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Strategy

Elements of revolutionary strategy

- Features -

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Introduction

This article is an edited version of a report given at a cadre school for comrades with national responsibilities in the LCR. It aims to bring up to date some key elements of revolutionary strategy in an advanced capitalist country. Several working hypotheses are submitted to the discussion. Among these, certain questions deserve to be more thoroughly examined. Others will remain work in progress.

ELEMENTS OF REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Chile_mural.jpg]

Even though the relationship of forces on a world scale remains largely unfavourable to the working class, a series of factors are putting a new discussion on strategic questions on the agenda: factors such as the crisis of neo-liberalism, the war in Iraq and the threats of war in other areas of the world, the social-liberal restructuring of the workers' movement and its contradictions, the discussion within the left on governmental questions, the depth of the social and political crisis in Latin America, the revolutionary processes in Venezuela and in Bolivia, the discussion initiated by Chavez on the socialism of the 21st century. Strategic questions are back on the agenda.

1) Remarks on the history of our discussions on strategic questions.

The history of the discussions on strategic questions in the LCR is marked by two stages. The first, in the period after May [1968] and up until the end of the 1970s, was favoured by the pre-revolutionary situations in Southern Europe. The second was rather characterized by an absence of discussion. In this first phase, the debates of the 1920s in the Communist International, but also a series of discussions around revolutionary experiences, were gone over again. May 1968 had been analyzed as a dress rehearsal, following the example of the relationship between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, but our analysis was never reduced to Russian questions. In the 1970s we distinguished the specificities of the Russian Revolution from those of the revolutions in Europe and Latin America. The League's cadre schools, in particular under the influence of Ernest Mandel, were centred on Germany, Italy, Spain, Chile. These strategic discussions were in direct connection with an analysis of the period that was marked, as we saw it at the time, by a new conjunctural actuality of the revolution. Pre-revolutionary situations were foreseen in Europe in the coming four or five years. The strategy of armed struggle in Latin America was adopted, with a perspective of taking power in the short-term in countries like Bolivia and Argentina. For some comrades, even, "history was snapping at our heels".

The inversion of the period, at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, with revolutionary perspectives receding, put an end to these discussions, except for some incursions in the cadre schools of the years 1986-87.

The Manifesto of 1992, for example, remained silent on these questions. "Because the Wall had come down", it was necessary to go back over our history – the history of the Russian Revolution and the Stalinist degeneration - and to bring our fundamental ideas up to date. It was a question of priorities. But we were losing the thread of the strategic discussion. The difference is clear between the Manifesto of 1992 and the Manifesto of 2005 which took up, even in a modest way, some strategic points. That raises a first question. Strategic problems can obviously not be dealt with in an identical way in different periods, it depends on whether the revolutionary wave is rising or ebbing. The strategic discussions of the 1920s – when the revolution was on the rise following the Russian revolution - and those of the 1930s - revolutionary reactions faced with the rise of fascism - were different. The approach to strategic problems

during the short century - 1914-1991 - was not the same as at the present time. Revolutionary Marxists, over and above the characterizations and the concepts covering the Stalinist phenomenon, modified many of their strategic approaches following the bureaucratic counter-revolution. The relationship of forces between the classes, the changes in capitalism and the modifications within the working class, the collapse of Stalinism, the social-liberal evolution of social democracy, the emergence of new social movements like the global justice movement, all that modifies the framework of and the approach to strategic questions.

Should this discussion be reserved only for periods of rising class struggle or revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situations, as we rather tended to think, implicitly, in the League? I do not think so. Over and above the difficulties or questionings, the question of the revolution and the problems which are linked to it must remain at the centre of our preoccupations. Let us not forget that Trotsky, even though he thought that the Second World War would be transformed into revolution, wrote the Transitional Programme in September 1938, after the defeat of the German proletariat in 1933, the defeat of the Catalan proletariat in 1937 – key date in the Spanish Civil War - and when the French workers' movement was in full retreat after the betrayals of the Popular Front, before the defeat of the general strike of November 1938.

2) Discussion on the concept of "actuality of the revolution"

The concept of "actuality of the revolution" has a double function: conjunctural but also historical. It was operational during the period after the Russian revolution and during the revolutionary periods of 1918-1923 in Germany, 1934-1936 in France, in 1936-1937 in Spain, the post-war revolutionary situations and those of the 1960s and 1970s, and the colonial revolutions. It is useful in order to characterize longer historical periods of rising class struggle which encompassed pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situations.

But when we go back over certain texts of Marx or certain documents of Trotsky, after the revolutionary period of the 1920s, the question of revolutionary perspectives is presented in a fuller way:

Let us recall this passage of Marx in the Grundrisse:

"At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society enter into contradiction with the existing relations of production, or, which is only the legal expression of the same thing, with the relations of property within which they had hitherto evolved. From being the forms of the development of the productive forces that they were, these relations become obstacles to it. Then a period of social revolution opens up".

In his turn, Ernest Mandel gives the following explanation of this passage in his notes on Late Capitalism.

"When we evoke the epoch of revolutions, that does not at all mean that no further development of the productive forces would be possible without the fall of this mode of production. It means only that, from this point of view, the productive forces which continue to develop enter into increasingly open rebellion with the existing mode of production and contribute to its downfall".

The revolutionary horizon or perspectives are linked to the reactionary character of capitalism, to its internal contradictions, to the social cost of the system of capitalist property, to the difference between the possibilities of technological, cultural and social development of society and the obstacles that are put in place by the race for capitalist profit.

It is also for this reason that the epoch of the actuality of revolutions or of socialism is related to the imperialist phase

of capitalism.

Mandel rejects any mechanical and catastrophist interpretation of the formulas of Marx.

What Trotsky, following Lenin, developed in the CI in 1926, was: "Can the bourgeoisie obtain a new epoch of capitalist growth? To deny such a possibility, to count on a 'situation without any way out' for capitalism would simply be revolutionary verbalism"...

And he specified that it was necessary to relate the developments of the capitalist economy and the cycles of the class struggle: "Retreats or defeats also make possible new phases of stabilization or revival of capitalism", he wrote in *The Third International After Lenin*.

It think it is useful for us to have such an approach, which takes account of the specific analysis of each period, while integrating it into a history which remains that of capitalism, its contradictions, and its possible revolutions. That may seem banal, but it is necessary to remember it in a situation characterized by the absence of revolutions in capitalist Europe over a long period: 23 years separate the revolutionary rise of 1944-45 from that of May 1968; and there have already been almost 38 years between May 1968 and 2006. Such periods of time explain why the thread of a strategic discussion on the revolution gets lost. It is also useful to reconsider these problems of periodisation.

The "periods of social revolution" result, therefore, above all "from a time marked by the fundamental contradictions of capital". Our perspectives of revolutionary transformation come back to these fundamental contradictions. They take account of the specific analysis of each historical period. They accelerate and are sharpened during situations where the question of power is really posed. But this course must be maintained, whatever the cycles, long or short, of the class struggle.

3) To come back to the concepts of revolutionary strategy

What is a revolutionary strategy?

The central question of any revolutionary strategy remains the conquest of political power. Although we approached strategic questions through the study of revolutionary crises - which was correct -, the League tended to reduce strategy to only the moment of the revolutionary crisis, and even to the politico-military modalities of the conquest of power, in particular by the study of the various models - insurrectionary general strike, prolonged war, guerrilla wars, debates on the Chinese, Vietnamese and Cuban models – etc. Though it was correct to work on these questions, nevertheless we often had a tendency to reduce strategic problems to a debate over models, whereas strategy includes many dimensions in the construction of the revolutionary subject. This tendency to modelisation furthermore led us to make mistakes, in particular in Latin America, by adapting to generalizations of the Cuban model by the Castroite currents.

Trotsky gives a more general definition of the strategic problems in the Criticism of the Draft Programme of the 6th Congress of the IC: "Before the war, we spoke only about the tactics of the proletarian party, and this conception corresponded exactly to the parliamentary and trade-union methods which then prevailed and which did not go beyond the framework of immediate demands and tasks. Tactics are limited to a particular problem. Revolutionary strategy covers a whole combined system of actions which, in their interconnection and their successive character, as in their development, must bring the proletariat to the conquest of power".

A "combined system of actions" and the "conquest of power" - it is this tension which makes revolutionary strategy.

We do not work enough on this "combined system of actions" and its relationship to governmental questions...

We must grasp both ends of the chain: the concrete modalities of formation of an anti-capitalist consciousness, of a socialist consciousness, starting from the key experiences of the class struggle, and at the other end, a permanent striving towards the final goal, the programme and strategy to reach it, starting from the specificities of the socialist revolution.

We do not know what will be the forms of the revolutions of the 21st century, but we are always confronted with this characteristic of the proletarian revolution: How, from "nothing", to become "all"?

The popular classes can conquer positions, obtain partial reforms, "seeds of workers' democracy within bourgeois democracy", but these conquests cannot be made permanent without replacing the power of the bourgeoisie by the power of the workers and the majority of society. From which flows the central strategic place of revolutionary crises, where the ruptures occur which modify durably the relationship of forces and the process of formation of a socialist consciousness. Unlike in the bourgeois revolutions, where the bourgeoisie had become the dominant class before the revolution, the proletariat can only become the dominant class after the conquest of political power.

Lenin had in his time given the first indications: the famous conditions of a revolutionary crisis, developed in Left-wing communism, an infantile disease: "Those on high no longer can, those below no longer will, the layers or classes in the middle swing to the side of those below, and there is a revolutionary leadership – [in the sense of leadership, party, and class consciousness, let us add] - to lead the process". And he added, along with Trotsky and the leaders of the CI in the capitalist countries of Europe: "It will be much more difficult to conquer power [compared to Russia] and easier to keep it" He was speaking about the more developed socio-economic level of these countries compared to Tsarist Russia.

It is in this sense, without building models, that Ernest Mandel tried to outline a typology of future revolutions, in the notes of his book *Late capitalism*: "The future typology of socialist revolutions in highly industrialized countries will probably more resemble that of the revolutionary crises of Spain in the 1930s, of France in 1936 and 1968, of Italy in 1948 and 1966-70, of Belgium in 1960-61, than the crises of collapse after the First World War".

These future revolutions will have much stronger interconnections on the continental and international level. The relationship between a revolutionary process which starts on the national terrain and its projection on the world arena is much stronger today than in the past. The international content - at least in the advanced capitalist countries – of revolutions is more marked. In Europe, that raises the question of a European strategy or at least of a European programme.

Lastly, it falls to us to incorporate into the main lines of a modern revolutionary strategy the lessons of the revolutions of the last century. We often explain that we will work for "majority" and "conscious" revolutions. Majority: which implies "revolutionary-democratic" processes... so with strong tensions between revolutionary chaos and "the mechanisms of democratic decisions". Conscious: which requires the preparation of the revolutionary rupture by a series of confrontations where the masses go through the experience of the superiority - even partial – of socialist solutions compared to capitalism. We never fell into a vision of the revolution as the product of "the great day", but both the increasing complexity of societies and the lessons of revolutionary experiences must lead us to get rid of any trace or remains of this type of conception.

These majority and conscious revolutions also result from a reorganization of the whole of the workers' movement. We can on this point take guidance from some of the intuitions of Trotsky, put forward in a discussion on the Transitional Programme with leaders of the American SWP in 1938.

He explained that there are three conditions for a new society:

- a) "that the productive forces are sufficiently developed and that they enter in contradiction with the relations of production;
- b) "a progressive class that is sufficiently strong socially" [the working class]
- c) "the third condition is political consciousness".

We are confronted with a double difficulty, objective and subjective.

Objective, because there is at the same time, extension of the proletariat on a worldwide scale, but also an increase in the internal differentiations within the working class - technical, of status, gender, nationalities... and a differentiation in class consciousness, impacted by these new differentiations of the working class but also by the balance sheet of the century, of revolutions, by the effects of Stalinism.

It is necessary to rebuild from further back...

The question with which we are confronted is not only "the crisis of leadership", as Trotsky presented it in the Transitional Programme, but an overall crisis of leadership, organization, consciousness, from which flows the necessity of reorganizing, of rebuilding the workers' movement.

It is not a question, as in the 1920s and 1930s, of substituting a revolutionary leadership for a reformist, centrist or Stalinist one. All these substitutions were possible because it was being done within the framework of the same culture, in a climate marked by revolutionary dynamics.

The subjective factor is not reduced, today, to the building of a revolutionary leadership, or even just to the building of the revolutionary party. There are problems of experiences, organization, consciousness of the mass movement. There is the need to discuss mediations, to discuss tactics in order to advance towards broad anti-capitalist parties, while situating ourselves in each country on the terrain of class unity and independence in order to build, under the best conditions, the future revolutionary leadership.

Today, without starting out again from scratch, by starting from the basis of the present-day reality of the workers' movement, it is thus necessary to rebuild practices, organizations, projects of revolutionary transformation of society, but on the basis of a series of strategic reference that we have outlined above.

4) The transitional approach

This is a weak point in the history of the French workers' movement, dominated by Jacobinism - the statist pressure - and Stalinism - the negation of self-emancipation. But it is also a weak point in the history of the LCR since May 1968. A weakness with which Ernest Mandel often reproached us, and which was, perhaps, also linked to an approach that was too centred on the moment of the revolutionary crisis, to the detriment of the preparations for it.

It is through a transitional approach that our strategic problematic must be redeployed.

It integrates immediate demands - compatible with the logic of capitalism - and intermediate demands that are contradictory with this logic. It combines the forms of day-to-day struggles, which respect bourgeois legality, and mass anti-capitalist actions, which transgress legality. It rejects the separation between a minimum program and a

maximum programme. A revolutionary strategy is simultaneously a strategy of wearing down the enemy and of confrontation. It comprises offensive and defensive periods, phases of retreat and of attack, depending on the class struggle.

This is how Trotsky defined the transitional problematic: "It is necessary to help the masses in the process of their daily fight to find the bridge between their current demands and the programme of socialist revolution. This bridge must consist of a system of transitional demands starting from the present conditions and consciousness of broad layers of the working class and leading invariably to one and the same conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat".

Each word has its importance:

- "daily", "immediate demands", "present consciousness". The starting point is the immediate demands of the popular classes. →
- "System of transitional demands": Trotsky underlines the combined character of the demands. →
- "Conquest of political power". The conclusion of the process is the revolutionary rupture.

Mass actions in general aim for the immediate satisfaction of needs. It is thus important that revolutionary strategy links to these needs demands which cannot be integrated into the capitalist socio-economic order, but which on the contrary, unleash an anti-capitalist dynamic, which leads to a trial of strength between the two determining classes of society. The consciousness of the masses can develop in a revolutionary direction only if they accumulate experiences of struggle which are not limited to partial demands that are realizable within the framework of the capitalist system. This consciousness also results from demands which start from immediate needs and raise the question of power or ownership.

The following examples can illustrate how to put forward demands which respond to the immediate needs of the masses and pose the question of power or ownership. →

- The question of water and gas in certain countries of Latin America, such as Bolivia, or the question of oil in Venezuela, poses all the problems of national sovereignty, control and popular management.
- The question of land occupations in the countries where land reform is a central issue: that is today, for example, the case in Brazil. These land occupations are not, in general, incompatible with the system, but, in the framework of the globalised capitalist economy, they are incontestably points of imbalance, points of rupture. →
- The taking over and running by the workers of certain companies condemned to bankruptcy by their owners. These experiences are partial and indicate that another kind of functioning of the economy is possible, with workers' or social management. These experiments are related to exceptional experiences of a rise of the mass movement: this is the case of factories abandoned or closed in Venezuela, with a mixed co-management between the workers and the public administration. These experiments of occupation, of control, of co-management and, under certain conditions, of co-operatives, were one of the expressions of the pre-revolutionary situation in Argentina in 2001-2002. The problem was posed, in a limited way, by certain experiences of control or management in the 1970s in Italy and France. It points its head in the mobilizations at Nestlé or in the shoe industry in Romans.

The transitory step that we must build is also crystallized through a series of demands put forward in a plan of social and democratic emergency measures: real, serious, immediate measures, but also which also aim at a redistribution of wealth and proposals for a reorganization of the economy in function of social needs and not of the capitalist economy.

- The question of the prohibition of sackings, in the form of a whole series of proposals or laws which call into

question the power, the arbitrary rights of the employers, is one of the principal transitional demands. It starts from the elementary refusal of sacking and leads to the idea that incursions into capitalist property rights are necessary in order to implement the demand.

– The refusal of privatizations implies not only the return to the public sector of all that has been privatised by the Right and the Left, but also a reorganization of the public ownership of key sectors of the economy.

This approach must be extended on a European level...

The starting point of these demands is the refusal of the liberal counter-reform and its measures. Their outcome and their effectiveness imply confrontation with the ruling classes and the capitalist system. There is an organic link between anti-liberalism and anti-capitalism. And when you separate anti-liberalism from anti-capitalism, you limit the range of even the anti-liberal demand: that is what happens with the programmes which only attack the excesses of "financialisation" or "commodification" without taking into account the overall logic of capitalist social relations. To be a consistent anti-liberal, it is necessary to tackle capitalist property relations and to pose the problems of public and social ownership. This global approach is not ultimistic. It can be concretized around some demands which can serve as key points, for example, for an election campaign.

– Behind the system of transitional demands, what is at stake is this: the accumulation of social experiences which destabilize the system, indicate another possible economic and social organization, and demonstrate the capacities of the working class from this point of view. Gramsci deals with this question with his "concept of politico-ethical hegemony". The oppressed class must conquer positions within society before conquering political power. Of course, in a normal situation, that remains propaganda and experiences which have a limited scope. But in a situation of social acceleration, it is integrated during a whole preparatory period to the conquest of political power.

5) The United Front

The policy of the United Front has a double dimension: strategic and tactical.

Strategic, because if the revolution is a majority process and "the emancipation of the workers, the act of the workers themselves", the popular classes must overcome their differentiations and internal divisions. Social differentiations related to the specific place in the production process and more generally in social life, but also political divisions related to the history of the workers' movement, to the crystallization of currents and organizations. Their social and political unification is one of the conditions of a revolutionary transformation.

Furthermore, Trotsky indicates the roots of the policy of the united front in this passage on Germany (The German Revolution and the Stalinist bureaucracy, 1932): "The proletariat reaches revolutionary awakening not by a scholastic approach but through the class struggle, which does not suffer interruptions. To fight, the proletariat needs the unity of its ranks. That is true both for partial economic conflicts, within the confines of an enterprise, and for 'national' political struggles such as the fight against Fascism. Consequently, the united front tactic is not something occasional and artificial, nor a skilful manoeuvre, no, it flows completely and entirely from the objective conditions of the development of the proletariat".

Thus the united front responds to the following strategic objective: to unify the proletariat - the working class in the broad sense, those who are forced to sell their labour power – in the course of a revolutionary process, to transform it from a dominated class into the dominant class in society. To stimulate this development, this movement must create the conditions of "the class independence" of the workers with respect to the bourgeoisie, and aim at the self-emancipation and the self-organization of the popular classes, fundamental condition for the revolutionary transformation of society. Thus, while making clear at each stage of the class struggle its content and its forms,

striving for the unity of the workers and their organizations is a permanent element of the politics of revolutionaries.

But the policy of the united front is also a political tactic, which depends on the general goals of revolutionary politics. Let us recall that a revolutionary policy is not reduced to the tactic of the united front. Many other aspects related to the political struggle, the definition of objectives, the delimitation between currents and organizations, the building of organizations, are essential links in the activity of revolutionaries.

Following from that, tactics remain subordinate to strategy: "The historical problem is not to mechanically link all the organizations which remain from the various stages of the class struggle, but to unite the proletariat in the struggle and for the struggle. These are absolutely different problems, sometimes even contradictory". (Trotsky, How to Defeat Fascism?).

The forms and the content of a united front tactic can abruptly change, in particular in crisis situations.

The question of the united front has a content, explains Trotsky: "The campaign of the united front must be based on a well worked out transitional programme, that is to say a system of transitional demands - with a workers' and peasants' government - which must ensure the transition to socialism".

However, our whole programme should not be a precondition for unity. But that must put us on guard against unity for unity's sake, unity without content.

In the policy of uniting workers for struggle, the conflicts with the reformists can reach points of rupture: "If the reformists sabotage the struggle, go against the dispositions of the masses, we reserve ourselves the right to support the action to the end, without our temporary half-allies, as an independent organization... In fact it is the masses who decide. From the moment when the masses separate from the reformist leadership, the agreements lose any meaning. To perpetuate the single face would mean not to understand the dialectic of the revolutionary struggle and to transform the united front from a springboard into a barrier. For Marxists, the united front is only one of the methods of the class struggle. In these given conditions, the method is completely unusable: it would be foolish to want to build an agreement with the reformists for the carrying out of the socialist revolution" (Trotsky, How to Defeat Fascism?).

Indeed, as Daniel Bensaïd explains, "The united front always has a tactical aspect. The reformist organizations are not reformist from confusion, inconsistency or lack of will. They express social and material crystallizations... The reformist leaderships can thus be tactical political allies to contribute to unifying the class. But they remain strategically potential enemies. The united front thus aims at creating the conditions that make it possible to break with these leaderships, at the moment of decisive choices, with the best possible relationship of forces, and to detach the broadest possible masses from them". (Crisis and strategy, 1986).

Its conditions of application also depend on the global relationship of social and political forces, and in particular on the relationship of forces within the workers' movement. This is moreover a problem which Trotsky posed, in the discussion with the French Communists in 1922: "If the Communist Party only represents an insignificant minority... its attitude with regard to the class front does not have decisive importance. The problem of the united front does not arise when the CP, as in Bulgaria, represents the only political force. But where the CP constitutes a political force without yet having decisive strength, where it embraces perhaps a quarter, perhaps a third of the proletarian vanguard, the question of the united front is posed in all its sharpness".

The question of the united front is a central question in a country like France in 2006, but it is not posed in the same terms before 1968, after 1968 or today, with the social-liberal evolution of the workers' movement, the crisis of the CP

and the new spaces for an anti-capitalist policy.

6) The general strike

One of the key questions for our strategic and tactical orientation consists of creating the conditions for the direct intervention of the workers, of the popular classes onto the political and social stage. To achieve this objective, the general strike represents a central element of our strategy.

The general strike appeared as the hypothesis of the overthrow of capitalism, from the end of the 19th century. In the first place as a surge of working-class energy, counter-posed by the anarchists to the old tried and tested tactic of social democracy, a tactic linked to the gradual conquest of parliamentary positions. For the anarchists, it was a question of counter-posing the extra-parliamentary mass movement to the parliamentary tactic of social democracy.

Rosa Luxembourgh took up again the perspective of the general strike, going beyond the anarchist-Socialist debate, and trying to link the dynamic of the mass movement to political perspectives. "The mass strike, the Russian Revolution showed us, is not a clever means invented to give more force to the proletarian struggle. It is the way of the proletarian mass movement, the form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution". Since then, the strategic hypothesis of the active general strike – the "revolutionary general strike" as our Spanish comrades said in the 1970s - remains, in new forms, the most probable variant of the upsurge of the masses against the established order.

Today, the relationship of forces between the classes in Europe does not put the outbreak of such general strikes on the agenda. But does this specific historical conjuncture put into question the strategic hypothesis? None of the theses which relativise the strategic role of general strikes and central demonstrations have been verified when the mass movement has gone into action, and the paths taken by it during certain pre-revolutionary situations in Latin America tend rather to give fresh force and vitality to certain traditional strategic concepts.

The general strike has several dimensions: it is not a "big day of action", it is the framework of a political movement of the working class, it makes possible its independent expression, it has its organizations - strike committees or the central strike committee -, it has a functionality in the confrontation with the state: paralysis of the economy, of the strategic axes of transport and communications. It creates the framework for re-launching production... In the central capitalist countries with a strong working-class social composition, it is the form par excellence of the direct intervention of the working class.

But the preparation of these general strikes also takes place through daily intervention, by practical proposals for coordination, centralization of struggles, by flexible propaganda and agitation to create the conditions of broad general movements of the working class.

We can add to it or combine with it the succession of big mass demonstrations which paralyse a country, the problem being on each occasion to find the forms which express the force of the mass movement, its radicality and its effectiveness in paralysing the bourgeois state. The recent social explosions or experiences of pre-revolutionary situations, once again in Latin America, remind us of the importance, at times of big confrontations between the classes, of general strikes and mass demonstrations, including insurrectionary ones.

Lastly, the "general strike" does not by itself resolve the question of the strategy of conquest of power. "It poses the question of power, it does not resolve it", said Lenin. For that, it must be accompanied by forms of organization and a perspective of governmental power.

7) Self-organization

In the rebuilding of a practice of self-emancipation, self-organization also has a strategic character.

These structures can appear in the course of a struggle or a strike, in the form of struggle committees or strike committees elected by general assemblies.

These kinds of structures appear in all pre-revolutionary or revolutionary periods. They emerge in general from concrete problems or in situations where the people try to obtain new instruments to deal with the organization of their lives in the workplaces or in the neighbourhoods. Their name varies according to the time and place where they are established: "Soviets", "factory committees" in Russia..., "internal commissions" in Italy, elections of workplace delegates in Germany, committees and militias in Spain, workers' commissions, shop stewards in England, Jap (food supply juntas), communal commandos, industrial cordons (local unions of the CUT trade unions) in Chile, workers' commissions and residents' committees in Portugal... They can also start out from forms of legal bourgeois institutions in the framework of existing institutions: elections of delegates, setting-up of structures to ensure supplies of food.

In short, the forms of self-organization can be varied and revolutionaries do not make a fetish of this or that form. What is essential is the democratic unitary expression of the dynamics of the mass movement, with an objective: to create the most direct mechanisms of representation of the mass movement.

At the beginning of conflicts, this can take the form of a united front of workers' organisations or else combined forms, but in the heat of the struggle, there is a need for structures which most accurately represent the reality of the mass movement. From this point of view, although Andreu Nin, leader of the POUM in Spain, was right to propose a "workers' alliance" in the years 1934-36 as the form of the united front of workers' organisations, he was wrong to want to replace the militias and committees, products of the insurrection of July 1936, by the formal unity of the organizations. Behind this substitution, there was a displacement of the relationship of forces: the most advanced elements - CNT, POUM, Socialist Left - of the revolution went back to being in a subordinate position with respect to the leaderships of the PCE, the PSOE and the republican bourgeoisie. It was a backward step.

We should have no formalism, all the more so as the explosion and division of the forms of self-organization are problems that we can be confronted with in situations of a rise of the mass movement. That was a major problem in Argentina between "neighbourhood associations or committees" and the "piquetero" movement, between the trade unions and the "piqueteros": more than 2336 barrages at the high point of the movement in 2002, involving several hundreds of thousands of people. The division between parties also fragments self-organization. Each party has its mass movement... This is a key question in Bolivia today, between the COB, the assemblies of El Alto, the indigenous movements, but also on a lesser scale, in certain social mobilizations in Europe (examples of co-ordinations, organized around this or that political organization).

Linked to the problem of unity, there are the problems of centralization: when there is division, corporatist or social fragmentation, there cannot be centralization.

What these experiences have in common is their social explosiveness but also their deficit of consciousness of the need for a radical transformation of society, which also has consequences for the organization, the leadership.

Are these structures incapable of taking power and reorganising society? We do not believe that.

Already the Austro-Marxists wanted to relegate them to "socio-economic" structures while leaving power to a parliamentary national assembly.

Others are taking up this thesis Trotsky today in their manner, explaining that "the forms of self-organization will have to find their place, without being institutionalized. But, especially, without taking power".

The limits of a revolutionary situation and the weaknesses of organization and leadership did not make possible - except in Russia, with the limits that we know - durable phases self-organised power. But, in all mass movements of a certain scope and, all the more so, all revolutionary crises, there is the aspiration of social movements to establish the first forms of self-emancipation. That creates the conditions for the emergence of new structures of representation of the popular movement. Without falling into any kind of linear vision of the development of the mass movement, that can take the form of general assemblies, action committees, strike committees, and later on communal or workers' councils. Our role consists on each occasion of testing the possibilities for new structures of self-organization, of creating them, of centralizing them as forms of popular representation, giving priority to the organization of citizens and workers in their localities and their workplaces. There is there a desire for coherence between our project for socialist self-management and the importance given to "socialism from below".

8) Dual Power

There too, the most recent experiences of situations of social and political pre-revolutionary crises pose the questions of dual power, always in "specific" forms. They result from new forms of popular representation, combining the organization of the mass movement and a crisis of the existing institutions, which can put on the agenda constituent processes. That was the case in Venezuela where elections to a Constituent Assembly are envisaged next August, under an enormous pressure of the mass movement. There again, when a revolutionary process deepens, new popular structures of representation appear, new legitimacies against the old central state apparatus are created: committees, but also communal or local structures of the "red municipalities" or "liberated zones" type. A process of confrontation and duality of power develops which also involves crises, fractures in the old existing institutional structures. The old shells can even become the envelope of new powers. That is the example of the Paris Commune, where the old commune was regenerated by the energy of the popular explosion which constituted it as an organ of popular power. Chile, in the years 1970-73 with the JAP - juntas for provisioning the popular neighbourhoods - and the industrial cordons - co-ordinations of the trade unions by geographical zone - saw the birth of a beginning of dual power, starting from structures established by the authorities or by the trade-union confederation. Something of capital importance was posed then: the new structures that were the most effective in the organization of the struggle also had to demonstrate their effectiveness in the resolution of daily problems, show themselves to be more democratic, more representative: demonstrate their superiority.

It is there that the problem of confrontation with the state is posed. As it becomes generalised, this process runs up against the rights of ownership, against the institutions and the capitalist state. "The right to existence takes precedence over the right to property" (Convention of 1793), the democracy of the new structures representing the people - factory or neighbourhood assemblies - takes precedence over the old structures. There is at this moment contradiction and struggle between the old and the new. The "new" also exerts pressure on the fragmentation of the old bourgeois institutions. Democratic demands must be put forward within the old parliamentary or municipal institutions, but the axis, the priority in order to resolve the "duality of powers", is for the mass movement to have its own independent forms of organization.

The experience of the Paris Commune made Marx evolve on the question of the state, which it was no longer a question of transforming but of smashing.

The lessons of all revolutionary experiences, socialist or revolutionary nationalist, confirm the need to destroy the

apparatus of repression of the ruling classes. And we mean by that, the hard core of the State - army, police, judicial system, central administrative machinery -, even if these institutions can, under the pressure of revolutionary events, fragment and split (e.g. committees or councils of soldiers, trade unions of magistrates, etc.)

History shows that this process unleashes the opposition and the repression of the ruling classes. The fundamental forces in struggle clash with each other, confront each other, tear themselves apart at strategically-decisive moments. These are the moments of revolutionary crisis, where the confrontation between the classes is played out, where things sway from one side to the other... It is necessary to prepare this or these moments... so as to concentrate the forces of the movement from below against the state apparatus. The question of power is posed, and the duality of powers must then be resolved, one way or the other. The preparations for revolution can last "several months, several years", Ernest Mandel specifies, but the moments of central confrontations are always the most decisive.

The objective is then to defend the revolutionary process. We are not putschists - "the emancipation of the workers will be the act of the workers themselves" - but we are not naive. This defence implies acting "militarily". Without however appearing to be the aggressor. Leon Trotsky explains, in extraordinary pages on the history of the Russian Revolution, that the MRC (Military Revolutionary Committee of the Soviet of Petrograd) took the initiative of the seizure of power, while taking care always to maintain a defensive position: it was necessary to defend Petrograd against the troops of Kornilov who were going to empty the city.

So from the history of this century and some revolutions, we will retain the importance of the preparatory process. But the decisive character of the revolutionary crisis is the "moment" or "moments" where everything is played out, where certain hours will determine the course of history for several decades...

The key question remains the conquest of the political power. The first specificity of the proletarian revolution is that the workers cannot establish new social relations, nor durably conquer new positions, without changing the entire social and political structure. Counter-powers are useful, the fight for reforms is essential. The partial experiences of control, of self-management in the workplaces or the neighbourhood are decisive, but not strong enough to start a process of transformation of social relations. We have to conquer power.

It is from this standpoint that we debate with Holloway and with all the currents of the global justice movement which defend the possibility of changing the world without taking power. And it is indeed Holloway that we are talking about, because it seems that the Zapatistas are evolving on this question and no longer make a virtue out of necessity by explaining that their struggle must not have a political outcome. Besides, they seized power in their zones in Chiapas. The revolutionary experiences in Latin America show on the one hand, the need to drive forward the movement from below, and on the other hand, the decisive importance of the impulsion from on high. The positive role and the limits of someone like Chavez show the importance of building an overall political alternative. The social-liberal policies of someone like Lula call for a political alternative, including an electoral one, oriented towards a break with imperialism and the financial markets. Counter-powers or the addition of social movements are not enough to oppose an alternative to liberal capitalism.

Of course, throughout the history of social struggles, many reforms, new rights, social conquests were obtained under the pressure of relationships of forces and social mobilizations... without taking power!

Revolutionaries are in favour of all reforms which improve the living and working conditions of the population. They are attentive to or take part in all the experiences which loosen the vice of capitalist domination. These movements are decisive but are not sufficient to consolidate the gains that have been made in the long term - the ruling classes often take back with one hand what they have conceded with the other - nor to change the fundamental logic and substitute a logic of social needs for the logic of profit.

In the building of an alternative, these experiences can prove to be indispensable points of support, but their accumulation cannot be enough to overthrow the fundamental logic of society. They run up against the central power.

To prevent structural modifications of society, the ruling classes use a double safety mechanism: the state and capitalist property. Moreover, the war in Iraq, the attempts to set up here and there in Europe or America state or para-state mechanisms demonstrate the key role of states. The state is redeploying, but it is there. The strength of American imperialism, like the power of the multinationals, demonstrates the importance of the ownership of capital and the major means of production in the world economy. Economic and military power appears to be more disseminated than ever, but it is also more concentrated than ever.

To open the way to change, this double safety mechanism must be demolished: the state and property. Without a revolutionary social mobilization which breaks the backbone of capitalist domination - the state - and which substitutes for capitalist property public and social ownership, the mechanisms of production and reproduction of capital continue to dominate.

9) Self-organization, democracy

The relationships between parliamentary institutions, constituent assemblies, and structures of self-organization constitute one of the key problems of a revolutionary strategy, in particular in the major imperialist countries.

The axis is the self-organization, the emergence, and the centralization of the structures of direct democracy, in the broad sense: not only "factory councils" in the "workerist" sense, but social and political self-management constituted as political power.

With the perspective of a new power for workers and citizens, there is also the place for a logic of radical democracy based on proposals for the transformation of parliamentary assemblies: a single-chamber constituent assembly, the definition of competences, proportional representation, control of elected officials, creation of structures of direct democracy, subsidiarity from the local to the European level, in the framework of a constituent process.

In short, the objective pursued is the generalization of a radical democracy which, starting from a radical transformation of the assembly, opens the perspective of structures for a new power. This is the problematic that Trotsky put forward, in 1934, in his draft action programme for the Communist League of the time.

This constituent process must be used to push forward a new power of direct democracy. But in a revolutionary situation, the democratic effectiveness of self-organization runs up against the state apparatus.

We have already seen various examples: either the constituent assembly is carried away by the revolutionary whirlwind and transmits its powers to the new revolutionary structures, or goes into hibernation, or else it opposes the new forms of self-organized power, thus provoking a conflict. Let us not forget that in certain revolutionary crises, Germany in 1918-19 or Portugal in 1974-75, the Constituent Assembly was used as a counter-revolutionary instrument. It was then necessary to put the accent on the structures of self-organization and on their centralization. All this process is not external to the institutions of bourgeois democracy, especially in countries with long-standing parliamentary traditions - the revolutionary process exerts pressure on them - but the objective is the constitution of a new power. We still do not think - unlike certain Austro-Marxist, "Eurocommunist" or "left reformist" theses - that we can conquer power by combining "popular power" and "gradual conquest of a revolutionary majority in the old parliament". The taking of political power requires getting rid of the old institutions and building new ones.

After the conquest of power, the problems are posed differently, in particular at the beginning of a society of transition to socialism: several assemblies elected by universal suffrage can coexist with territorial assemblies and assemblies resulting from elections in the workplaces, even assemblies representing national minorities. Assemblies which will have power, assemblies elected by universal suffrage. This combination was tried in an ephemeral way under the Paris Commune.

This was the position of Rosa Luxemburg on the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in Russia. She came out for the dissolution of an assembly which no longer corresponded to the real state of the country and demanded a new Constituent Assembly, that is, alongside the power of the Soviets an assembly elected by universal suffrage: "Without general elections, without unlimited freedom of the press and of assembly, without a free struggle of opinions, life dies away in all public institutions, vegetates, and the bureaucracy remains the only active element".

When there is conflict, it is the people who have the last word.

10) Workers' government

The demand for a "workers' government" ("government of the workers" or of the "popular classes") is a transitional slogan put forward in a revolutionary situation, in the 1920s, or on the eve of the Second World War, which Trotsky envisaged as a repetition of the First. These are the formulas developed in the Transitional Programme. In general, these questions take on great importance in situations of acute social and political crisis. The debates that we have on the governmental formula or formulas of are often far removed from this context.

The workers' government is a transitional governmental formula, in a situation of crisis where the institutions of the old state apparatus are not yet destroyed. It is not yet the power of popular organs or the "dictatorship of the proletariat", but it is no longer the normal functioning of bourgeois institutions. It is thus not a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is a possible intermediate government, on the road to the conquest of power by the workers.

Also, all the formulas of workers' government include in general immediate demands, but also objectives related to workers' control, to the expropriation of the capitalists, or even the arming of the proletariat. In revolutionary situations, there is a coherence between a united front policy and the proposal for a government that breaks with the bourgeoisie. There, the "workers' government can be the crowning point of the united front policy". The basis for unity of action and for a government is the same: they are coalitions of revolutionary forces, left reformists, centrists or revolutionary nationalists, based on popular organizations or committees. It is by referring to Russia from February to October 1917, and Germany between 1918 and 1923, that Trotsky uses his formulations "demanding that the workers' parties break with the bourgeoisie". But these formulas have today been relativised by history.

Two remarks on this approach:

a) It is closely related to revolutionary situations. In many documents, in particular on Germany or France in 1922, Trotsky speaks about "the parliamentary beginning of the proletarian revolution".

But all these experiences, even though they can have as their starting point a parliamentary majority, must very quickly find their centre of gravity in the organs of dual power, otherwise these governments get bogged down or become the hostages of bourgeois institutions.

This is what Trotsky denounced as "the parliamentary interpretation" of the workers' government. It is unfortunately

the error that was committed by some revolutionary militants: in Saxony-Thuringia, where the leaders of the KPD made the decisions on insurrection depend on the legal government of the Land, dominated by left social democrats, and not on a council of committees. This was also the experience in Catalonia in July and September 1936, where the POUM accepted the dissolution of the "central committee of the militias" in order to enter and recognize the government of the "Généralitat Catalana" as the legal government of Catalonia.

These formulations were situated within a certain historical framework, marked by the driving force of the Russian Revolution, where the reformist and Stalinist parties, in spite of their degeneration, still had references to the revolution, to the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (the SFIO and Léon Blum in the 1930s), to the break with capitalism, where a vanguard of several million working-class militants, even reformists, were educated in this "ideological bath". These demands for a break with the bourgeoisie no longer make much sense addressed to social-democratic formations which have been carried away by social-liberalism. They can have, in certain political conjunctures, a certain functionality with respect to the militant base of certain CPs, in the following form: "choose between a social-liberal alliance and an anti-capitalist alternative", understanding well that the dynamics of reformism and of integration - over a long period - into bourgeois institutions, leads the bureaucratic apparatuses of the CPs to adapt to the existing order. These historical modifications of the workers' movement have consequences for the problems of "current policy": there is a certain de-synchronisation between the policy of unity of action and the construction of a political alternative. We are for unity of action of the entire social and political left against the far right, the right and the employers. We do not think it is possible to build an alternative to liberal capitalism along with social-liberalism. There is no logic other than a parliamentary logic in seeking "an anti-liberal majority against the Right involving the entire Left and therefore the SP and the social-liberal Left". This "parliamentary" option cannot be taken up to the detriment of an accumulation of forces against liberal capitalism.

Lastly, there can be specific cases, in the developing countries, where revolutionary nationalist governments break with imperialism, even if it is a partial break. This is the case with Chavez in Venezuela. Trotsky gave some indications concerning the government of Lazaro Cardénas in Mexico in the 1930s or the APRA in Peru. These governments, which oppose imperialism, must be supported against imperialism, while maintaining our independence. Independence, because there is a political battle, a struggle in the "anti-imperialist" camp between revolutionaries, reformists, nationalists, etc. Political struggle, but support for a process. We judge the measures that are taken for the popular classes and the initiatives for action and mobilization. As a result of which, for example, we give support to what is called the process of the Bolivarian revolution.

On governmental questions, our positions must therefore combine: Æ-

- a) independence with respect to the governments which manage the institutions and the capitalist economy;
- b) the refusal to take part in any government which manages the institutions or the capitalist economy. Our tactic is determined by the policy and the decisions of each government, supporting positive measures, opposing the others;
- c) a position determined by the course of the government in question - from frontal opposition to the Lula government, which is today a social-liberal government - to support for the experience of Chavez;
- d) and to always centre our efforts on the development of the independent movement of the masses.