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# Resolution on Latin America

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**The prospects for initiating a process of socio-economic transformation which could lead to a shift in the relationship of forces favorable to the majorities of the population in several Latin American countries, have been postponed. Such a prospect could have resulted from the creation of governments by democratic and/or left socialist parties and/or coalitions following several elections held recently in the continent, but their negative results have put off this possibility.**

In the economic terrain, the crisis which erupted in Mexico in December 1994 dramatized the effects of the policies that had been pursued since the 1970s. Beyond the particularities of the Mexican case, we have now witnessed the collapse of a model undermined, in the strictly economic field, by its own internal contradictions. The trend towards more and more severe programs of capitalist restructuring, with the resulting worsening of economic, social and political conditions is stronger than ever and must, in the coming years, confront the new forms of struggle and resistance that are arising in the continent.

The political and social instability that emerged in our countries in the 1980s - in the aftermath of the controlled removal of the military dictatorships - combined with the negative effects of the "wasted decade" and the dislocations caused by the reinsertion of the Latin American continent into a new division of the world, has not only not disappeared, but in fact, is leading to a permanent social polarization. Far from experiencing an expansion of democratic rights and freedoms, we are faced with their reduction and by the re-emergence of sharper forms of authoritarianism.

### 1. The economic landscape

**1.1.** The "structural adjustment" programs imposed since the beginning of the 1980s have modified the regime of accumulation which had been dominant for 40 years and placed the continent within the framework of a so-called competitive insertion into the world capitalist market. These qualitative transformations imply centering the axis of the accumulation of capital around the development of foreign markets, promoting multilateral integration pacts, decisively altering the relations between labor and capital, as well as advancing in the creation of a new framework of relations between the state, society and the imperialist countries.

This so-called competitive insertion implies a process of integration subordinated to the imperatives laid down by the main imperialist powers, a process which, furthermore, generates and reproduces hierarchical forms of integration among the dependent countries themselves, as the cases of Mercosur, the free trade agreement between Mexico and the countries of Central America and the Andean Pact demonstrate.

The free trade agreement (NAFTA) signed by Canada, Mexico and the U.S. is part of the latter's strategy to shift the relationship of forces which, in the arena of international competition, has been unfavorable to it in recent years. Such an agreement is different from other processes of economic integration, such as the European Union, since it implies the subordinated integration of an economy as heavily dependent as Mexico's to the dynamics imposed by the main imperialist power. NAFTA is part of a larger project which seeks to modernize Mexico's capitalist economy, locating it within the international division of labor as a subordinate if privileged partner.

At the same time, the policies promoted by the U.S. with the objective of creating a free trade zone in which it would lay down the rules of the game, has continued to slowly but steadily advance. Although certain commercial sectors in Latin America face, or will face, obstacles in attaining their objectives, the world-wide reorganization of economic

blocs is undoubtedly underway in the region.

One of the salient aspects of these agreements is the fact that they do not offer an alternative to the ever-growing economic, social and technological abyss which separates the dependent from the imperialist countries. The key features of the ongoing processes of restructuring and integration is their exclusionary, perverse and conflictual character.

The shift to an externally oriented economy has been coupled with indiscriminate trade liberalization programs which have deeply affected the productive structure as a whole. Deployed during a period in which the imperialist powers have both increased their protectionist measures (limits to steel, textiles, banana exports, "voluntary" accords...) and strengthened their control over the world market (GATT, WTO), trade liberalization leads to the break-up, collapse or disappearance of portions or whole sectors of production and to the exclusion of millions of people from the circuits of production, where it has not led to a real process of de-industrialization, like those experienced by Bolivia, Peru and Argentina itself.

**1.2.** The limits and range of capitalist re-structuring are evident. In spite of the growth in manufacturing production in most countries in the region, which is the basis of the increase in exports, Latin America's share of world trade - which fell from 12% in 1950 to 3% in 1992 - has been continually shrinking. The priority given to the development of external markets furthers the consolidation of a sharply-divided society. Similarly, in spite of the efforts of the Latin American bourgeoisies and of the disagreements which exist among certain countries, the main exports from the region continue to be raw materials, which are subjected to a slow but irreversible deterioration, caused by changes in the production process, which limits the ability to maneuver in the international market.

The crisis in Mexico and its international repercussions have demonstrated the structural fragility of the new patterns of accumulation. Factors such as the policies of privatization of state enterprises, high interest rates, the recessionary atmosphere which reigned in the imperialist countries, the liberalization of financial markets, and the presence of strict wage-control measures, attracted foreign capital, which began to flow back into certain countries (notably into Mexico, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina). Nevertheless, only a small portion of that capital was invested productively, a fact which combined with an indiscriminate commercial opening-up, the absence of even the most minimally coherent industrial policies, and the linking of national currencies to the dollar (necessary to attract foreign capital), led to the growth of gigantic commercial deficits as well as to other contradictions which eventually undermined the economic model of which they were part.

In this sense the financial "rescue" of Mexico, unprecedented in terms of the amounts involved, is completely geared toward safeguarding the interests of international speculative capital, since it will be used to service the country's foreign debt. Furthermore, all of this implies an unprecedented and dangerous reduction in national sovereignty (complete U.S. control of the income generated by the sale of Mexico's oil).

**1.3.** The fact that most countries have again experienced positive rates of growth does not mean that they have regained the ground lost during the "wasted decade". The levels of capital investment remain lower than in 1982. Furthermore, the region is again entering a period of recession, as the cases of Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, and probably Brazil, already indicate. The increase in GDP rate of growth and the reduction in the rate of inflation, often presented as the main "achievements" of neo-liberal policies, are taken as being synonymous with an improved standard of living and increased employment. Nothing could be farther from the truth: 8 out of 10 jobs generated in the region between 1990 and 1993 corresponded to the informal sector or to micro-enterprises. There is growth, but wealth is ever more concentrated in the hands of a very small social layer.

During the 1980s poverty grew most strongly. More than 45% (196 million) of the people of Latin America are affected by this scourge, generated by capitalist restructuring. Although more prevalent in rural zones (61% of the

people), poverty has increasingly hit urban regions. The favelas in Brazil, poblaciones in Chile, ciudades perdidas in Mexico, ciudades ocultas in Argentina, ranchos in Venezuela etc. have continued to grow. More than a mere economic and social “dualism”, this implies that people increasingly live in two different social universes, a context in which the excluded constitute a growing majority.

The extension and deepening of poverty is not a minor aspect of ongoing capitalist restructuration. This process has seriously weakened the very social fabric of many forms of resistance. It does not strengthen the left electorally or otherwise. On the contrary, it tends to nurture an increasingly violent atmosphere, to create conditions favorable to the growth of political clientelism, and to reduce all democratic spaces as it denies individuals any guarantees regarding even the most basic living conditions.

Poverty is not gender neutral, as it affects women, “the poorest among the poorest”, first. Women are furthermore faced with an unprecedented offensive of the state, the Right, and the Church hierarchy, against their social, reproductive, and sexual, etc., rights.

**1.4.** In Latin America the privatization of public enterprises accelerated after 1985. Branches and whole economic sectors, many of them of strategic importance, have been transferred into the hands of private capital. In this fashion, the 1970s notion of the public sector as a sort of “hospital for ailing enterprises” has been abandoned and replaced by the objective of placing a large part of the nation's wealth in the hands of the “free play of the market” which, in fact, fosters the concentration and centralization of capital in the hands of large monopolies.

Given the extent of the present crisis, a renewed “interventionism” by the state may be expected, as measures taken by several governments already indicate. Obviously, this does not imply a return to the past, nor does it go against the central aspects of the neo-liberal project. Nevertheless, a point had been reached at which the lack of state intervention in the economic sphere risked unleashing an explosion nurtured by runaway neo-liberalism.

Subordinated as they are to the imperatives of the world market, the governments of the region are also pushing through the privatization of lands belonging to peasant and indigenous communities. A veritable agrarian counter-reform has been carried out in Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia and Ecuador which has deprived millions of people of their last remaining means of subsistence. The indigenista ideology, linked to the populist paternalism regimes in place for decades and used by the state to control important layers of the population, now yields its place to a brutal “modernization” which includes the destruction of the indigenous communities of the Amazon, environmental pollution and deforestation suffered by all countries, the destruction of our people's history, culture and traditions, a “modernization” which is the cause of the social explosions of the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the peasants of Mexico, Paraguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, etc.

**1.5.** The region's foreign debt remains one of the key factors which blocks any possibility of stable long-term growth. The measures taken during the late 1980s, with the implementation of the Brady Plan, have lessened the problem, but do not solve the dilemmas posed by the uninterrupted outflow of capital. Having accepted the discipline of the so-called “Washington consensus”, the governments of the region remain committed to servicing the foreign debt - mainly its interest payments - while accepting the framework of separate, country-by-country negotiations. Through debt renegotiation accords, a considerable portion of the wealth to be produced early in the next century - and national sovereignty with it - has been pledged away. The foreign debt continues to play an eminently de-stabilizing role while keeping the door open for the interventions of the IMF and the World Bank as regulators of the economic policies to be implemented.

**1.6.** This is the context in which a shift in the relations between capital and labor has taken place. Work reorganization, as an attempt to increase the rate of profit through an increase in the rate of exploitation (the principal mechanism for overcoming the crisis), seeks to dismantle the power and presence that workers wielded within the

factories and to weaken trade union structures.

While neo-liberal discourse promotes free trade, all sorts of obstacles to the free circulation of labor power are introduced, just as internally the bourgeoisies and their governments impose strict controls to prevent wages from rising. Capitalist re-structuring and the continued attacks against past social conquests have permitted profits to recuperate as well as relative improvements in productivity to occur. The latter, however, remain well below the levels required by the world market. The project of relocalization of the Latin American economies in the world market thus largely relies on the limitation and reduction of wages.

Thus, only a few of the region's economies can hope to improve their position - without escaping their situation of dependence - as a result of the process of redistribution of zones of influence. Most are condemned to a passive role as providers of cheap labor power, raw materials or standardized manufactured products. In our continent, so-called economic modernization is by nature exclusionary. It promotes a social apartheid and deepens the contradiction between city and country as never before. Since it depends on the evolution of international factors, its capacity for self-expansion is rapidly exhausted.

The dynamic opened by capitalist restructuring generates the space for counterposing an alternative economic and social project. Such an alternative project would formulate as its priorities the satisfaction of the needs of our peoples, the homogenization of wage and social conquests along the lines of international norms, the creation of industrial protection programs for certain areas, etc. Nevertheless, no national economic program, advanced as it may be, can hope to solve the crisis if there is no shift in the relationship of forces within the imperialist countries.

### **2. Uninterrupted social and political instability.**

**2.1.** The policies deployed by the bourgeoisies and their governments have failed to reconstruct or renew the mechanisms of domination which functioned until the 1970s. Unable to solve old or new problems generated by their situation of dependency and by the ongoing changes on an international scale, they have basically reproduced the worst aspects of any capitalist re-structuration, fueling social polarization. Unemployment, poverty and growing inequality are the main factors which promote social confrontation and radicalization.

Exclusion has a direct effect on social and political participation. For those excluded, whose main and immediate concern is survival, it is very difficult to act politically. This implies a systematic - and anti-democratic - reduction of citizenship as such. Nevertheless, this should not be confused with depoliticization, demobilization or the absence of popular initiatives, just as it is neither the case of communities or sectors resisting modernity, but rather of dependent capitalism being structurally incapable of satisfying the needs of the majority. This is why we speak of the perverse and conflictual modernization at the same time that we seek to understand how the terms and forms of struggle have been changing.

In the last few years it has been the more radically dispossessed sectors, such as peasants, indigenous peoples, pobladores (shanty-town dwellers), women, old people, the young that have led risings, struggles and revolts which stand out because of the forms they have taken (semi-insurrection, burning of government palaces, national marches), the organizational structures or means they have adopted or generated (collective leadership, processes of self-organization), as well as the demands they have formulated, with the question of democracy, in its widest sense, being at the center of the struggle.

**2.2.** As the channels to advance certain demands have been closed, social explosions like those of Caracas in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Santiago del Estero and Jujuy in Argentina, Paraguay and Ecuador have erupted. Although these outbreaks of resistance and agitation do not constitute a definite trend, they do correspond to a deep,

undergoing process as they underlie a situation of political crisis and ungovernability. Similarly, mobilizations in which diverse social sectors have acted as citizens have been responsible for the victory of Aristide in Haiti, the resignation of Collor and C.A. Pérez (Brazil and Venezuela), the collapse of Serrano's attempt to arbitrarily remain in power in Guatemala, the partial blocking of Menem's initiatives in Argentina, and the restraining of the Mexican government's genocide against the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). In other cases the initiatives of political and/or trade union organizations have led to open confrontations, such as the general strike in Nicaragua, the popular mobilization which stopped the process of privatization in Uruguay after the referendum of 1992, the mobilizations in Puerto Rico which in 1993-94 led to defeats of the government in two referendums, the general strike in Paraguay (May 1995), the popular mobilizations which shook Bolivia early in 1995, as well as the land take-overs in Peñalolen and then the mobilizations of teachers and coal miners in Chile.

For a certain number of these situations, they were largely spontaneous, heterogeneous and discontinuous movements which lacked a definite class identity. This is why they are fragile and why it would be a mistake to turn them into a model; and yet they should not be underestimated, given their enormous de-stabilizing potential, evidenced by the victory of Caldera in Venezuela after the "caracazos" (popular riots in Caracas) or the deterioration of Menemism and the growth of the Frente Grande and the Marcha Federal of July 6 following the social explosions in the North-east of Argentina. In the case of Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE) in Ecuador and of the indigenous peoples of Guatemala, the movements in question possess a clearly defined identity (peasant-indigenous), an organization, a political program. Above all, they have been able to provoke a political polarization while turning themselves into a reference point for an important part of society.

Several of these movements had as a starting point specific (health, housing, wage) demands which, in the process of becoming political demands, went beyond the narrow framework of an institutional struggle while simultaneously seeking new forms of participation which challenge political parties and their verticalism. An additional fact should be noted. During recent years, those struggles have pushed important social sectors to the left, a process which in turn has tended to radicalize those struggles and which has also manifested itself in the favorable electoral results obtained in several countries by democratic and left-wing currents.

Besides promoting growing social polarization, capitalist re-structuring has also brought with it another significant modification of the context in which those struggles unfold. While in the main countries of the region, the working class (wage-earning sectors with a steady income) constitutes an important social sector, it has nevertheless, as a class, lost part of its centrality as a driving force in the struggle for social change, either because its trade union organizations are in crisis, or have degenerated (through institutional corruption and/or betrayal by its leadership) or because, given the absence of credible alternatives among the political parties, workers have expressed themselves as citizens and not as class-conscious political actors.

**2.3.** In the case of Mexico, the emergence of the EZLN which challenges the regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), declares war on the federal army, demands democracy, justice and liberty for all Mexicans, denounces the discrimination against indigenous peoples practiced by the whole of society and demands - arms in hand - the most elementary civic and democratic rights, the right to a dignified existence, the right to be an integral part of the nation, constitutes a specific expression of our peoples' resistance to a present and a future characterized by the growing poverty, exclusion, oppression and exploitation which imperialism seeks to impose on us.

Unlike social movements which have emerged in other Latin American countries, neo-Zapatismo represents a clearly defined national political project, with social and political objectives which are not limited to one town or region and which go beyond a single sector (even if the EZLN is deeply rooted in the indigenous communities of Chiapas). It is not by chance that the government and its army have been completely unable to question the justice and legitimacy of its struggle.

The neo-Zapatista insurrection has deepened the crisis (opened in 1988) of the party-state regime while also unmasking the contradictions of a neo-liberal project which had openly proclaimed its goal of leading Mexico, through a path of unprecedented prosperity, into the "first world". Through the formulation of a brief program which incorporates the aspirations of the Mexican people, the EZLN was able to attract the support of very wide and diverse social, political, ideological (both organized and un-organized) sectors, of almost all independent social organizations, a good part of the NGOs which have attained significant public presence, as well as of those Christians involved in and committed to popular struggles. The EZLN has sparked a powerful wave of national mobilizations for democracy with justice and dignity and against the war and the militarization of the country. This has awakened a wave of international solidarity which we must struggle to strengthen through all possible means.

All of this has been made possible, not only by the justness of the Zapatista demands but also by their tactical flexibility, which has made it possible for them to build bridges toward the whole of society around certain shared objectives: an end to the party-state regime, a struggle for a new constituent assembly and a new constitutional framework, in one word, around a struggle for achieving democracy in Mexico which does not exclude any path, even the peaceful one. This tactical flexibility has been linked to a strategic clarity and ethical dignity, which has not been common in the Mexican left.

Neo-Zapatism constitutes a watershed in the history of Mexico, not only because of its extraordinary contribution to undermining the party-state regime, but also because it represents a turning point for the left: on the one hand, it brings out the weaknesses, the deficiencies and shortcomings of the left which are obstacles to the growth and qualitative advance of the democratic movement, at the same time it underlines the need for a programmatic, organizational and practical reconstruction of the left. The experience of the EZLN itself sheds light on some aspects of this necessary reformulation.

**2.4.** The armed conflict which erupted in early 1995 between the armies of Ecuador and Peru, countries which have had a territorial dispute for a long time, introduced a new element of instability in the region. This was the first conflict of its nature since the war between El Salvador and Honduras in the early 1970s.

International organisms once again showed their incapacity to stop a confrontation which has weakened the economies of both countries, and resulted in several hundred deaths, thousands of displaced among the indigenous communities and ecological damage that may be irreparable. Multi-national corporations have immediately sought to take advantage of the last two aspects of the situation through their attempt to create a free-trade zone on both sides of the border.

The war has been to the advantage of both governments. In Ecuador the President used it as an opportunity a "national unity and defense" rhetoric, which was taken up, not only by the general public but also by the majority of the left, thus contributing to an increase in the government's perceived legitimacy. In Peru the war played a key role in Fujimori's electoral victory. The almost complete absence of any reaction by the left organizations is an indication of the precarious state to which they have been reduced in both countries.

**2.5.** Within a complex social situation it has been impossible to overcome the lack of synchronization between working-class struggles and the mobilizations of other social sectors. Important trade union struggles have occurred in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Colombia, Brazil, etc. which point toward the beginnings of a recomposition within the working class. Nevertheless, the main social mobilizations, such as the revolts in the Argentinean north-east, the struggles of the coca leaf growers in Bolivia, of the CONAIE in Ecuador, the Zapatistas in Mexico, and the mobilizations against C.A. Pérez in Venezuela have developed without the large labor confederations or the main sectors of the working class playing the leading political role that they had, for example, in the 1970s.

The relative weakening of a class dimension or point of reference, itself a product of the crisis of capitalism and of the

drastic reconfiguration of social relations in the continent, opens the space for struggles by new social forces and thus for the active emergence of new potentially revolutionary subjects, which we must follow closely, taking advantage of every experience to overcome the lack of synchronization already mentioned. This is particularly important in those countries where the working class has considerable weight within the productive structure, since no radical social change can be conceived without a significant portion of that class being won over to the notion of a break with the status quo.

**2.6.** Inspired by the Sandinista victory in 1979, the launching of the Salvadorian revolution in the early 1980s, the political-social growth of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT), the vitality shown by the social conquests of the Cuban revolution, while the rest of the continent sank into its "wasted decade", the social movements of the region made substantial advances in their process of recomposition. Although facing the searing consequences of the neo-conservative offensive, they exhibited, until 1990, a dynamic which made a revolutionary outbreak a credible option. But the substantial modification which took place in the international political arena after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the disappearance of the "socialist bloc", the defeat of the Sandinistas and the victory of Collor inevitably had negative consequences for the ongoing processes of recomposition. To these processes we must now add the evolution of the Salvadoran revolutionary process, leading to the signing of the 1992 Peace Accords, and the appearance of the deepest crisis in Cuba since the triumph of the revolution.

As in the rest of the world, capitalism in general and U.S. imperialism in particular presented themselves as the absolute winners of the Cold War, while the hope for social change through a revolutionary break moved farther away from people's minds than ever before. This is not, nevertheless, a one-way process: the inability so far shown by capitalism to solve its own crisis, the sharp differences which exist between the imperialist powers coupled with continuing social resistance place obstacles and delay the coming of the "new world order", so loudly proclaimed in 1989 in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Nevertheless, since the class relationship of forces favors capital and its agents, the dynamic of the social movement, in spite of the uninterrupted nature of the struggles which constitute it, does not at present pose a revolutionary break, particularly as many political organizations or important sectors within them have definitely abandoned any notion of revolutionary change.

**2.7.** Favoring, as never before, the sectors of the bourgeoisie linked to the world market, the governments of the region subordinate any national interests, even sacrificing the public functions the state is supposed to have, to private interests. In this fashion diverse regimes and their parties have amputated a considerable portion of the social base of support they had relied on for decades. Consequently, the crisis which in the 1980s had already swept away most nationalist-populist governments and parties has left no structure of domination unaffected. The most outstanding example of this is the crisis of the Mexican party-state embodied in the PRI. However, one may also mention the cases of Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Brazil, countries in which the traditional party system is fractured and/or in open decomposition.

The key weakness of the political projects of the Latin American bourgeoisies stems from the disintegration of their old social pacts, while they have not been able to propose a new long-term alternative project. To prevent the latter from emerging or imposing themselves is a key task of the revolutionary movement. Nevertheless, we must avoid any spontaneist impressionism. The crisis of the traditional parties and the existing social polarization do not in themselves lead to a crisis of the regime of domination; if a popular and democratic alternative which struggles for a break with the status quo does not emerge, the bourgeoisie will continue ruling, despite formal changes or changes in personnel.

### **3. Political environment and options in Latin America.**

**3.1.** The defeat of the Republicans in the U.S. and Clinton's rise as head of the government of the main imperialist power has not been without consequences for Latin America. While preaching free trade and continental integration,

the Democratic administration has reinforced its protectionist measures and, above all, strengthened the obstacles faced by immigrants, thus turning the stabilization of the regional migratory situation into a key aspect of its present strategy. Lacking a strategic enemy ("there is no communism anymore"), its traditional interventionist policy now disguises itself as an anti-drug or anti drug-trade campaign. Behind these maneuvers lies a systematic effort to prevent self-organization processes of sectors of the people from emerging or advancing, while they can also be used to blackmail governments immersed in the swamp of narco-politics, as is the case of Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, Bolivia.

**3.2.** The struggle against the Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, and Salvadorian revolutionary processes was a priority of the U.S. administrations during the 1980s. After their defeat, imperialism has concentrated part of its attention on Haiti and Cuba.

Aristide's triumph in 1990 was based on a mobilized people, a people hungry for democracy, ready to sweep away all vestiges of Duvalierism. The military coup reduced to nought the measures taken by the new government. Forms of terror comparable to the worst moments of the Duvalier dictatorship were soon imposed with the objective of crushing a social movement which during the preceding decade (a unique case in Latin America and the Caribbean) had attained ever higher levels of consciousness. The almost unanimous popular rejection of the savage military dictatorship that had not weakened popular determination; the pressures placed on the U.S. government by the thousands that fled Haiti and sought asylum there; the firm position adopted by Aristide himself, and the role played by the Afro-American community in the U.S. electoral conjuncture; and Washington's plans for economic integration, were all factors that led Clinton to decide to invade the island in order to restore the legitimate government under the strict tutelage of U.S. troops.

Clinton's administration succeeded in presenting itself, not as a promoter of the coup, but as a champion of democracy, thus making the invasion seem the only possible option. This is the first time in which a U.S. occupation has gained such legitimacy - even if it is only temporary - in a Latin American country.

After going into exile, Aristide chose fundamentally to rely on the contradictions of U.S. imperialism to return to power in Haiti. He thus subordinated the growth of an internal resistance to the shifts and turns of his diplomatic activity. His return was a victory for the Haitian people, but it took place under conditions qualitatively different from those that characterized his election. His policies, which now assume the trappings of populism, locate themselves within a global program of structural adjustments, which is part of the U.S. strategy. The disillusionment of many, for whom Aristide had been a synonym of change, threatens to generate an even deeper demoralization. Nevertheless, the situation remains highly unstable.

**3.3.** The change of government in the U.S., on the one hand, and the feeling of political isolation generated by the fall of the Berlin Wall, on the other, created the context in which sectors of the Latin American left speak of significant changes regarding the first, and even come to regard it as a key ally. Such a radical shift in perspective is in principle explained by the enormous difficulty which the left confronts in elaborating a credible strategy for social change, but it must be forcefully opposed given the illusions it generates regarding the role of U.S. imperialism or the possibilities for social change without a radical break with the ruling power. Those positions place themselves within a perspective of conciliation, which subordinates the need for social mobilization, self-organization and a radical democratic break to the imperatives of "governability".

**3.4.** The crisis in Mexico is in many ways one of the most salient aspects of the present situation in Latin America. The party-state regime, and with it a whole system of political domination, is immersed in a crisis which may become terminal. The Salinas government, which had advanced the farthest in the integration of Mexico's dependent economy into the U.S. sphere of influence, until recently presented itself as a model to be followed by other Latin American governments. The signing and implementation of NAFTA offered a chance to mask the disastrous social

consequences of the policies followed since 1982; the resources obtained through the privatization of public enterprises made it possible for the government to deploy its project of "social liberalism" through the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), which sought to ameliorate - not overcome - the extreme poverty suffered by a growing sector of the population and to, above all, co-opt social movements and leaders that had accepted the productivist discourse. The agrarian counter-reform unleashed in 1992 constituted a historical overturn for the country. It also became a watershed for the left, which split between those that supported or vacillated in their appreciation of this measure and those which correctly opposed it from the start, thus contributing to opening the path for the most radical social explosion in recent years.

The creation of a social, democratic movement organized around the National Democratic Convention (CND), a political-military force with national (and international) significance; a fractured ruling party - the major source of political instability in the country - with many of its leaders turned into narco-politicians, and the collapse of the economic project which has led to the devaluation of the peso and the worst financial crisis of the last few years, form the background in which the democratic and revolutionary left as well as the new government, formed after the fraudulent elections of August 1994, will have to maneuver.

The beginning of a democratic break embodied in the Zapatista uprising was temporarily interrupted by the electoral fraud of 1994 and by the left's underestimation of the Mexican government and bourgeoisie's continuing capacity to respond. A prolonged, conflictual and dangerous transition has now been opened. It will test the ability of Mexican revolutionaries to finish off the ancien regime. If the latter succeeds in neutralizing the ongoing social mobilizations, it will also open the path for the defeat of the EZLN and for recovering the ground it has lost. On the other hand, a coming together within a political movement of the social forces organized in the CND - the social basis of radical Neo-Cardenism - and the EZLN itself could, in the medium term, favor a radical democratic break which could put an end to the existing regime.

**3.5.** The main country of the region, Brazil, went through a prolonged social and economic crisis, a crisis which was used by the bourgeoisie to install a social apartheid in which economic growth is built on the exclusion of a majority of the population. The deep political crisis among the Brazilian elites, social polarization, and the presence of a powerful popular-democratic bloc grouped around the PT, also made it possible for the social mobilizations which led to Collor's resignation in 1992 to deal a serious blow to the neo-liberal project.

After that date, the struggle between the coalition of conservative forces and the PT to build alternative social projects and to gain hegemony among the majority of the population became sharper and reached its climax in 1994, during the presidential elections. The result has been an important political defeat for the Brazilian people and the Brazilian left, as well as for the democratic and revolutionary forces outside Brazil that were hoping for a victory of the PT.

The Brazilian and international power elites carefully prepared themselves to prevent Lula's triumph. The Brazilian bourgeoisie subordinated its internal divisions to its strategic objectives, took advantage of the poverty and marginalization suffered by millions of Brazilians and found in Henrique Cardoso a figure capable of reconstituting a bourgeois center around the Brazilian Social-Democratic Party (PSDB)-Liberal Front Party (PFL) alliance, with which capital can now move forward in imposing its project of conservative restructuring.

Several elements explain the defeat of the PT and of the popular-democratic bloc. The neo-liberal project launched by Collor took Brazil into a deep recession, with the social consequences this implies. Social - and in particular working class - struggles went into retreat beginning in 1990, while the popular-democratic movement was not able to stop the offensive launched against it. To obtain Collor's resignation, the PT ably took advantage of the divisions of the bourgeoisie, of the means of mass communication and of popular mobilizations in the streets, but it was unable to redeploit that triumph in the struggle to take over the government. Mobilizations continued under Itamar's

government, although at a much lower level.

Furthermore, the leadership of the PT underestimated how much the bourgeoisie had learned from the 1989 elections and the resources it was willing to invest in again preventing a victory of the PT. A triumphalist attitude (an electoral victory in the first round was taken for granted) prevailed during the first half of 1994, which demobilized many of the militants, while the party at the same time found itself paralyzed by the debate and the ambiguities of its position regarding the Real Plan. At the time of the elections the degree of social polarization was far less acute than it had been in 1989, when the PT came very close to taking over the government.

Cardoso's victory radically alters the socio-political landscape and threatens to close a period in the country's history. It forces the PT to re-evaluate its political orientation of the last few years, the way in which the party is constructed within society, its presence within bourgeois institutions, and above all, it poses the challenge of how to present itself as a consistent opposition to Cardoso and his party (PSDB), who have become its main adversaries and consciously seek to attract the support of some of the social sectors on which the PT has historically relied. From the first days of his tenure Cardoso has demonstrated his willingness to impose a radical program of capitalist re-structuration which requires breaking all social resistance. His response to the oil workers' strike of May 1995 has shown that one of the central objectives of the government is to decisively defeat the trade unions and in particular the Single Workers' Federation (CUT). This orientation, with its heavily authoritarian implications, requires constant blows against all points of resistance. It is thus particularly important that the PT maintain a policy of permanent mobilization and of no concessions vis-a-vis the government.

**3.6.** In Uruguay, after a virtual tie between the country's three main political forces, the traditional two party system has been irreversibly fractured, thus deepening the crisis of the political system. In a country with a culture of resistance and in which the left has hegemony over the popular movement, the campaign of the Frente Amplio has shown that, in spite of the unfavorable international situation, it is possible to deploy a discourse of open confrontation with the ruling system while at the same time growing electorally and socially.

Through a mass campaign based on mobilizations throughout the country, the presidential candidate of the Frente Amplio (FA)-Encuentro Progresista, Tabaré Vázquez, was able to polarize society by highlighting the nature of the projects proposed to the country: that of the Colorado and Blanco parties - the pillars of the traditional two party system - and that of the FA itself. The left received the votes of the most impoverished and marginalized social sectors, a fact which substantially differentiates this experience from other electoral processes in Latin America.

The electoral results constitute a shake-up of the Uruguayan political system in which instability and ungovernability may now become the dominant characteristics. Thus, an authoritarian turn by the Sanguinetti government should not be excluded, particularly if his coalition with the National Party fails and the economic crisis deepens. The Frente Amplio, and the forces of the revolutionary left grouped in the Popular Participation Movement (MPP), now face the challenge of giving concrete form to the demands of the popular sectors which supported them, which implies a rejection of all compromises based on the theory of "governability" promoted by the more conciliatory sectors of the Frente Amplio.

**3.7.** As in the case of Mexico, Brazil and Uruguay, recently held elections in several other countries determined the political conjuncture, since there were real possibilities that democratic and/or revolutionary left currents could form new governments (El Salvador, Venezuela), thus creating more favorable conditions in the struggle for a shift in the relationship of forces in the continent. The results are in and a balance sheet is in order.

The bourgeoisie and its governments, without exception, formed a solid front to prevent a victory of the left. The state apparatus was placed at the service of the candidates of capital, by modifying existing laws (Mexico, Brazil), through terrorism (El Salvador, Mexico), or through electoral fraud (Venezuela, Mexico), to which one must add the media,

the support from international capital (El Salvador, Mexico, Brazil), and the mistakes of the left itself.

The left underestimated this situation and in many cases used a discourse which - with the pretext of not scaring potential voter support - consciously sought to avoid polarizing society. Although the international context imposes certain adjustments in discourse, even on the program (the revolution is not around the corner), it must be pointed out that the obsession with the need to present a credible option has led to the notion that this requires limiting the level of social confrontation, while worrying more about the veto of those in power than the vote of the dispossessed, which in the end makes the latter feel excluded. It is true that the deepening economic and political dependence of our countries on imperialism allows the latter to exercise its political and economic blackmail from a position of increased strength, but it is precisely this fact which accentuates the importance of social mobilizations and, above all, of popular self-organization as key elements of any project seeking to achieve government power.

In this sense, it will be necessary to draw the lessons which flow from this and thus reformulate past strategies: it is impossible for the left to seek a democratic break while taking as its practical axis the search for "governability" over and above popular mobilization, or reducing the institutional struggle to the electoral question particularly when, as we know, the bourgeoisie has the means to alter the electoral game at any moment. The institutional spaces conquered by the left (it has obtained its best results in its history), if they are to be useful, must become true sources of popular counter-power. It is necessary to combat and reject the gradualist and conciliationist positions which, in the aftermath of electoral defeat, argue that victory was never possible and which now promote pacts with the governments in power, through "coalition governments," "national accords" or "co-governments."

**3.8.** The exclusion from citizenship rights which social marginalization implies once again poses the importance of democratic demands. Within an ever more polarized and exclusionary reality, these demands are imperative as the axis of any alternative project. Thus, in the face of the insulting celebration of 500 years of the Conquista, the indigenous peoples of the continent re-emerged to demand equal rights, recognition of their traditions, cultures, languages and, above all, the right to be recognized as different from the mestizos, thus questioning the concept of "nation" imposed by the West. These democratic demands are playing a key role in the struggles going on in Ecuador, Mexico, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Guatemala.

These democratic aspirations were also present in the mobilizations and struggles which led to the fall of Collor and C.A. Pérez, as well as in Panama, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and the Dominican Republic, in the ongoing democratic re-birth in Chile around the trial of the assassins of Orlando Letelier, as well as in Argentina, as a result of new revelations regarding the genocide carried out by the dictatorship. If these democratic aspirations are to generate a dynamic tending toward a radical-democratic break, they must stimulate not only actions within the existing legal framework, but also a clear orientation of struggle against military tutelage or impunity as well as against all forms of authoritarianism. The continuity between those aspirations and such a break is not guaranteed, as political vacillations or lack of credible alternatives would permit the bourgeoisie and its governments to retake the initiative.

Like the rest of the world, Latin America is going through a transition marked by economic, political and social convulsions. Far from implying a uniform dynamic, this generates and reproduces diverse forms of struggle, new experiences, varied expressions of radicalism. It is in this framework, and without having recovered from the shock constituted by the collapse and disappearance of the "socialist bloc", that left-wing currents have had to re-examine many of the precepts which governed their action in the past. This has given rise to many ongoing discussions. Given that these conditions have produced a certain socio-political differentiation but which is as yet incomplete, the form and content of these discussions takes on greater relevance.

#### 4. Debates and Situation of the Left

**4.1.** The creation of the São Paulo Forum in 1990 is the most important international attempt to create a shared

point of reference and a common framework for discussion in the left. It is plural and democratic and it promotes necessary debates. Nevertheless, the five meetings which have taken place so far have demonstrated that its main weakness lies in the lack of connection between what is discussed and what is done, and in the distance - which was evident in the Fifth Forum which met in Uruguay - that separates the institutional left from the social left. It is the latter which, structured around the popular movements, carries most of the weight of the resistance against the neo-liberal project. The internationalism which many members of the Forum claim to defend has not gone beyond the limits determined by narrow interests. The refusal of the majority of the members and participants of the Forum to denounce the electoral fraud in Mexico (Managua, 1993), "justified" by the links of those forces with the Mexican government; the lack of any continental initiatives in solidarity with the Zapatista rising; the lack of criticism of the role of the Free Bolivia Movement (MBL), a member of the Forum, in the repression of the Bolivian people; the silence regarding the war into which the people of Peru and Ecuador have been dragged, cannot be passed over. Without losing sight of the fact that the Forum is not a homogenous movement or that the revolutionary currents within it constitute a minority, a debate must be urgently promoted regarding its composition and the ways in which it could bring some coherence and substance to its declarations. Only thus could this valuable instrument be saved from becoming another failed project of the Latin American left. Regardless of political creeds, the crisis in Eastern Europe has dealt a blow to the Latin American and international left as a whole and its effects will persist for a long time. The few remaining CPs (with the exception of the Cuban CP) have been swept away by the crisis. Organizations which identified themselves as Marxist and/or revolutionary have turned to liberal positions. This is the case of the majority of the Salvadorian ERP (Renewed Expression of the People, formerly the Revolutionary Army of the People), Radical Democracy in the PT of Brazil, part of the leadership of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). In other cases, as in the case of our international current, they have been weakened, given the difficulties encountered in adjusting to the new political situation. To these factors we must add the effects generated by defeats in Nicaragua, El Salvador and the crisis of the Cuban Revolution.

**4.2.** In Nicaragua we have seen a qualitative reversal of the conquests of the revolution. The sector known as the "Area of Workers' Property" is highly bureaucratized; the achievements of the agrarian reform, in education, etc. have been totally or partially dismantled in accordance with the interests of the speculative and rentier sectors of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie; the perspective of the army and police as defenders of the people has been eroded, while the country as a whole, wearied by the destruction generated by the war and its foreign debt, remains subordinated to imperialist pressures and to the blackmail of the U.S., the IMF and the World Bank.

After a painful internal struggle the FSLN has split. Some of its leaders have been converted to liberalism, others make apologies for the Mexican regime, in the name of "stability" some have ordered the repression of popular mobilizations while others have used undemocratic methods to impose their decisions, and this leaves out those involved in corrupt acts (the "piñata"). A portion of its social base has left out of dissatisfaction with the policies of its leaders or because caudillista methods obstruct any democratic functioning, as was demonstrated by the 2nd Congress of the FSLN.

When we held our 1991 World Congress we stated that the electoral results of 1990 constituted a significant political defeat but we hoped that the Frente would be able to resist and reorganize the people to regain power. Today, in spite of the break up of the National Opposition Union (UNO), this hypothesis is in doubt. The limiting of social mobilizations, the resistance to democratizing the FSLN, and its split into two opposing currents, which have weakened it politically and socially, make it all the more difficult to defend what is left of the conquests of the revolution. Even if one of the currents claiming the heritage of Sandinismo again takes over the government in 1996, this will not imply retaking the reins of power; in other words, it will not imply resuming the leadership of a process interrupted in 1990.

**4.3.** In El Salvador, where the International accompanied the revolutionary process from the start, it is necessary to formulate certain considerations in the aftermath of the Peace Accords, the results of the elections and the break up of the Farabundo Martí- National Liberation Front (FMLN). During 10 years of civil war, the FMLN exhibited a

political-military capacity which inspired a whole generation of militants. Neither imperialist support or death squads, nor the assassination of 80,000 civilians, were able to stop the momentum and capacity of this organization which became the undisputed vanguard of the mass movement.

The defeat of the 1989 offensive, the shift in the international situation, the war-weariness of the people, including its most politicized sectors, led the FMLN to seek a negotiated end to the armed conflict, through which it secured a peace accord without defeat, thus opening a conflictive transition in the aftermath of a bloody war.

The negotiations completed in 1992 counterposed two tendencies which had been crystallizing since the 1989 offensive. On one side were those that concluded that the revolution was not a break but a process (the majority of the ERP and the National Resistance - RN); on the other, those that argued that the accords were only one phase (the political revolution) after which the social revolution should be carried out (Popular Liberation Forces - FPL, Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers - PRTC), with both sides coinciding in the notion of unleashing a democratic revolutionary process (for a new economic, social and democratic order).

The Chapultepec Accords could not have been anything more than the beginning of a solution to the armed conflict, but the turn towards liberal and renegade positions by the main leaders of the ERP and the RN completely upset the delicate balance within the FMLN. After the failure in the 1994 elections, a crisis broke out over the support given by part of the ERP and RN to the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) government. Having lost the common objective which united it, the FMLN now moves around two differentiated projects: the project of the CP-FPL-PRTC and the tendency that broke from the ERP, on the one hand, and the project of the RN and of the Villalobos current, which have left the Front to create the Partido Demócrata, on the other. It must be underlined that a large majority of cadre and militants exists which correctly insists in giving priority to popular mobilizations to make sure that the Chapultepec Accords will be respected. It is this sector which the International must address, joining the fight to ensure that the Accords are respected while also struggling against those currents which now seek to deform the history of that proletarian revolution, presenting it as the adventure of a minority which for 10 years sought to "take power by assault".

**4.4.** The significance of the Central American revolutions must be assessed on the basis of the extremely weak and dependent character of its economies and of the existing international political situation. Both revolutions confronted the U.S. political-military machine; the material and human consequences of the war (150,000 dead in the two countries in 10 years) must not be forgotten. The militarization of social structures as a whole led to a proportional and parallel militarization of the revolutionary organizations, thus favoring verticalism at the expense of democratic functioning, a situation which had (and has) consequences for the relations among revolutionary organizations themselves as well as their relations with other social organizations and sectors.

Furthermore, although there was a movement of international solidarity, it must be admitted that it did not match the needs of the two revolutionary processes, particularly as imperialism and international social democracy, through different means, opted for sabotaging them. Thus, the international left, as well as the apathy in which workers of the imperialist countries have been submerged for the last 10 years and the generalized retreat of internationalism in all countries, are also responsible for the defeat of the Central American revolution. Given the extent of the crisis of the Central American revolutionary project, our current is forced to rediscuss its political orientation in this zone, to draw from the experiences of both processes as well as participate in the debate which at present involves thousands of militants committed to international solidarity, a debate in which questions such as whom to support and with what objectives must be answered.

**4.5.** Between 1991 and today our presence as a current became weaker in Latin America. As a result of the crisis mentioned above and of our own failings, we ceased to exist in several countries. The core of militants that for ten years ensured the continuity of our political work is not functioning in a structured fashion. A new collective leadership

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must be built. This crisis has not been compensated by the affiliation of those groups and organizations which in the same period have joined the International. The debate regarding our prospects in Latin America must advance in the context of the discussion regarding the future of the International as such. Our stronger social implantation in those countries where we retain organizations must be the basis for facing this challenge. New dilemmas, forms of struggle, and social actors have made their appearance, and the possibilities processes leading to radical breaks continue to exist. We are but one part of the revolutionary left that exists in the region. We must orient our efforts toward transforming those possibilities into realities.