



Nahuel Moreno
Mercedes Petit
Elementary Political
Concepts

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Foreword

This text was the sixth and last of the “political education notebooks” published by the MAS between 1984 and 1986. Several of them have been republished subsequently, and — except that by Ernesto González — they are available on www.nahuelmoreno.org.

The political education notebooks were:

No. 1: *Organisational Issues* (Nahuel Moreno, 1984).

No. 2: *1982: The Revolution Begins* (Nahuel Moreno, 1983).

No. 3: *Revolutions of the XX Century* (Nahuel Moreno, 1984).

No. 4: *The Rise and Fall of Peronism* (Ernesto Gonzalez, 1986).

No. 5: *Mandelist Party or Leninist Party?* (Nahuel Moreno, 1973, Chapter VI of *The Party and the Revolution*).

No. 6: *Elementary Political Concepts* (Nahuel Moreno and Mercedes Petit, 1986).

This sixth notebook intended to bring in a simple and easy manner to the whole of the militancy, particularly to the new litters, the central tools of political elaboration that Moreno had been developing and defending in his polemics within and without Trotskyism (in particular with Comrade Ernest Mandel).

In the first three chapters (strategy and tactics, program and slogans, propaganda and agitation) it is resumed to a large extent what has already been presented in the “classic” *An Scandalous document* (1973), known in the ranks of the PST as “the Morenazo” (it can be found in www.nahuelmoreno.org under the title *The Party and the Revolution*), and also *The Transitional Program Today* (1980, both by Moreno). And linking these issues are linked with the great facts of the 1980s. This is why issues such as the anti-bureaucratic political revolution and wars between the then bureaucratic workers states were given a more extensive development.

In particular the final chapter, on agreements, pacts, unities of action and fronts was the longest. Presented in it is not only the revolutionary Marxist tradition about these tactics, but particularly the relentless pursuit of new progressive phenomena of reality, with currents or centrist organizations that move towards left and revolutionary positions, to result in bold unitary tactics and leaps in party building through the “revolutionary front”.

Since then, this paper has become as an inevitable component in the tasks of political and Marxist education of party members and cadres.

An appendix is included where the various definitions and concepts are used around the intervention of the MAS in some key aspects of the class struggle between 1983 and 1985, as the fight against the genocidal military and the non-payment of foreign debt, among others.

Mercedes Petit

August 2016

**Nahuel Moreno,
Mercedes Petit**

**Elementary Political
Concepts**

Strategy and Tactics

These two concepts were taken up by Marxism from military science. As we explained in the paper *A Scandalous Document*¹ (1973), the strategy has to do with the ultimate goal, overall, long-term, and tactics are the different ways to achieve that goal. Both are relative terms. That is, we always have to point out that such issue is strategic with respect to what, and equally that such question is tactical with respect to what. This relative nature of both concepts leads to what is strategic at some stage or partial task, to be in turn tactical in respect to a superior or more general purpose.

In the same paper quoted above, we gave as an example of this relative character that, in a phase of retreat of the working-class struggles, we can say that we hold the strategy of developing defensive union struggles and that, in relation to this strategy, tactics can be, for example, the long strike, and not be other tactics such as factory occupation. But the long strike is a strategy regarding the tactics, the means we employ to guarantee it, for example, picketing. And pickets become a strategy in relation to the tactics, the means we use to build them (whether we make them public, elected at a meeting of all workers, or clandestine, elected in secret by the strike committee leading the strike). And the strategy itself by which we began, the development of defensive union struggles, becomes a tactic in relation to our strategic goal of obtaining important triumphs to help change back from a stage of retreat to a stage of rising of the worker's movement.

Trotskyism has just two long-term strategies: to mobilise the masses and to build the party to take power

Elucidated the precise definition of the two terms, let us move to a fundamental political and programmatic problem. In the current historical epoch in which we live — of decadent imperialist domination and socialist revolution — we Trotskyists, do we have some fundamental strategic objective, decisive, long-term? The answer is that, in the long term, and at national and global levels, i.e. in each country and around the world, we have two strategies, or two permanent strategic goals: building the party, to equip the working class and the masses of a revolutionary leadership, and the mobilisation of the same working class and the masses to take power and make the successful socialist revolution.

This is for us the way to defeat the bourgeoisie, imperialism and its lackeys, the treacherous and bureaucratic leaderships, i.e. Stalinism in all its variations, from Maoism to Castroism, the Sandinistas, the social democracy and the trade union bureaucracies all over the world, and to establish socialism in our country and the world. While we live in the present historical epoch of unrelenting struggle against imperialism and its lackeys, in relation to these two fundamental strategic goals everything else is tactical, although we may often speak of “strategies”, for all kinds of tasks and situations or partial stages.

¹ *A Scandalous Document* is a work by Nahuel Moreno written as a response of the PST (Argentina) to the revisionist positions of Trotskyism raised by Ernest Mandel and the majority of the United Secretariat in its preparatory documents for the Tenth World Congress, held in February 1974. It has been published in English with the title *The Party and the Revolution: Theory, program and policy – A polemic with Mandel*, and can be found in www.nahuelmoreno.org.

To develop these two strategies we can and must find and use the suitable tactics at every moment: taking part in the elections, forming slates of anti-bureaucratic opposition, raising minimum economic slogans of wage increases, and so on and so forth. Any tactic can be valid if it is the tactic that suits, in the specific situation of the class struggle, to the best achievement of our strategy. That is why tactics are used and discarded as often as called for by the changes in the class struggle.

As we explained in the quoted paper, this definition of long-term strategic goals and the changing and broad character of the tactics is characteristic of the Bolsheviks, of Leninism and Trotskyism. Other currents of the worker's movement do the opposite. They confuse strategy with some privileged tactics and they raise them to a permanent strategy. For example, the social democracy since the beginning of the century transformed the correct tactics of electoral and Parliament intervention through workers' deputies into an end in itself, strategic, which subordinated everything else, including the strike and the independent mobilisation of the masses. The Stalinist Communist parties transformed the correct tactic of seeking agreements or unity of short-term action with bourgeois sectors against imperialism or the fascists (e.g. in the Faculty of Law of Buenos Aires, of forming an armed group with the members of the Radical Party to defend ourselves from the fascists), into a permanent frontist strategy with the bourgeoisie in the field of popular fronts, i.e. of class conciliation. Guerrillistas elevate the strategy of armed struggle to sacred and permanent, and so on. Anarchists commit the opposite mistake. They only accept raising principles and strategies without tactics. The only answer of classical anarchism to the daily struggles of the worker's movement since the last century — either for salaries, political, democratic, or whatever — was: Down with the bourgeois state!

The history of Bolshevism, by contrast, is a constant struggle to impose on all terrains (both on party building and the mobilisation of the masses) the means and tactics appropriate to each moment of the class struggle against the different currents that claimed just one mean or tactics, transformed in strategy. Bolshevism fought against terrorists, but it knew how to use terror; it fought against the trade unionists, but it was a champion of the union struggle; it fought the parliamentarists but it used skilfully and revolutionarily parliament; It fought the guerrillistas, but knew how to wage guerrilla warfare; it fought the spontaneists, but it knew how to take charge of spontaneous demonstrations. And, unlike the anarchists, who spent their life threatening to bring down the bourgeois state, without success, Bolshevism knew how to do it when it was necessary and possible. Because all its tactics, that it used boldly and without any prejudice, were always at the service of its great strategic objective: its development as a workers' party, to equip the Russian masses with a revolutionary direction and, at the same time, the mobilisation of those same masses, which allowed them to take power and make the successful socialist revolution in October 1917.

Some characteristics of our strategic objectives

Our two great permanent tasks, building the party and the mobilisation, each have their own characteristics, we could say their own, specific laws of development, although they are, of course, inextricably linked and both occur in the same, all-determining frame which is the class struggle and its dynamics. Here, for the purposes of our study, we just want to dwell on one aspect, in which both tasks are opposite. It is very dangerous to forget it because it can destroy the party and does not help the mobilisation. The first, building the party, depends largely on us (it is subjective), while the mobilisation does not; it is independent of the wishes and the will (and even the existence) of the revolutionists. This is why we say it is objective. When it happens, it happens. There are stages of struggle and mobilisation and stages in which they do not occur. Therefore, it is so important to always look for the tactics, the political line, that respond to the objective situation.

If there are no joint revolutionary wills which are proposing, constantly and consistently, to build a revolutionary party, it will not exist. In this sense, it depends on us. While the mobilisation is the opposite, it does not depend on the will or what revolutionists do; even the revolutionary mobilisation, which causes the revolutionary crisis and the power vacuum. Forgetting this crucial aspect of the mass mobilisation not only leads the revolutionists like us to err on tactics (a tactic typical of the stage of mobilisation raised in a stage of retreat not only does not cause the mobilisation

but destroys the party), but it is at the base of all voluntarist deviations of the different variations of foquist and terrorist guerrilla warfare.

Our insistence on the objective character, independent of our will, of the mobilisation, is even more important due to the fact that today all Trotskyist groups, including us, are not parties with mass influence. For a revolutionary party with mass influence the question would change a lot, but not completely. Regardless of the size of the party, the systematic search for mobilisation in our political tactics can only take place in stages in which these conditions for mobilisation exist. If this were the case, if we are already a party with some influence or at least a solid party, even though it is a party of the vanguard, and not a small group, then it will be a fundamental task, together with the specific tasks arising for party building, the systematic search of action, of mobilisation, in whatever field, and from there the most diverse tactics can take place. §

Propaganda, agitation, and action

We just want to recall the classic definitions. Propaganda is the activity of giving many ideas to a few. Agitation is the activity of giving a few ideas to many. In the document *Mandelist Party or Leninist Party?*,¹ we said: “Propaganda ranges from a course on Marxist economics or dialectical logic to an individual talk with a worker activist to whom we explain the national and international situation, our program and the differences between ours and other workers organisations. Agitation, however, consists of raising a few slogans (sometimes just one) to give an outlet for the struggle waged at any time by the workers or mass movement (higher wages, democratic freedoms, constituent assembly, all power to the soviets, etc.).” (Op cit., p. 158.)

The MAS, which for the time being is still a small party in relation to the whole Argentine working class, in relation to the exploited population of the country, carries out with its newspaper a systematic work, week to week, of propaganda on the activists and workers of the unions and the neighbourhoods who read us. During the election campaign, we had the opportunity to carry out agitation to a much wider audience, for example around the slogan of no repayment of the foreign debt. In general, propaganda is directed at the vanguard and agitation to the entire working population, the working class, and the exploited masses. Given our current forces, the party can hardly make “agitation” to the entire population in the strict sense of the term, except for an exceptional situation as the election campaign. However, at the level of a union or a factory, we can indeed make agitation, when for a conflict or a campaign of union election we turn to it in full, we get thousands and thousands of leaflets, do rallies at the gates of establishments, and so on. Placing ourselves in the perspective of transforming ourselves into a party with mass influence, we can say that what characterises the activity of a revolutionary party is the agitation on the whole of the exploited population. Currently, with few exceptions, we can only do it at the level of union or establishment.

Comrade James Cannon, the former American leader of the Third International and one of the first to accompany Trotsky in his struggle against bureaucratisation of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and the Third International in the 1920s and 1930s, made an important contribution to these classical definitions of agitation and propaganda. Cannon added a second type of agitation, for action, the launching slogans to be carried out. Not only for them to be heard by thousands of people, but after listening to the agitation for those thousands of people to take action, because the subjective conditions are ripe. The slogan will be merely agitational or for action depending on the possibilities of it being carried out, according to the consciousness of the working class. The slogans we raise in our agitation reflect pressing, urgent needs, and if joining, or rather, when joined with a broad level of consciousness — i.e., with the fact that the workers realise that they have to make them or they have to go decisively to the struggle to conquer them — they become for action. For example, the slogan which Trotsky always suggested to the comrades of the US SWP to form a labour party was merely agitational. Suddenly, the comrades transformed it into another similar but wrong slogan: Let’s form a labour party now! We say wrong because nobody wanted to do it at that time, neither the workers nor their union leaders. The slogan the MAS systematically raise,

¹ This is chapter VI of the previously document quoted *The Party and the Revolution*, and which at the time of writing of this pamphlet had been published separately.

that we need a workers' party, what does it mean? It means we are calling the union leaders, class activists, and all workers not to join politically with the bosses and to have a class party, considering it a much needed urgent task, to be done as soon as possible. But we know that, unfortunately, we cannot do it now, we cannot call a meeting or founding congress of the worker's party because there are no workers currents willing to do so; unfortunately that level of consciousness does not exist and therefore it is not a slogan for action. However, in Brazil, in 1979, the call of Socialist Convergence, our Brazilian sister party, had a favourable echo and was taken to the action by an important sector of the workers' vanguard, especially the metalworkers of Greater Sao Paulo headed by the leader linked to the Catholic Church, "Lula", and the PT was formed.

A positive example, which was implemented immediately, can be the call to "do a unitary march against NATO" in Spain this year, when pacifist anti-NATO demonstrations began to develop, before the plebiscite held by Felipe González on whether or not to enter NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the military leadership of the main European imperialist countries and the United States). Although our party, the Spanish PST, is very small, the unitary march was held, there was a mass action because the call matched the dynamics of the situation in the country at that time.

This important precision by Cannon on agitation for action allows us to make a connection with the above in regard to our strategic tasks. We can say that there is "agitation for action" to the masses, and "agitation for action" to the party itself, inside our movement. For example, in 1984-85, the MAS discussed and resolved a slogan for party action "let's form a thousand rank and file teams". Although they are undoubtedly linked, there is a clear distinction between actions and mobilisations that the masses make and those we propose to our parties.

Program and slogans

Schematically we could say that the slogan is a single idea or task and the program is a whole system, a set of slogans that respond to the tasks for a whole stage, for a period.

To give an example of program, we can say the documents of the first four congresses of the Third International (1919-1922), the *Transitional Program* (1938) and other important Trotskyists documents, up to the *Manifesto of the IWL*¹ (1985) are for us the programmatic basis, the enunciation of the historic tasks for the working class and the revolutionary leadership in the era of decadent imperialist domination we are living.

In 1985 the MAS adopted its program, where we say what needs to be done in today's Argentina to exit the decadence, hunger, exploitation, and submission to imperialism.

Both in those programs we mentioned as well as in ours there are numerous ideas and tasks, numerous slogans, but of varying importance. We can summarise the structure of a program saying that at every stage it has to answer to three fundamental problems, the problems of government, regime, and system. Around the answer we give at each stage to these three problems or fundamental axes, all other problems and tasks will be combined. In the pamphlet *1982: The Revolution Begins*,² regarding changes in the program based on the change in the stage, we say:

“This change in the objective situation [for the victory of the democratic revolution] requires a change in the party program and slogans. In the counter-revolutionary stage, under the Process dictatorship, our central slogan was negative: Down with the dictatorship! Just like it was in Russia, Cuba or Nicaragua: Down with the Tsar, Batista or Somoza! Because first and foremost, to make way for the socialist revolution we had to destroy the obstacle of the bourgeois counter-revolutionary regime. But as of the triumph of the democratic revolution, of the fall of that regime, anti-capitalist slogans have become central. If we used to call the workers to concentrate their demonstrations in overthrowing the dictatorship, now we call them do focus in liquidating the imperialist capitalist system. We tell them that the great task is to defeat the bourgeois or petty bourgeois parties in power for the working class to assume the government with its parties and organisations. We call them to make a new revolution to change the character of the state, not just the political regime; a social or socialist revolution. We might say that we call them to do in a conscious and centralised way what they are doing in fact in an unconscious and scattered way: fighting against capitalism and the bourgeois state.

“Apparently, the partial slogans of this stage are the same as in the previous: we always call to the struggle for wages, jobs, education, housing, health, the disappeared, freedom and national liberation from imperialist oppression. But before the Malvinas War, all these slogans joined around the overthrow of the political regime, of the military dictatorship. Now, in this revolutionary stage

1 Following on Moreno's death in January 1987, the International Workers League – Fourth International (IWL-FI) went into crisis and in 1990 it began to split. Currently, Moreno's followers in that organisation, and the keepers of the web page www.nahuelmoreno.org, are grouped in the International Workers Unity – Fourth International (IWU-FI), www.uit-ci.org.

2 Available for download in www.nahuelmoreno.org.

and under the new regime, they unite around the axis of ending the semi-colonial capitalist system, i.e. with the bourgeois state, to impose socialism.

“Therefore, at this stage, our central slogans are no longer negative as before, but positive. We say, of course: Down with the semi-colonial capitalist regime! But fundamentally we propose: For a government of the working class supported by the working people! This central slogan will assume the most specific possible form, as it was in Russia: All power to the soviets! Or in Bolivia: All Power to the COB! At the very moment, do not yet exist in Argentina organs of power of the masses as were the soviets or the revolutionary unions, thus we still have to raise a more abstract and general slogan for a socialist or workers’ and socialist government. But we must be prepared to detect the emergence of these organs of power of the masses. And also, in case they do not appear or are weak, or take place simultaneously with the appearance of bourgeois or petty bourgeois parties that objectively face imperialism, we must be prepared to call these parties — which do not exist today — to take power and break with the bourgeoisie, i.e. the workers’ and peasants’ government or — in our case — workers’ and popular.” (Op. Cit., p. 15-16.)

In the program of the MAS we added a very important programmatic slogan as current expression, as a bridge or transition to the slogan of power of the workers and popular government: “economic plan of the CGT”, to be voted democratically and controlled by the workers, and which was becoming increasingly current given the growing deterioration of the economic and social situation in the country and the surrender to imperialism.

The slogans

While for each stage of the class struggle there is a program, we can say that the slogans are endless. No debt payment!, Moratorium!, Rockefeller Out! Vote Orange slate! Down with bureaucrat X! Let everybody stop on the 25! All are slogans. And we could keep adding hundreds and thousands. Slogans can be grouped or classified from different viewpoints. For the type of tasks that emerged in different historical periods, our program covers several types of slogans. Since the 18th century, democratic slogans, snatched by and for all the people in the time of the rise of capitalism (freedom of work, equality before the law, government elected by the vote, land reform, national unity or independence, etc.). From the second half of the 19th century, minimum, economic or partial slogans, snatched by and for the working class at the time of the reforms of capitalism and the emergence of imperialism (eight-hour day and other labour laws, such as the protection of work for women and children, labour courts, freedom of joining in the unions, legality of the workers parties, etc.).

Since we entered the current era of international socialist revolution and decadence and counter-revolution of imperialism and the bourgeoisie, which began with the imperialist war of 1914-1918, with the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia in October 1917, and then expressed in the counter-revolutionary phenomena of fascism in the capitalist countries and of Stalinism in the first workers’ state, new tasks and slogans emerge: transitional slogans, of the political revolution or anti-bureaucratic struggle in the USSR, and re-acquiring a colossal importance are the traditional democratic slogans in the face of fascism, in the face of the bourgeois counter-revolution.

The *Transitional Program*³ (Trotsky, 1938) defines this epoch:

“[...] in an epoch of decaying capitalism: when, in general, there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and the raising of the masses’ living standards; when every serious demand of the proletariat and even every serious demand of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state.”

We could define the transitional slogans themselves as those “socialist solutions”, those advances of workers’ power that we raise in the present given the worsening living conditions of the masses under the decadence of the capitalist system. *The Transitional Program* says:

“It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide

³ All quotes from L. Trotsky’s *The Transitional Program for the socialist Revolution* come from the First Edition, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973 [TN].

layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.”

The political revolution

In addition, the *Transitional Program* points out another characteristic feature of this era, the bureaucratisation of the workers organisations, including trade unions, and especially, since the 1920s, the bureaucratisation of the first workers’ state, the Soviet Union, which has as tragic consequence “the historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat” and poses as urgent and decisive the tasks and slogans of the political revolution, the anti-bureaucratic struggle and the need to build a new international revolutionary leadership.

The term political revolution, developed by Trotsky in his book *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) which analyses in detail the social phenomenon of the bureaucratisation in the Soviet Union, alludes to the fact that a revolution is not necessary there in the sense of wresting economic power from the hands of a class to pass to another, what we classically call social revolution. The entire analysis of the bureaucratisation of the Soviet Union starts from the categorical proof that the social basis of the workers’ state, the crowning achievement of the October Revolution remains: the economic expropriation of the bourgeoisie and imperialism, i.e., that the conquest of the social revolution of 1917-1918 is kept. The triumph of the bureaucratic counter-revolution led by Stalin meant the loss of democratic control of the workers over their institutions of power, the loss of workers’ democracy which had flourished in the early years of the Revolution. To regain it, a revolution — in the sense of mobilisation and confrontation with the bureaucratic caste that is not willing to give up their privileges — is necessary, but only in the superstructure. What needs to be revolutionised are the institutions of the new counter-revolutionary regime, and this is why we say political revolution, because the structure, the economic basis of society remains in the hands of the ruling class in the country, the workers, although they have been expropriated of their democratic rights by the caste of bureaucrats. For all of this, the need for a political revolution in the USSR is accompanied by another fundamental slogan: defending it against the attacks of imperialism, as it remains a workers’ state, although bureaucratic, and those workers economic fundamentals conquered in the October social revolution are a heritage of all workers in the world.

From the tremendous revolutionary upsurge started in 1943 until now new workers’ states arose, all of them bureaucratic from the beginning. Poland, Czechoslovakia and other “popular democracies” of Eastern Europe were conquered directly by the Red Army. China, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia were the results of colossal mass revolutions, headed, controlled and led by Stalinism, albeit with a large margin of independence from Moscow. In Cuba, as well, a great mass movement defeated Batista and forced the petty-bourgeois leadership of Castro to move forward, against his will, in the face imperialist aggression. It is the first triumphant workers’ revolution of the postwar period not led by Stalinism, although it was later taken over by it.

The revolutionary workers’ state of Lenin and Trotsky, by a complex national and international process, went from deeply democratic to the opposite, it was transformed into a bureaucratic workers’ state. Instead, the new workers’ states of the postwar period were born directly bureaucratic, and they had from the beginning totalitarian regimes and never knew the Soviet workers’ democracy. Undoubtedly, the conquest of these new workers’ states, despite their bureaucratic character, expanded the tasks of defence, not only of the USSR but of all the workers’ states, in particular, Cuba — which was invaded, unsuccessfully, by the USA in 1961 — from attacks by imperialism. And also they expanded the tasks of the political revolution, since in all of these states the struggle to topple the bureaucratic leaderships and establish workers’ democracy is raised. The anti-bureaucratic struggles of the workers of East Berlin (1953), the Hungarian and Polish workers (1955-1956) and the Czechoslovak (1968) began to implement this policy program of the Trotskyist revolution. We know nearby examples. The anti-bureaucratic struggle of the Polish workers resumed in 1970-71, organised in the independent union Solidarity, which brought together millions of workers and is now in hiding fighting against the repression of Jaruzelski.

The development of the political revolution and the growing degenerative character of the counter-revolutionary bureaucracies that parasitise the workers' states multiply the problems and tasks. In 1956, to suppress and quell anti-bureaucratic mobilisations of the Hungarian workers, the USSR sent the Red Army to invade Hungary. For the first time, we met the Stalinist monstrosity of a workers' state invading another militarily. Of course, our immediate response was solidarity with the Hungarian workers and a demand for the immediate withdrawal of the Red Army. Given the development of the political revolution, in Czechoslovakia in 1968 a similar situation repeated itself.

Our orthodox Trotskyist current not only gave great importance to these facts as part of the development of the anti-bureaucratic political revolution, but we were the only ones who, in 1978, anticipated that the bureaucratic degeneration would lead to direct wars between workers states. In his work *The Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Darioush Karim⁴ said:

“[...] one of the most outstanding events of the last decades, concerning the existing proletarian dictatorships: the invasion of one proletarian dictatorship by another, those of Hungary and Czechoslovakia by the USSR. [...]

“It is our belief that, sadly, we have embarked upon a period in which it is very possible that wars between proletarian dictatorships —workers' states— will break out, and be repeated over the next decades. This is a clear perspective.

“These possible wars between workers' states, or the occupation of one by another, add a new dimension to the emergence of the next revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. Up to now, we have witnessed two invasions of workers' states by the USSR. Both were produced by the Russian bureaucratic caste's fear that these states might become revolutionary as a result of the beginning of a political revolution and the appearance of councils or soviets in embryonic form. It is permissible to think that these workers' bureaucracies will fall into a state of chronic desperation as soon as revolutionary proletarian dictatorships emerge, heralding their destruction as a privileged caste.

“On the other hand, we cannot set aside wars brought about by nationalist economic interests such as that between Cambodia and Vietnam. Without embarking upon a discussion as to whether or not these are proletarian dictatorships, we must recognise the new possibility of wars between workers' states in which neither side is sustained by a revolutionary dictatorship. The campaign undertaken by China a few years ago against 'Russian Social-imperialism' was an ideological preparation for a possible war between these two bureaucratized workers' superstates.

“The possibility of wars between two bureaucratized workers' states, or between a bureaucratized and a revolutionary workers' state, poses a serious theoretical problem which we must start to discuss if we are to find a Marxist course of action for these events. [...]

“One variation of this possibility is the inevitable armed uprising of the national minorities oppressed by these bureaucratic dictatorships, an uprising which we will support unconditionally.

“If war breaks out between one of the two gigantic workers' states [the USSR or China] and a small one, we believe that the small proletarian nation will be struggling for its self-determination and that the war will be provoked by the hegemonic nationalist ambitions of the greater nation. In this case, we must fight against the great-Russian or Chinese chauvinism and for the right of national self-determination of the small” workers' state.

“On the other hand, let us suppose that a war breaks out between two bureaucratized states of relatively comparable strength —for example, Vietnam and Cambodia, assuming that they are workers' states. Our general political position will be for fraternity between all workers' states, for a peaceful and democratic resolution of the dispute. This position must be accompanied by a permanent campaign for the democratic federation of all existing workers' republics. This is a decisive matter which, henceforth, must be the most important demand of our International. It is this campaign and not the cybernetic telephones, that lays down the most important programmatic necessity of the moment for the world proletariat and the workers' states. It will lead to the overcoming of the present backwardness in the development of the productive forces in the workers' states, and strike a most decisive blow at imperialism. It will also help to prevent the imperialist manoeuvres which try to take advantage of the differences between the workers' states, and lead to solid unity in the face of the

4 **Darioush Karim** was the pseudonym used for reasons of clandestinity by Nahuel Moreno when writing this book. The book can be downloaded from www.nahuelmoreno.org.

enemy. It will equally help to avoid the economic exploitation of the less developed workers' states by the most developed ones through the commercial exchange. The slogan of "Federation of the existing workers' states" is far more important now than when Trotsky raised the demand of "Federation of European Socialist Republics". Both are propagandistic, but also essential. It also points to political revolution because the present bureaucratic governments will never accept a demand that hits at the heart of their privileges: the existing workers' states with their present borders.

"This is, however, an essentially propagandist line, and we cannot keep to it in the concrete event of war or military conflict. We must first study carefully to see if one state has hegemonic ambitions over another, and then adopt a political defence of the workers' state under attack as well as a political attack against the state that was the aggressor. In the case of war between a bureaucratised workers' state and a revolutionary workers' state, Trotskyists support the latter unconditionally regardless of whether or not it the aggressor."

Sadly, shortly after the publication of this work its concern was tragically confirmed by the war between China and Vietnam.

Since 1980 it is raised the problem of the invasion of Afghanistan (a very poor capitalist country, which borders with the Soviet Union to the south and has a majority of Muslim population) by the mighty Red Army. The IWL (FI) denounced the alleged military-bureaucratic Stalinist "defencism", and called for the withdrawal of the occupying army, to respect the right to self-determination of the Afghan nation.

A summary of the Transitional Program that Trotsky wrote

- The decadence and growing and inexorable crisis of the world capitalist economy puts before the workers the need to fight permanently two chronic scourges: unemployment and high prices, which "demand generalised slogans and methods of struggle" (TP, p.76): sliding scale wages and sliding scale of working hours.

- Decadent imperialism uses and encourages the growing bureaucratisation and stultification of trade unions. There is a great need for the fight for the independence of the trade unions from the state and workers' democracy.

- Within each factory, within each company, in this more and more acute struggle against the bosses, to "pay attention to the initiative of the masses" and to give an organised expression to the decisive question that mobilisation and strikes pose — "who is the boss of the factory, the capitalist or the workers?" (p. 79) — factory committees are needed. "Elected by all the factory employees, the factory committee immediately creates a counterweight to the will of the administration." (p. 79.) The *Transitional Program* says:

"Trade union bureaucrats will as a general rule resist the creation of factory committees, just as they resist every bold step taken along the road of mobilising the masses. However, the wider the sweep of the movement, the easier will it be to break this resistance. Where the closed shop has already been instituted in 'peaceful' times, the committee will formally coincide with the usual organ of the trade union, but will renew its personnel and widen its functions. The prime significance of the committee, however, lies in the fact that it becomes the militant staff for such working-class layers as the trade union is usually incapable of moving to action. It is precisely from these more oppressed layers that the most self-sacrificing battalions of the revolution will come.

"From the moment that the committee makes its appearance, a factual dual power is established in the factory. By its very essence, it represents the transitional state because it includes in itself two irreconcilable régimes: the capitalist and the proletarian. The fundamental significance of factory committees is precisely contained in the fact that they open the doors if not to a direct revolutionary, then to a pre-revolutionary period — between the bourgeois and the proletarian régimes." (p. 79-80.)

- Workers' control of industry, the expropriation without compensation of the large capitalist groups and private banks, and nationalisation of foreign trade are the main measures to break the control of the financial capital and the monopolies of economic production and the distribution of social wealth. From there the country's economy can be reorganised based on an economic plan democratically voted and controlled by the workers.

- The workers in struggle will seek and find important allies among rural workers, the agricultural proletariat and the lower and poorer layers of the peasants, as well as among small traders and artisans and the dispossessed urban masses, all of them increasingly ruined by capitalist greed. This is why we incorporate the demands of these sectors as part of the program of the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat. For the countryside, it is essential the expropriation without compensation of landowners, agrarian reform, price monitoring committees (in conjunction with urban workers), cheap credit, and so on.

- Strike pickets, combat detachment, workers' militia, arming of the proletariat. The *Transitional Program* says:

“The sharpening of the proletariat’s struggle means the sharpening of the methods of counter-attack on the part of the capital. New waves of sit-down strikes can call forth and undoubtedly will call forth resolute countermeasures on the part of the bourgeoisie. Preparatory work is already being done by the confidential staffs of big trusts. Woe to the revolutionary organisations, woe to the proletariat if it is again caught unawares!

“The bourgeoisie is nowhere satisfied with official police and army. In the United States, even during ‘peaceful’ times, the bourgeoisie maintains militarized battalions of scabs and privately armed thugs in factories. To this must now be added the various groups of American Nazis. The French bourgeoisie at the first approach of danger mobilised semi-legal and illegal Fascist detachments, including such as are in the army. [...] The bourgeoisie keeps itself most accurately informed about the fact that in the present epoch the class struggle irresistibly tends to transform itself into civil war.” (p. 84-85.)

After this description of the destructive violence of the bourgeoisie, it adds that the treacherous leaderships of the workers:

[...] systematically implant in the minds of the workers the notion that the sacredness of democracy is best guaranteed when the bourgeoisie is armed to the teeth and the workers are unarmed.” (p. 85.)

Therefore, it is our duty to put an end to “such slavish politics”:

“Strike pickets are the basic nuclei of the proletarian army. This is our point of departure. [...] It is necessary to write this slogan into the program of the revolutionary wing of the trade unions. It is imperative wherever possible, beginning with the youth groups, to organise groups for self-defence, to drill and acquaint them with the use of arms.” (p. 85.)

- Given the imperialist aggression, in this era of wars and increasing aggression, the defence of the colonial and semi-colonial countries and the Soviet Union or any other workers’ state have become permanent slogans. We have noted before this defencist position on the USSR is characteristic of Trotskyism since its breakup with the bureaucratised Third International. The *Transitional Program* also raises the main slogans of the political revolution, “it is necessary to drive the bureaucracy and the new aristocracy out of the soviets.” (p. 105.)

“A fresh upsurge of the revolution in the USSR will undoubtedly begin under the banner of the struggle against social inequality and political oppression. Down with the privileges of the bureaucracy! Down with Stakhanovism! Down with the soviet aristocracy and its ranks and orders! Greater equality of wages for all forms of labour!

“The struggle for the freedom of the trade unions and the factory committees, for the right of assembly and freedom of the press, will unfold in the struggle for the regeneration and development of soviet democracy.

“The bureaucracy replaced the soviets as class organs with the fiction of universal electoral rights – in the style of Hitler-Goebbels. It is necessary to return to the soviets not only their free democratic form but also their class content. As once the bourgeoisie and kulaks were not permitted to enter the soviets, so now it is necessary to drive the bureaucracy and the new aristocracy out of the soviets. In the soviets, there is room only for representatives of the workers, rank-and-file collective farmers, peasants, and Red Army men.

“Democratisation of the soviets is impossible without legalization of soviet parties. The workers and peasants themselves by their own free vote will indicate what parties they recognise as soviet parties.

“A revision of planned economy from top to bottom in the interests of producers and consumers! Factory committees should be returned the right to control production. A democratically organised consumers’ co-operative should control the quality and price of products.

“Reorganisation of the collective farms in accordance with the will and in the interests of the workers there engaged!

“The reactionary international policy of the bureaucracy should be replaced by the policy of proletarian internationalism. The complete diplomatic correspondence of the Kremlin to be published. Down with secret diplomacy!”

“All political trials, staged by the Thermidorian bureaucracy, to be reviewed in the light of complete publicity and controversial openness and integrity.

“Only the victorious revolutionary uprising of the oppressed masses can revive the soviet régime and guarantee its further development toward socialism. There is but one party capable of leading the Soviet masses to insurrection – the party of the Fourth International!” (p. 105-106.)

- The increasingly totalitarian and exploitative character of imperialist capitalism, which is expressed in the rise of fascist barbarity and the growing economic exploitation of colonial peoples, gives strength to the democratic and anti-imperialist slogans, such as Constituent Assembly, defense of democratic rights against fascism and the struggle for national liberation from the imperialist yoke.

- To defeat the bourgeoisie, imperialism, and its agents, and the treacherous leaderships (mainly social democracy and Stalinism) the proletariat led by the revolutionary party has to take power, leading the democratic organisations of the mobilised workers and masses, which for example in Russia in 1917 were the soviets.

Hence all of the above slogans converge towards the formation of organs of workers’ and popular power – for example, the soviets – and towards the imposition of workers’ and peasants’ (or workers’ and popular) government, that is, a government independent of the bourgeoisie, which excludes the bourgeoisie and is led by the workers.

- And, to conclude and given the betrayal of the traditional leaderships of the workers’ movement, it raises the need for building the revolutionary party, i.e. to build a new leadership: the Fourth International.

“The Fourth International, already today, is deservedly hated by the Stalinists, Social Democrats, bourgeois liberals, and Fascists. There is not and there cannot be a place for it in any of the People’s Fronts. It uncompromisingly gives battle to all political groupings tied to the apron-strings of the bourgeoisie. Its task – the abolition of capitalism’s domination. Its aim – socialism. Its method – the proletarian revolution. Without inner democracy – no revolutionary education. Without discipline – no revolutionary action. The inner structure of the Fourth International is based on the principles of democratic centralism: full freedom in discussion, complete unity in action.

“The present crisis in human culture is the crisis in the proletarian leadership. The advanced workers, united in the Fourth International, show their class the way out of the crisis. They offer a program based on international experience in the struggle of the proletariat and of all the oppressed of the world for liberation. They offer a spotless banner.” (p. 111.)

Our program: “a system of transitional demands”

Returning to the initial classification scheme of the slogans (democratic, minimal or partial and transitory and of the political revolution), let us say that:

“The Fourth International does not discard the program of the old ‘minimal’ demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective.

“Insofar as the old, partial, ‘minimal’ demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism – and this occurs at each step – the Fourth International advances a system of transitional demands, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever

more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois régime.” (*Transitional Program*, p. 75-76.)

Now we can say that, following the method, the guidelines and the slogans outlined in the *Transitional Program* that we summarised above, the Program of the MAS, which we all know, is the “system of transitional demands” that we have developed to help the Argentine working class to “ever more openly and decisively [...] direct [themselves] against the very bases of the bourgeois régime.” As explained in *1982: The Revolution Begins*:

“Within this program to make the socialist revolution clearly stand out three groups of transitional slogans of fundamental importance: those that go against imperialism, those that go against the new political regime of the bourgeoisie, and those that respond to the great unresolved democratic problem: the genocide.” (Op. Cit., p. 16.)

Within this framework, in the Program of the MAS we developed all the core issues that have to do with the imperialist exploitation of our country and the world, with the local exploiting role and as accomplice of imperialism of the national bourgeoisie and its apex, the new landowning, industrial and financial oligarchy, that are plunging the workers across the country in misery and ruin. We propose the possible solutions, which will only be possible and durable with a complete change in the structure of the country, imposed by the revolutionary mobilisation of the workers and all the exploited people, headed by a new leadership.

Daily we are formulating and prioritizing differently all kinds of slogans that allow us to express these objectives in the everyday struggles and tasks. For example, the push for new anti-bureaucratic slates, the renewal of the internal commissions and delegates committees, nurturing them with new anti-bureaucratic and anti-bosses activists, or the very important slogan: a direct vote of the rank and file to choose the leadership of the CGT! Also, we are looking for slogans that allow us to respond to the imperative need for the complete restructure and democratisation of the armed and police forces, the dissolution of the “services” and other slogans of defence of the workers and the people against the repression and the danger of military coups.

In these aspects, we can say that we are elaborating and developing a “military program” as part of our system of transitional demands, with the ultimate goal of the destruction of the bourgeois state, i.e., of its reactionary armed forces.

The Program of the MAS raises, given the decadence and utter bankruptcy of the country, the need for a Constituent Assembly, democratic and sovereign, where everything is discussed — in particular, for us, our misery and submission to imperialism — and it is where we as Socialists will take our proposals for a socialist Argentina. We could go on and on. We do something similar in the economic field and in the struggles. For example an immediate emergency increase of 100 australs! The immediate validity of collective agreements! Immediate Unity Congress of all who support the 26 points and the moratorium! Solidarity with the conflict of Light and Power Union!

And, to finish, let’s say that, at this stage “when every serious demand” “inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state”, above the classification scheme, any slogan can acquire a “transitional” character in the sense of being the bridge to the socialist revolution, if it becomes the banner of the revolutionary mobilisation. The working class took power in Russia, leading the masses of millions of peasants, with three super-minimal or democratic slogans: “peace, bread and land” because the only way to achieve them — which was essential to continue living — was sweeping the bourgeoisie from power, for the workers to take power, and sweeping clean the bourgeois state and capitalists.

Returning to our country, and wondering on the future steps and slogans that will be giving the development of the revolution in course, let’s consider, for example, that an elementarily democratic slogan as “trial and punishment of the culprits” will need quite possibly a revolutionary mobilisation to have it imposed, a revolutionary movement that sweeps aside both the abettors — the current Radical government of Alfonsín, and the Armed Forces — as well as the whole regime and capitalism in Argentina.

The art of finding the slogans

For the revolutionary party, both the correct elaboration of the program and the permanent search for its expression in the slogans that, as Trotsky said, “carry the masses forward” are decisive. For this reason, we want to dwell on the subject. In the document *The Party and the Revolution*, we say:

“A Bolshevik party begins with an analysis of the stage of the class struggle, from this analysis emerge one, two or three essential tasks for the mass movement, which we define in slogans. This is the concrete aspect of our policy; this is why it is fundamental. The theory and the propaganda serve to clarify this aspect. All our activity, including theory and propaganda, is subject to this final objective of defining what are the general tasks facing the masses in a determined stage, but posed in the form of slogans.

“Let’s see an example: a new government assumes power. The bulk of the party’s theoretical effort will concentrate on defining it precisely, in carefully analysing the relationship of forces between the classes, what sectors make up the new government and those in opposition, and the relations of both with imperialism, the role played in it by the armed forces, and so on. If from there follows, for example, that it is a counter-revolutionary Bonapartist government, we will define a few agitational slogans which respond to the needs this government poses to the mass movement (defence of the economic gains; democratic freedoms; defence of workers’ organisations). However, we will find that this characterisation and these tasks are different from those proposed by reformist and bureaucratic leaderships and the far left and also they collide with the spontaneist tendencies of the vanguard. This will force us to also focus our propaganda around the constant explanation of the characteristics of this regime, the polemics with our enemies within the worker’s movement about said characterisation and why the tasks we propose the mass movement are correct. In short, our theory will focus on discovering what slogans we must agitate, our propaganda will focus on explaining to the vanguard why we should agitate these slogans and not others. This does not mean they are our only theoretical and propaganda activities, but they are the main ones.

“Schematically, we can say that the whole science and art of Trotskyism comes together in the capacity to formulate the appropriate slogans at each moment of the class struggle. It is the same thing that Lenin said: ‘For that reason, the principal content of the activity of our Party organisation, the focus of this activity, should be work that is both possible and essential in the period of a most powerful outbreak as well as in the period of complete calm, namely, work of political agitation, connected throughout Russia, illuminating all aspects of life, and conducted among the broadest possible strata of the masses’. (Lenin, V. I: “What Is To Be Done?”, in *Collected Works*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961, Moscow, Vol. 5, pp. 347-530.)

“Lenin based this political line on a blind trust in the capacity of organisation and mobilisation of the backward worker or average worker, and not in the special capacity of the vanguard or ‘advanced’ workers. [...] For Lenin, if we impact the masses with one of these campaigns, the workers are capable of anything. The role of the party is to start those campaigns, to accompany and lead the mass movement. Thus he criticised the intellectuals ‘who lack the ability or opportunity to connect the revolutionary struggle and the working-class movement into an integral whole’. ‘We must blame ourselves, our lagging behind the mass movement, for still being unable to organise sufficiently wide, striking, and rapid exposures of all the shameful outrages. [...] the most backward worker will understand, *or will feel*, [...]. Feeling that, he himself will be filled with an irresistible desire to react, and he will know how to shoot the censors one day, on another day to demonstrate outside the house of a governor who has brutally suppressed a peasant uprising, on still another day to teach a lesson to the gendarmes in surplices who are doing the work of the Holy Inquisition, etc.’ (Ibid.)”

Agreements, pacts, unities of action and fronts

The countless variations of the agreement, unity, and frontist tactics are very important for both the tasks of party building and for the mobilisation of the masses. The specific sphere of the first task in all the situations of class struggle will result in various agreements and, as we will insist later, we consider that the tactic of revolutionary united front with the workers currents and political or union, left-centrist, or progressive organisations who face or who are placed on the path of confrontation with the treacherous or reformist or bureaucratic leaderships is an issue of life or death for the development of the revolutionary leadership, that is, for party building.

At the stage of a rise in the struggles — not to mention, of course, in its highest expression, the revolutionary situation, and crisis — it is posed with all its importance the issue of unity for the struggle, unity for the mobilisation. In those moments, unitary tactics are directly decisive to advance and deepen the mobilisation and in getting the mobilisation to go not only against the bourgeoisie but also against their lackeys in the mass movement, the treacherous leaderships, as well as to develop the course towards the left of spontaneous centrist or organised left currents.

We could do the following super-schematic count:

First: the action of the working class and the masses, the mobilisation, for a party like ours, is an objective process and it is our duty to take part in it.

Second: the above becomes concrete by or means giving them slogans for action.

Third: that in these actions and mobilisations we prioritize the strengthening of workers' actions and workers' mobilisations or of the workers' sectors in the popular mobilisations.

Fourth: that in these objective actions and mobilisations of the working class and the masses may take part, forced by the pressure of the movement or their own needs, traitorous, reformist or bureaucratic leaderships of the workers' movement, and also petty-bourgeois or bourgeois, and that we do not give up taking part in these processes of struggle and mobilisation because in them are involved or because, as it happens in most cases today, they are led by these traitorous or non-working class leaderships.

Fifth: we can make any kind of agreements, pacts or unities of action with these traitorous or bureaucratic leaderships (or even fronts, if they are working class), if they serve to the mobilisation and if they do not mean any curtailment of our full independence, if they do not imply any type of diplomacy in the criticism or even to restrain criticism, since at the time of mobilisation is precisely when we need to be the most critical of those leaderships.

Sixth: every deep action and mobilisation of masses inevitably causes left shifts within the traitorous and bureaucratic currents, of the fighters or of progressive centrist workers' currents, that move towards positions of class independence, of workers' democracy and consistent mobilisation, and which have to be the prime objective of our unitary and frontist tactics, either in the trade union or political spheres, since their strengthening is the best help for the weakening of the treacherous leadership, for the triumph of the mobilisation and the building of the party.

The tactic is unity–confrontation

We know, within the Trotskyist movement, groups which we could call the sectarian aspect, which systematically reject intervention in common with other organisations or the treacherous leaderships, which are obsessed with maintaining their absolute isolation and purity. But we also know that there is another aspect, also wrong and more serious, which crosses over to the other side, the “agreementism” or directly to the support of Stalinists, bureaucratic, petty bourgeois or straight bourgeois nationalist currents. This is the case of Mandelism, i.e. the international current of Trotskyism grouped around Ernest Mandel and which calls itself United Secretariat. They insist on the trend to unity and the support for years of petty bourgeois, bureaucratic, Stalinist or bourgeois nationalist currents, as they did with their support of Tito in Yugoslavia between 1948 and 1951, their support of Maoism, with “entryism sui generis” in Europe, which meant living vegetatively within the communist parties for 18 years, supporting the leadership of the FNL [National Liberation Front] in Algeria, Castroism and now the Sandinistas.

On a global scale, the masters of “unity” not as a tactic or revolutionary necessity, but as a death-trap to carry the workers’ struggle to class conciliation, to capitulation to the bourgeoisie, to peaceful coexistence with imperialism, is certainly the Communist Party of the USSR and its agencies in each country, the national Communist parties, i.e., Stalinism. Their power and danger come from the fact that they are political organisations dominated by the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy of a workers’ state, which gives them a social identity with workers around the world, a working class character to their national agencies, beyond the particular social composition of each of them (such as the Argentine CP, which only has a very minor workers’ rank and file, is mostly petty bourgeois and even bourgeois). By definition, both the Communist Party of the USSR and the national Communist Parties which respond to it, which determine their national policy according to the guidelines of the foreign policy of the USSR, are organisations that fall within the classification of “working-class” given their essential social support in the workers’ state. But this definition is insufficient: they are bureaucratic working-class organisations, dominated by the Soviet bureaucratic clique that dominates the workers’ state and the CPSU and the various national cliques agents of Moscow. All these bureaucrats have as a goal not the defence of the interests of the workers of the USSR, of the workers’ states and the entire world, nor the defeat of imperialism and the victory of socialism in the world, but the defence of their bureaucratic privileges. Therefore their affinity is not with the dispossessed of the world — the workers — but with other privileged, the exploiters of the capitalist and imperialist countries. Thence they directly join or capitulate to imperialism in the counter-revolutionary policy of defeating or demobilising the revolutionary struggles of the masses worldwide. Their policy, summarised in Moscow’s motto of “peaceful coexistence”, seeks to maintain a balance with imperialism and prevent the emergence and development of independent and revolutionary workers’ leaderships, since the victory of the masses led by a new revolutionary leadership would mean the end of capitalism, imperialism, and the end of all the privileges, whether bourgeois or bureaucratic.

In this regard, Mandelism is one aspect of what we criticise above. It is the wing of the Trotskyist movement reflecting the impact produced in the middle, student and university, layers, especially in Europe, of the revolutionary processes where petty bourgeois, bureaucratic or Stalinist leaderships took power. Mandelism, far from raising a correct consistent Trotskyist political line, capitulates to these leaderships, adapting to them.

Returning to Stalinism, without making a detailed history, let us recall the formal birth, in the 1930s, of the multiclass unity of the popular fronts: the unity to rule, political, with the bourgeoisie (and, of course, with the petty bourgeoisie) that was according to them “democratic”, particularly in the imperialist countries, with which they led the workers’ struggles to class conciliation and capitulation to the bourgeois government. The defeats of the workers’ revolutions that were experienced in Spain and France in that decade, part of the vast list of Stalinist betrayals, correspond to the classic politics of Popular Front.

This drive inherent to the policy of Stalinism of joining the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie was and is kept in the postwar period and until today. Wherever they could, they have taken part

directly into bourgeois governments — imperialists or not — as in Italy and France immediately after the war and later in Chile, Panama, again in France, in Bolivia. But there are also countries where they have spent years and years without any bourgeois willing to join them, to which support (for example, in Mexico and in recent years in Argentina). Anyhow, since the 1950s, since the crisis of world Stalinism began, and particularly since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, policies different from the popular frontist orthodoxy of the 1930s began to be outlined.

In Latin America, the triumph in January 1959 of the 26th of July Movement, which, as we said, was a nationalist petty bourgeois leadership opposed to Moscow, gave rise to the first workers' state on the continent and it took place not only without any participation of the Communists, but the rickety Cuban CP was on the other side of the road, next to the dictator Batista and against the Castroists. Although over the years Moscow and the Stalinists took over the Cuban revolutionary process, the triumph of socialist Cuba without them was a blow to world Stalinism. In July 1979, the Sandinistas took power in Nicaragua in a coalition government with the anti-Somoza bourgeoisie. The FSLN [Sandinista National Liberation Front], in which three currents coexisted, was independent of Moscow, and the Nicaraguan SP, which was the local party faithful to Moscow, mostly supported Somoza against the Sandinistas. Apparently, this second gross “mistake” of the Stalinist policy in Latin America has generated a discussion from the upper echelons of Moscow to the various CPs in Latin America. We say “apparently” because at the moment we have little documentation, we are just beginning to investigate. For example, one Kiva Maydanik, member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, published immediately after the fall of Somoza in 1979, an article in the journal *América Latina*, where he says to expand the concept of “revolutionary” to radical forces other than the Communists (although in his article he excludes “Trotskyists” and “Maoists”), that the Nicaraguan process showed that it is possible the correct organic unity between different currents (referring to the three currents within the FSLN) and that the great teaching of the Nicaraguan victory is the need for the “unity of the communist parties with those insurrectionary forces that for decades have been called by inertia ‘ultraleft’”.

He adds that it is essential to prioritize the importance of the two types of unity which are posed, “of the forces of the left and the broad democratic unity” and that “*the unity of the left is the main link, the decisive one, to drive the revolutionary process*” (emphasis in original). And to avoid any doubts, then he continues: “and the broader it is — at national and international level — the potential front of anti-dictatorial and anti-fascist forces, the greater will be the imperative of the left towards unity”. There is no doubt the discussion is important because according to the policy proposed by this article, Moscow would have given an order opposite to the one it gave its Cuban party 20 years earlier, in 1958-59 (to join the Castroists rather than to confront them and support the dictator Batista) or to the Nicaraguan SP until July 1979, which attacked the Sandinistas. The author proposes to take the orientation of the Cubans, the Salvadorans, and the Uruguayan CP, which were already suggesting that, if it is a political line to power, the first step towards a broader unity is the unity of the left forces.

What is the policy proposed by the Salvadorans, which would coincide with the Soviet strategist? According to its secretary general since 1973, Commander Schafik Handal, since 1976 “the Salvadoran Communist Party has the merit of having raised first and most systematically the banner of the unity of the left”.¹ Let's see how he explains this peculiar policy of the CP of El Salvador in relation to the most traditional policies of the various communist parties in the continent:

“It is curious and symptomatic that the Communist parties we have shown in recent decades a great capacity for understanding with the neighbours on the right side, while on the other hand, we are unable in most cases to establish relationships, stable and progressive alliances with our neighbours on the left. We fully understand all the nuances that go from us to the right, their origins, their meaning, etc., but with regard to those who are on our left, we are unable to understand even the very essence of the phenomenon of their existence and characteristics, nor their objective historical significance, nor our tasks towards them. For a long time, we Latin American Communists have not had a consistent and systematic line to unite all the forces of the left, including the armed left.

¹ This and other quotations of Handal come from the article “The power, the character and the path of the revolution and the unity of the left”, December 1981, published as a special supplement of *El Combatiente* No. 318.

“There is nothing derogatory or disparaging in the name ‘neighbours on the right side’, it is only a resource to illustrate the exhibition of these ideas. The Salvadoran communists, we feel proud and honoured by the friendship of a large part of these allies, firm and consistent fighters for democratic ideals, of independence and social progress.”

In summary, the unitary policy whose model is the Salvadoran CP and that the strategist of Moscow considers successful can be summarised in that, as there are “revolutionary organisations emerged outside the structures” of the communist parties — and Handal says this is due not only to “reformists errors” by some CPs, but to objective reasons — it is not right to have unity only to the right, but also to the left. Furthermore, this unity on the left is the first, decisive step to also achieve the broadest unity of all “anti-dictatorial and anti-fascist forces”. It is the policy by which the FDR/FMLN [Democratic Revolutionary Front/Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front] developed in El Salvador, where they have achieved the political and military unity of the workers and petty bourgeois fighters of four guerrilla organisations and the Salvadoran CP with an important bourgeois sector, led by a sinister agent of imperialism, the bourgeois Guillermo Ungo, and with which they have not only managed to drag the Salvadoran CP out of the crisis and marginality, but also, and very importantly, to stop for the time being the fall of the Duarte regime, the defeat of his genocidal army and the seizure of power in El Salvador by the heroic masses in struggle that follow the FMLN.

Unlike the Communist parties, which use the needs or desires of unity to blur class boundaries, in order to strengthen non-workers or bureaucratic leaderships and to save the bureaucratic regimes and capitalism itself, or unlike Mandel and his followers, who constantly capitulate to those leaderships, for us the unity always requires the delimitation of class and the critical definition of the type of leadership to which we are circumstantially joining. This is why the tactic of the unity of action or frontist with Stalinists and petty bourgeois or workers bureaucratic leaderships (and let’s not even mention if they are bourgeois!) is a combination from the start and at all times of unity and confrontation, of rupture. For us, we take part in the action, in the mobilisation, obviously, to confront and defeat imperialism, capitalism and the exploiters, but also, at the same time to confront, weaken and if we can defeat these enemy leaderships irreconcilable with the independent and democratic organisation of the workers and the revolutionary triumph. This is crucial because it is precisely the mobilisation the best and peak moment to face the syphilis that corrodes from within the workers’ movement, the moment where the conditions to wipe it out exist.

This is why we say it is a very complex, very contradictory tactic, which we have to ensure it is balanced. On the one hand, in order to help the action, the mobilisation, we do all kind of agreements and find it extraordinary to involve all kinds of working class forces, even if Stalinist or bureaucratic organisations, and according the type of struggle, not even workers but petty-bourgeois or bourgeois who circumstantially are facing the bourgeois government or imperialism. But such agreements must always be combined; they have to be part of a strategy of class delimitation and confrontation of those leaderships. That is, between the agreement and the confrontation, if the time comes where this contradiction openly arrives, we continue with the denunciation to those leaderships, even if it breaks the agreement. It is essential to discuss this very well because otherwise, we run the risk of falling into a common error, a Mandelist-type error: to silence our criticism of these treacherous or petty bourgeois bureaucrats, or directly support their anti-worker policies, because of the circumstantial fact of having a common ground of struggle. In doing so, we would only succeed in weakening the struggle, in confusing the rank and file and the vanguard and in pulling the treacherous leadership out of the fire. Let us recall, for example, the performance of the Simon Bolivar Brigade in the Nicaraguan revolution. The SBB fighters fought — and three of them gave their life — next to the FSLN to defeat Somoza. They had the merit and heroism of liberating the first city on the Atlantic coast, the port of Bluefields. Once Somoza was defeated, the Sandinista leaders imposed a government formed by the commanders and the anti-Somoza bourgeoisie (Violeta Chamorro and Robelo). The Brigade, meanwhile, set itself to the organisation of the workers in independent trade unions. In less than a month, the existing agreement, that had allowed the Brigade to have large legal premises in Managua, blew up, as the brigadists did not give in, as demanded by the Sandinista leadership, their promotion of independent trade union organisations. The brigadists,

although they were supported by a demonstration of 5000 workers, were expelled from Nicaragua by the Sandinista police and beaten by the Panamanian police, to which they were handed over at the border. The Mandelists, meanwhile, supported the repression of the government and the bourgeois police against the brigadists — many of them Trotskyists — in order to keep their support for the FSLN.

Our starting point to define any unitary tactics is the interest of the struggle, of the mobilisation for the most pressing needs of the workers. Only from there we begin to raise the various possibilities of alliance or unities. Forgetting it can lead us to the Mandelist or the Communist Party point of view: to go looking for some “progressive” bourgeois, a “revolutionary” petty bourgeois or some incurable centrist or directly traitorous bureaucrat with whom to unite, and from there to call for unity, or, even worse, to support him directly. Reality and revolutionary politics are the opposite. The actions of the mass struggle are, as we said, an objective process and our great task is to find which are the best slogans to develop them. Among them, we will see which one is the best tactic of unity to be raised, to strengthen the struggle and defeat, or at least weaken, the bureaucrat or traitor with whom we can be tactically united at a time of mobilisation.

In the same vein, it is good to clarify that we will never support a bourgeois, petty bourgeois or traitorous, reformist or bureaucratic workers leadership, even when we are tactically united in a struggle. We only support the struggles, the mobilisations, whoever may lead them. We always denounce those leaderships — beyond the question of the form, the means and the time in which we express this denunciation — and dialectically and contradictorily, we denounce them the most when we are tactically united to them because it is the time of the mobilisation. This is so because the only way to defeat these bureaucratic leaderships and make way for a new leadership is the mobilisation. Only when there is mobilisation can be made evident in the eyes of the masses the vacillations and betrayals of the bad leaders and at the same time to have the necessary strength to sweep them and forge the new leaders who will be able to replace them. This is why we always insist on that the key is the struggle, the mobilisation. If the mobilisation demands unitary tactics, we raise them, and surely the very development of the mobilisation will bare the bureaucratic betrayal and allow us to advance in the construction of a new leadership. We could say, as we have defined at the beginning the terms strategy and tactics, that within our decisive and fundamental strategy of building a revolutionary party with mass influence, fighting on a daily basis the treacherous leaderships, helping the working-class and popular masses to break with them, to destroy them, to make a revolution against them and led by the revolutionary party, it will always be tactical an agreement or unity of action or united front, although this tactic at a pivotal moment can be decisive to achieve the working-class or popular mobilisation.

Finally, we wish to point out that it is not an absolute law that faced with these processes of struggle and mobilisation we are required to raise the tactic of agreement or unity of action with the treacherous leaderships. Quite the opposite. It is tactical. We will do it if it is best to develop our strategy to mobilise and build the party. This is why quite often we raise the call to action and mobilisation against the express will of the leadership. The way we do it — which may also include some kind of unitary approach — will depend on each situation. We can call to the treacherous leadership to take the lead, or to reflect and change; thousands of variations. What is important is that we do not marry to a unitary tactic, however, important it may be, because ultimately what we most want is the confrontation and defeat of those leaderships. More specifically, as we are shown daily by the union bureaucracy entrenched at the head of the CGT [General Confederation of Labour] and the vast majority of unions, we constantly see demonstrations, strikes and disputes that to succeed have to go against those leaderships, have to fight and defeat them while at the same time fighting and defeating the bosses. In many such situations, the proposal of unity does not fit or just fits in a very secondary or pedagogical way. We all know the case of the struggle of the Ford plant in Pacheco in 1985, where the centre of our policy — very correctly — towards the head of SMATA [auto workers union], Jose Rodriguez, was to denounce him as a traitor for not supporting. And more generally, due to the tremendous crisis of the union bureaucracy, it has become a matter of life or death, for action, the issue of workers’ democracy, that the rank and file discuss and vote on what to do against the hunger and the surrender to imperialism. Therefore we will find a thousand times that

tactical proposals of unity are secondary or only educational given the frontal proposition that the bureaucratic leadership is scum, with whom you cannot go out to fight to win, and that it is the rank and file who should decide when and how to do it. Let's recall the nefarious and negative experience of the last fight of the food union in Capital [Buenos Aires], where because of inexperience we put first the unity around the struggle plan of the sinister bureaucrat Daher (formally "voted" in a plenary of delegates), against what the best activists and much of the rank and file wanted in the Bagley plant.

The unitary tactic is different towards progressive independent currents

As we said before, and schematically, where there are action and mobilisation there begins to be a dislocation of the bureaucratic and treacherous apparatus, an emergence of workers currents, whether organised or not, that are becoming independent, which place themselves to the left and towards the confrontation against those bureaucratic leaderships, in the union or political terrain. We have to act in full on these phenomena, looking for all possible agreements and unities with them, so that the dislocation of the apparatus goes further. These agreements, although initially happen on the union and non-political terrain, are decisive and we have to privilege them because they accelerate the crisis of the treacherous and bureaucratic leaderships.

In this case, there will not exist either, at least initially, a complete unity, an agreement complete and about everything. Surely there will be countless differences in method, of principles, of the program. But if we are facing a progressive working class current, the tactic will be unity-differentiation, emphasising what unites us, on the positive, and discussing fraternally on the points or issues in dispute, trying to advance to the commonly finished program for the socialist revolution. In other words, it will be the tactic of the revolutionary united front. This relationship will remain so until we achieve the leap from which emerges a common organisation with democratic centralism and around the revolutionary program, or until reality shows that the path of that current is another, which is no longer a progressive current although it is centrist, and it crystallises as centrist or it is reabsorbed by the apparatus, in which case we will break the revolutionary united front.

In the bosom of the mobilisation, then, we systematically privilege the rapprochement and unity with this type of current or working-class fighters of the left, and with whom our more ambitious, more positive perspective is not only the short-term agreement but something much deeper and fundamental: the revolutionary united front, in the perspective of advancing not just on the tactic — important but tactic nevertheless — of a union or political unity of action, but in the fundamental and permanent strategic ground of building the revolutionary party.

At the scale of our global organisation —the IWL — we have raised for years the need to give great importance to the bold pursuit of revolutionary unity with currents independent of the bureaucratic apparatus, the Stalinists, social democrats and the Church. In the last World Conference of March 1985 — in which the Manifesto was approved — we voted it as a very important, privileged tactic, for all our parties. During 1985 and so far in 1986 we deepened the experience of trade union-revolutionary unity of *A Luchar* [To Fight] in Colombia and we began to make important experiences of trade union unity against the government and against the bureaucracy in Brazil and Argentina, which is showing that in practice, in the daily activity taking part in the class struggle, the possibilities of achieving revolutionary fronts has been happening for the moment more on the union than the political arena, like we expected. The analysis of these experiences is in the article "The revolutionary united front" in *Correo Internacional* No. 20.

"A mass insurrection shakes the world"

We said in the first chapter or the *Manifesto of the IWL*:

"From the British coal mines to the Polish and Spanish shipyards, in the cities and rural areas of Latin America, in the Philippines and India, in South Africa, the Middle East and New Caledonia, millions and millions of workers, peasants, unemployed, people marginalised in miserable suburbs, women, the poor and the young, oppressed peoples, nations, enslaved religions and races come out

to fight. Large street demonstrations, social outbursts, insurrections, strikes and general strikes, occupations of land in the countryside and of plots and homes in the cities, mass guerrillas explode at any time, and anywhere on the planet.

“We are witnessing a tremendous exacerbation of the class struggle, political and social. This massive uprising of the masses, ready to kill or be killed in the fight, in the midst of an economic and social crisis with no end in sight, has triggered a worldwide revolutionary situation. Those below are not willing to continue living as until now, victims of the crisis and the growing misery. And they have begun to corner those above, who can no longer dominate as before.” (*Correo Internacional* No. 10, June 1985.)

This small quote, as well as the whole *Manifiesto of the IWL*, shows us that we are living a situation where the struggles and demonstrations erupt everywhere, which gives us ongoing opportunities to take part in them and to build the party.

In some countries and regions, such as the Southern Cone [of South America], we directly live in a revolutionary situation that has been deepening for several years. The richness of the objective situation, surely, very often will place us before the possibility and the need to promote tactics of agreement and unity of all types and for the most diverse tasks (trade union, political, democratic, anti-imperialist, etc., etc.), as the working class and mass action develop through infinite channels. In Argentina, in the MAS, we have had the opportunity to develop unitary tactics in the ground of the struggle for human rights, for the issue of the disappeared, in some labour disputes, and for the time being in its greatest expression of mobilisation, in the general strikes called by the CGT for its 26-point program and a moratorium on the foreign debt. In the superstructural but decisive arena of the class struggle that union elections are, given the tremendous crisis of the sinister bureaucracy, we constantly have a chance to advance in the struggle to overthrow the bureaucracy promoting unitary slates of anti-bureaucratic opposition.

Also in the superstructure, in the political-electoral arena, we have had the opportunity to develop a tactic of the electoral front with the Communist Party and a small sector of working class Peronism, the FREPU [*Frente del Pueblo*, People’s Front].²

In regions or countries where the situation of the class struggle has not yet reached the sharpness of the confrontation in the Southern Cone, such as Europe, or of course some countries in the rest of Latin America or the USA, we cannot talk about opportunities presented to us daily to participate in the struggles and promote them and that they take place in all fields. However, the correct description of the world we give in the *Manifiesto of the IWL* explains the fact that, although more spaced, more sporadic, mass mobilisations often arise in which we can take part. For example, in March in Spain, the mass activity of the opponents of the reactionary socialist government of Felipe González to boost the NO in the referendum on NATO membership already mentioned. The Spanish PST could develop an important activity, which placed it in a very good position on the stage of political life of the Spanish state by promoting the tactic of the unity of all those who were for the NO. The urgent need to defend Nicaragua from Yankee imperialist aggression forces us to consistently raise in all countries the broadest unity of action with all those willing to defend it.

The conditions

Having extensively explained the issue of our historical strategy (the party and the mobilisation), it is easier to set out the minimum conditions to advance any agreement or unitary tactic: That they are the best suited at that moment for the development of the party and the mobilisation and that they do not limit our political or organisational independence, do not limit our chances of fierce criticism of the treacherous reformist or bureaucratic leaderships, although we may have some agreement, a front or whatever circumstantial situation with them.

In other words, we can make covenants, agreements, unities of action or anything of the sort, circumstantial, even with the devil and his grandmother — to use a famous expression — if it helps our strategic goals of building the party and promoting the mobilisation.

² The People’s Front was also known by its Spanish initials (FP), and acronym (FREPU). Both, initials and acronym, are used by the authors in this paper. (TN.)

Something similar arises for a front with working class organisations. For each specific situation, we will specify how to materialise such conditions, depending on the type of front.

Beyond these political, organisational and class constraints, there is in everyday activity a specific problem we also have to take into account, as it is an objective type conditioning: the size of the organisations concerned, the correlation of forces among the potential players in the agreement or the front. In broad terms, if we are talking about tactics to act, to take part together, they will be raised between organisations of a more or less similar size, more or less comparable. For example, in France, we cannot imagine proposals of the type that “our group, the Socialist League, and the CP do such and such things together”, let alone to go visit the CP and formally proposing it, because we would be taken for madmen. We are a tiny little group and the CP is still, despite being in decline, a party of mass influence among the workers, which traditionally received a high percentage of the votes and directs the CGT, the main workers central. In any case, we will have to say “that the CP do such a thing”, and fight alongside them if they do. Otherwise, we criticise them for not doing so. In Argentina, the relationship of forces is totally different. Both the CP and us, without having massive influence, we are major national parties, and we can make proposals “on equal terms”. More generally, this question of size always influences the choice and formulation of all tactical issues.

Forgetting this issue of size in the formulation of our unitary tactics can make us look ridiculous. Trotsky, for example, quite the contrary of the picture of “sectarian” made by Stalinism, was a stickler for the unitary proposals, agreements, and fronts. Usually, in the talks and discussions with other leaders and members of the Fourth, he was the first to propose the boldest agreement tactics, which were often rejected by others. This is why led by his enthusiasm for the intervention in the class struggle, he could sometimes forget the proportions. When Mateo Fossa visited him in 1938, discussing the problems of national liberation in Latin America, Mateo asked his opinion of the APRA, Peru’s bourgeois nationalist party led by Haya de la Torre. As part of its response, the “Old Man” pointed out that “agreements with APRA for certain practical tasks” seemed “desirable and possible”, “on condition of full organisational independence”. Undoubtedly, in the formulation of the policy, he was setting aside the fact that the APRA was a national party with mass influence and the Peruvian Trotskyists who would have proposed the deal would be approximately... two or three.

The different types

Deliberately we did not begin with a historical enunciation or with a classification scheme of different types and levels of agreements and fronts, because, in practice, we could say they are almost endless. It would be a mistake to start from a classification scheme and seek to apply it to reality or to try mechanically to copy the classic tactics. The right thing is the opposite: reality itself puts us countless times, in matters of detail or of large scale, in situations that can be resolved with an agreement, with a covenant, or that require raise a unitary tactic for the mobilisation, to develop in the superstructural ground class independence, etc. Let’s see some examples.

As we insist that the agreements can be of any type, of any order, let’s recall an extreme one, with fascists – years ago, before the coup of 1976, both our newspaper and a fascist pamphlet were printed on the same printers, and the setting out day matched, what caused every week all kinds of stressful situations and clashes between our comrades and the fascists, for the use of the table. Finally, our editor, very correctly, discussed with the head of the fascists, and reached an agreement with these fascists, allowing the orderly share the use of the table. We deliberately started by a super minimal example and with the opposite end of the political spectrum, the fascists, to insist on the very broad, concrete and tactical nature of the issue.

Another example, also extreme, no longer technical as above, but of parliamentary type could take place today if we had a deputy in the French parliament. Against the position of the centre-right headed by Chirac that wants to impose representation by constituency, both the semi-fascists of Le Pen as well as Mitterrand’s Socialists believe that proportional representation must be kept. We believe that the latter is more democratic than the former, and therefore, if we had a deputy, we could make a minimum conjunctural parliamentary agreement with the semi-fascists and socialists who are in government to face the vote on the issue in parliament.

Without doubt, these are two super limited examples: The first, how to use a table with the fascists; the second, a situation that may happen every 20, 30 or 50 years, or never in the century, which is we agree with the extreme right and the extreme left in a parliamentary vote. In a similar vein we could imagine a situation here in Argentina, in 1984, when the question of a peace agreement with Chile and the referendum was discussed, if the government had said “we give this much free time on TV to those who are for the NO and they sort it out how to divide it”. We cannot rule out that, to take advantage of this great tool which is television, we would have had to sit at a table with super-gorilla³ Admiral Rojas, to make an agreement on the distribution of spaces. We keep talking about minimum technical agreements.

Of course, much more important, are the possibilities of unity of political action, as we did in November 1985 with sectors of the Justicialist [Peronist] Party for the referendum on the Beagle, or what is dawning today, that it already began to manifest through the national strike on 24 January, against the payment of the foreign debt. When such opportunities arise we do not have to be sectarian, we must raise without fear the unity, and find the way and the right balance of our unitary arguments and our criticisms. For example, as we are interested in the non-payment of debt, we agree with whomever around this line, and we make our criticism in the newspaper, and not every time we meet with our occasional allies, as this would almost surely spoil that possibility if every time we meet we tell all, even if everything we say is correct.

The front has to be between working-class parties or organisations

If we talk about a front, i.e. the opposite of the temporary unity of action, the specific agreement or covenant, around a task or a slogan, but the formation of some kind of permanent body and a program, it has to be between organisations of the same class, i.e. working-class organisations. The working class is the base of support of the possibility of more or less long, more or less durable progressive fronts, with bodies, with some kind of institutionalisation. For example, a typical body of workers’ front is a union, because it is not about a daily slogan or partial task, but about a historical task, which occurs over time, as is the defence of the interests of the workers against the bosses and the government. Whenever there is a struggle for a partial problem, whether achieved or not, the struggle passes but the union continues. For example, there was a long struggle for the eight-hour day last century. The eight-hour day was achieved in Europe and the unions continued. This is why we say it is a front because it leads to a class body, and for us the fronts tend to create class bodies.

For example, since we did it in 1985 in Argentina, the FREPU tends to be a class pole, and even can outline a trend towards the Workers Party, towards the Labour Party or to a single class party in the country. Beware, for now, this is just a hypothesis, a question, which we see as very difficult to achieve. Anyway, to some extent it is justified the name Front because it was an electoral front, which developed a campaign with a common program. In any case, there is still no basis to allow us to say that this front has transformed into a solid front of the class. When it does, should it be the case, for example, it would have to act by the majority and minority and discipline in action, by democratic centralism, which is the characteristic of the class fronts in the organisational field.

When we talk about the revolutionary united front as a very important tactic for party building, the concept of “front” in its strictest sense, of class, is perfectly applied because such a strategic task we always insist it corresponds to the working class currents and organisations. As part of the development of the workers’ party with mass influence and of every revolutionary mobilisation, we may propose common activities and tasks with non-working class allies, such as radicalised popular sectors, or the agricultural semi-proletariat, for example, depending on the country. But from the standpoint of class, the task of building the revolutionary leadership that can lead to the triumph of the world socialist revolution corresponds to the workers, only a revolutionary workers’ leadership can achieve it.

3 **Gorilla** is a term from Argentina’s domestic politics, historically used to refer in a derogatory or pejorative way those who gave a coup against Peron. Over the years, the term has been extended to a greater or lesser extent to other countries in Latin America, as synonymous with “reactionary right”. [TN]

The struggle of the workers' movement: examples of agreements and fronts

From a bird's-eye perspective, we want to show that from the beginning of its struggle organised as a class and the formation of its political and union organisations, the history of the working class constantly presents examples of agreements, unities of action and the most varied fronts. We already said that unions are, in fact, traditional organisations of the workers' front. Likewise, taking Ryazanov's classic definition, we can say that the first international organisation the working class had, the First International — founded by Marx in 1864 — was also a workers' front, in which coexisted in a democratic way the two great currents in which the workers then were grouped and other groups or smaller currents, as the followers of Proudhon, Lassalle, et cetera. Since they started to struggle, to organise themselves and to make revolutionary propaganda, the working class activists and the artisans and intellectuals who swelled the revolutionary ranks knew the repression of governments, dictatorial as well as "liberal", monarchist or republican. Hence, from prison and exile and from the clandestine work all kinds of agreements were developed early on between the most disparate currents, to ensure in common the publication and distribution of the illegal revolutionary press, to face together the repression, to defend against infiltration and detect spies and betrayers, to organise secret meetings of working class activists and leaders, to improve the lives of exiled prisoners, or arrange their escape.

Also since the socialist workers' parties became of masses they began to take part in political life with agreement tactics. For example, when there were electoral processes with two rounds, and in the second round the bourgeois liberal party and the party of the monarchist reaction were faced, the German Social Democratic Party called to vote for the liberals in the second round.

Russian Marxism and its revolutionary expression, the Bolsheviks, took and deepened this tradition. The RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Labour Party) was divided in 1903 into two factions — the Bolsheviks (majority, followers of Lenin) and the Mensheviks (minority, the opportunist wing, followers of Martov, Plekhanov and others), which were transformed into two enemy political currents irreconcilable within the Marxist workers' movement. However, until 1912 there were sustained and systematic arrangements to maintain the party, to defend it from tsarist repression, as well as numerous partial agreements and even common Congresses and temporary mergers. Moreover, both Bolsheviks as Mensheviks made numerous agreements and joint actions with other currents of the revolutionary movement, for example with the Social Revolutionaries (a party of important peasant base and which encouraged terrorism) or anarchists. The soviets, forged in the heat of the revolution of 1905, were, in fact, bodies of workers' united front of the revolutionary masses in struggle, particularly the workers in St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) and in them all the currents of the Russian revolutionary movement coexisted.

All we have just mentioned are examples among currents of the workers' movement. But Lenin, for example in the Duma (kind of a restricted parliament that existed under tsarism from the year 1906), he heralded that in the event of a tie between the Kadets (liberal bourgeois constitutionalists) and the extreme tsarist reaction, the Black Hundreds, the RSDLP representatives would break the tie in favour of the liberals.

Trotsky, after the split of 1903, was left out of the two factions. He worked with the Mensheviks (edited a newspaper with Martov), although he used to agree more with Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the political positions. In his book *My Life*, referring to the "history" of Bolshevism that Stalin and his henchmen began to paint, he says:

"For the benefit of the novices and the ignorant, the past is there presented in such a way as to suggest that Bolshevism came out of the laboratory of history fully armed — whereas the history of the struggle of the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks is also a history of ceaseless efforts toward unity." (L. Trotsky, *My Life*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1970, p. 316.)

Let's see how he recounts the common work within the RSDLP and some of those "ceaseless efforts toward unity". During the revolutionary test of 1905 his most extensive proclamations were reproduced in a clandestine printing press in the Caucasus, installed by a member of the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks, Krasin, who lived in Kiev. For the joint Congress of the RSDLP which was to be held in May 1905, Trotsky prepared a thesis in common with Krasin, who presented them

in the Bolshevik meeting prior to the Congress as amendments to the propositions of Lenin on the subject of the provisional government. Lenin considered correct the proposals sent by Trotsky through Krasin and they were approved as Bolsheviks positions in the Third Party Congress. It was also the Bolshevik Krasin who helped Trotsky to enter clandestinely into St. Petersburg, where shortly after he became the President of the local Soviet.

Also in 1905, after the arrival of Lenin in Russia, the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks voted unanimously a proposal for the merger. According to Trotsky, the Bolsheviks said that the split in the two branches, caused by transient circumstances, had no reason to be given the development of the revolution. In April 1906 both factions were merged in Stockholm, although their paths quickly distanced themselves again. Anyway, even in this arena internal to the RSDLP, neither Lenin nor the Bolsheviks raised the question of unification as a duty or a goal permanent and superior to the various positions raised. The best demonstration of this happened in 1912 when the revolutionary upsurge restarted. Trotsky, who remained independent although he agreed much more with the Bolsheviks than with the Mensheviks on political issues, tried to put together a conference with the representation of all factions, and particularly of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The Mensheviks agreed with the proposal and among the Bolsheviks the desire for reconciliation to reunify the party had a certain weight. Lenin opposed the merger with all his strength, calling it an unprincipled block and that was the position that prevailed among Bolsheviks. Shortly thereafter, Trotsky himself agreed with Lenin, recognising that there was no common political basis for the reunification.

We speak in the previous part not only of political agreements between the currents of the workers' movement but of agreements of all kinds. Let's see an example quite original to the Russian revolutionary movement. Trotsky gives an account that while the 1907 party congress, held in a socialist church in London, was in session they realised that they lacked money to finish the work of the Congress and to pay the return tickets of delegates back to Russia. At such time, although the Russian revolution of 1905 was already in decline, it had the English liberal circles shocked and curious. Thanks to that, they managed a very peculiar arrangement with an English liberal: he lent them the money they needed — a juicy amount — in the form of a “loan to the Russian revolution”. His condition was for it to carry the signature of all members of the Congress. Trotsky explained that only after the years of reaction and war were completed, with the Soviet government in power, they could pay for it, and did so.

The revolution of 1917 in Russia will give, of course, many more examples. Let us begin by recalling the agreement, which we might call technical, done no less than between Lenin and... the empire of the Hohenzollern. Germany and Russia were at war (it was the time of the great imperialist war of 1914-1918). Lenin needed to go through German territory to return as soon as possible to Russia, where the tsar had fallen thanks to the victory of the February revolution. The German government, knowing the anti-war position waged by the Bolsheviks and a handful of internationalists in exile, speculated that the return of Lenin could only hurt the war effort of their enemy, the provisional government, an unconditional ally of England and France. The deal was sealed. This is how Trotsky recounts the episode:

“The conditions of the journey through Germany were worked out with extraordinary care in this unique international treaty between the editorial staff of a revolutionary paper and the empire of the Hohenzollerns. Lenin demanded complete extraterritoriality during the transit: no supervision of the personnel, of the passengers, their passports or baggage. No single person should have the right to enter the train throughout the journey. (Hence the legend of the “sealed” train.) On their part, the emigrant group agreed to insist upon the release from Russia of a corresponding number of German and Austro-Hungarian civil prisoners.” (*History of the Russian Revolution, Vol 1, op. cit., p. 267.*)

Before departing, the revolutionists made the following statement:

“The Russian internationalists who are now going to Russia in order to serve there the cause of the revolution will help us arouse the proletariat of other countries, especially of Germany and Austria, against their governments.” (Ibid.)

Without a doubt, these blunt words could clear up any suspicion that the achievement of this agreement would have changed the irreconcilable feelings of struggle against the German government

of Lenin and his companions. This agreement with the Kaiser gave rise to the infamous campaign by the provisional government, headed by Kerensky, that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were paid agents of the German government and that they were returning to Russia fulfilling secret orders of the German general staff. Of course, the further development of the struggle sent together to the same dustbin of history the slanders and their promoters and the petty bourgeois agents of the provisional government.

Going to more political issues, we already mentioned in respect of 1905 the role of the soviets, which are strengthened and extended in 1917 as the democratic bodies of the united front of the revolutionary masses in struggle, headed by the workers. Initially, they were dominated by Mensheviks and social revolutionaries. Between September and October, the Bolsheviks won a majority in the workers' soviets. Lenin encouraged several proposals of mergers between revolutionary groups. First with the "internationalists" Mensheviks. Later with the "Interdepartmental Committee of Petrograd", a purely working class grassroots organisation led by Trotsky that joined the Bolshevik Party in May 1917. At the same time, he flatly rejected merger proposals with the Mensheviks (who were part of the bourgeois government) raised by some Bolshevik leaders. When the military uprising of the bourgeois counter-revolution led by Kornilov took place, Lenin favoured, along with Trotsky, to fight militarily together with the provisional government to crush the counter-revolution. Finally, let's say that the seizure of power in October by the Bolshevik Party was greatly facilitated thanks to an agreement with the left wing of the Social Revolutionaries, who accompanied the Bolsheviks in taking power. The Bolsheviks, meanwhile, giving up many of their proposals in this regard, agreed to raise much of the program for the countryside of their circumstantial allies, the Left SRs. This is a simple listing of the most important tactics in the arena of agreements, fronts, and mergers of the Bolsheviks before taking power.

The Third International also keeps and extends this tradition in the brief but fruitful years of its revolutionary work, which were expressed in its first four congresses (1919-1922). Let us recall the tactic of the united workers' front launched between the III and IV congress to address the revolutionary ebb, the recomposition of the world imperialist capitalism and the fact that in many countries the workers were divided between the communist parties — followers of the revolutionary leadership of the Third International — and the Social Democrats, organised in the Second International, which had gone since the beginning of the imperialist war in 1914, to the fierce defence of the capitalist system. In addition, a very controversial issue, which generated different unitary tactics, was the union orientation. Some raised the "red" unions, formed exclusively by the Communist workers, others to work within the yellow or independent trade unions, and others to promote united unions.

After Lenin's death (21 January 1924) and the bureaucratisation of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and the Third International, Trotsky raised many times unitary tactics. One of the most important examples was his call to a united workers' front in Germany, between the Communist and Socialist parties (that between the two they headed the vast majority of the German proletariat), to crush Nazism. At that time, the Third International followed the ultra-left line of the "third period" imposed by the Stalinist bureaucracy since the VI Congress in 1928, according to which the German Social Democratic Party and the workers who followed it were as many enemies as the Nazis followers of Hitler. In Spain, Trotsky called to fight in the Republican military camp to defeat the fascists, since July 1936 when the civil war began. Also when the Japanese imperialist aggression against a China dominated by the fascist Chiang Kai-shek took place, he pointed out the need to defeat the Japanese fighting alongside the armies of the fascist Chiang.

In the field of the construction of revolutionary parties in different countries and the new International after the bankruptcy of the Third in 1933, the positions of Trotsky often envisaged the boldest agreement attempts. The first call for the formation of the Fourth International, in 1933, was signed by four organisations, three independent centrists and just one of the International Left Opposition (the organisation of the followers of Trotsky), the Russian section. Regarding the important individual leaders who broke with Stalinism, ultra-left as the Italian Bordiga or opportunistic centrist as the Spaniard Nin, Trotsky always made the greatest efforts to iron out differences, convince them of the rightness of the positions of the Fourth and reach agreements. And

always he sought reconciliation even after the most terrible fights and breakups, whether they were for political or methodological reasons. Let us just give the example of Spain. Trotsky broke publicly and violently with Nin in 1933 because of his capitulatory and opportunist positions. In the 1970s it became known that as soon as the civil war broke out in July 1936, Trotsky sent a personal envoy to Barcelona to meet with Nin with a letter in which he proposed to immediately discuss an agreement to take part jointly in the civil war, also adding that what he wanted most was to move himself to Barcelona to carry forward that agreement. To our knowledge, this letter did not reach Nin, who was killed in 1937 by the Stalinists.

When the Moscow Trials (1936-1937) where Stalin set up the “legal” farce of accusing Trotsky as a German agent, Trotsky encouraged the formation of the “Dewey Commission”, a kind of moral court, which was a very positive agreement with very honest intellectuals, to develop a kind of parallel “trial”, which acquitted Trotsky.

We have already mentioned, with regard to the chat with Mateo Fossa in Mexico, the mania of Trotsky of encouraging agreement and unitary tactics to take part in the class struggle that led to his exaggerated proposed “agreement” with the APRA.

After the assassination of Trotsky in 1940, a period of crisis of leadership began in the Fourth International that we have not yet overcome. Since the beginning of the 1950s, this crisis was expressed in the emergence of a revisionist wing, Pabloism-Mandelism, which did keep the unitary tradition, as already noted before, but to put it fully at the service of opportunism and the capitulation to Stalinists and petty bourgeois or nationalist leaderships.

The orthodox Trotskyist current which fought revisionism, and of which we are a part, knew how to raise correctly proposals of unitary tactics. Recalling some examples of the Argentine party, we can mention our policy to confront the coup offensive against the government of Peron by the Yankees, the big bosses and the Argentine Church in 1954-55. We called for months “to a single workers’ front to curb imperialism, the priests, and the capitalists” and made the following proposal to the government:

“Despite our differences with the Peronist government, despite our criticisms, we want to express publicly that while the government does not yield to US imperialism, facing the danger of a coup d’état promoted by Wall Street, we offer the government a technical agreement, well-defined, public and without political commitments in order to halt all attempts by imperialism to colonise the country and super-exploit our working class” (“1954: Key year to understanding Peronism”,⁴ by Nahuel Moreno, published in *The gorilla coup*.)

Unfortunately, neither Peron nor the bureaucratic leadership of the CGT called for the mobilisation of the Peronist workers to defeat the coup, and this proposal did not go farther than mere propaganda. A different case occurred during the Resistance, in 1956, when under the gorilla repression and with Peronism banned and the unions and the CGT intervened, we made an agreement between our party, the POR [*Partido Obrero Revolucionario* – Workers Revolutionary Party], with the revolutionary trade-unionist rank and file of Peronism to form the *Movimiento de Agrupaciones Obreras*, MAO, [Workers’ Groups Movement]. The agreement between the POR and those rank and file workers’ groups, which were very revolutionary although they continued claiming to be Peronists, led to the formation of *Palabra Obrera* [Workers’ Word] and the great strength we had in the “62 Organisations”⁵. Today we could say it was an extraordinary experience of the union-political revolutionary united front, and if we had opportunist deviations it was not because of this front, which was extraordinary, but because of our inexperience, by the youth of our organisation.

The importance that we gave to these problems of the unitary tactics and the possibilities of the Revolutionary United Front led us to present a paper on the subject at the 1958 World Conference of Orthodox Trotskyism, which was held in England. Because of all this, we can say that our current emphasis on the importance of agreement and unitary tactics and in particular the revolutionary united front is merely the continuation of a long tradition, started with Marxism, followed up in Leninism

4 There is no English translation yet of this work [TN].

5 The “62 Organisations” were born as part of the resistance of the Peronist workers’ movement against the dictatorship emerging from the coup d’état that overthrew Peron. Later on the name “62 Organisations” was kept to designate the unions dominated by the Peronist bureaucracy. [TN]

and Trotskyism and continued since 1940 in the revolutionary work of the Fourth International in its struggle for the construction of a world revolutionary leadership with mass influence.

Appendix

**Summary on some
orientations and
activities of the MAS
between 1983 and 1985**

The problem of the disappeared

From the very beginning of the revolutionary period, it was raised for our party that the issue of human rights would be one of the cornerstones of the program for the socialist revolution since the magnitude of genocide transformed it into a social crime. In *1982: The Revolution Begins* Nahuel Moreno said:

“In relation to the genocide, our central slogans are: the formation of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, involving organisations for the defence of human rights, primarily the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the unions; that the results of their investigations be made public in a comprehensive manner; that what the Process has done over the years falls under the concept of genocide and therefore cannot be tried by ordinary courts, just as the war crimes of Hitler and his accomplices were not; that justice must be done through democratically appointed popular juries.” (Op. cit. p. 17.)

These are not bourgeois-democratic but popular-democratic-revolutionary slogans, and together with those of non-payment of the foreign debt and the Constituent Assembly “[...] the three frontally go against the semi-colonial capitalist system and its government and regime of the day” (Ibid., p. 17.)

For this reason, the slogans against genocide were one of six central themes of the election campaign of 1983 and appear in both the program of the MAS and the resolutions of the Second National Congress of the MAS held in February 1985. There, in the programmatic part of the National Thesis, we say:

“No to military courts. For juries, as stated by the Constitution, and integrated by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.”

This has been and is our program regarding human rights. Let’s see now how the party worked based on this program.

That the military do not judge themselves!

As soon as Alfonsín took office, we said that one of his goals would be to demobilise the democratic vanguard who had gathered around human rights organisations, as their mobilisation was a problem for the bourgeoisie since the opening of the revolutionary situation. Together with this, the government also had a complicated task, as it had to pick up the hatred of the masses for the genocidal military, and at the same time to leave intact the apparatus of the Armed Forces.

So it was that three days after taking office, in December 1983, Alfonsín ordered the prosecution of the nine former commanders of the three military juntas that had ruled during the Process, repealed the law of self-amnesty proclaimed by the military, appointed a commission — CONADEP — investigating the denunciations of the disappeared and sent to Parliament a draft reform of the Military Code which in fact meant that the military would judge themselves.

¹ The **National Reorganisation Process** — often simply “the Process” — was the name used by its leaders for the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983. [TN].

This policy had two immediate effects. On the one hand, the denunciations of relatives and witnesses became public for the first time, and not precisely through the CONADEP, but through the traditional human rights organisations; cases of unidentified bodies multiplied and increased the incidents in the courts with the military or in Congress against the adoption of the law.

On the other hand, human rights organisations, given the evidence that at least the vast majority of the disappeared were dead, entered a stage of division and despair. However, despite its internal problems, as soon as the draft reform of the military code was known, the agencies Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared for Political Reasons, and the Service for Peace and Justice took a public advertisement opposing that “the crimes attributable to the armed and security, police and prison forces — which acted with the alleged motive of repressing terrorism — be tried by the Supreme Council of the armed forces, i.e. BY THEM THEMSELVES”. And they added: “It is also extremely serious the principle established in the same bill which exempts from sanctions the military and security personnel who had acted under orders. This implies impunity for those who kidnapped, tortured and killed”.

The party focused its action then around this point: the rejection of the bill to reform the Code of Military Justice, and we called the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and all human rights organisations to convene the popular political parties, workers’ and people’s organisations, and personalities who were in favour of it to a meeting to decide a plan of struggle culminating in a major mobilisation.

Thus, without abandoning our democratic program, we proposed that the rejection of the draft code of military justice be transformed into a slogan for action.

Two months after the start of this campaign, on 8 March 1984, well-known artists, led by Soledad Silveyra, commemorated Women’s Day doing a tribute to the Mothers under the slogan “Mothers of the Plaza, the artists embrace you!”.

But that was not the only rally; from January to March seven rallies were held in Capital, Greater Buenos Aires and the interior, in addition to talks and lectures and the collecting of signatures for a petition. Zamora and Parrilli¹ became the two most prominent figures in the fight against the Radical Party’s law. Seeing the results and despite the mistakes, in Memo No. 41 of 15 March 1984 we said: “The policy revealed itself as correct and the party applied it well”. And we explained why:

“When we started the campaign we gave as its central objective to fight the government policy of trying to mobilise workers and the mass movement... Therefore, the slogans we had to pose were those that would unite us to as many organisations of the relatives and the disappeared, political parties, unions or student, and popular organisations... the best slogan was then that one, to unite us to mobilise.

“The rejection of military tribunals had been raised by the Mothers, Grandmothers, and Relatives through a public advertisement; Peronism, the PI [Intransigent Party] and the DC [Christian Democrats] had opposed it in parliament and the entire population was sensitized by the complaints against the dictatorship... On this basis, we defined that the rejection of military tribunals was our central slogan.

“This being our central slogan, we had the need to simplify it for the rally on 8 March in Plaza de Mayo with the artists. This time, we decided not to raise the rejection of military courts, the only condition for participation in the rally was solidarity with the Mothers... We vindicate this orientation because it was the only one that allowed the unity and mobilisation to confront the policy of the government, which it is the centrepiece of our campaign.”

¹ **Luis Zamora** and **Marcelo Parrilli** were lawyers, politicians and members of human rights organisations in Argentina, and at the time they were also members of the MAS. [TN]

The plebiscite on the Beagle

In late July 1984, and less than a year in office, Alfonsín was in a difficult situation. On the one hand, the situation of the economic and social crisis had worsened, as inflation reached the highest levels in the previous eight years and two million striking workers were expressing their discontent. On the other hand, the Radical Party government had to finally sign the peace agreement with Chile on the basis of the papal proposal, and it suspected it would be difficult for the Senate to approve it just like that. Alfonsín then decided to carry out a manoeuvre. Through a decree, he established the holding of a popular plebiscite, to be held in September or October, a month after the signing of the agreement with Pinochet and in which the people would say YES or NO to the papal proposal. In a cheating manoeuvre, the government played with the desire of the Argentine people for peace with Chile disguising the YES vote as a vote against the war. But behind this there was a dirty trick, the government needed to win the plebiscite to continue thoroughly squeezing the workers movement with the plans of hunger and surrender to the IMF. The triumph of the YES would be used by the government as a vote of confidence in its management.

As soon as the proposal was known, the Peronist deputies and senators issued a statement in which they proposed that a consultation be also held with the Argentine people to see what they thought about the renegotiation of the foreign debt, its legitimacy, and illegitimacy and the rejection or acceptance of the terms imposed by the IMF.

The policy of the MAS

The plebiscite on the Beagle is an interesting case to see how the party, when the time comes, to achieve its goal, can change its slogans when the situation changes.

A campaign of agitation and propaganda to disseminate our program and repudiate the government: Vote in protest against the government.

When the proposal became known, from the pages of *Solidaridad Socialista*,¹ the MAS raised that the consultation was poorly formulated and proposed to unfold it. On the one hand, we had to ask whether the proposal that for years had been cooked at the Vatican could be approved. This question could not be answered because the negotiations were secret. On the other hand, we had to ask whether it was lawful to sign an agreement with the bloody dictatorship of Pinochet. And to this, the answer was NO. Once again we insisted that we were the first advocates of peace with Chile, but we were against propping up a dictator as Alfonsín was doing (*Solidaridad Socialista*, 2 August 1984).

The National Council (NC) of the MAS, met on 18 and 19 August, confirmed this position and considered:

“[...] it would be a highly progressive factor that the government be defeated in the referendum by the sum of all negative votes, that is, by the votes that say NO, blank votes, the void, the contested and abstentions.”

¹ *Solidaridad Socialista* [Socialist Solidarity] was the weekly journal of the MAS. [TN]

In turn, it acknowledged that the party could not be an objective factor in the defeat of the government; therefore it resolved to participate in the consultation with the following objective:

“2. This campaign has as central objectives to denounce the government and propagandise the party and its program in such a way as to assert our image and political line.

“3. The focal points of the electoral campaign, which will be on our own ballot:

“REPUDIATE THE GOVERNMENT OF ALFONSÍN: NO TO THE SIGNATURE OF THE TREATY WITH PINOCHET, YES TO PEACE WITH CHILE.

“WE DEMAND A REFERENDUM ON THE AGREEMENT WITH THE IMF.”

So that, to the call made by the government, the party said: “[...] let’s make a great campaign of agitation and propaganda having as focus the dissemination of our program and the denunciation and repudiation of the government”.

The slogan we raised at that time was “Let us vote in repudiation of the government”.

One of the axes of the campaign was that Alfonsín supported Pinochet. To make it evident, we proposed that the peace agreement be signed by the opposition parties and the Chilean workers’ central.

As part of our policy, we organised a youth music festival of the MAS with the slogan “Nothing with Pinochet”. On 7 October we were able to gather 2000 young people in the Federation of Box, not all of which were members of the MAS, but there were many young Peronists. In addition, endorsements were sent by student centres, sectors of the Communist Youth Federation, Radical youth of Renewal and Change, Intransigent Party Youth and Peronist Youth (JP). Participated in the rally known artists as Makumagiuela, Fontova and Family, Aguafuerte, Group Of People, the Murga Por La Vuelta, Orient Express and other acts, and the Argentine Actors Association also sent an endorsement.

But we did not stop here. In *Solidaridad Socialista* of 11 October 1984, we again denounced that Alfonsín supported Pinochet and we called on the trade unions, political parties and people, youth and professional organisations to a 24-hour boycott of Pinochet on 30 October, the day of the general strike in Chile.

A change of tactics: Do not go to vote

Finally, in October, the government signed the peace treaty with Pinochet and set for 25 November the date of the plebiscite.

But between that moment and the initial call something had happened. On 3 September bureaucratically the CGT had called a general strike that divided the working class and increased their distrust of the leadership. The workers’ movement, which had been on the offensive, becomes defensive. Memo No. 72 of 10 October 1984 described the situation as follows:

“[...] it is unlikely in this political situation that in the movement of masses currents may arise spontaneously that decide to actively confront the government and towards which we may direct our policy, because the workers’ and mass movement is on the defensive, confused because its leadership crisis is exacerbated without a glimpse of an alternative leadership to replace Peronism and the bureaucracy and with great distrust of the political parties.”

With the change of attitude of the workers’ and mass movement, we had to change our tactics. Our goal remained:

“[...] to repudiate the government manoeuvre and [...] denounce the plans prepared together with imperialism to deflect the rise of the movement of the workers and the people.”

But to succeed, to demonstrate our and the workers’ movement repudiation we found that the best way at this juncture was not going to vote. And we said:

“Not going to vote is a passive rejection, but highly progressive [...] because those who will not go to vote are saying they are not interested in the consultation for the Beagle, i.e., that they do not fall in the government manoeuvre, in the smokescreen that the latter wants to build to prevent the workers from thinking and mobilising for wages, or against the IMF, or the genocide of the military, while delimiting themselves from the ‘no’, which so far is only raised by the most reactionary sectors

of the country. Not to go to vote is a passive manifestation of discontent and anger against the government that grows between workers and sections of the middle class.

“[...] in this election campaign we will dialogue with millions of workers [...]. For this dialogue, we must find the slogans that allow us to be heard, the points that unite us with the workers from which we can repudiate and denounce the government, and raise the whole of our program.”

The final call: Unity action to defeat the government

Four weeks before the plebiscite a new fact takes place, most of the Peronist leadership (although the vote was “unanimous”) turns to abstention. Again the MAS rediscusses its policy. The resolution of the NC published in Memo No. 74 of 1 November 1984 said:

“1. PERONIST ABSTENTION GIVES NEW MEANING TO THE CAMPAIGN ON THE BEAGLE.

“Peronism, by calling for abstention in the consultation on the Beagle, opens the possibility that the radical government be defeated... In a sense, the consultation becomes a foretaste of the elections of 1985 and a plebiscite on the policy of the government.”

Once again reality shifted, this time in favour of the workers’ and popular movement. Hence our policy also changed. Now our goal was not only to repudiate the government but also “to help it to be defeated on 25 November”. This is why we added to our system of slogans and to the propaganda the possibility of the government’s defeat.

This change of party policy also brought a change in its activity. Previously, we proposed dialogue with Peronist workers, now we added to it a dialogue with the leadership of PJ to:

“[...] to exhaust all possibilities of the unity of action open to us with the same Peronist workers.”

So talks, folk club meetings, neighbourhood, regional and provincial rallies were held in the unity of action with the Peronist workers and activists, always proposing abstention. The campaign culminated in the main rally that took place on 23 November in Congress Square, Buenos Aires. This rally was originally called together with Peronism, but at the last moment they quitted and we did it alone. However, 6000 comrades attended, of whom about 1,000 were Peronists. To get an idea of its success let’s say that the rally called by Alfonsín which was attended by 40,000 people was carried out at the same time. (This rally was not only attended by the Radicals but also by the Intransigent Party and the CP, which were both for the YES, and Ernesto Cardenal on behalf of the FSLN.) Despite the agreement with the Peronist leadership having been broken, attended and took the floor in the act Nilda Garre and other Peronist leaders, and endorsements by Saadi, Cepernic and Licastro were read. The latter was not present because at the same time his current was holding their rally, but he marched along with his comrades to Congress Square and unfortunately arrived when we were dispersing.

In other words, we made the most important rally of opposition to the government in Buenos Aires.

A balance sheet of the campaign

At the end of the plebiscite, in Memo No. 77 of 29 November 1984, we did the balance sheet of the campaign. In it, we said that the party had met the goal that had been put forth. We came out of the plebiscite with a distinct personality. We no longer were just the party that proposed not to repay the foreign debt, but we were also consolidated as the only party uncompromisingly opposing the Radical government. And we added:

“It is no exaggeration to say that we started to become a political pole of obligatory reference in the political life of the country and in the workers’ movement...”

But we said also that: “[...] the policy of unity of action with Peronism... IS ONE OF THE BIG SUCCESSES OF THE PARTY this year”, since thanks to it for the first time we could establish organic relations with sectors of its leadership, its middle cadres, its grassroots organisations in factories and neighbourhoods, and not only we stayed in excellent relations with them, but began to appear as an alternative leadership given the failure of their leadership.

However, there were tactical errors by the National Directorate, which could have been fatal, regarding the organisation of the closing ceremony of the campaign. This rally, which was to be done in principle with the Peronist Party, as we said, was finally carried out only by the MAS. Criticism of the National Directorate in the Memo was as follows:

“The national leadership moved naively in almost all negotiations with our allies of the day. This naïveté led to minor errors that do not deny the great success it had, but which could have been catastrophic. In the negotiations we did not work with written resolutions or minutes of each meeting; we did not require public pronouncements of the agreements that were being achieved and without this material evidence we hastily announced the holding of the rally. Those are the mistakes committed.

“We can never forget that in any unity of action we are dealing with our enemies and in this specific case, members of a bourgeois party in the middle of a rampant crisis, which required us to be much more careful and constantly seek proof that there was interest in finalizing the agreement.”

Unity of action in solidarity with a dispute

Between April and May 1984, it took place in Merlo the strike of Cepa meatworks, which was the longest strike the Radical government had to face up until then. It lasted 49 days. The MAS gave full support for the strike to succeed through a campaign of solidarity with the soup kitchen the workers of Cepa had installed next to the factory. The main problem the strike had was its isolation, so our goal was to surround it with the widest solidarity, to make the dispute of Cepa known by and to receive the support and commitment of union leaders, parliamentarians, political parties, student centres, etc.

This political line took shape on 25 May in a major arts festival promoted by the internal commission [factory committee] of Cepa and the Committee of Artists for Human Rights.

The festival was a success, as very well-known artists participated such as Soledad Silveyra, Litto Nebbia, and others, and attended or solidarity was sent by internal commissions, trade unions and shop steward committees. Dante Guilo was present, and there were delegations of IMP [*Intransigencia y Movilización Peronista* – Peronist Intransigency and Mobilisation] and PO [*Partido Obrero*, Workers Party]. About 4500 people attended.

The end result was that it helped the strike to end with the factory workers united, and the bosses having to back down reinstating almost all the workers and giving an increase, although it was not a total victory.

In the balance of the rally, however, some mistakes by the party were noted. The main one: sectarianism. While it is true that agreements on banners and slogans were respected, it is also true that because of our sectarianism were booed the CP, the solidarity of Imbelloni, the Peronist mayor of La Matanza, and of Delich, Radical president-of FUBA [University Federation of Buenos Aires] and Dante Guilo and personalities from other parties were hardly applauded. On balance we raised the danger of this attitude, and wondered:

“Can we applaud our political enemies? [...] We have to applaud them, for the strike and for the party it is a victory that Imbelloni, the mayor of La Matanza, that the Communist Party have joined the Festival of CEPA, and also it is a victory that Dante Guilo has attended [...] This time we measure the success of our policy not for the presence of our comrades or by the presence of the party, this is the least we can expect, we measure it by the presence of our ‘political opponents’ there in the mass actions. [...] We managed to ‘wrest the reformists from their paradise and put them to our side before the masses’ as Trotsky told us, To boo them is to show that we still have among us the spirit of a ‘propaganda society’ and that we are still missing to the point of no doubt that we have the spirit of a ‘party that fights for the conquest of power’. Those who boo in the unitary acts have nothing to do with the party we want to build.”

The electoral tactics of 1985

At the Second Congress of the MAS, in February 1985, we said that the election campaign would surely be the main political campaign that year. We also said that it was very difficult at that point to define the orientation of the campaign but we added that the objective situation showed “the crisis of Peronism and the possibility of a left front arising around the PI and CP”. We felt that this perspective was progressive, since it could mark a break of broad working class sectors and of the left with the Peronist leadership, and this is why we proposed that our goal be the fight for the formation of an electoral front. We could not yet define what kind of front might arise and therefore we had to hit on different sectors with different slogans: Left Front, Workers Front, and Socialist Front.

On 7 March 1985, in *Solidaridad Socialista* we said:

“We call to establish a broad unity of action and an electoral alliance intended to impose the government, the IMF, imperialism, the multinationals and the oligarchs a total change.

“[...] we propose to certain parties, starting with the Communist Party, forming an electoral alliance or political front, to open a new horizon to the country.

“Together [...] we could call the Intransigent Party not only to the united struggle against the IMF but to review its refusal to form an electoral alliance now, inviting it to agree with our socialist program [...]”

In the same issue, we called the CP and the PI to the unity of action around a May Day unitary rally along with all the labour trade unions and popular organisations of the country, whose axis would be supporting the project presented by the PI in Congress. The project proposed to pay in the concept of foreign debt no more than 15 percent of the annual exports of the country.

But in addition, we called the CP to form an electoral alliance of the left, by asking that our unity would make easier the call to the PI.

At the same time, we called the PI to review its anti frontist position by putting forth that we support and would fight to impose their bill against the IMF in Congress, but the best way to fight for them was presenting a united front of all the left, creating a new political alternative.

With these two slogans for the unity of action — one, joint rally for May Day; and two, electoral-frontist: left electoral front — we continued hitting especially on the CP.

The dialogue with the CP begins

On 13 March the CP answered for the first time our call rejecting it, but at the same time initiating the debate. On 21 March, we replied to the CP in *Solidaridad Socialista*, repeating our call and presenting what could be, for us, the basis for the program of the future Front:

“The basis of the program is [...] the suspension of payment of the illegitimate foreign debt and the confrontation with the IMF. Also our similar slogans in terms of wages and a national plan of struggle of the CGT resolved in democratic workers’ meetings.

“[...] the defence of democratic rights, especially in confronting the fascist gangs and the satisfaction of the claims of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and other human rights organisations.

“Equally, we will agree with the unconditional defence of the USSR, Cuba, and Nicaragua, against imperialist attack.”

With this, we asked them fraternally to call together for the left front.

Electoral front of the workers and the left

On 24 March 1985, we again made in *Solidaridad Socialista* a call to the front. This time, it was addressed to the Peronist workers, and we proposed to them a workers’ front, with the same electoral program that we proposed to the CP.

In early April in *Aquí y Ahora* [Here and Now], the magazine of the CP youth, Ernesto Godelman answers our proposal in an article entitled “Towards a front with MAS?” This article was published in full in *Solidaridad Socialista* on 11 April, and we responded by calling to the organisation of the discussion, proposing that both the CP and us mutually publish in our newspapers each other’s proposals for the purposes of the discussion to be made public and that the rank and file could take part in it. In the same article we proposed that beyond our strategic differences, it was possible and necessary an electoral unity.

And so we continued week after week raising the need for an electoral front of the left and the workers. In all the issues of the paper published after the Congress, one article can be found. And in each one, we raised the possibilities, always with the same program: the unconditional struggle against the government plan and the IMF, for wages, for the punishment of the genocidal military and for an economic plan and a government of the workers.

And we continued to press the CP.

On 25 April, *Solidaridad Socialista* published a letter that the MAS National Council addressed to the Executive Committee of the CP. In it we said that “The CP and the MAS can lay the foundation of the left front” and we send them a draft program which included all key agreements, and as time was of the essence, we proposed them the formation of a joint commission to “define the political and organisational bases of the front and the initiatives for its formation and immediate expansion”, while we urged them to call together a great rally for May Day.

We had no response to our call. However, we continued insisting. We did it again at our rally for May Day in Atlanta stadium and on all issues of *Solidaridad Socialista*.

On 8 May, the CP answered us in *Que Pasa* [What’s Up]; or rather it gave its rank and file the reasons for not making the front with us. Basically, it said:

“[...] the policy of alliances of the CP goes through Peronism — firstly through its rank and file of workers and popular masses and their advanced currents — the Intransigent Party, Humanism and Liberation of the Christian Democracy, PSA [Argentine Socialist Party] and other socialist sectors and the wide progressive band of Radicalism.

“[...] the coherence of the CP policy towards the working class and towards Peronism is not compatible with a bilateral alliance with the MAS.

“The CP [...] requires differentiation within the bourgeoisie, admitting alliances, even temporary, with sectors — including Radicalism in its largest part — which are not part of the pole of privilege. The MAS does not understand it so and systematically and in block attacks the government and the UCR [Radical Civic Union].

“[...] Trotskyism originated as a current hostile to the USSR, true socialism and genuinely revolutionary movements.”

The front begins to take shape

On 23 June in Ushuaia, the Socialist Front of the Workers of Tierra del Fuego takes shape, formed by an agreement between the MAS and the Argentine Socialist Party of Tierra del Fuego concrete.

On 16 August, PO holds a rally at Luna Park stadium calling to an “Electoral Front of the Left”. Until then, the PO had rejected our proposal for a Workers and Left Front considering it a betrayal.

Taking advantage of the festival, the MAS leadership did not remind them of their previous refusals to form the front, but distributed a leaflet entitled “Long live the electoral front MAS-PO” in which we said:

“[...] we accept that platforms of ‘immediate struggle’ held by the CP and the left parties which we target are a good starting point.

“To realise the front, let us propose to the CP, to the Peronist groups that have broken with the PJ and to other local currents to organise meetings by district and municipality to discuss and vote democratically, according to proportionality, the lists of candidates [...].

“For various reasons, it may happen that the CP does not want to hold these meetings to nominate candidates. A variation which would respect the rank and file and the proportionality of the members of the front in each district could take as a basis the result of the elections of 1983.”

On this basis then, negotiations on the electoral front begin with PO. At the same time, these negotiations were started with PO, negotiations with the CP are reinitiated.

The FREPALI

As seen, at no time did the MAS abandon the line Electoral Front of the Workers and the Left. But we have to say that reality came to our aid to achieve it. On 27 June, in Memo No. 98 we said:

“The turn of the CP towards opposition to the government’s economic plan and the campaign of continental scope initiated by Fidel Castro about the problem of foreign debt, open to us a great chance of pressing from top and bottom with proposals of unitary actions and relaunching the invitation to the Front.”

As we said before, talks with the PO and CP began a few days before the deadline for registration of electoral alliances. Finally, two hours before the deadline, the PO-MAS alliance materialised. PO inexplicably refused to join the FREPALI [Front for Liberation], later called FREPU [Front of the People]. In the Memo of 12 September 1985 we said:

“[...] the Front is the result of the consistent and systematic implementation of a political line voted six months ago in which, although there were moments when it seemed almost impossible to form a front of workers and the left at national level, we kept the orientation, we continued fighting for its realisation [...] we must never give up an orientation until we get to the categorical conclusion that there is no chance for it to take place and until we exhaust the last effort to make it happen.”

But we also clearly knew that this front was not “the exact expression of the political line voted in Congress, of a Front of the Workers and the Left”. Moreover, we said it was a defensive front that we were forced to call because “the current situation the worker’s movement is facing and defensive because of the electoral possibilities open to the political currents that are part of it”. This means, that the political situation following the imposition of the Austral Plan without struggles after the defeat of the workers of Ford, and the division of Peronism that gave the front more chances in Buenos Aires province, along with the electoral rise of the PI, the electoral possibilities of the CP and ours were diminishing. In this situation, it was also at stake the legality of the party, as it was necessary to get 3 percent of the votes to keep it.

The Quilmes Municipal Front for Social Justice

The Quilmes Municipal Front for Social Justice deserves a special mention for its features. In the Memo of 12 September 1985, in which we analysed the FREPU and its characteristics, we said:

“We have already said that the FREPALI is not the exact expression of the political line we voted in the Congress, that of the Front of Workers and the Left. Its ultimate expression in this election campaign is the front in which we are involved in Quilmes, at the municipal level, because in it there are representatives of virtually all major factories in the area, a good number of neighbourhood progress associations and representatives of Peronism of the Workers, the CP, and our party.”

That same day, *Solidaridad Socialista* reproduced a letter from the Front addressed to its Peronist rank and file saying:

“But it should be clear that the front in which we take part is a RANK AND FILE FRONT, as it has been called for by nearly 100 union, neighbourhood, student, and professional leaders. And it should also be clear that there is an agreement in the sense that the Front is led by militant Peronist leaders, representatives of the struggles in our municipality. Finally, another point of agreement between the forces that make up the Front for Social Justice is that candidates and programmatic points emerge from meetings and assemblies in factories and places of residence, from the bottom up.”

The People’s Front Program

On 19 September 1985, the program of the FREPU is published in *Solidaridad Socialista*. It reads:

“Moratorium for 10 years in the payment of interest and principal on the foreign debt. Investigation and non-payment of its illegitimate part. Rejection of the legitimisation of the debt issued by the government.

“For an immediate increase in wages and pensions [...]. Price control [...]. Application of Law of Supply [...].

“Nationalisation of foreign trade, banking [...] and the monopoly sectors. [...] Agrarian reform [...].

“Promoting of an alternative Economic Plan agreed between the CGT and other sectors of the workers and the people. Increase of the education budget to ensure public, free and secular education at all levels [...]. Emergency Housing Act to suspend evictions of family homes [...].

“For an Integrated National Health System to coordinate all resources and ensure services.”

“To guarantee democracy in the internal affairs of trade unions [...]. Trial and punishment of those responsible for state terrorism and all those who carried out acts violating human rights [...].

“Against any coup attempt. For the working class and popular mobilisation to stop it [...].

“Solidarity with the peoples of Nicaragua and El Salvador in their struggle against imperialism. Support for the struggle of the Chilean people to overthrow Pinochet. Rupture of relations with the racist apartheid regime in South Africa.

“For breaking the dependence on imperialism [...].

The People’s Front after 3 November

On 21 November 1985, we did an assessment of the elections and the tactics of the FP. In that assessment the first thing we said was that we had made an initial mistake:

“[...] not to have incorporated as a fundamental element of our political line and analysis that led us to define the alliance with the Communist Party, with sectors of Peronism and other left forces, the existence of an incipient workers vanguard that seems to be resuming the process of struggle against the bureaucracy and for the leadership of the unions.”

From that, we proposed that it was our task to correct this mistake “immediately because it is part of one of the most important problems of the Argentine Revolution: the union leadership of the workers’ movement.”

With regard specifically to the FP we said that we had given ourselves two goals with the FP in the election campaign: the possibility of grouping a Peronist current emerging as a result of the crisis in Peronism and, secondary but also important, to get the 3 percent of votes required by the electoral law for the legality of the party. Neither goal was achieved. However, we contend that it had been correct to have raised these goals:

“The first, because it was a real possibility raised by the deep crisis of disintegration that Peronism had and that took it to present divided in several provinces and particularly in the province of Buenos Aires. For the party, it was a political obligation to work on this opportunity and exhaust all possibilities in our power to facilitate this possible process.”

And thus we recalled that we had already anticipated the fact that Peronism presenting divided in the elections could play in its favour. In fact, as the campaign progressed this variant became increasingly possible, and we were left convinced of this after the rally on Congress Square.

Regarding the second goal, to exceed 3 percent, we missed by a few votes to get it in Capital and in the province of Buenos Aires. In short, we said:

“The People’s Front allowed us to become an objective fact of national politics. We were the fifth national party, we fought for a national deputy in province of Buenos Aires, a provincial deputy in the third [electoral] section of the same province, a councillor in the Federal Capital; newspapers had to refer to the alliance which we were part of [...] and several speakers for the bourgeoisie expressed their concern for the good vote we had in Greater Buenos Aires. We appeared before the workers and the electorate as a credible alternative, as a viable variable, and as a serious party.”

In addition, the experience of the FP had been profitable for the party because:

“All our cadres were forced to discuss with other political forces, to schedule actions in common, to write unitary flyers, to make rallies where we had to address a different audience to the one traditionally made up by our militants and our periphery. We had to practically fight against sectarianism. The results of this learning are better than good and will assist in the future to better link to currents that may arise outside of us; it is an element to place among our electoral achievements.”

In that same assessment we raised the prospects of the FP and say that for us we had:

“[...] to keep it as an electoral alliance or agreement, which makes political statements about facts of the class struggle when its members agree, always within the framework of the program we adopted and that, if sustained, it take part in the next elections.”

And we added:

“[...] we see no possibility of building a permanent front with the CP not only for the programmatic differences, for the different strategy and history our two parties have, the two most important components of the People’s Front, but because in the class struggles generally, we are on different paths.

“Building a stable front requires a common participation in the class struggle alongside the workers to confront the bosses, the government, imperialism and the bureaucracy. While these conditions are not met it is impossible its realisation. That is, while the CP prefers allying itself to the bureaucracy and the bosses, there is no possibility for the existence of the Front, the People’s Front will continue being an electoral alliance.

“This political line requires a practical behaviour: we cannot encourage anywhere organisms or actions feeding the possibility of a stable front, it would be self-deception, bringing confusion to our members and the workers. We refer to the opening of premises of the FP, to the creation of common organisations of the Front requiring that we submit to its decisions, to the creation of common regional or local leaderships.

“Moreover, the only real way of possibility to know whether the CP is ready to make a class front, serving the workers’ struggles against imperialism, the bourgeois government of the day, the bosses and the bureaucracy, is stating with absolute clarity what a front means for us and why at this time it has no chance of existence.”

The CP, meanwhile, proposed to us in its preparatory Policy Thesis of their 16th Congress:

“The 23 programmatic points of the FP constitute a reference to ensure, among all its components and the forces that can be incorporated or coalesce, its continuity and strengthening with a dynamic, flexible, active structure, based on thousands of basic committees. [...]

“The main task in the coming period unfolds around this effort for the continuity, consolidation, and development of the steps that have occurred in the construction of the Front of National and Social Liberation.”

For all the above considerations, we voted a precise orientation: to prioritize the work on agreements and work in common of the CP-MAS in the unions, in the trade union arena, and “to freeze” the development “on the rank and file” of the People’s Front.

The foreign debt

The “madmen of no payment”: systematic propaganda and agitation of a programmatic slogan

Practically since its foundation the MAS took up as one of its main programmatic slogan the call to NO PAYMENT OF THE FOREIGN DEBT. In *1982: The Revolution Begins* Nahuel Moreno said:

“Against imperialism, while we continue to maintain our traditional slogans (expropriation of industrial, commercial and financial imperialist monopolies, breaking of the political and military pacts that bind us to it, as the OAS, the Rio Treaty, etc.), we raise a great central slogan: non-payment of the foreign debt. This slogan summarises in a sense all others because it attacks the most tremendous expression of imperialist exploitation of the country and the people.

“If we continue paying, there will be no economic recovery, no wages, and no jobs. And it raises the remaining problems: the need to expropriate imperialism and its national partners to prevent economic sabotage, as well as the need to arm the people to face an eventual retaliation of world imperialism and, finally, to impose a workers’ or workers’ and popular government to carry it out.” (Op. Cit., p. 16.)

Nahuel Moreno characterised the slogan of NONPAYMENT as an anti-imperialist-revolutionary-popular slogan because it “frontally [goes] against the semi-colonial capitalist system and its government and regime of the day”. (Ibid. p. 17.)

Consistent with this, since the beginning of the election campaign of 1983, which began on 1 July with a big rally at Luna Park stadium, the MAS identified himself throughout the country as “the party of NONPAYMENT”. And we were so maniacs with our proposal and our insistence, we earned the nickname from the press and other political parties as the “madmen of the non-payment”.

When the campaign ended, due to the small number of votes that the MAS had achieved, there were comrades who argued that it had been a mistake to raise this slogan. However, in the assessment of the campaign we said that on the contrary, raising the slogan of non-payment was the greatest success of the campaign, because:

“Raising the non-payment of foreign debt we gave a response to the most critical, we could say dramatic, the objective problem of the mass movement and the Argentine popular sectors: its extreme and growing misery asphyxiated by the economic collapse of Argentina’s semi-colonial economy in hands of the financial capital of imperialism. And we pointed out a perspective: either the mass movement takes action with their mobilisation to prevent the imperialist plunder or we will reach hunger levels never seen in our country with economic plans thousand times worse than those of Martinez de Hoz.”

This position implied that the Non-Payment would remain one of our programmatic slogans, as we stated in the national document of March 1984, and we did it again by integrating it into our program of February 1985, during the Second Congress of the MAS. But not only that, it also meant that from March 1984 the task would be to make the Non-Payment a permanent campaign, hitting with it on all sectors which would oppose the IMF in order to mobilise the masses. We could just do

that because being the first to raise this slogan in the country, we were in the best position to raise the issue.

Other sectors begin to worry about debt

After Alfonsín taking office, the government entered into a scuffle with the IMF. The Fund demanded more and more, and the economic situation of the country, beyond some fleeting recovery, was getting increasingly worse. In this frame, the issue of foreign debt became increasingly evident. It was no longer only the MAS which emphasised the seriousness of the problem and that we had to reject the demands of the Fund. Since the beginning of 1984 other sectors began to raise it even timidly and sporadically, making possible the unity of action against the IMF. Between February and March 1984, the wrangling between the government and the IMF made current the possibility of anti-imperialist and popular resistance. At this time, the MAS analysed this situation and raised different proposals for slogans that generated an extensive internal discussion. In Memo No. 39, from 1 March 1984 analysing the national situation, we said:

“Therefore, if the financial capital does not yield we will march possibly towards a major political crisis: either because Alfonsín resists relying on the working-class and popular mobilisation, and comes to the extreme of breaking with the IMF and ordering the closure of the economy (autarky), or because he capitulates completely and applies a plan of hunger as we have never seen. [...]

“This situation finds our party very well placed politically to take advantage of it. In the election campaign, we had the good sense of introducing ourselves as ‘the party of non-payment of the foreign debt’. Foreign debt is the crucial problem of Argentina and perhaps the trigger for the next revolutionary crisis, as Malvinas was what sparked the crisis of June 1982.”

And we added our main goal had to be to get the masses to participate in this tug of war between the government and the IMF. To achieve this:

“All our concern has to be how to change this situation and that the masses get involved. The mobilisation of the masses was what ‘kicked the board’ in Malvinas. Our main goal now must be that the masses find an opening in the tussle Alfonsín-IMF to once again ‘kick the board’: that is, produce a revolutionary crisis.”

To manage this it was necessary to achieve a slogan that would help to mobilise. Ours, the Non-Payment, not being taken up by the major sectors obviously was not useful for the unity of action. We proposed then different variations, and thought the best was perhaps “No to the IMF” because it was so general and abstract that could be filled with any objective and we added:

“If there are mobilisations, it will be the class struggle and not the semantics, what will finally fill the content of the slogan ‘No to the IMF’.”

The possibility of mobilisation shows up

The following week we defined better the slogan and the possibility of a mobilisation was already showing up. As it happened, the book by Radical economist Aldo Ferrer was published at that time. In the book, titled *Living with what is ours*, Ferrer proposed that only 10 percent of our exports be allocated to the payment of foreign debt. In the Memo of 8 March, we mentioned this and we said it was a bourgeois slogan, but that, however, the possibility existed it would be taken by broad sectors and if so it could be converted into a slogan for the mobilisation. And the “mass mobilisation can be the decisive factor tipping the situation for both sides”. Thence, we proposed practical measures to start the campaign.

“We must begin to consider this campaign as we did our election campaign. We say this in the sense of taking it as our main campaign and for a long period, although it is very different to the electoral campaign, as our concern will now be to achieve unity to mobilise.”

We proposed that we had to touch with this slogan all sectors — student, workers, popular, etc. — in order to achieve joint action: demonstrations, petitions, joint statements, whatever. And we added a warning against sectarianism:

“We make on this a serious warning: our attitude should be to want truly to achieve the mobilisation. We will go to see the Peronists, Radicals, and other sectors to try by all means that they do something, that they also mobilise. We will not go to see them as a ‘manoeuvre’, to then ‘unmask’ them in the newspaper because they do nothing. If we do not succeed in that they mobilise, this represents a failure for us and not a ‘win’ because we have managed a pretext to ‘denounce’ them. We must, therefore, eradicate all sectarian ultimatums.”

Our campaign objectively coincided with other facts of reality, and having this line hitting on all sectors, we could then participate and in some cases influence. For example, the march on 14 June of Ex-Combatants of Malvinas had among its slogans “No to the IMF”.

Around 20 June, the government had to deliver its letter of intent to the IMF. The MOJUPO [Movement of Political Youths] decided that a mobilisation would help the government to take a firmer attitude against the Fund. Then it called a march for 22 June, with these slogans: “against the pressures of the IMF and international usury” and “for the unity of Latin American peoples against imperialist aggression”. Our party argued that one of the slogans had to be also “Down with the letter of intent”.

Although our proposal was not accepted, we still attended and marched under the slogans: “Down with the IMF”, “That the government withdraws its unilateral ‘Letter of Intent’”, “Let us do as in Bolivia, let us cease payment of the debt and increase wages”.

The march was massive and was even attended by a sector of the Radical Youth who truly thought their presence helped Alfonsín. This attitude caused them a later reprimand by the president himself.

The Peronist Party proposes a plebiscite on the debt

As we said earlier, other sectors were beginning to raise the problem of the debt. The main advance in this situation happened because the Peronist Party raised the need to plebiscite the payment of the debt.

As always, it was the reality which led to this. President Alfonsín raised it was necessary to call a plebiscite on the Beagle. To this, the Peronists answered publicly that it was much more important to call a plebiscite on “the renegotiation of the foreign debt, its legitimacy or illegitimacy, and the rejection or acceptance of the terms imposed on the country by the International Monetary Fund” (*Tiempo*, 1 August 1984).

The MAS supported this proposal and called on all trade unions, popular and student organisations to support it. At the same time, we proposed the CGT to make a general strike having as one of its claims to break with the IMF. From this slogan, “Plebiscite of the debt” we began a campaign that was reflected in articles published weekly in *Solidaridad Socialista*.

Only the vanguard

However, the slogan of the plebiscite on the foreign debt did not catch on. The problem of foreign debt remained the concern of a sector of the vanguard, and the government could once again hide it using for that the plebiscite on the Beagle.

This does not mean that nobody would take up the debt issue, but the sectors that did were very small. The CGT, for example, called on 3 September 1984 to the first general strike against the government of Alfonsín and does not even mention the issue.

In fact, all parties agree to pay the debt, as evidenced by accepting the budget. Despite that, we still keep pounding maniacally with our slogan, especially on the PI.

1985: the year of the foreign debt

By 1985 the situation became untenable for the government. Rampant inflation, a workers’ movement that came again to fight, everything conjured to hinder the negotiations. And within that

framework, in which the government yielded more and more and the IMF increasingly demanded more, we begin to see the first pronouncements against the government negotiations and for a break with the Fund.

On March 14, 1985, teachers, non-teachers and students of the University of Cordoba are mobilised, among other claims “against the IMF”.

In those days, Piccinini (UOM, Metalworkers Union) and Nestor Vicente (PI) argued that the only way out is a break with the IMF, and Vicente Leonides Saadi argues that the solution is to declare a unilateral debt moratorium for 10 years.

But even more interesting things happened. In May, the Radical senators Leon, Mazzuco, Napoli (who was also chairman of the radical bloc), Velázquez, Gass and Falsone and deputy Negri made different propositions regarding the debt. Leon said we had to declare a moratorium of 10 years during which 20 percent of the trade balance would be paid, and the others spoke for the halving of the annual interest payments on the debt.

During May, and in preparation for the general strike on 23 May, Ubaldini travels the country with the famous “Either change or leave”, but in addition saying, “On 23 May we will say ‘enough’ to the IMF”. And the same say De Gennaro and Abdala, ATE [State Workers Union] leaders.

This repudiation of the IMF is shared by the Bureau of National Entrepreneurship formed by the Argentine Agrarian Federation and the Argentine Council for Industry, who argued for the need to “recompose the agreed conditions for payment of foreign debt”.

Amid growing pronouncements against the IMF, the government begins to implement the Austral Plan on 14 June 1985. This plan was devised and imposed by the IMF to ensure payment of the debt.

The next day, on 15 June, the Confederal Council of CTERA [Confederation of Education Workers] voted to suspend payment of the foreign debt until the National Congress decides.

All throughout 1985, the problem of foreign debt becomes increasingly a focus of discussions, and the electoral polemic pushes it backwards and forwards. Finally, after the elections on 3 November, the MOJUPO, without the participation of the Radical Youth, called along with the CGT to a rally to be held in Atlanta on 13 December. The central slogan of the event was “For the moratorium on foreign debt, decent wages and social justice”.

The MAS supports this rally and proposes to participate. However, because of the lack of democracy in its organisation, which did not allow us to state our position on the debt, we did not attend. The CGT at the last moment decided not to attend either.

Fidel and the foreign debt

Meanwhile at the Latin American level facts were also taking place that made it more evident than ever that the debt was an insoluble problem not only for Argentina but for all dependent countries.

Already in 1984 Bolivia had suspended payment of debt interest, and a general strike takes place on the 11 February 1985 in Santo Domingo for the Non-Payment. Two years earlier the population had brought lootings on supermarkets to protest the negotiations with the IMF. But the slogan of Non-Payment takes true prominence when Fidel Castro convenes a conference in Havana to address the problem of foreign debt. The statements that led to this conference were very promising. Fidel called “a general strike of debtors in Latin America”, and added that:

“[...] the foreign debt of Latin America and the Third World should not and cannot be paid.

“[...] for five centuries we have been funding the development of industrialised countries, which is why they are so rich and us so poor. I think they are the debtors and we the creditors.”

The Trade Union Conference was held between 15 and 18 June 1985 at the Palace of Conventions in Havana and attended by the national labour centres of Cuba, Nicaragua, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru and Uruguay, and delegations of workers and peasant union groups of all Latin American and Caribbean countries. The CGT did not attend but about 20 Argentine unions did. The Act of Havana established that:

“The vast majority of participants declared for the foreign debt to be cancelled. Other trade unionists presented variations of the moratorium, immediate suspension of payments or postponement for a number of years, including the interest.”

At the Conference it became clear that there were two opposing sectors: one of the left (involving members of the Bolivian COB, the Brazilian CUT and other unions), which proposed confronting the governments which implement the plans of the IMF and imperialism and the struggle for socialism; and another, right-wing, headed by Fidel, who refused to attack the bosses’ governments on the continent and instead proposed a “new international order”.

Fidel took that position thoroughly when in closing the Havana Conference he commended the Austral Plan of Alfonsín. How can this contradiction between the first and the latter position be explained?

The key can be found in the interview he gave to Brazilian newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo* and reproduced in Argentina by *La Nueva Provincia* on 17 July 1985. There Fidel stated:

“[...] let’s discuss now the salvation of capitalism. The approaching collapse will bring down the American and European bankers, creditors of defaulting debtors. However, banks are the foundation of capitalism. [...] The IMF deserves to be saved, but as a forum for governments, not for the banks. [...] My scheme is to save the banks and not only to depositors: a proposal to save capitalism from the defeat approaching, at the latest in 1988. The countdown of the debt time bomb may reach zero in 1988.”

Later, in an interview on 30 July 1985 he added: “It is a matter of achieving justice, a new international order, for which we have all understood that we must face it jointly”. In other words, that the call to non-payment of the debt would be to Castro-Stalinism a preliminary step to sit down and negotiate with imperialism on more favourable terms.

On 1 August 1985, Alan Garcia, president of Peru, argued for only having to pay 10 percent of exports and not negotiating with the Fund but directly with the banks.

The CP and the foreign debt

We just saw what was Fidel’s position regarding the debt and how he used the slogan of non-payment for his own politics. Let us now see what the policy of the CP of Argentina was.

During the first months of the government of Alfonsín, the CP lives a romance with Radicalism that leads it to not make any proposal to oppose the plans of Alfonsín, and to not say that the government is implementing the plans of Reagan and the IMF. In *Que Pasa* on 4 April 1984, it said:

“It’s not about making alarmist proposals of the kind of breaking with the IMF, but we will have to see now how are expressed the promises of not admitting ‘recessionary recipes’ in the letter of intent that the Argentine government will submit to the consideration of the Fund probably next Thursday 12.”

Three months later, on 4 July 1984, they advanced a little bit more. In *Que Pasa* they said:

“The Communists do not propose not to pay, but the country wants fundamental conditions without which the official administration can end up in a resignation of positions that could knock over democracy itself. In short, the CP holds: 1) not to pay anything illegitimate; 2) not to add to the debt any unilateral rise in US rates; 3) that payment be suspended, as Bolivia did, of any interest until the negotiation of the debt is finished; 4) to make effective a moratorium of five years for interest payments and amortization and then 15 years to pay them; 6) for the Letter of Intent to the IMF to be withdrawn, because the same commits to an adaptation of the economic policy in a regressive and anti-wage sense; 7) to address a concerted action with debtor countries.”

That is, at that time there was already some overlap with our proposals.

But this leftward trend was accentuated when Fidel took out his proposal of non-payment. Thus, on 1 May 1985, Athos Fava, in an interview for *Que Pasa*, said:

“For the Communists [...] there are no intermediate solutions. The foreign debt cannot be paid under current conditions [...] there is only one patriotic attitude to regain the power of national decision, and this attitude is to declare the moratorium for 10 years, freezing in that period principal and interest, in agreement with creditors or, otherwise, unilaterally.”

The People's Front

Since the end of the Second Congress, in which the political line of the Front was voted, we had taken out a policy to achieve an electoral front with the CP. At this point we already had, due to the shift to the left of the CP regarding the denunciation of the government and the Austral Plan, a basic point of coincidence: the moratorium on foreign debt. In the FP program, this was point number one:

“Moratorium for 10 years in the payment of interest and principal on foreign debt. Investigation and non-payment of its illegitimate part. Rejection of the legitimacy of the debt issued by the government.”

The CGT and the foreign debt

We saw that in May the motto of the CGT had been “Either change or leave” and that it had begun to raise “Enough of the IMF”.

On 31 July 1985, in a plenary of general secretaries of the CGT, and opposed by the “62 Organisations” and Management and Labour, it is voted and approved a program of 21 points which included the moratorium in the payment of foreign debt for five years. These 21 points were the ancestors of the current “26 points”. In the plenary it was decided to call to a new strike and mobilisation for 29 August, carrying as banner the 21 points. Therefore, this is the first time that the point of the moratorium on repayment of foreign debt appears, although mixed with other points, in a call of the CGT for a general strike. However, the call is distorted and so although the rally was massive, the strike was a setback with respect to the strike on 23 May.

But the pressure of the masses continued, and thus, for the first time in January 1985 the CGT is forced to call a general strike with the slogan: “For the people not to pay what they don't owe”.

The general strike on January 24

For the MAS, the call to a general strike on January 24 by the CGT was very important because of the time at which happened and what it meant. In the internal Memo of 16 January 1986 we said:

“The wave of struggles and the general strike are not isolated phenomena, they are part of a general picture in which new contradictions appear between sectors of the bourgeoisie and the government, between the provinces and the central administration, within the government itself, of new difficulties for the Austral Plan, and new developments in the crisis of foreign debt as another expression of the difficulties of the world economy.

“[...] a new period is opening in the country, a period of new and great struggles of the workers that can lead to the defeat of the Austral Plan, to new leaps in the economic crisis of the government, which may lead to a revolutionary crisis [...].

“The general strike called by the bureaucracy is the defensive response to the immense anger existing among the workers against the Austral Plan and the government of Alfonsín, which is expressed in dozens of conflicts which without interruption have taken place at the end of 1985 and the beginning of 1986.”

Consistent with this analysis, we said that:

“The party stakes everything to support the general strike and will make every effort within its power to help ensure it [...]

“[...] to do this we have to promote the holding of meetings in the factories and work sites that choose to support the strike and approve the call to continuity with a plan of struggle.”

Alfonsín's reaction few days before the general strike showed that our analysis was right. A week before the strike, the president spoke from Villa Regina accusing the CGT, the CP and the MAS of being destabilising.

Finally, on January 24 the strike was carried out and for two basic points: the rejection of the Austral Plan and the moratorium on foreign debt, and it was successful. On the 30 January 1986 we made the following assessment in our Internal Memo:

“The extraordinary triumph achieved by the workers’ movement is crucial in the evolution of the political situation. Firstly, because the Argentine workers’ movement, headed by the CGT, has taken as its own slogan the moratorium on foreign debt, which combined with the fight against the Austral Plan, makes this general strike an essentially political strike, of direct struggle against the government and imperialism.

“Secondly, because the workers’ movement was accompanied by sectors of the petty bourgeoisie and sectors of the bourgeoisie: the general strike was more than a massive workers’ strike, it incorporated important segments of the population to become a huge antigovernment and anti-imperialist mobilisation.

“Thirdly, because it is the highest point of the colossal rise the workers’ movement started in December [...].”

“The victorious general strike strengthens and decants this process which is just beginning, and places Argentina as one of the cornerstones of world revolution [...].”

And we concluded that our policy had to be to “fight for unity to defeat the Austral Plan and impose a moratorium on foreign debt”, as unity was the only possible way to ensure the continuity of the fight against the Austral Plan.