discriminated and oppressed by the system: women, youth, children, the elderly, indigenous peoples, blacks, certain religious creeds, homosexuals, etc.

3. **Neoliberalism impoverishes the great majority of the population of our countries, those impoverished in the socio-economic sense and also in the subjective sense**.

4. Some of these sectors have transformed themselves into powerful movements. Among those are women's, indigenous and consumer rights movements, and movements that fight for human rights and in defence of the environment.

5. **These movements differ in many ways from the classical labour movement**. Their platforms have a strong thematic accent and they reach across classes and generations. Their forms of organizing are less hierarchical and rely more on networks than those of the past, while their concrete forms of actions vary quite a lot.

6. **New social actors** have also appeared. What is surprising, for example, is the capacity to mobilize that has manifested itself among **youth, fundamentally organized through electronic means**, with the object of rejecting actually existing globalization; resisting the application of neoliberal measures, promoting very powerful mobilizations against war and against military occupation, and spreading experiences of revolutionary struggle, **breaking up the information blockade** that had been imposed on left and progressive ideas.

7. This growing rejection is being expressed through diverse and alternative practices of resistance and struggle.

8. **The consolidation of left parties, fronts or political processes** in opposition to neoliberalism is undeniable in various countries: Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay, El Salvador, Bolivia. In some, such as Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Mexico, **powerful social movements have arisen**, which have transformed themselves into major political actors, becoming important opposition forces that occupy the frontlines of the fight against neoliberal globalization.

9. **However**, despite the depth of the crisis that this model has provoked, the breadth and variety of affected sectors that embrace the majority of the population, the multiplicity of demands that have emerged from society and which continue to remain unmet – all of which have produced a highly favourable situation for the creation of a very broad anti-neoliberal social bloc with enormous social force – **the majority of these growing expressions of resistance and struggle are still far from truly representing a real threat to the system**.

10. I believe that one of the reasons that helps explain this situation is that parallel to these **objective conditions which are favourable** for the construction of a broad alternative social bloc against neoliberalism, there are **very complicated subjective conditions** which have to do with a profound problem: the dispersion of the left.

11. And that is why I believe that for an effective struggle against neoliberalism, it is of strategic importance to articulate the different left sectors, **understanding the left** to mean all those forces that stand up against the capitalist system and its profit-driven logic, and who fight for an alternative society based on humanism and solidarity, built upon the interests of the working classes.

12. **Therefore, the left cannot simply be reduced to those that belong to left parties or political organizations; it also includes social actors and movements**. Very often these are more dynamic and combative than the former, but do not belong to or reject belonging to any political party or organization. Among the former are those who prefer to accumulate forces by using institutions to aid transformation, while others opt for revolutionary guerrilla warfare; among the latter, some attempt to create autonomous social movements and different types of networks.

13. To simplify, I have decided to refer to the first group as the **political left** and the second group as the **social left**, even though I recognize that this conceptual separation is not always so in practice. In fact, the more developed social movements tend to acquire socio-political dimensions.

14. To sum up, I believe that only by uniting the militant efforts of the most diverse expressions of the left will we be able to fully carry out the task of building the broad anti-neoliberal social bloc that we need. **The strategic task therefore is to articulate the party and social left so that, from this starting point, we can unite into a single colossal column, the growing and diverse social opposition**.

Ideas for the struggle #7

REASONS FOR POPULAR SKEPTICISM CONCERNING POLITICS AND POLITICIANS

1. In one of my previous articles, I stated that in order to wage an effective struggle against neoliberalism, it is necessary to unite all those suffering its consequences, and to achieve this objective we must start with the left itself, which in our countries tends to be very dispersed. But, **there are many obstacles that impede this task. The first step to overcoming them is to be aware of them and be prepared to face them**.

2. One of these obstacles is **the growing popular skepticism regarding politics and politicians**.

3. This has to do, among other things, with the **great constraints that exist today in our democratic systems**, which are very different to those that existed prior to the military dictatorships.

4. These low-intensity, controlled, restricted, limited or monitored democratic regimes drastically limit the effective capacity of democratically elected authorities. The most important decisions are made by unelected institutions of a permanent character, and which therefore are not subject to changes produced by electoral results; such is the case with national security councils, central banks, institutions for economic advice, supreme courts, ombudsmen, constitutional tribunals.

5. Groups of professionals, and not politicians, are responsible for making decisions, or at minimum have a decisive influence over the decisions made. The apparent neutrality and depoliticization of these entities conceals the new way in which the dominant class does politics. **Their decisions are adopted outside the framework of parties**. We are dealing with controlled democracies, where the controllers themselves are not subject to any democratic mechanism.

6. Moreover, **instruments for manufacturing consensus** – monopolized by the ruling classes – **have been dramatically improved**, conditioning to a great extent the way in which people perceive reality. This explains why the most conservative parties, which defend the interests of a tiny minority of the population, have been able to quantitatively transform themselves into mass parties, and why the social bases that support their candidates, at least in Latin America, are the poorest social sectors of the urban peripheries and countryside.

7. Other elements that explain this growing popular skepticism include, on the one hand, **the unscrupulous appropriation by the right wing of the language and discourse of the left** – words such as 'reforms,' 'structural changes,' 'concern for poverty,' 'transition' – today form part of its everyday discourse; and, on the other hand, the quite frequent adoption **of political practices by some parties on the left that hardly differ from the habitual practices of traditional parties**.

8. We must bear in mind that, increasingly, people are rejecting clientalist, non-transparent and corrupt party practices carried out by those who reach out to the people only at election time; that waste energy in internecine fighting between factions and petty ambitions; where decisions are made at the top by party elites without a genuine consultation with the ranks; and where personal leadership outranks the collective. **People are increasingly rejecting messages that remain as mere words, and are never translated into action**.

9. Ordinary people are fed up with the traditional political system and want renewal, they want positive change, **they want new approaches to doing politics, they want clean politics, they want transparency and participation, they want to regain confidence**.

10. This distrust of politics and politicians – which also permeates the social left – which is growing daily, is not a serious issue of the right, but it is for the left. The right wing can operate perfectly well without political parties, as it demonstrated during periods of dictatorship, but the left cannot do without a political instrument, be it a party, a political front or some other formula.

11. Another obstacle to the unity of the left – following the defeat of Soviet socialism, and the crisis of the welfare state promoted by European social democracies and Latin American populist developmentalism – is that it has had great difficulties in elaborating a rigorous and credible alternative to capitalism – socialist or whatever you want to call it – that takes into account the new world reality.

12. Capitalism has revealed its great capacity to re-invent itself and utilise the new technological revolution toward its own ends: fragmenting the working class and limiting its negotiating power, creating panic over unemployment. Meanwhile, on many occasions, the left has remained anchored in the past. **There is an excess of diagnosis and an absence of remedy. We tend to navigate without a political compass**.

13. Most of the obstacles outlined above come about due to realities imposed on us from outside, but there also exists obstacles that disrupt attempts to unite all of the left which come from within.

14. Moreover, during the last decades, the party left has had many **difficulties in working with the social movements and winning over new social forces**. While, on the other hand, there has been a tendency in the social left **to dismiss parties and magnify their own roles** in the struggle against neoliberal globalization, an attitude which hasn't helped in overcoming the dispersion of the left. The next chapter will deal with these issues.

Ideas for the struggle #8

THE LEFT MUST STRIVE TO SET THE AGENDA FOR STRUGGLE

1. In the previous chapter, we stated that a large section of the party left has found it very difficult to work with social movements and develop ties with the new social forces in recent decades. This has been due to several factors.

2. While the right wing has demonstrated great political initiative, the left tends to be on the defensive. While the former uses its control of the institutions of the state and the mass media, as well as its economic influence, to impose its new model, subservient to financial capital and monopolies, that has precipitated privatizations, labour deregulation and all the other aspects of the neoliberal economic program, to increase social fragmentation and foment anti-partyism, **the party left, on the other hand, has almost exclusively limited its political work to the use of current institutionality, subordinating itself to the rules of the game imposed by the enemy, and hardly ever taking them by surprise**. The level of absurdity is such that the calendar of struggle of the left is set by the right.

3. How often have we heard the left complain about the adverse conditions it had to face during election campaigns, after discovering that its electoral results were not what it was expecting? Yet the very same left seldom denounces the rules of the game imposed on it, nor proposes electoral reforms, during its electoral campaigns. On the contrary, what tends to occur is that in seeking votes – instead of carrying out an educational, pedagogical campaign that serves to increase the organization and awareness of the people – the left uses the same techniques to sell its candidates that the ruling classes use.

4. On the other hand, the current rules of the game imposed by the dominant classes hinder the unity of the left and foment personality-based politics. In some countries, the left is forced to work to support its own party instead of for a broader front, because if it doesn't the party tends to disappear from the political sphere.

5. **This means that**, when electoral defeats occur, the frustration, wearing down and debts incurred during the campaign are compounded by the fact that **the electoral effort does not translate into political growth, leaving a bitter sense of having wasted their time**. The situation would be very different if campaigns were conceived from a pedagogical point of view, where election campaigns are used to deepen awareness and popular organization. Then, even if the electoral results are not the most favourable, the time and effort invested in the campaign are not wasted.

6. It is not surprising that some argue that **the cult of the institution has been the Trojan horse that the ruling system has been able to introduce into the fortress of the revolutionary left**, thus attacking the left from inside.

7. The work of the ranks is progressively delegated to people who hold public and administrative positions. Most of the effort stops being directed toward collective action and are redirected toward parliamentary action or building a media presence.

8. Militant action has tended to be reduced to activities on election-day, putting up posters and other such trivial public acts.

9. And, even worse, **party financing is increasingly relying on the participation of party cadres in state institutions**: parliament, local government, election boards, etc., **with all that this entails, in terms of dependency and undue pressure**.

10. The political activity of the left cannot be reduced to the conquest of institutions; it must be directed toward changing those institutions in order to be able to transform reality. A new balance of forces must be created so that the necessary changes can be implemented. We have to understand that we cannot build a political force without building a social force.

11. At the same time, we must also avoid "party-izing" all initiatives and the social movements we relate to; on the contrary, effort must be made to bring together their practices into a single political project.

12. Additionally, the party left **has had a hard time adjusting to the new realities**. On many occasions it has remained firmly locked into rigid conceptual frameworks that prevent it from appreciating the potential of the new social subjects, exclusively focusing efforts on forces that have traditionally mobilized, such as trade unions, that today are much weaker due to a variety of factors.

13. Lastly, one of the greatest difficulties for the party left regarding work with the social left has been **the viewpoint that sees social movements as conveyor belts for the party**. The leadership of the movement, positions in leadership bodies, the platform of struggle, that is everything, is decided by party leaders and only afterwards is the line of march taken to the social movement in question, without allowing them to participate in the process of deciding the matters that affect them directly.

14. Summing up, in order for **the party left to develop strong bonds with the social left, the party left must renew itself ideologically, change its political culture and work methods**, and incorporate into its arsenal the innovative forms of struggle and resistance utilized by the social left.

Ideas for the struggle #9

RESPECT DIFFERENCES AND BE FLEXIBLE IN REGARDS TO ACTIVISM

1. Among the left, there continues to be a difficulty to work together while respecting differences. In the past, the tendency of political organizations, especially parties that self-declare as 'parties of the working class,' was always toward homogenizing the social base within which they carried out political work. If this attitude was once justified due to the past identity and homogeneity of the working class, today it is anachronistic when confronted with a working class that is quite differentiated, and with the emergence of a diversity of new social actors. Today, we increasingly have to deal with a unity based on diversity, on respect for ethnic and cultural differences, for gender and for the sense of belonging of specific collectives.

2. It is necessary to try to **channel commitments to activism by starting with the actual potential of each sector, and even of each person, that is willing to commit itself to the struggle**, without seeking to homogenize these actors. It is important to have a special sensibility toward finding all those points of agreement that can allow for the emergence of a common platform of struggle.

3. This respect for differences should also reflect itself in our discourse. We must break with the old style of attempting to take a uniform message to people with very different interests. We cannot think of them as an amorphous mass; what exists are individuals, men and women who live in different places, who do different things and who are under different ideological influences; **the message has to adopt flexible forms in order to be able to reach these real men and women**.

4. When all our speeches and messages are cut from the same cloth and are transmitted in the same manner and with the same words, pronounced in the same tone and through the same megaphone, and when the years go by and the posters and slogans don't change, **our words lose their value**. They can no longer win the imagination of anyone.

5. We have to individualize the message, but without losing sight of the common objectives.

6. We believe that the issue of respect for differences can help shed light on the issue of the crisis of activism. Furthermore, everyone knows that over the last few years, a fairly generalized crisis of activism has occurred, not only among left parties but also in the social movements and grassroots communities influenced by liberation theology, something that is not removed from the changes that the world has suffered. Nevertheless, in many of our countries, together with this crisis of activism, we have witnessed a parallel increase in the influence of the left in society, and an increase of progressive sentiments among popular sectors.

7. This leads us to the conclusion that one of the factors present in the origins of this crisis is the type of demands placed upon people in order for them to be able to involve themselves in organized political activity. We have to examine whether the left has been able to **open up avenues for activism** and help nurture that growing progressive sentiment in society, because not all people have the same activist vocation nor do they all feel inclined to be active on a permanent level. This fluctuates a lot depending on the political climate at the time. To ignore this, and **demand a uniform level of activism, is self-limiting and weakens the political organization**.

8. For example, there are those who are willing to be active over a specific issue: health, education, culture, and not within a local branch in their workplace or community. There are others who only feel the need to be active at certain junctures (elections, etc.) but are not willing to do so all year round, even though during key moments of the political struggle you can always count on them to be there, and in their daily lives they are promoting the project and values of the left.

9. **To try and pigeonhole people who are willing to be active into a single norm**, based on 24-hours-a-day/seven-days-a-week level of activism which is the same for everyone, **means excluding all these potential militants**.

10. We have to create a type of organization that can house the widest range of militants, allowing for diverse levels of membership. **Organic structures have to abandon their rigidity and become more flexible in order to make the most of the different levels of activist commitment**, without establishing a hierarchy between these different levels.

11. In order to facilitate the different levels of activism, it is necessary to adapt the structures and grassroots units of the organization in order to suit the character of the surroundings in which their political activism is carried out.

Ideas for the struggle #10

A STRATEGY FOR BUILDING UNITY

1. I have previously referred to the necessity of building unity among all left forces and actors in order to be able to group a broad anti-neoliberal bloc around them. Nevertheless**, I do not think that this objective can be achieved in a voluntarist manner**, creating coordinating bodies from above that end up as simple sums of acronyms.

2. **I believe that this unity can emerge through concrete struggles for common objectives**. And that is why I think that we can help create better conditions for this unity if we put into practice a new strategy of anti-capitalist struggle.

3. We are talking about a strategy that takes into consideration the important social, political, economic and cultural transformations that have occurred across the world in the last period. A strategy that understands the new forms of capitalist domination go far beyond the economic and state sphere and have infiltrated into all the nooks and crannies of society, fundamentally through the mass media which has indiscriminately invaded the homes of all social sectors, and in doing so changed the conditions of struggle.

4. **Today, more than ever, we have to confront not only the dominant classes' apparatuses of political coercion but also the mechanisms and institutions present in civil society that generate a popular acceptance of the capitalist social order**. These tend to achieve a significant hegemony over important popular sectors, a cultural leadership over society; they have the capacity to ideologically subordinate the dominated classes. As has already been said, propaganda is to bourgeois democracy what the truncheon is to the totalitarian state.

5. Our challenge therefore is to elaborate a revolutionary strategy within the conditions of a bourgeois democracy that enjoys a level of acceptance by an important part of the popular sectors which allows it to maintain itself without having to recur to repression; what's more, we have to take as our starting point the recognition that large parts of popular sectors accept as good coin the capitalist leadership of the process.

6. For this reason, simple propaganda about an alternative society is not enough. The greater complexity that domination has assumed, the presence of important extra-state factors that produce and reproduce the current popular fragmentation and that attempt to delegitimize the thought and project of the left in the eyes of the public, **means that we must practice what we preach**.

7. To do so, **we must develop a process of popular construction opposed to capitalism** in the territories and spaces won by the left, **that seeks to break with the profit logic and the relations this imposes, and tries to instill solidarity-based humanist logic**.

8. We must promote struggles that are not reduced to simple economic demands – although they must necessarily be included – but that advance in the development of a more global, social project that encourages authentic levels of power from the grassroots.

9. What we are dealing with is the construction of experiences in popular democracy that are tangibly superior to bourgeois democracy. For example, the elaboration of a project for a humanist and solidarity-based city in a local government, promoting diverse spaces for participation that allow local residents to transform themselves into active members of their community. Or the construction of a pole of rural settlements where peasants can establish diverse forms of collaboration among themselves, not only in agricultural production, but also in industrialization and commercialization of their products, in the education of their children and the formation of their cadre according to a model that foreshadows the new society. Or the building of a student federation that defends the democratic participation of students in the running of a university committed to society. Or the construction of a trade union confederation that puts an end to bureaucratic leadership separated from the grassroots, that defends a social-political unionism, that overcomes simple economism, and that proposes as its objective an active insertion in the struggle for social transformation.

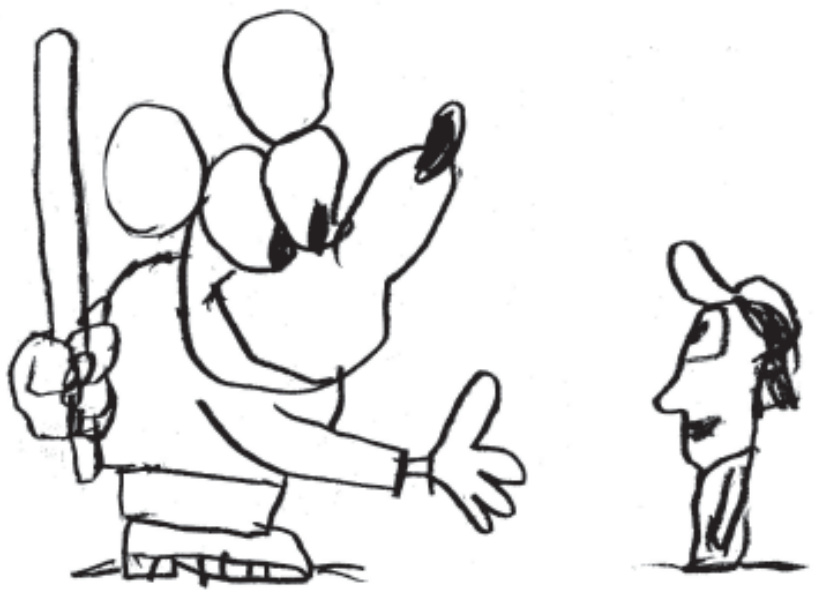
10. A strategy of this type can enormously facilitate the cohering of all the sectors of the left, both those that are members of parties as well as social movement activists, because it involves a different type of call to action. **In order to be active, one does not necessarily have to become a member of a party, a mass organization, a movement; one can be active simply by participating in putting into practice the project of an alternative model**.

11. More than just a propagandized utopia that is sterilely introduced into the minds of men and women in a passive manner, as enlightened education without any practice in concrete construction, we are dealing with the construction of popular democratic reference points which, given they reflect different practices, tend to attract new sectors.

12. Moreover, it is only through these practices that many people begin to understand why it is that in order to expand their humanist and solidarity-based projects it is necessary to put an end to the capitalist system that, with its logic of profit, raises enormous hurdles to any type of alternative model.

13. It is therefore an urgent priority to put an end to the 'tactics' of shortcuts, of focusing only on the conjuncture, and thread together a practice centred on the promotion of democratic struggles from the grassroots; in the local construction of forms of power and popular democracy; that allow us to define the meaning and timing of electoral struggle, and other forms of struggle. Otherwise, these practices will not overcome the long string of 'short-termism' that we have encountered over the last years.

14. But it is also urgent that we overcome grassrootism, localism, apoliticism, corporatism, that limit the struggle of the popular sectors to trade union horizons or economic struggles.



Ideas for the struggle #11

POPULAR CONSULTATIONS: SPACES THAT ALLOW FOR THE CONVERGENCE OF DIFFERENT FORCES

1. I have previously argued the case for the need to create a large social bloc against neoliberalism that can unite all those affected by the system. To achieve this, it is fundamental that **we create spaces that allow for the convergence** of specific anti-neoliberal struggles where, safeguarding the specific characteristics of each political or social actor, **common tasks can be taken up that aid in strengthening the struggle**.

2. In this respect, I think that **popular consultations or assemblies** are very interesting spaces. **These can allow us to mobilize behind a single concrete task** of convincing – undertaking door to door popular education – a large number of people and youth who are beginning to awaken to politics, who want to contribute to a better world, who very often don't know how to do it, and **who are not willing to be active in the traditional way, because many of them reject politics and politicians**.

3. Moreover, this concrete door-to-door work **leads toward having to directly relate to poor popular sectors and their arduous living conditions**. Many can be radicalized by coming into contact with so much poverty.

4. A recent example of this was the referendum held in Uruguay on December 8, 2003, to decide whether to repeal or ratify a law supporting the partnership of the state oil company ANCAP – that has held a monopoly over oil since its foundation in 1931 – with foreign private capital. The new company was to be managed and run by the foreign partner.

5. The vote to reject the privatization of the state oil company won be a wide margin (62.02% of the vote), and by a bigger percentage than was foreseen in the polls leading up to the vote (50.2%).

6. The law had been approved in 2002. Having proven that irregularities were committed by the new managers of ANCAP, the left-wing political coalition, *Frente Amplio-FA* (Broad Front), and allied social and union organizations decided to promote a campaign to collect signatures in support of a referendum against the law. Around 700,000 signatures were required.

7. In the midst of the petition campaign, the financial crisis of mid-2002 occurred, the value of the currency collapsed within days, some people lost their life savings, many bank accounts were frozen, there were massive company closures and unemployment surpassed the historic high of 13%, rising to 20%, something unbearable for a country like Uruguay. Social discontent increased. The possibility of **turning the popular**

consultation into a symbolic act of rejection of the government's policies allowed the campaign to grow, gain strength and motivate people.

8. Even though the mass media was totally hostile and tried to ignore the existence of the initiative, the house-to-house campaign across the country to collect signatures was more powerful than the media blockade. **The strong point of the campaign, once again, was the work done in the grassroots, shoulder to shoulder, talking with people in their homes and using local radio stations that supported the cause**.

9. The initial weight of the campaign was shouldered more by the social organizations than the political instrument [party], which was somewhat hampered by its initial hesitations. But when *Frente Amplio* joined the campaign, it once again demonstrated its clarity in the debates and the great potential of neighbourhood, unionist and propagandistic activism.

10. The initiative was supported by all the tendencies in the union confederation, PIT-CNT, the FUCVAM, the Federación Unitaria de Cooperativas de Ayuda Mutua (Unitary Federation of Mutual Aid Cooperatives), which carried out an important mass mobilization across the whole country, and the student movement (FEUU) also joined the campaign, although with little force.

11. The right wing took the initiative to start with, even covering the walls of Montevideo with slogans attacking Tabaré Vasquez, then FA presidential candidate, and supporting the law. Within weeks, thousands of walls were recovered and the right disappeared off the streets. From that moment on (August-September, 2003) fractures began to appear in the traditional parties: the Partido Nacional mayor from Paysandú (a large city on the border with Argentina, a former industrial centre, today in ruins) declared himself in support of abolishing the law. The same occurred with many local leaders from outside the capital and some mid-level national leaders.

12. Although the right found it hard to accept, an electoral triumph of this sort and by such a wide margin was a sign, perhaps limited but an eloquent one, of what was to come in the Uruguayan presidential elections set for the end of 2004 (where Tabaré Vasquez won).

13. Another example, if we focus on recent ones, is the consultation over the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) held in Argentina in November 2003, where more than 2 million votes were cast. It was organized by the *Autoconvocatoria NO al ALCA* (Self-initiated No to FTAA), a diverse and large space that brought together a growing number of trade unions and movemements such as professionals, women, farmers, enviromentalists, religious, human rights, political, neighbourhood, cooperative and business organizations.

14. **Even when these consultations lack legal backing, they can have important political effects**. Proof of this was the declaration made by Argentina's then head of cabinet, Alberto Fernández, who stated that the result of the consultation should be taken into consideration by the government at the time of making decisions concerning the FTAA.

15. On the other hand, this experience allowed thousands of activists from different backgrounds to work together in carrying out the popular consultation. The participation within this large and diverse space is what enabled the proposal to reach out to different popular sectors that are usually separated among themselves, both geographically and socially.

Ideas for the struggle #12

DON'T CONFUSE DESIRES WITH REALITY

1. Unfortunately, there tends to be a lot of subjectivism in our analysis of the political situation. What tends to occur is that leaders, driven by their revolutionary passion, tend to **confuse desires with reality**. An objective evaluation of the situation is not carried out, the enemy tends to be underestimated and, on the other hand, one's own potential is overestimated

2. Moreover, leaders tend to **confuse the mood of the most radical activists with the mood of the grassroots popular sectors**. There exists a tendency in more than a few political leaderships to make generalizations about the mood of the masses simply based on their own personal experiences, whether it is in the region they are in or the social sector they are active in, or their guerrilla front, or, in the most general sense, based on the perception of those around them, who are always the most radicalized sectors.

3. **Those that work with the most radicalized sectors will have a different vision of the country compared to those that carry out their political activities among the least political sectors**. Revolutionary cadre who work in a militant popular neighbourhood won't have the same vision of the country as those that are active in middle-class sectors.

4. The same thing occurs in countries where both war zones and political spaces exist. The guerrillas who face real confrontations with the enemy, and who have been able to win control of certain zones thanks to their military victories, tend to believe that the revolutionary process is more advanced than militants who work in legal political spaces in the large urban centres, where the ideological power and military control of the regime is still very large.

5. The only guarantee for not committing these errors is assuring that leaders are capable of evaluating the situation not on the basis of their mood, but rather taking as their starting point the mood of the bulk of the people, the mood of the enemy and the international reality. Once this evaluation is carried out, it is necessary to come up with proposals that allow us to take advantage of the situation as a whole.

6. It would seem to be a truism to say that **it is important for the top leaders to learn to listen**. We believe that this is fundamental. Nevertheless, what occurs is that some leaders are so impregnated by preconceived ideas regarding the current state of affairs, of how things are, of what can be done and what can't be done, that **in their contact with intermediary leaders and the grassroots, they tend more toward transmitting their vision of things than informing themselves about the actual mood of the people**.

7. What therefore can occur is that, when one has to make an analysis of the situation, errors occur, not so much due to the lack of information, but because, despite information having been transmitted correctly and in a timely manner by the ranks, it has not been assimilated by the leadership.

8. But it is also important that the ranks and middle layers of leaders be objective in providing information. Sometimes they can misinform rather than inform by providing, for example, inflated numbers for certain mobilizations or actions.

9. **The tendency to delude oneself, to falsify data** regarding mobilizations, meetings, strikes, the weight of each organization, **is quite common in politics**. For instance, saying that thousands were mobilized when it was really only hundreds.

10. This **triumphalist focus is the product of the mistaken idea that we are always right, that we are always the best, that everything we do ends up in a positive result for us**.

11. It is not only in regards to numbers where self-delusion has existed, but also in the evaluation of actions that have been proposed. If the objective was to achieve a certain representation in parliament but this was not achieved, recognition is not given to the fact that the number of votes received was below the expectations that had been created; instead, there is always an attempt to seek out a way to present the event as a triumph, for example, stating that the number of votes increased compared to the previous election. If a national strike is proposed, but only a partial strike is achieved, this is not recognized as a defeat; rather the success of the strike is talked up because more workers did not go to work compared to previous actions of this type etc.

12. If leaders do not know how to listen – something that requires a large dose of revolutionary modesty – and, at the same time, they receive falsified information, then proposals are made which – taking false premises as their starting point – are not adjusted to the real possibilities of the forces on the ground; **battles that are planned out can lead to significant defeats because they are not based on the real balance of forces**.