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Latin America: The strategic challenge for the revolutionary left

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I. The economic crisis in Latin America

1. THE ECONOMIC situation in most Latin American countries has deteriorated since 1981, as shown by the fall in average annual growth of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP): from 5.6 in 1975-80 to 1.47 in 1981-87.

In many ways former high economic growth rates were explained by the policy of import substitution, which laid the objective basis for the emergence of populist nationalist currents - sources of corruption and waste, which at times prioritized political stability and control of the working class over productivity. This began to generate a series of problems for the economy and its role in the world market. The deterioration of the Latin American economy became clearer at the beginning of the 1970s, but governments decided to alleviate the situation by contracting foreign debts far greater than those of other areas of the so-called third world.

2. In some countries, economic policies aiming to respond to this crisis situation have been implemented, linked to bourgeois political projects.

a) Attacks on the old populist state. The policy of import substitution accompanied the development of strong states (Bonapartist or military dictatorships) with a strong intervention in the economy. The weakness of the indigenous bourgeoisies was partly compensated by state interventionism, which developed a sector of the economy. While initially this helped generate an indigenous bourgeoisie, it later became the main obstacle to both national and foreign private investment. The populist state also created an important social infrastructure, a product of big workers' struggles. From the end of the 1950s to the mid-1970s, workers' real wages rose, and although unemployment was high it was more a result of emigration from the countryside to the town.

The state was "slimmed down" little by little, with important sectors of production re-privatized. There has been a gradual disinvestment in education, health, and so on. The effects speak for themselves: diseases that had disappeared in most of our countries are beginning to reappear; the proportion of doctors per head is being reduced; 88 million Latin Americans exist in conditions of total poverty.

b) The foreign debt has generated an article of faith: the essential thing is to export. This determines everything. Export fever supposedly aims to:

i) generate a mechanism for obtaining foreign currency, primarily to service the debt and also because it is more difficult now to get foreign loans;

ii) reach a surplus commercial balance of payments as a supposed means of economic health.

The Latin American bourgeoisies have used several means for increasing exports. One is lowering production costs with the objective of attracting foreign capital. Even Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea are beginning to establish factories in some Latin American countries. The attack on living standards has been brutal. In the last five years, workers' real wages have fallen by 27%.

c) Export fever currently provides no incentives for small- and medium-scale industry, significantly reducing the

domestic market. The informal sector has grown, and while it is true that it has always existed, in some countries it has become a key sector of the economy. In Peru it contributes more than 40% of GDP. In Uruguay, this sector was practically non-existent before the dictatorship but now amounts to more than 20%. In Mexico the figure is around 34%.

3. Although this restructuring has meant a relative incorporation of new technology - particularly in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Venezuela - this has not been a fundamental element. These have been:

– Attacks on “old-style” trade-unionism aimed at reducing the weight of the trade unions and the old union bureaucracies in the productive process, thus changing labour relations.

– Attacks on collective bargaining and labour legislation.

– Technological changes in some countries and certain sectors (steel, cars, oil, petro-chemicals, telecommunications, financial systems), causing a considerable rise in unemployment and confirming the dependent and semi-colonial character of our countries.

– The establishment of regional agreements, in particular Bush's call for a free trade zone from Canada to Tierra del Fuego. This policy of imperialism and the associated bourgeoisies intends to inflict a historic defeat on the working class of America by using the Latin American working class as a means of pressure to lower wages in Canada and the United States. It also intends to use these latter as a lever to step up the productivity of the Latin American working class.

All this has meant a modernization of poverty and an overall attack on social gains, illustrated not only in Bolivia and Peru, but also in Mexico and Argentina. This attack has not just been against populist policies but has also tried to eliminate the social gains won in revolutionary processes (in Mexico in 1910-1917 and then in the 1930s, in Bolivia in 1952) or mass mobilizations (Peronism in Argentina, the struggle in the regime of Vlasco Alvarado and since against the dictatorship in Peru).

Obviously, nobody has had the last word. The foreign debt is the principal factor acting against the Latin American bourgeoisies. It is significant that despite the respite it gave, the renegotiation of the Mexican debt did not fundamentally resolve anything. This is the material basis for the instability of the bourgeois parties and their governments, affecting both the old ruling apparatuses like the PRI, APRA or MNR, and “novel” projects like the PMdB.

II. Political transformations of the ruling apparatuses

1. Just before Reagan took office, imperialist representatives elaborated a counter-revolutionary conception called “low-intensity conflict”. Although this was said to correct many errors in former strategy, in general it was a continuation of previous policies:

– The Vietnam war represented a defeat for the USA's method of confronting revolutionary movements: a strictly militaristic approach in which revolutionary conflicts were resolved via the direct intervention by the US army. US intervention in Vietnam not only did not defeat the revolution, but it stimulated a political movement in the USA that provoked a deep crisis in the system of political rule.

– The old Pentagon anti-Communist vision analyzed revolutionary organizations from a militarist outlook: guerrilla nuclei with a simple strategic vision, generally isolated from big urban concentrations. The Vietnam defeat and the transformation of revolutionary guerrilla organizations into politico-military organizations required an approach responding to political questions as much as to military ones.

– These two elements made some politico-military transformations necessary:

a) The installation of constitutional regimes with a certain degree of legitimacy. In their terms “to fight for the hearts and minds of the people against the insurgents”. In some cases overthrowing dictatorships has been part of this approach.

b) Plus a dual policy of transforming local armies so that they themselves confronted the insurgent forces, and using the same army to fight for the “hearts and minds of the masses”, through the creation of strategic hamlets - if this did not work support for politico-military organizations was undermined with “scorched earth” policies.

The presence of North American troops or police, as well as the extradition agreements with certain Latin American states, like Colombia for example, are becoming more and more crushing and pose the problem of sovereignty on the political and military plane.

The pretext for this has been the fight against drug trafficking. This pretext has allowed the installation of military bases in Peru and Bolivia, the existence of thousand of police in Mexico in violation of all its laws and the imprisonment of dozens of Colombians in US jails, which do not respect their most basic human rights

2. After a few years the dictatorial regimes and those installed by coups d'état in the 1960s and 1970s began to wear out. The indigenous bourgeoisies gradually withdrew their support, considering their goal - sweeping out the communists - to have been attained.

After several years of misleadership, a recomposition of the popular movements also began. The combination of traditional forms of struggle, like the general strike, with civic actions for democracy gradually weakened the dictatorships. This situation led to the local bourgeoisies and imperialism understanding the need to ensure a transition to constitutional regimes that preserved the basic structure of the state apparatus, in particular the army.

This project had some success, particularly at first, but its limits very soon became obvious. The economic crisis was fundamental in preventing the stabilization of these regimes. The internationalization of capital and the role played by many Latin American countries in the international division of labour, as well as a bourgeoisie that only acts as a junior partner, means that the only thing they can offer to the populations as a whole is “modernization” seeking so-called insertion into the 21st century. This will not stimulate any support from the masses.

We can draw certain conclusions about the crisis of bourgeois projects:

– First, bourgeois nationalism is in crisis. It is experiencing an Indian summer in certain countries (Mexico, Argentina), but this simply confirms the general tendency. The rise of Cardenism is a product of the worst crisis of the most solid nationalist project in Latin America. The announcement of a shock plan by Menem in Argentina, and particularly his ferocious criticism of Alan Garc a (“we are not going to make the same mistakes as Alan Garc a, we are not going to confront the IMF”), are a clear demonstration of the limits of nationalism. Nationalism before being in government is one thing; nationalism while in government is something else.

– Second, certain sectors of imperialism and the bourgeoisie have tried to develop political projects that keep their distance from the old nationalist ideals, presenting them as champions of modernity, or have even succeeded in substantially modifying the old populist parties, such as the MNR in Bolivia and the PRI in Mexico.

They have sought to link old nationalist projects to the Second (Socialist) International: for example, the PRD in the Dominican Republic, the Liberal Party in Costa Rica, the APRA in Peru, the MIR in Bolivia, Brizola's PDT in Brazil, the ADN in Venezuela, the Michael Manley's Jamaican PNP, and - even though they are only in the process of possible integration - the UCR in Argentina and the Partido Colorado in Uruguay. Obviously this does not mean that there has been a change in the class nature of these parties: they are still bourgeois parties. They want a better image in the mass movement and the world economic community. Just like the Christian Democrats and the neo-liberals, these parties seem to have the approval of imperialism (on condition that they do not insist on flirting with populism, of course). They have a weakness that flows from their position midway between nationalism and neo-liberalism.

– Thirdly, right-wing alternatives have begun to emerge, although only around individuals. They may use party names, but they place themselves above party structures, even criticizing them very harshly. The examples of Fujimoro in Peru or Collor de Mello in Brazil point in this direction. With an ethical and moral discourse trying to distance itself as much from populism and the left as from the right, this type of candidate is presented by the most pro-US currents as the only real option.

The economic crisis is the initial block for all these projects. Their weakness makes it possible for left electoral fronts - such as the Frente Amplio in Uruguay or, more importantly, the Frente Brasil Popular (hegemonized by the PT) in Brazil - to be seen as governmental alternatives by important sections of the population. We know that an FA government in Uruguay (the case of the PT is totally different) would not solve the fundamental problems of the population. Nonetheless, at the level of consciousness and organization, a vote for the left may lead important sections of the masses to politically break with bourgeois parties. Even electoral projects with a clearly bourgeois character, such as neo-Cardenism in Mexico, inevitably carry along with them social confrontations.

This is one of the best proofs of the semi-colonial character of most Latin American countries. It is not simply loss of monetary sovereignty, but above all loss of national sovereignty. Insofar as they yield to an alliance with imperialism, dismantling nationalized industry, Latin American governments increasingly lose their populist and anti-imperialist character. They become regimes with democratic facades, but with increasing reliance on the army and police, and with a doctrine of national security to prepare for possible eruptions. So-called national security policy represents one of the worst dangers for the mass movement. This policy even tries to create snares for social organizations through infiltration and provocation.

III. The mass movement and its political expressions

1. A reorganization of the mass movement has been under way since the late 1970s. This process does not only reflect the changes in the model of accumulation, but also the beginning of a change in the relationship of forces between different currents in the mass movement:

– The reorganization of the CGT in Argentina starting several years before the fall of the dictatorship. Just months before the fall several general strikes erupted.

– The spectacular case of Brazil. The PT was formed in the midst of a huge strike wave in the late 1970s and early

1980s. The CUT now plays a key role in the reorganization of the Latin American workers' movement and not only because Brazil is the country with the main concentration of workers.

– The struggle against the dictatorship in Uruguay, mainly conducted by the PIT. The organization of general strikes constituted the backbone of the struggle for democracy.

– A series of strikes in Paraguay, with increasing political possibilities for the MDP (which has now fused with other organizations to form the PDP). Since the fall of the dictatorship, the formation of the CUT has made it possible to bring together dozens of trade unions. It is within the CUT that the battle between the reformist and the democratic revolutionary organizations to know who will win the majority of Paraguayan workers will be carried out.

– The relaunch of the CGTP in Peru, shortly before fall of Morales Bermúdez' dictatorship. The teachers' struggles, the formation of the SUTEP and its later incorporation into the CGTP, and the development of class-struggle currents within the miners' and workers' trade unions, such as Moraveco and Diamante, made it possible for the CGTP to play an important role in the general strikes and in the formation of the Comandos Centrales de Lucha (central command of struggle).

– The reorganization of the COB in Bolivia, immediately after the fall of the García Meza dictatorship in 1981. At first it organized the great majority of the Bolivian people: workers, peasants (Tupak Katari), students, housewives, and so on. However, after the Marcha del Hambre (hunger march) and the failure of the general strike, as well as the sectarian policy that led to surrendering the leadership of the organization to Juan Lechón, the COB stopped playing an important role. This, along with the economic policy implemented by the MNR government, led to the COB's deterioration, which very much reflects the Bolivian situation.

– The formation of the Colombian CUT in 1987 was an important step. Although it was confederation formed on the basis of an agreement at the top, it made it possible to organize the vast majority of workers. First, it ended the dispersion of workers in five different confederations, although this is still not directly reflected in struggles. Thus, there was not a united response to the CUT's call for a general strike in 1988. Similarly, the CUT has not taken up a series of central political questions, such as the struggle for respecting human lives. Although formally it has decided to support this type of campaign, in practice the CUT leadership has been an obstacle to involvement in them.

– The coordination of different confederations by the FUT in Ecuador. Unlike most countries, it is the key element for organizing a big number of general strikes.

– The formation of the UNTS is another example which makes it possible to talk of a recomposition of the mass movement. Based on a structure similar to the COB, it has organized all the exploited and oppressed of El Salvador: workers, those in cooperatives, urban dwellers, peasants, women, and so on. Its formation was the sign of a major correction by the FMLN and was just as important as the formation of the Front itself. This is even more important given the former practice of Salvadoran revolutionary organizations, which always tried to impose their hegemonic projects, preventing a process of united self-organisation of the mass movement. But this is not simply an organizational advance. The UNTS is ever more clearly a central tool for taking power, even more than is understood by certain currents within the FMLN itself.

– In Mexico, after a long period of disarray, a thoroughgoing trade-union recomposition is starting to take place. The strike of the teachers' union, which organizes more than 1.2 million workers, and the gradual weakening of the trade-union bureaucracy, offer a real possibility for a qualitative leap forward.

To be sure, the scale of the neo-liberal attack on the standard of living of the workers, as well as the deterioration in

working conditions and the increasing limitations of the traditional implements of struggle, have imposed a defensive dynamic on the workers

2. In respect to other social movements, the situation is even clearer. The recomposition of the peasant movement has been very significant.

– In Mexico, there are several independent peasant organizations, which have hundreds of thousands of members. However, the task of forming a unified peasant organization independent of the state and the parties still remains on the agenda. This is the sector where state control has been most relaxed since the first radical mass actions. Recently there have been land occupations with increasingly developed forms of self defence, and organization in productive projects without accepting co-optation by the state. This movement has also been characterized by its readiness to advance in forging the worker-peasant alliance.

– In Peru, the CCP has been a bastion against the reactionary plans of the APRA government. The defence of agrarian cooperatives and the struggle for land have been central to their organization. The formation of the peasant rondas, real self-defence mechanisms, has enabled them to stand up to the landowners and force respect for their organization.

– In Brazil, the emergence of the landless peasants' movement was the expression of one of the central struggles of the mass movement. After some timid governmental declarations, the bourgeoisie decided not to advance on the question of agrarian reform. In practice, the most violent confrontations of recent years in Brazil have been in the countryside. But we should also point out the close links between the CST, the PT and the CUT.

– In Colombia, the struggle of the peasantry is closely linked to the politico-military organisations, which guarantees a higher level of radicalisation than for other social movements. Even if some of the guerrilla organisations have had a focoist orientation in the recent past, they are currently rediscussing their attitude to the peasant movement in which it was considered to be simply as logistical rearguard mechanism. This process of change is, however, continuing.

3. A dynamic urban-dwellers' movement has developed in recent years, as a result of the economic crisis and the failure of industrialization in the cities and agrarian reform in the countryside. It combines peasant and traditional working-class methods of struggle: occupying land for house-building, involving a considerable degree of confrontation and violence; participating actively in general strikes; providing a certain haven for the political activity of a large number of trade-union activists who cannot meet in their factories or trade unions, because of the dangers of being sacked.

The urban-dwellers' movement is not qualitatively different from the peasant movement. Behind it lies the inescapable problem of Latin American cities. As the struggle for agrarian reform plays a fundamental role in the strategy of permanent revolution, so the struggle for radical urban reform today becomes a transitional democratic demand that cannot be resolved in the framework of dependent capitalism. Just as the bourgeoisie cannot resolve the problems of industrialization or agrarian reform, it now confronts a new insoluble problem: urban reform.

In some countries the urban dwellers' movement has a greater capacity for mobilization than others. In Peru, the formation of the "cuatro conos" of Lima, with their "pueblos jóvenes" (squatter settlements - literally "young towns"), is regarded with great distrust with the inhabitants of San Isidro and Miraflores. When the "pueblos jóvenes" demonstrate through Lima, the country's rich have a glimpse of what will happen during the insurrection.

In Central America, this sector has been the basis for the development of revolutionary organizations. It played a key role in the Sandinista revolution, particularly in Managua and Masaya. In Mexico, it has always been closely linked to

the left and has escaped PRI control. It played a key role immediately after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, which was a real step forward.

4. Another emerging movement in Latin America is undoubtedly the women's movement, which has not evolved exclusively out of gender demands. But in the fight against attacks on living standards women's political and social action has created the political conditions for making significant advances in the process of their self-organization. This has happened in Peru in the struggle for the Glass of Milk, in Chile in the fight for democracy and against hunger, and in Mexico's local neighbourhoods.

This has gradually highlighted the need to take this as a starting point for generating an autonomous women's movement fighting for its specific demands, to feminize the struggle. The meetings of Latin American women are a pointer in this direction. We have to start from today's level of consciousness, but simply remaining at this level favours the possibility of these movements being coopted by different governments.

5. A consciousness of ecological problems is also starting to develop. The gradual destruction of the Amazonian forest, the devastating atmospheric pollution in Mexico City and to a lesser extent in São Paulo, the pollution of seas and rivers, and, especially in Mexico, the struggle against building nuclear plants, have given rise to an ecology movement that has tended to link itself naturally to the broader social struggle.

The critical economic situation has forged a link between the struggle against the destruction of the Amazonian forest and the PT in Brazil rather than favouring the emergence of Green parties. In other cases, as in Mexico, it has encouraged the self-organization of ecologists on a really pluralist basis, without the domination of any single political current.

This movement is growing because of the huge devastation of natural resources. It also has an anti-imperialist thread, given that imperialism is behind the destruction of nature and the modification of different habitats.

6. The ecclesiastical base community movement has emerged with an impressive capacity for organization and mobilization in the very heart of the Catholic institution - although not only there. It questions the basis of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and its relationship to exploitation and oppression. The church of the poor does not only mean a moral option but fundamentally a politico-moral option. The communities do not simply seek to have a caring/helping vision, but above all a vision of change. This is why they actively participate in mass actions that raise the need for an overall political transformation of society. Very often, the base communities study socialism and Marxism much more seriously than the left organizations themselves.

However, it would be a big mistake to have a utilitarian vision of the base communities. They should be looked at and analyzed as part of the forces fighting for the liberation of our peoples. And while we should seek to influence their evolution - and learn from them - we have to maintain the same type of respect for their autonomy and independence as we do for other social movements.

– Finally, in the last two years we have seen the emergence of a powerful indigenous movement in different countries of the American sub-continent, in which millions of Indian men and women are fighting for their most basic rights. This movement has already given a first example of what can be won through a rising of the indigenous population in Ecuador, and then with the holding of the First Continental Conference of Indian Peoples which was attended by representatives from some 20 Latin American countries.

Given all these elements, it is very difficult not to share the idea that there is a process of reorganization of the mass movement underway in Latin America. That is to say, we are not simply dealing with a specific trend, but with a

general dynamic.

IV. The relationship of forces

Since the Nicaraguan revolution there has been a change in the relationship of forces between social classes. The domination and political control of the national bourgeoisies was a product of the crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s, as well as of the Stalinist parties' popular-frontist policy. Today, the situation has substantially changed.

Some decades ago, the development of nationalist currents and the objective situation meant that the bulk of the workers identified with pro-capitalist policy. The mass movement was essentially under the control of nationalist currents, which used mobilizations only in order to ensure that part of the economic surplus did not leave the country. The mass movement today tends to express itself independently from the big apparatuses of bourgeois rule. This transformation is the central aspect of what is happening today.

This process started with the Cuban revolution. However, its effect was rather marginal in relation to the big battalions of the working class. Castroism in the 1960s was above all a sign of the crisis starting in the reformist parties, especially the Communist parties, and the radicalization of student youth.

The Sandinista revolution and the emergence of the PT - both in 1979 - made it possible for the mass movement to make a qualitative leap forward. At the same time, the revolutionary left (which survived) is being transformed. Having made a profound self-criticism of its "focoist" and militarist deviations, it has started to work publicly and openly within the mass movement, or developed politico-military organizations.

But this is not the only change in the relationship of forces. There is also a change in the relative influence of reformist (especially CP) and revolutionary currents in the workers' movement. The CPs today are in deep political crisis, marked by two main tendencies: either almost total adaptation to bourgeois or petty-bourgeois populism (equivalent to the social-democratization of the European CPs), or contradictory assimilation of the positions of Shafic Handal (leader of the Salvadoran CP).

However, this process has been modified recently by perestroika. Handal's positions are no longer important, but the Stalinist apparatuses are once again unashamedly promoting a policy of class collaboration as a result of the counter-revolutionary meaning of perestroika in international policy. Even in countries where the CPs had maintained a certain stability and control (to a greater or less extent) over the workers' movement, the crisis of perestroika today has affected their base. Thus the three CPs which were exceptions are also today experiencing serious difficulties. In Chile and Colombia, the CPs have experienced a series of splits, although in Uruguay the Stalinists maintain a significant political and electoral strength.

But the problem is not solved. Indeed, some revolutionary currents, particularly those that have gained a certain mass influence, are going into crisis, mainly because they have not found a strategic perspective allowing them to offer a revolutionary alternative to the masses. Some general aspects that have led to a weakening of the revolutionary left, at least temporarily, are:

– Cuba in the 1960s was the great example for the peoples of Latin America, but today serious doubts about the Castroist leadership are emerging. The imperialist offensive against Cuba on democracy is starting to have an impact in some sections of the masses. This, together with perestroika's success in the mass media and some sections of the movement and the clear democratic sentiment of the masses, provoke a certain distancing from the Cuban

leadership.

It is also obvious that Castro's attitude to the Latin American bourgeoisies and some governments has been rather opportunist; for example, the big favour he did the Mexican government by approving the electoral fraud.

But the main problem is the question of democracy and the attitude taken to events like those in Poland or China. It is not only a matter of "imperialist propaganda". Today as never before, the revolutionary left is forced to give a clear answer about what type of democracy it wants to build. In most countries, the schema "let the leadership decide" has stopped functioning. The struggle against corruption in the populist or modernizing governments, against gangster-like trade-union bureaucracies, against violations of human rights, has made a very strong democratic consciousness possible. Cuba is not an example in this sphere.

– The economic crisis in Nicaragua was a serious blow to the vanguard. There is still a great respect for the Sandinista leadership and its defence of democracy; but each currency devaluation, rise in inflation, sacking of thousands of workers, or announcement of austerity plans were a severe blow to the Latin American revolutionary left. It was very difficult to explain that in our own countries we struggle against this type of plan but that they were applied in Nicaragua. We are aware of imperialism's responsibility, and that the solution to Nicaragua's economic problems does not lie there but in the extension of world revolution. But for big sections of the Latin American masses, this sounds rather abstract.

– Perestroika is creating new problems for revolutionaries because it is helping anti-communist propaganda (the failure of communism) and pro-market ideology. Perestroika, in practice, is a sort of peaceful coexistence, but much more dangerous than in the past. The starting point is simple: everything can and must be negotiated. Thus its main protagonists are the bourgeois mass media and governments who are talking about using the Afghan or Angolan model in Nicaragua or El Salvador. This ignores the fact that there is no comparison between the forces in these countries.

The main problem is the debate on strategy in the revolutionary vanguard, and a crisis in certain revolutionary organizations in key countries like Peru, Chile and Colombia. Some of the strategic problems posed today for the revolutionary vanguard are:

– The character of the revolution. The traditional debate around revolution by stages or socialist revolution appeared to be closed, judging by Handel's self-criticism, Ortega's declaration on the character of the Sandinista revolution and the socialist definition of the PT. However, the pronouncements by commandant Tirado Lopez on the supposed end of the cycle of anti-imperialist revolutions and the need for coexistence with capitalism, denote a debate on perspectives in the whole of the Latin American left. The electoral defeat of the FSLN, the loss of all support from the so-called socialist camp and the intensification of imperialist intervention have prompted a questioning of the traditional strategic schemas. The initiative has been taken by a new "realism", which questions the viability of a perspective of revolutionary upheaval and which generates demoralisation in the face of the new challenges of taking forward a project of an alternative social order in the current international context. In a certain way it follows on from the former campist illusions and the limits noted in the Cuban and Nicaraguan experiences of overcoming conditions of economic underdevelopment. But this is only part of the problem, which is posed today concretely: what weight should the struggle for democracy and an independent nation have in a revolutionary strategy?

Because of a certain reaction against populist demagoguery and Stalinist reformism, and an overly class-oriented reading of Che Guevara "socialist revolution or the caricature of revolution", the revolutionary left neglected the struggle for democracy and the defence of the oppressed nation. A workerist current considered that our countries had changed their nature from semi-colonial to semi-industrialized or, worse, "sub-imperialist". It was even stated that the only significant contradiction was the waged worker/capital one, leaving totally out of the reckoning the

contradiction between the oppressed nation and imperialism.

In a certain way, the Sandinista revolution brought everything back into place. The struggle for democracy and national liberation were the fundamental characteristics of the July 19 revolution. The weakness of the Nicaraguan working class and the type of dictatorship very much determined the force and character of the struggle. But we emphasize that, regardless of the degree of industrialization of different countries, the struggle for an independent nation and for a democratic project are central questions that may very often spark off revolutionary crises.

– The revolutionary subject. The de-industrialization process in some countries and the bourgeois austerity offensive, especially on questions of unemployment and redundancies, have meant that the working class, with the exception of Brazil, has lost a certain political weight. In Bolivia, Uruguay, Peru, Chile, Venezuela, and even Argentina, the working class has lost power. This does not mean that the bourgeoisie has regained control over the workers' organizations. It means that, in the struggle of those at the bottom of the pile, the working class does not have the same capacities of attraction and organization as it had previously.

This has reopened the debate about the revolutionary subject and the nature of the revolution in Latin America.

As it arises and develops from the inexistence of a bourgeois democratic revolution, the dynamic of permanent revolution is different from that of anti-capitalist revolution. The strategic questions are posed in a radically different way. There are endless particularities both in the driving forces of the revolution and the type of state they have to confront. This has revived the idea of using the concepts of “the people” and “popular” or “people's”, which have a different connotation in Latin America than in the imperialist metropolises. All those at the bottom of the pile (the poor, workers, peasants, poor urban dwellers, the unemployed, etc) - the immense majority of society, excluding only the bourgeoisie and the oligarchy - are considered “the people”. It is true that bourgeois nationalists and Stalinist reformists had so extended the concept of “the people” that only the foreign investors were excluded. But the Sandinista revolution and some of the left's practice since then have started to resolve that contradiction.

It is also clear that if there was a break from a class-oriented (we would say “a truly people's”) outlook, there would be the risk of confusing the character of the revolution - analysis of the revolutionary subject - with the nature of the party, or, worse, with giving up a project of socialist political independence, so that those at the bottom no longer exist independently but in function of a fraction of the bourgeoisie.

– Alliances, political fronts and party. The economic crisis itself and the declining importance of nationalist currents naturally lead to posing the question of possible alliances with certain sectors of the bourgeoisie. This is obvious from the formation of broad opposition fronts that are usually established on the basis of the need to fight for democracy. Bourgeois populist currents obviously seek to take advantage of the democratic feelings of the masses to attract them.

The alliance policy of revolutionary forces starts from the obvious fact that as bourgeois parties and governments begin to decline, those on top divide and ruling mechanisms break down, giving the possibility of isolating the most retrograde forces. But this concept is full of dangers. There is the possibility that left organizations themselves will give the bourgeois populist currents a representativity that they did not have before. Thus the best arena for establishing this type of alliance is in action. Usually, establishing electoral agreements with bourgeois forces is profoundly wrong. What is contested in elections is the question of government and which class should govern; agreements with bourgeois forces on joint candidates and programmes create illusions in the masses about the possibility of halfway solutions that do not necessarily imply a rupture. We are not talking about agreements on fighting electoral fraud, which are totally correct.

It is very important to make progress in forming political fronts that unify class-oriented (peoples') and revolutionary organizations and the vanguard around agreement on the needs and tasks of the period and the revolution to win control of important sectors of the mass movement from the populist bourgeoisie. These fronts are therefore the basic instrument in the fight for hegemony in possible alliances or in society. They have a function that is not just conjunctural, but long-lasting.

This has led several revolutionary organizations to discuss what type of party to build. Once there is a level of implantation that makes it possible to lead tens or hundreds of thousands of social fighters, the pressure to make the pressure to make the qualitative leap from a nucleus of a party, with hundreds or thousand of activists, to a mass revolutionary party becomes a permanent anxiety. A typical example is the PUM in Peru. It leads the CCP, the class-oriented current in the trade unions, some trade unions and the urban-dwellers' movement, with a big influence in the women's movement and the largest left parliamentary group. But it is still a party with no more than 2,000 active members. Other revolutionary parties are or could be in similar situations, like the Mexican PRT, A Luchar in Colombia or the MLN in Uruguay.

Several responses to this question have been begun, reflecting the need to adapt political projects in response to the changes we have noted in the composition of the revolutionary subject and to the new dynamics in the mass movements in our countries. Experiences like that of the PT in Brazil and the building of the MPP in Uruguay show the diversity of the responses arising from different national situations. It is nevertheless clear that it is not possible to resolve this question simply by an effort to politically and organisationally dilute the revolutionary projects and that the problem of growth to mass parties is determined in the last instance by a process of maturation of the mass movement itself.

– The military strategy of these revolutionary parties. We can establish two categories:

a) The politico-military organizations. On the basis of a criticism of “focoism” immediately after the Cuban revolution, of the reformist, legalist and gradualist conception of the Communist parties and of the insurrectionalist, workerist vision of some Trotskyists, these organizations underwent a qualitative transformation, developing a mass policy directed at taking power. The mass strength of organizations like the Salvadorans, Colombians, and in some periods the Guatemalans, is undeniable. These currents have an important specific weight even within the trade-union organizations and major confederations.

These organizations start from the idea that revolutionary strategy is a whole in which political tasks combine with military tasks in a natural way with no apparent contradiction. Their history shows that they have an undoubted capacity for mass mobilization. However, their trajectory has been marked by the problems of this conception.

b) The unarmed revolutionary organizations. Their strategic hypotheses are much more approximate. The relationship to the mass movement is more natural and fluid. In practice, the struggle is for self-organization and the formation of big confederations in different sectors of the movement (which does not exclude a hegemonic practice). However, once a certain level of implantation is reached and there is a real possibility of confrontation with the police or army, or the degree of instability of the bourgeois parties or governments opens a political crisis of the ruling apparatuses, thus creating favourable conditions for revolutionary upheavals, being organized in a party steeped in parliamentarism and the institutions in general, and confined to a practice of struggle for minimal demands in the mass movement, becomes an obstacle.

– The transition. The Nicaraguan situation, the debate on perestroika and rectification, the debate on the risks of bureaucracy, the proposition that the revolution does not solve the problems of underdevelopment and so on, have led to a debate on the problems of transition.

The richness of the Nicaraguan democratic experience is a vital source for the Latin American left. But its terrible economic situation has led to a certain rethinking. There is a strong ideological tendency to identify the market with democracy, as if the latter could not exist without the former, and to say that the market is the precondition for solving poverty and hunger. Nobody in Nicaragua today challenges the idea that the laws of the market have had full play, and that this has sunk the people further into poverty, rather than saving them from it. It is obvious that the decisions taken by the Sandinistas in this field have been overdetermined by the actions of imperialism and the bureaucratized workers' states. Nonetheless, it is an overwhelming reality.

The Cuban model for the economy has to be vindicated. There is no possible comparison between the social situation in Cuba and the rest of Latin America. In this respect, statistics are still useful to demonstrate the superiority of a non-capitalist economic system, despite its deformations.

But this does not solve the problem of democracy, around which the Latin American revolutionary left is beginning to be particularly sensitive. Its reaction to the Tiananmen events was a first sign that something is changing deep down.

– The difficulties in consolidating the revolutionary left. These strategic debates are determined by the international context and its repercussions in our sub-continent: the break-up of the “socialist camp”, imperialism retaking the initiative, the isolation and crisis of Castroism and the Castroist currents, the strengthening of gradualist and realist ideology, a certain downturn of bourgeois institutions and the emergence of social-democratic currents within revolutionary and class-struggle parties.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was welcomed by the bulk of the left and revolutionary parties. To some extent, they took a position that tried to stop the bourgeois governments and the right appropriating what was happening in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, the collapse of the “socialist camp” has very profound consequences in the development of strategic thinking.

Until recently, the Latin American left made a dogma of the “socialist camp” as the rearguard of the revolution. Criticism of the bureaucracy was allowed in private, but publicly the “camp” had to be defended. In this vision, the socialist camp would neutralize a possible US intervention. This was inscribed in the idea of a revolution limited to national borders.

Today the “socialist camp” no longer exists. And the bulk of the revolutionary left, educated and trained by Castroism, has lost all international reference points. For Fidel, imperialism, particularly the USA, is the sole enemy. This determines his whole policy. His yearning for the “socialist camp” starts from the idea that the destruction of the Berlin Wall has changed the balance of forces in favour of imperialism, a view that the Costa Rica Accords and the US intervention in Panama confirmed for him.

This is a distorted outlook that nevertheless partly reflects reality. Perestroika, more than the fall of the Berlin Wall, has had absolutely negative repercussions in Latin America. The resurgence of gradualism and institutionalism are only the most obvious expression of this. Some years ago, the crisis of the Latin American CPs was expressed in the emergence of Handalism (vindication of the revolution, criticism of the stagist vision, etc.). Today this is totally overtaken by perestroika.

Of course, Castro's conclusion is totally wrong. In identifying socialism with the dictatorial governments in Eastern Europe, not distancing itself from these dictatorial governments and not changing the hierarchical and bureaucratic relationships in Cuba, Castroism has become isolated. No revolutionary organization can solidarize with this vision as it risks becoming a dead-end in its own country. It is not possible to fight for democracy and at the same time defend the one-partyism and bureaucratic relationships existing in Cuba. Castroism is becoming an ever more archaic and

and less attractive ideology. But this does not mean that the revolutionary left has made real progress. The emerging social-democratic currents in the left organizations seek not only to exorcise Castroism, but revolution itself. For them, the world situation is so complex that it is only possible to promote economic and social modernization through parliamentary democracy (consensus). Such currents have emerged in the PCM, MIR, PT, Venezuelan MIR and even in the Mexican PRT's ranks.

The situation becomes still more difficult with acts like the Sandinista government signing the San José Accord, and even worse with Humberto Ortega's explanation. Everybody knew Nicaragua's terrible economic situation and the importance of ending the war for the Sandinistas. But this does not justify such a political act. The San Isidro Accord was a direct product of perestroika. For Gorbachev the Salvadoran revolution is the "fly in the ointment", the reason why he put pressure on Cuba and Nicaragua to support him.

The danger threatening the Cuban revolution today must be added to this. It seems that Gorbachev has decided to bring the Castro leadership into line by gradually withdrawing economic aid. The aim is to force a change in attitude or provoke a social explosion. There are many differences with Eastern Europe. Fundamental sections of the masses support Fidel. But Bush is much more worried about restoring capitalism in Cuba than in Rumania, Hungary, Poland or even Czechoslovakia. Cuba is an open wound for the US. It is a symbol to be destroyed. This is why the media is doing so much to prepare the millions of Cuban exiles living in Miami for US intervention. Defence of the Cuban revolution is a priority task. Cuba is also a symbol for us. But defending the Cuban revolution means generating a political movement pushing for the necessary changes. The revolutionary left must address the Castro leadership and demand democratization.

Several of these standpoints were discussed during the Conference of Left Parties and Organizations of Latin America and the Caribbean held in Brazil in 1990 on the initiative of the PT. This meeting very possibly marks the end of a cycle and the beginning of something new, that is, among other things, that the Latin American left demonstrates its desire to confront the present situation with a critical and self-critical attitude. This would make it possible to develop a new way of thinking free from dogmatism, fantasy and schemas.

Finally, but fundamentally, we have to analyze the significance of the electoral defeat of the FSLN.

Imperialism operated an economic stranglehold which led the Sandinistas to implement a policy of economic adjustment which had harmful consequences on living standards for the mass of the population. This was implemented through two readjustment plans. The first was launched in February 1988, and in some ways already meant an aggressive policy towards the population. However, this plan still maintained three central aspects: a significant harmonization of wages; subsidy, and thus price control, of 45 basic food products; and the continuation of a policy of stable employment. This proposal was carried through alongside a mobilization of the population, especially on the question of monetary modification. Still, at that point the population still had a great deal of confidence in the Sandinista government. This plan lasted only four months due to unprecedentedly high inflation rates and a certain amount of de-capitalization.

Later, in June 1988, a new plan was introduced which increased the burden on the workers in the countryside and the city. In this plan, the number of basic food products subsidized was reduced to only four (rice, sugar, oil, soap), accompanied by an indiscriminate liberalization of prices without any concomitant wage rises for the workers. At the same time, the first cut was made in the number of state employees, increasing unemployment and under-employment, plus indexation (to inflation) of interest rates on credits to the APP and small peasant sectors. The combination of these two adjustment policies led to the almost total bankruptcy of the Nicaragua economy by the end of that year; inflation reached 36,000% - 100% per day. GDP decreased by 9%, while GDP per capita dropped by 12.1%. The value of exports fell by 15.5%, while that of imports rose by 9.1%.

This adjustment policy meant further impoverishment of the people without any popular mobilization, which is why many called it a "plan without the people". Comandante Carión pointed out that the era of great social reforms had passed, and that the driving force of economic improvement was to come from foreign and private investment. To achieve this, they had to represent themselves to the investing sectors as credit-worthy, and thus the social aspect of the revolution had to be stopped.

We can point out that the pressure from the so-called socialist countries grew unbearable for the Sandinistas. It was felt all the more harshly as overall aid from Eastern Europe to Nicaragua had reached \$7,000 million. This was very little for in comparison with Nicaragua's needs but seemed very high to the Soviet technocrats. That is why the Soviet bureaucracy is so happy about UNO's victory. It is significant that for the Soviets, Señora Chamorro's victory simply represents savings in oil, dollars and weapons. The return to normality means that Nicaragua returns to the orbit of imperialism's "responsibility", not only in the political arena but also and fundamentally in the economic arena. This element should not be forgotten in analyzing the Sandinistas' view of what was possible and why they had to reformulate their relationship with US imperialism.

Aid from Eastern Europe was not enough to make the Nicaraguan economy function. The defence effort made GDP fall by 15% and the war left accumulated damages of \$12 billion. On the other hand, in the last few years, there has been an even greater deterioration in the exchange mechanisms for raw materials exports, as well as a significant reduction of the land surface dedicated to producing cotton. And all of this took place in the context of the US trade embargo. To this we have to add the direct damage caused by Hurricane Joan, which was estimated at \$700 million. The Sandinistas concluded that they urgently needed to open credit lines from the United States and end the trade blockade. It was within this perspective that they brought forward the election.

– The economic and social effects of such a crisis have been impressive. Public investment fell by 66% between 1987 and 1989. Jobs in the public sector were cut by 35,000, GDP per capita fell by 27.4%, real wages - taking the base of 100 in 1980 - were reduced to an index of 11 in 1987 and as low as 5 in December 1988, falling further to 1 in January 1989. This is to say that readjustment plans followed the same criteria as in the rest of Latin America, but with a central difference: there was no input of fresh hard currency that could ease the situation in return for implementing these plans.

This situation had important consequences for the relationship between the FSLN and the masses. Most leaders of the mass organizations decidedly supported the readjustment plans. One of the clearest examples of this was the attitude of the CST (Central Sandinista de los Trabajadores) which publicly supported the redundancies in the state sector. Another example was that of the Juventud Sandinista which supported the reactionary restructuring plans for the university, similar to those in other Latin American countries (leading them to lose some elections). Some government ministers even had to point out to the leaders of mass organizations that they should take some distance from certain economic projects that the government was forced to initiate. But reality was very complex.

However, today it would be too Manichean to hold the leaders of social organizations responsible for something they did not decide. The Sandinistas tried to bridge this abyss with the *cara al pueblo* ["face the people" public meetings for dialogue between Sandinista leaders and the masses - Translator's note]. It is well known that very often the local Sandinista leaders prepared the *cara al pueblo* to question the government's central policy, interventions were organized and more than once they won important concessions. Daniel Ortega was obliged to modify his economic policy under the pressure of these assemblies. However, in the long run, these small expressions of people's power did not manage to develop and express themselves through the big mass organizations. A section of the Sandinistas thought that these consultations replaced the need to really consult the workers but reality demonstrated a fundamental truth. In moments of revolutionary euphoria (when there is unlimited confidence in the vanguard) democracy of this type appears as sufficient. However, when the crisis explodes, this type of plebiscitary democracy not only does not function, but very often generates more dissatisfaction. The problem is that it is necessary to develop direct democracy (creating an organizing structure where the social organizations can exercise their power)

starting in the period of revolutionary euphoria, because later on it is much more difficult.

In a certain way there began to be a separation between the FSLN and the masses, especially between the social organizations and the masses. What was most worrying in the last electoral campaign was the famous closing rally of the FSLN campaign. More than half of the participants voted for UNO, even though they had attended the rally, as well as many previous demonstrations that had affected the whole city. Let us consider what it means when 35% of the inhabitants of a capital city participate in a mobilization. What we have to ask is why they participated and why they subsequently voted for UNO.

In large sectors of the population a certain fear and rancour began to develop in regard to the Sandinista cadre in the social organizations. Many people who had participated in that rally did so simply under social pressure, in order not to be shown up in front of their leaders. These leaders asked the workers to mobilize to support the austerity plans of the government, and at the same time some of them already started to have a standard of living slightly different to that of the workers as a whole.

– But this was not the central factor determining the vote for UNO. The five years of war and the continuation of obligatory military service weighed heavily on the consciousness of the population. Important sections of the people drew the following conclusion: a victory of the FSLN will not only not end the war but, on the contrary, lead to its intensification.

There is a weakness in the usual analysis of the Nicaraguan situation. Everybody said that the Contra had been militarily defeated, and thus that a key element of the US strategy of “low-intensity conflict” had stopped functioning. However, reality was totally different. Undoubtedly the Contra had no military perspective if viewed as the key instrument for taking power, but it is very difficult to think that this was the imperialist vision. For them the Contra was an element of destabilization which played a key role in the formation of a solid civilian instrument. In this respect, Cardinal Obando's role has been fundamental. We should look for the explanation of UNO's victory (from the point of view of its forces) in the light of the division of labour between the Cardinal and the Contra.

The war meant almost 50,000 dead - 1.66% of the population. Transposed to France we would be talking about more than 800,000 dead, and more than 3.5 million in the USA. To this has to be added the number of wounded and mutilated, and also those who were evacuated or who lost their homes. This means that almost every Nicaraguan home concretely experienced the effects of the war in one way or another. It was in order to end the war that the majority of Nicaraguans voted for UNO.

– These are the elements which fundamentally explain the defeat. Nonetheless, we have to point out another very important element. The only way in which a people can accept the type of poverty and difficulties experienced by the Nicaraguans is if they have a very big decision-making power over what is done. An adjustment policy that provokes a drop in living standards can only be accepted if it is decided by those who are going to be centrally affected by it. For us, the problem is not the number of nationalizations carried out by the Sandinista government. Nicaragua is often spoken of as if it was France or Japan. Of course, the Nicaraguan government made mistakes in terms of economic policy, and those mistakes significantly influenced the mood of the masses. But to think that in a country like Nicaragua nationalizations could have solved the social problems of the population is not to understand what underdevelopment means. If the Sandinistas carried out that economic policy it was fundamentally due to the limits of the international situation.

Giving Cuba as an example can be very good for public rallies, but the situation was totally different. The Cuban revolution coincided in time with moments of euphoria of the Soviet bureaucracy. Nikita Khrushchev was firmly convinced that the USSR would in a few years overtake the USA's work productivity level. Soviet aid to Cuba was out of all comparison with the aid given to Nicaragua. A policy of collectivization of the means of production inevitably

requires significant international aid (if you do not want to immediately fall into the abyss).

We think that the fundamental weakness was the very limited existence of direct people's power. After the 1984 elections no form of direct representation of mass organizations developed again. The disappearance of the Council of State distanced the organized masses from the spheres where the fundamental decisions were taken. It was thought that the question was solved by recruiting most of the social leaders to the Sandinista Assembly (a sort of central committee of the FSLN). Obviously, this was not so.

The FSLN gradually developed, and in a way theorized, the importance of elections as we know them in the capitalist world. We did not explicitly point out the limits of this path. We should not make the opposite mistake today by criticizing the Sandinistas for having held this type of election. We express our admiration for the way in which the Sandinistas maintained - in a situation of counter-revolutionary war supported by US imperialism - the fundamental political freedoms and the democratic character of the process as a whole. However, the democratic mechanism chosen by the Sandinistas had all the limits of bourgeois parliamentarism: separation of executive and legislative power, which led to strengthening presidential power and the delegation of power for a significant period (6 years) without the electors having any means of control. These two elements alone reflect the limits of parliamentary democracy. Thus we have to demand democracy at the base, that is to say people's democracy, which in Nicaragua could have adopted the following form: the municipalities would have been the power base, guaranteeing the existence of multi-partyism and freedom of elections, with also the free recall at any moment by the electors who would have permanent control over their representatives. It is obvious that this formula would have saved the Nicaraguan people from having a reactionary parliamentary majority elected for six years, when a great number of those who voted for UNO will be sorry or are already sorry they did so, without having the possibility of changing this majority in the institutional terrain. Only a general strike or the creation of a popular movement of such vigour that it would impose new elections could change this majority. The method we are talking about is by principle opposed to the idea that a government is legitimate once and for all. The limit of years that parliamentary democracy of bourgeois origin always imposes really reflects the limits of its democratic vision. The legitimacy of a government is won daily.

This raises a question to discuss in the Latin America revolutionary left (which was hard hit by this defeat). One of the key elements in answering those who say farewell to anti-imperialist revolutions is to make these criticisms of the FSLN. Building direct people's power is still a goal to be realized. Only this type of regime can lay the basis for resisting imperialist aggression, through the workers of the countryside and city taking their fate into their own hands.

– The Sandinista electoral defeat has of course given rise to a discussion on the type of revolution that it was, the type of state it created and what exists today. The Fourth International must take part in this discussion, but it should not make this its only interest. The discussions on what happened and what to do to win back the government are of such richness that we would be wrong if we limited our discussion to that subject. However, it is necessary to say several things about it.

The Nicaraguan revolution was, more than anything else, a national, popular, democratic and anti-imperialist revolution where the class struggle demands were not the central ones. This is not unimportant. This limited class struggle profile was not due, as some sectarians could think, to the weakness of the leadership or a policy of alliances with the leadership. The explanation is a little deeper. The Sandinista strategy for taking power was the only one possible in a country like Nicaragua. This strategy was determined by the type of society and the level of consciousness of the population. The Sandinistas achieved something that still inspires the Latin American revolutionary left: this is to be the vanguard in the struggle to refound (or actually found) the Nation with an autonomous and sovereign project in relation to imperialism. The social content and driving forces of this project were democratic and popular. The particularity - and what marked it out from other Latin American and generally third-world revolutionary processes - was the socialist and revolutionary character of the FSLN. That is to say that the FSLN developed the beautiful idea of José Carlos Mariátegui that the work of Latin American revolutionaries is to

fuse the highest point of the social scientific thought of the developed world (Marxism) with Indo-American reality. This was the great achievement of the FSLN.

Daniel Ortega pointed out that the Sandinista revolution had been socialist, and this is absolutely true from the point of view of the path it took. The sole possibility for “refounding” or “actually founding” the Nicaraguan nation as autonomous and sovereign in relation to imperialism, was through a socialist perspective. That is to say the building of a socialist society in Nicaragua started on July 19, 1979.

In our analysis and our political vision of Latin America it is important to take into account the concept of the pueblo (“people”) as not only the sum of sectors that form the driving force of the revolution, but also the ones are going in the direction building another society where exploitation will not exist. The people are those underneath, the poor of Latin America. The Sandinista revolution was a revolution of the poor, of those from underneath and the state that was formed answered to them.

To think that the Sandinista revolution did not qualitatively modify the type of state that existed under Somoza is not to understand anything about the revolution in the colonial and semi-colonial world. It is to live by and for schemas.

The Fourth International characterized the state born on July 19, 1979 as a “workers' state”. This category - like all analytical categories including “bourgeois state - covers very different realities. For us the Sandinista state had a proletarian nature, which was determined by workers', peasants' and people's power. From this characterization we can draw two conclusions: 1) in the framework of this new state, the backbone of the advance to socialism was the Sandinista armed forces and the popular militia; 2) for the bourgeois counter-revolution to triumph it would have to dismantle this state and rebuild the bourgeois state destroyed since the fall of Somoza.

The fundamental thing is to understand that July 19 was a qualitative change in the state framework, that this change was determined by the type of revolution (popular democratic) and that socialism began to be built on the basis of this state.

This state has not been changed by the victory of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. What we are experiencing is a contradiction between the UNO government and the state apparatus of the revolution. This contradiction will tend to be resolved in the framework of an advance of the revolution or the triumph of the counter-revolution. In conclusion, the elections of February 1990 signify a serious political defeat for the FSLN. The revolutionary state has not been dismantled, but the coalition of counter-revolutionary forces which UNO represents has seized the government and other important positions within the state apparatus. Broad popular sectors have found themselves disorientated and demoralised. The FSLN has quickly reactivated itself, affirming its decision not to give up control of the army and to defend the social gains, relying on popular mobilisations. Negotiations with the Chamorro government have been begun with the aim of realising these aims.

One year after the elections, it is difficult to predict the outcome of this stage, in which the revolution is threatened. There have been big struggles and strikes against the policy of the government, which have been supported by the army and in which, despite the orders of the government, the army and police have not acted as forces of repression. This gives us some hope.

But at the same time some serious events have occurred which put the social and political gains of the revolution in danger: among other things, massive disarmament of the population, the privatisation of a large part of the public sector and the repression of officers in the Sandinista popular army (EPS) who had supplied the FMLN in El Salvador with weapons of defence against air attack. Such measures weaken the revolution. Solidarity and dialogue with the FSLN are more necessary than ever.

The new world situation creates further difficulties for the revolutionary left. Nonetheless, the political relationship of forces is still favourable. In the short-term, reformist currents cannot hegemonize the mass movements. The economic and social crisis itself limits the possibilities for these gradualist currents, all the more so that the Latin American bourgeoisie is now confronted with new competitors from Eastern Europe seeking imperialist credit and investment. The revolutionary left, with almost 30 years of experience and significant mass implantation, is confronting a new challenge: to make the revolution in an era when everything seems to be negotiable, even principles, (at least, that is what the Kremlin neo-bureaucrats try to make them believe).

V. Our orientation

It is obviously impossible to offer a single orientation for all our sections. There is no one single model for party building nor a single line for party building valid for all times and all places. It is now clear that the Nicaraguan revolution and the constitution of the Brazilian PT gave rise to attempts to repeat these two experiences. We are for building big mass revolutionary parties, but there are countless different variants possible for getting there.

What we can do is discuss our concrete experiences and draw out some lessons. In a schematic way we can talk of four different types of party building:

– The emergence of a mass workers' party like the PT made possible the growth of a revolutionary Marxist current within it that works in the most loyal possible way to build it. Their party is the PT and its (our) interest is to help the revolutionary socialist positions to win ground within the party.

The growth, the successes and the tests passed by the PT confront us - along with the other party activists - with the need to start thinking strategically. The electoral successes, and most of all the fact that a PT government does not sound a crazy idea for big sections of the population, pose a series of difficult problems.

If the PT does not start a debate quite soon on how to implement a policy of breaking with capitalism, there is a risk that the most conservative, social-democratic-type currents will attempt to build a party that "finds" its place in Brazilian society by winning islands of power at parliamentary or municipal level. But with our weight within the PT we can have a decisive role alongside other sectors in consolidating a revolutionary vision.

– The Mexican PRT has basically developed as an independent revolutionary party with mass influence. Before the emergence of neo-Cardenism, we were close to obtaining the convergence of the bulk of the revolutionary left around the PRT. It had achieved such a level of hegemony that the revolutionary left turned around its initiatives. The integration of the left into neo-Cardenism, into the PRD, has been a very significant step backwards in the process of forming a revolutionary alternative.

The PRT is now the only nationally present socialist organization. In practice this poses, at least in the near future, a party-building perspective that depends on building the party itself. However, it will be crucially important to take a series of initiatives towards the PRD, which, although bourgeois nationalist, has a very important left base. We must establish a privileged alliance with it, aiming to draw out the radicalized cadres, essentially in the course of the mass struggle.

To achieve a growing-over of the social organizations, most initiatives should be on the basis of seeking unity. At the same time, there should be a thoroughgoing ideological debate with the neo-Cardenists, especially those who identify with workers' struggle. The PRT is seen as the second option by many Cardenist sympathizers. If, as we

expect, the PRD gets into difficulty because of the contradiction between the radicalization of its supporters and its electoralist policy, it will again become possible to promote a policy of regroupment.

– Entering revolutionary organizations already existing or in formation. This is the path followed by our Colombian section. Our comrades went into A Luchar on the basis of political agreement, basically around the situation in Colombia. In many ways, A Luchar summarizes the recomposition process of the Colombian revolutionary vanguard, with all its strengths and weaknesses. It includes several leaders of the CUT, the peasant movement and other mass organizations.

A Luchar lacks clarity on its own character: mass front of a politico-military organization or a revolutionary party with mass influence? A clear answer to this question would be a qualitative step forward.

There is also the problem of the current situation in Colombia. The dirty war launched by the government significantly limits the space for political activity. For the bourgeoisie, the unstable situation obliges them to wipe out the communists. The people's movement has not succeeded in creating an organization capable of successfully stopping the repressive activity of the bourgeoisie and the government. Our comrades can play a central role in the democratic struggle, which does not just mean elections.

– Participation in a revolutionary political front while maintaining an independent existence. At this level, the experience of our Uruguayan comrades in forming the MPP through the convergence of several currents - the MLN-Tupamaros, the PVP, the MRO and good section of independent individuals - is very important.

The MPP emerged from the crisis of the Frente Amplio, following its policy of respecting the transition as conceived by the military and the bourgeoisie, that is the installation of a democracy under military guidance. This crisis culminated in the withdrawal of the PGP and Christian Democracy because of their electoral expectations. The other factor was the PCU, which was eager to play the role of championing negotiations with the traditional parties as the "only possibility for taking Uruguay out of its deep crisis". So it had to demobilize the masses, thus becoming the main obstacle to the movement. The MPP is emerging as a grouping of the sectors still in struggle, which promoted the referendum, and made progress in forming local committees, becoming in practice the promoters of big mass actions.

The MPP faces three important challenges: elaborating an overall alternative to the retrograde conservative project; being a factor in the recomposition of the Frente Amplio on a totally different basis; and becoming a revolutionary reference point for the masses.

Of course, the MPP still confronts countless problems, particularly a hegemonist vision that may make it appear more of a manoeuvre to create a certain relationship of forces than a useful instrument for revolution. Our proposals and alternatives must be posed openly and we must continue building the PST in the framework of the MPP as one of the guarantees of its evolution.

There have been advances in the diverse forms of building a revolutionary option. Fourth International forces in Latin America, although small, are not insignificant. One of our central objectives since the first meeting of the Latin Americans PBs has been achieved: we are an integral part of the revolutionary vanguard and everything seems to indicate that, unlike in the past, we are starting to accumulate experience of building revolutionary parties. Propagandist factionalism and sectarianism are being banished from our political tradition. We do not deny that our forces are still very weak or that we are virtually absent in key countries for the Latin American revolution. But today, without wanting to fall into sterile triumphalism, our organizations have more confidence and more possibilities to play a significant role in the evolution of political events. Unlike in the past, we do not want to sell models or political

projects that create false expectations.

In Brazil there is a great opportunity, but the challenges are immense and the answers still few. In Mexico, our party has passed a significant test and has many cadres with important political experience but, at least on the ideological front, it is going against the stream of the usual expression of the mass vanguard today. In Uruguay, our party, although small, was not only able to exist under the dictatorship but has also played a fundamental role in the reorganization of the vanguard, even though the relationship of forces among revolutionaries is still very unfavourable. In Colombia our nuclei of comrades - saved from the liberal shipwreck of the PSR - have a significant political authority and a high level of political education and are taking part in the beginnings of the reorganization of the revolutionary vanguard, which has the big disadvantage of taking place in a very bad social situation. In Chile, Argentina, Venezuela we also have small groups of comrades facing very difficult situations. Finally, in Ecuador we have two organizations with real possibilities of playing a role within the vanguard, but they have to step up their efforts to find a common framework for political action which does not seem likely in the short term.

Our organizations have a place in the Latin American revolutionary vanguard. We are part of it; we share many of its vices but also many of its virtues. And we are proud of this. We do not have any interest in a separate existence simply to reaffirm a certain self-proclamatory vision. Where the process of reorganization of the revolutionary vanguard makes it possible to create revolutionary parties, this should be the priority place for our activity and growth. The Fourth International was created for the revolution and everything should be subordinate to this objective.