

# INSTRUMENTS FOR DOING POLITICS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY POLITICS	3
1) A Conservative vision of politics	3
2) a revolutionary vision of politics	4
a) Will power is not enough, we must start from the existing situation	4
b) How Fidel changed the correlation of forces in Cuba	4
c) Making possible in the future what seems impossible today	4
d) Not reducing politics to institutions	5
e) Overcoming the narrow concept of power	5
f) Creating social forces: something that is fundamental	5
g) People's scepticism towards politics and politicians	6
h) Utopian goals: beacons that light the way	6
i) A general orientation is not enough in politics	7
II CORRELATION OF FORCES	7
1) Correlation of forces in Venezuela when Chavez won his first election	7
a) Changing the rules of the game of the institutional system	9
2) Correlacion of forces in Venezuela before the april 2002 coup	9
a) Rapid apprenticeship of the people in revolutionary processes	11
3) what happened after the coup in April?	11
III. STRATEGY AND TACTICS	12
a) To win a battle it is necessary to plan well for the fight.	12
b) Defining correlation of forces	13
c) Examples of strategy and tactics in the military terrain	13
d) The concept of strategy	14
e) The strategic goals	14
f) The need to prepare a strategic plan	14
h) We can not always be on the offensive	15
i) A platform for struggle which unites broad sectors of the population	15
j) Who can be counted on for support and who must be fought	16
k) Take advantage of the contradictions within the enemy	16
l) Forms of agitation and propaganda	17

IV. STATE OF MIND OF THE PEOPLE	18
a) The term “masses” seems too homogenizing.	18
b) The danger of subjective analyzes	18
c) The state of mind of the people	18
d) Leaders must learn to listen	18
e) Giving wrong information is a major political error	18
f) The need to recognize what it is that we are doing wrong	19
g) Distinguishing the different levels of consciousness among the population.	20
h) Sketching a territorial map of the distribution of forces.	20
i) Determining which are the strategic territories for leading the battle	20
j) Be careful with quantitative analysis!	21
k) Active and passive popular grassroots	21
V. ENEMIES, ALLIES AND POLITICAL FRONT	22
a) The immediate goal of the revolutionary struggle in Russia	22
b) The strategic and immediate enemy in Cuba	23
c) The strategic and immediate enemy in Nicaragua	23
d) Taking advantage of the contradictions in the midst of the enemies	24
e) Revolutionaries alone cannot make a revolution	24
f) How to build alliances	24
g) Agreements and compromises	25
h) Can revolutionaries accept compromises?	25
i) Strategic and tactical allies	27
j) Potential and real allies	27
k) The policies of alliances	27
l) Tactical flexibility	28
m) Alliance is not merger	28
n) Incidental alliances, agreements and political pacts	28
o) Permanent alliances: the political fronts	29
QUESTIONS	30

## I. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY POLITICS

1. In this pamphlet, part of a series dedicated to popular education, we will address the issue of what kind of instruments do we require for doing politics.
2. We will look at a variety of instruments and begin of course by defining politics.
3. Do you know some definitions of politics?
4. Well, you can find many different definitions in dictionaries, but there are really two major definitions.

### 1) A CONSERVATIVE VISION OF POLITICS

5. The conservative vision of politics that we usually hear about, and is frequently used in analysis, describes politics as “the art of the possible”.
6. What do we mean by the art of the possible?
7. It means that, having analyzed a concrete complex situation, within a fixed correlation of forces, you say: “All right, the enemy is very powerful and I am weak, I cannot do anything against this powerful enemy, so what I have to do is adapt myself to the situation”.
8. That is why this concept leads to political opportunism, which we call “ducking and weaving”, that is to say: “I adapt as best I can to the existing correlation of forces.”
9. We should not confuse opportunism with opportune or sensing opportunities. An opportune action can be useful, pertinent or congruent within a given context. For example, the decision by the Movement PAIS Alliance to not stand candidates for Ecuador’s parliament elections, given the lack of trust in the institution at the time, was opportune. By opportunist we are referring to a utilitarian action or one that seeks solely to benefit an individual or group. For example, complimenting someone to his or her face with the purpose of receiving some benefit in return.
10. In the end, conservative politicians defend this concept saying they are realists and to be otherwise is to be subjective, utopian, idealist.
11. They say that to be a good politician one must be a realist.
12. That is the well-known “realpolitik” that some authors talk about.
13. It means that one must resign oneself to doing nothing, to accept the “status quo”.
14. Some comrades don’t know what “status quo” is.
15. It is the existing state of affairs. You subordinate yourself to the politics of others.
15. And generally, what is the politics others do?
16. Precisely the politics of the dominant classes, the classes who have the state power at the time.
17. Gramsci —many know this Italian Marxist thinker, — considered that diplomats had to adapt themselves to the circumstances around them.
18. In some ways, the work of a diplomat is to adapt themselves to circumstances, to do – what we call – “ducking and weaving”, to be all things to all people.

## 2) A REVOLUTIONARY VISION OF POLITICS

19. Politics – as Gramsci said – is something quite different if we think of politics as being revolutionary politics.

20. For a revolutionary, politics is not accepting what exists. A revolutionary is defined by his or her capacity or desire and the dedication of his or her life to changing the existing situation.

### *a) Will power is not enough, we must start from the existing situation*

21. Changing the existing situation does not mean that we do not have to take as our starting point the existing situation. In order to change something we must start from the existing state of affairs.

22. Therefore, we must acknowledge the present reality and the correlation of forces that exists at this time, not in order to adapt ourselves to the situation opportunistically, but in order to change that correlation of forces.

23. We cannot deny the present reality, we cannot ignore it and try to act by wishful thinking alone

24. That is, willpower alone will not change reality; willpower is essential but not enough. We must begin analyzing the forces as they are now.

### *b) How Fidel changed the correlation of forces in Cuba*

25. That is what Fidel Castro and his group did in Cuba.

26. You remember that a terrible, repressive dictatorship, that of Fulgencia Batista, existed in Cuba, and this dictatorship relied on the armed force of the Cuban political system, the army. An army that was not like the army of the Bolshevik insurrection at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but a much more sophisticated army. At that time the world's political analysts said that in those new conditions it would be impossible to create an insurrection or a popular rebellion against an army.

27. Fidel did not accept this, but this did not mean that he did not accept reality. His starting point was of course the real existing situation in Cuba but he did not agree to sit back and do nothing. By studying that reality and studying the way in which the *mambises* (Cuban independence guerrilla fighters) had defeated a colonial army much more powerful than they were, and seeing that it was by using guerrilla tactics that they defeated the powerful Spanish army he thought: "Against Batista's army, we must use guerrilla warfare.

28. This is a form in which the army is not confronted directly through a popular insurrectional struggle; instead it is confronted by small army patrols out on reconnaissance missions, ambushing them. In this way, you defeat the army by attacking its weakest points, and creating low morale among the enemy troops who feel morally weakened when a small group of guerrillas continuous defeats them in numerous encounters.

29. That was a very important factor in defeating the Batista army. Independent of the fact that, as the guerrillas advanced, the success of the guerrillas also increased, and so did the size of the attacks on military barracks, etc.

30. It was by this method that it was possible, little by little, to change the correlation of forces and achieve victory against that army which, according to the analysts, could not be defeated by weapons alone.

31. The specific character of a revolutionary politics is to start from reality, but to seek the right method to change the correlation of forces in favour of the revolutionaries.

### *c) Making possible in the future what seems impossible today*

32. Revolutionary politics is not the art of the possible, but rather the art of making possible in the future what seems impossible at present, not because we are wishful thinkers who desire change in the future, but because we are realists and we start from the present reality, we analyze that reality and we seek a way forward to change the correlation of forces.

33. The correlation of forces must be changed.

34. There is no victory without a change in the correlation of forces.

35. So, the art of politics is precisely the capacity to create a correlation of forces increasingly more favourable to the revolutionary process.

36. That is what, throughout the history of humanity, all revolutionary politicians have done.

37. But this concept of politics as the accumulation of forces, as the construction of a new correlation of forces, is very distinct and operates in a very different manner than that which considers politics to be the art of the possible.

*d) Not reducing politics to institutions*

38. This concept does not reduce politics to institutions.

39. Usually when one speaks of politics and politicians, one is thinking of people who have posts in parliament, in ministries, in the judicial system, positions of power, and because of that, to achieve more power, their political group must win more deputies. So alliances are made between party leaders and between political parties. By doing this, it is thought that the correlation of forces will change.

40. That is not our concept of politics.

*e) Overcoming the narrow concept of power*

41. In our vision of politics, we have to overcome this narrow concept of power.

42. Politics is not just state power. It is not just located in the state. Power is diffused through many parts of society in many sectors, in many fragments.

43. For example, media power, as you know, is a fundamental power.

44. The issue is how new expressions of power can begin to arise from the base of society.

45. An enterprise abandoned by the capitalists which is taken over by its workers and begins to be self-managed, that is a creation of power.

46. Same as when peasants take over land from large landowners. And when student unions transform universities, etc.

47. So power cannot simply be reduced to the state, this is something else to consider.

*f) Creating social forces: something that is fundamental*

48. Ultimately, and most importantly, if we define politics as the art of changing the correlation of forces, we should realise that the correlation of forces will not be changed solely with political forces, we must also create the necessary social forces, build social forces, which will enable us to strengthen our political force and defeat opposing political forces.

49. So, this revolutionary politics is fundamentally focused on popular organization.

50. There can be no revolutionary change in the correlation of forces if there is not an increasingly organized people.

*g) People's scepticism towards politics and politicians*

51. But we confront a serious problem when speaking about politics and that is the scepticism of people towards politics and politicians.

52. If you speak to people about parties, they usually react negatively. Surveys has been done in some countries which show that people reject parties due to the existing participatory, to the back-scratching, to the top-down decision making, to the perks which politicians get.

53. Politics and politicians are greatly discredited, and one reason for this, among others, is that the right has appropriated the language of the left. They adopt our words, and so their speeches sound very similar to our speeches.

54. We can add to this something of our own doing, our own weakness, which is that when our politicians do politics, they often use the same political style as the right, that is, use the same patronage, the same personalization, etc.

55. When people hear very similar speeches and see very similar practices why would they become enthusiastic about politicians and politics?

56. That must be taken into account.

57. For a good example of this we can look at the movement that currently supports President Correa in Ecuador: The Movement PAIS Alliance. This movement was very careful to take into consideration the high level of scepticism that existed in the country towards politicians. For this reason they create a political instrument that was closely tied to what they called the Citizens' Movement.

*h) Utopian goals: beacons that light the way*

58. I want also to clarify at this point that, when I say we have to make possible what today seems impossible, I don't mean that everything is possible.

59. There are goals that no amount of willpower can attain — as Hinkelammert, a German writer, now residing in Costa Rica, who has written a number of interesting works on Liberation Theology, said: "We are dealing with desirable goals that contain human values in their pure and definitive form, but which due to their level of perfection are not humanly possible and in this sense are utopian goals: for example, we will never fully achieve the kind of society based on full equality that Marx dreamed of."

60. These utopian goals are very important because they inspire our revolutionary actions, they drive us to act, and they convince us of the need to struggle. You are moved to struggle because you have hope, you have an alternative to fight for, is that not the case?

61. Even if the goals are utopian and cannot be achieved, they are like stars lighting up our path.

62. Someone could argue that to accept the fact that some of our goals are utopian goals, that is, to say goals that cannot be achieved is to be pessimistic. I believe the opposite: I think that any action or step towards that goal, no matter how small, is a step forward. In that sense I am optimistic: I see how small actions go somehow to foreshadowing the new society we are struggling for.

63. Now to avoid wishful thinking we must take reality as our starting point. We must analyze what in politics is called the current situation, the current conjuncture.

64. That is, those involved in politics must not only be capable of clarifying long-term goals: "I want to build socialism", "I want to be liberated from Batista," etc. No! We must also be able to

obtain our goals and for that we must know what is happening in the present reality in order to best know what to do next.

*i) A general orientation is not enough in politics*

65. So a general orientation is not enough in politics, concrete actions are necessary and, in addition, it is fundamental to be able to read a change in the correlation of forces because correlations are not something static, they are always changing.

66. When a qualitative change occurs, what is it that leads you to think the situation has changed? Because, if the situation has changed, the instruments we use for doing politics must also change, as we will see later on.

67. Before finishing this section, I want to tell you that in the following sections, we will consider some aspects regarding how best to characterize the current situation: Who are the opposing forces? How are these forces organized? What position is each one holding at this time? How are they operating? And which is the one driving the process, or what we call the motor force or main force?

## **II CORRELATION OF FORCES**

### 1) CORRELATION OF FORCES IN VENEZUELA WHEN CHAVEZ WON HIS FIRST ELECTION

68. We will now turn to something very concrete — the situation in Venezuela when Hugo Chavez was first elected president.

69. Using this concept of the correlation of forces, we will see how it applies in a specific historic reality like Venezuela.

70. What was the situation like in Venezuela when President Chavez won the election in 1998?

71. The world correlation of forces was very negative.

72. Remember that the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Soviet bloc disappeared at the end of 1991.

73. As a result, capitalist forces, the imperialists, remained in a position of absolute dominance and the United States became the primary world military power without any counterforce, because the counterweight of the Soviet military, the threat of a nuclear war, acted to paralyze or at least could be dissuasive at that time.

74. The U.S. gained the capacity to act unilaterally because it had the most powerful military force on the planet.

75. And with the disappearance of the Soviet socialist economic model, capitalism was strengthened because now no one could convincingly argue that there was an alternative or another possible way of doing things.

76. In this context emerged Fukuyama's thesis that neoliberalism represented the end of history.

77. That occurred on the international arena.

78. When Chavez began his process he was alone in Latin America, and facing this correlation of forces at the world level.

79. And internally, what was happening?

80. Internally, Chavez won an election with more than 50% of the votes, with majority popular support. This result can be explained by the fact that: the country was immersed in a structural crisis, the state was in crisis, a previous president had been removed for corruption, the people were

fed up with corruption, with patronage, with everything which existed in the apparatus of the Venezuelan state.

81. Chavez — who had first thought of carrying out an armed insurrection to achieve power and transform the country — realizing that in general the Venezuelan people did not want violence, decided he had to engage in the electoral struggle, the institutional struggle, and stand for election and win.

82. But what was the correlation of forces that characterized the situation after his victory?

83. He had the support of a large part of the army, but he had a minority in the National Assembly, and the same was true with regards to regional governors and mayors.

84. The judicial power was in the hands of people who represented the previous ruling bloc.

85. Similarly, the economy and the media were basically in the hands of previous ruling sectors.

86. And the level of organization of the popular movement and of Venezuelan political parties was very weak. We cannot compare, for example, the parties of the Chilean left with the parties of the Venezuelan left. The Chilean parties were larger and stronger with great traditions of struggle.

87. What did Chavez do in the face of such a negative situation, both internationally and domestically?

88. Internationally, the first thing he did was to try to change the correlation of forces, encouraging alternative organizations to those of the empire, of imperialism.

89. Among other things he promoted Latin American and Caribbean integration in different ways: for example: empowering Mercosur creating ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas, which truly represents a different form of integration which acting differently according to each country's need and with solidarity between these countries.

90. The most concrete expression of this new form of integration is the bond that exists today between Cuba and Venezuela.

91. Another measure was the preferential treaties he signed with the poor countries of Central America and the Caribbean whereby Venezuela sold oil at prices much lower than those of the world market.

92. He revitalized and strengthened OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which at that time had been greatly weakened, and he succeeded in getting one of his best cadres, Ali Rodriguez, to become the president of OPEC. With this move came an important achievement: the establishment of fair oil prices for producing countries.

93. In addition he sought to create alliances or establish relations that sought to break the nearly absolute dependency that Venezuela had on the US.

94. So he established relations with India, Russia, China, and Iran.

95. He established these multipolar relations, fundamental for a country like ours to be sovereign.

96. He also promoted international forums for emerging nations: the Forum of the 15, the Forum of South-South Cooperation, and the Group of 77, which brings together 120 underdeveloped nations.

97. In Latin America we have made very important advances. We already have meetings of our countries without the presence of the US.

98. We are sovereign and we are beginning to decide things without having to consult the US.

*a) Changing the rules of the game of the institutional system*

99. Now, as for the internal forces, President Chavez understood that the first thing he had to do was to change the rules of the game of the institutional system, given the fact that he had decided to pursue a process of social transformation via the institutional road; through non-violent popular mobilization rather than a direct military challenge.

100. He knew the limits of this path and therefore said that these limits, these rules of the game had to be changed, and to do that his first move was to promote a popular referendum which asked: Do you want us to form a Constitutional Assembly to draft a new Constitution?

101. The people supported the referendum, the Constitutional Assembly was convoked, the Assembly drafted a new Constitution and the great majority of voters approved that Constitution.

102. The new Constitution required elections to be held for elected officials at all levels of the state, and in those elections the President and those that supported him achieved a great victory: they attain a comfortable majority in the National Assembly, they gained control of a significant majority of governorships and mayoral offices, and they converted the judiciary into an institution which was willing to uphold the Constitution rather than be managed by oligarchic groups.

102. Now, these achievements were not permanent, as we will see in a moment. This was the situation following the Constituent Assembly, after the general elections.

103. But before going on to see what happened next with these institutions, we have to take into account that together with these wins it was necessary to take stock of the fact — which as a good strategist, a good politician, Chavez did — that the social and political movements in Venezuela were very weak, the parties were not, as we say, sufficiently consolidated.

104. The Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200 — which was the political group that supported him in the army — was composed of a reduced number of militants, and the Movement for a Fifth Republic — which was the electoral instrument created to win the elections — was simply an electoral vehicle.

105. So Chavez began to look for different initiatives to build popular and party-type organizations.

106. He called for the rebuilding of the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200, he promoted the Bolivarian circles and afterwards created a political command of the revolution, picking Guillermo Garcia Ponce, a well-known communist leader, to fill the role of secretary general.

107. That is to say, we see that Chavez was thinking of the necessity of a political instrument and the necessity for social organization.

108. This is not the place to analyze how successful these initiatives were, but it gives us a good overview of Chavez as a political strategist and of his awareness of the necessity of changing the correlation of forces.

2) CORRELACION OF FORCES IN VENEZUELA BEFORE THE APRIL 2002 COUP

109. Now we will analyze the new situation in Venezuela. We saw the political situation that existed when Chavez won; now we will see the political situation that emerged shortly before the military coup of April 2002.

110. At the end of 2001, Chavez succeeded in getting Parliament to accept an Enabling Law, a law which permits the Executive to draw up law-decrees and approve them rapidly given that the National Assembly did not have the capability to draw up all these laws. This was crucial because a Constitution without laws is like a skeleton without flesh, therefore, flesh had to be put on that

skeleton, laws had to be made which enabled specific work to be done, because if you have a Constitution and laws which are contrary to the spirit of that Constitution, you cannot act legally in the country.

111. It was in this way that laws were passed like: the Law of Lands, the Law of Fishing, the Law of Hydrocarbons, the Law of Micro-credit, the Law of Cooperatives, etc.

112. These were laws that for the first time took some minimal privileges away from the ruling class and immediately there was a huge reaction from the Venezuelan oligarchy — a Venezuelan oligarchy that had not heard the message of John F. Kennedy, the liberal president of the USA in the early 1960s.

113. Kennedy, when faced with the victory of the Cuban revolution, had understood very well that if the Latin American oligarchies did not give up privileges, if those oligarchies were incapable of better distribution of the wealth, if they hoarded all the wealth, they would suffer the same fate as befell the oligarchs in Cuba.

114. The only ruling sector that accepted and applied Kennedy's policies was Christian Democracy in Chile. The rest of the Latin American oligarchies simply did nothing. The latifundists (large land owners) continued to exist, as did the huge social differences between the ruling class and the popular sectors.

115. Then the opposition led by this oligarchy and by the communication media dominated by it, played the role of the political parties in Venezuela because the traditional political parties — the right wing ones — had remained very weak, after the Constituent Assembly.

116. What happened to the middle classes? The middle classes began to withdraw their support for Chavez. Some of Chavez's policies, and especially some of his speeches, the ways in which he referred to them in *Alo Presidente*, had deeply hurt them, and, as a result, he began losing their support.

117. Among them was Luis Miquelena, who had played a key role in the first few months of the government and was a fundamental figure in the Constitutional Assembly, a person trusted by Chavez at that time.

118. Miquelena, when confronted with the opposition of the oligarchy to the aforementioned laws, tried to convince Chavez to stop and to not move against the oligarchy, Chavez told him – “No, I cannot do that. I went to the election to advance a process of transformation, not to govern without being able to govern”.

119. In that moment, the split between Miquelena and Chavez began.

120. Consider the situation in the Supreme Court of Justice. The correlation of forces was such that out of 20 judges, 11 were of the opinion that there was no coup d'état in April 2002!

121. There was no question that there was a coup and behind the coup d'état were the hands of what we call the “oligarchic bloc”.

122. Who were the components of this oligarchic bloc? Generals that participated in the coup, business sectors, members of Fedecamaras, the business employers' association; the Workers' Confederation of Venezuela, the CTV, that was dominated by pro-business sectors, the hierarchy of the Catholic church, the media —except, of course, for the official channel —, which played a key role in organizing the coup, sectors of the middle classes influenced by the media — media which made the opposition seem much more powerful than it was—, and remember the middle classes

usually tend to go with those with greater strength and, clearly it appeared that the opposition was far stronger than it turned out to be.

123. Also acting against President Chavez where the ambassadors of Spain and the USA. The coup was certainly successful, and Chavez was imprisoned.

124. However, as everyone knows, the popular reaction ensured that in less than 48 hours Chavez was returned to his post and the illegally installed president, Pedro Carmona, had to flee the country.

125. Afterward, a bosses' lockout was carried out, but it did not achieve its objective because the Venezuelan workers knew where their real class interests lay and impeded the closure of factories.

126. So, who can we say made up the "revolutionary bloc" that defeated the coup and lockout?

127. Well, basically, the armed forces and the people.

128. The people, among them the popular sectors of the barrios and the workers.

129. Now it is important to ask why the army in Venezuela is different.

130. The army that supported President Chavez was not trained in the School of the Americas. A Venezuelan military academy was created where, for example, officers studied the issue of democracy, including the most advanced ideas in this field. They studied political science and democratic thinkers. They analyzed Venezuelan reality and the military students had exchanges with other students.

131. On the other hand, this army did not have to confront Venezuelan guerrillas it had to confront poverty. When they went to look for the guerrillas, what did they find? They did not find guerrillas, they found very poor people, and at times shared their food rations with those poor people, because they were upset that these people had nothing to eat. That same contrast between the poverty of the border areas and the wealth of the Venezuelan oligarchy was what awakened the conscience of an important sector of the military.

132. On the other hand, in Venezuela there are not, like in other countries, military castes, and generally, soldiers of high rank do not come from oligarchic families, or from very rich families, on the contrary, they came from poor families.

#### *a) Rapid apprenticeship of the people in revolutionary processes*

133. Now, something happens in revolutionary processes, which is very important, and it happened during this time in Venezuela: the rapid apprenticeship of the people in revolutionary processes, in times of revolution.

134. Lenin says that people learn more in hours of revolution, of revolutionary shake ups, than in 15 years of studying texts and political education. And that was what happened with the Venezuelan people, these events increased their consciousness enormously.

#### 3) WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE COUP IN APRIL?

135. What happened after the coup in April?

136. Domestically, what was achieved? A people with high political consciousness, the purging of the armed forces, because those who were coup-plotters had been exposed, the opposition finished up divided between sectors who wanted to continue the coup and institutional sectors who wanted to respect procedures, and the middle classes who had distanced themselves from Chavez once

again came closer when they saw that the only possible government was that of Chavez. There was growing popular support.

137. Popular organizing accelerated. Workers began to form their first autonomous trade union confederation, separate from the CTV, the old confederation, which had been dominated by sectors of the previous ruling class.

138. New actors arose on the political scene.

139. It is interesting to see that one important actor were the motorcyclists, those people who do errands on motorbikes. They organized themselves and were the means for communication within the poor neighbourhoods, because they moved rapidly from one place to another in Caracas. Caracas is a city with horrendous traffic and it is only possible to travel quickly by motorcycle. They organized themselves as a group in support of the President.

140. New organizations also appeared as forms of popular organization, and the leftist parties that were very previously divided began to redefine themselves.

141. Internationally, what was achieved is very important, because clearly nobody could now doubt the authentic democratic character of the process defended by its people.

142. Now I want to briefly turn to the new organizations that arose out of these struggles.

143. Organized groups arose to reopen schools — which the conservative forces had closed —, groups of parents and teachers reopened them despite the coup leaders. Peasant and fisherpeople circles arose to defend the laws — remember that there now existed the new Law of Fishing, the Law of Land—, groups to defend consumers emerged to ensure that food supplies could not be disrupted, groups of neighbours to defend the sale of gasoline, a group involving sectors of the middle class, called “Middle Class in Positive”, which supported the government, and groups which began to collect signatures for different things, which would be very important in the future when the opposition introduced a referendum against Chavez.

144. And lastly, the workers who had played a very important role in stopping the closure of factories.

145. Chavez recognized their role and went to the factory gates to meet them. He wanted to recompense the workers, naming representatives of those unions that supported him to the executives of strategic enterprises.

### **III. STRATEGY AND TACTICS**

146. Now we will define what we mean by strategy and tactics.

*a) To win a battle it is necessary to plan well for the fight.*

147. We know that to win a battle it is not enough to want to win, it is necessary to plan well for the fight.

148. To plan in such a way that allow us to attack the enemy, defeating it little by little. We have already seen how the guerrilla method worked in the Cuban situation.

149. Now, to plan such “combat” we have to know the terrain on which we are fighting, and we have to know it very well.

150. We have to know the enemy and its strength and we also have to know our own strength: what are the weak and strong points of the enemy and what are our weak and strong points.

### *b) Defining correlation of forces*

151. We have spoken a lot about the correlation of forces, but we have never defined it because the words themselves are somewhat self-explanatory: relation, correlation, it is the relationship between and among opposing forces.

152. Said differently, it is the relationship between the capacity that one force has to impose its interests on an opposing force and the capacity that the opposing force has to do the same.

153. In this sense, by negative or unfavourable correlation of forces we are referring to a situation when the strength of our adversary is stronger than ours. Therefore what we need to do is change this situation so that we can become the stronger force. Once we have achieved this, we can say that the correlation of forces is to our advantage, that is, we have a positive correlation of forces.

154. We have to always assess whether in any given situation the correlation of forces is favourable to us—the revolutionary forces— or if it is favourable to the enemy.

### *c) Examples of strategy and tactics in the military terrain*

155. We will now give examples from the military terrain, the terrain of war, and we will explain why we use the terrain of war for demonstrating what we understand by strategy and tactics.

156. Let's imagine a national liberation war like, for example, that which took place in China in the war against Japan, and the Vietnamese war against the French.

157. There we can see that there exists different ways to confront the enemy. For example, we can choose the strategy of direct confrontation with the enemy.

158. What does that mean? It means that, in the case of China, the revolutionary army, the army of national liberation confronts the enemy army in a large battle where — we would say — the forces of both contenders are fully exposed, this is what is meant by direct confrontation, and it can be one way to defeat an enemy.

159. Our army and the enemy army, all our forces and all their forces are all there.

160. But if the enemy forces are larger and better armed, we run the risk of losing in a direct confrontation.

161. To choose a direct confrontation tactic can appear to represent a very brave attitude: “Look how capable we are”, “We are great, we will win”. This is a voluntarist type of attitude, but it can lead to a catastrophic defeat.

162. What other paths exist?

163. There are other paths, for example, that of encirclement.

164. Knowing the enemy is very powerful and, in addition, where it is located, perhaps, it has already advanced and taken a very important city from us, and has concentrated its forces there: what can we do?

165. We can employ the strategy of encirclement, that is, we find a way of encircling it so that it cannot get supplies, and thereby weakened it. That can be another tactic.

166. A third strategy could be to divide the enemy, that is, if the enemy is in two places — we can imagine this on a map — we put a wedge between these places, between the two locations, in such a way that the two sections of the army cannot help each other. That is another way: divide and attack the separate parts.

167. We also have the guerrilla strategy of which we spoke of earlier: attack by surprise and ambush, at times when the army goes on patrol, etc.

*d) The concept of strategy*

168. So what does the concept of strategy mean?

169. Strategy is the way in which we plan, organize and direct various battles.

170. For what purpose?

171. To achieve a goal, which could be winning the war, or winning a battle in the war.

172. Let me repeat this point, strategy is the way in which diverse battles are planned, organized and directed to achieve our objective (goal).

173. Now, what is a tactic or what are the tactics? They are the operations or actions which enable us to specifically execute our strategy.

174. For example, in the strategy of encirclement in which my army surrounds the enemy, one tactic is to impede the supply of food, to impede water and medicines getting in.

175. Another tactic in the strategy of encirclement can be to create constant threats about an imminent invasion by our army sending false signals of alarm and attack, creating a constant sense of insecurity within the enemy army.

*e) The strategic goals*

176. We call the long-term goals we are hoping to achieve, strategic goals.

177. There can be two types.

178. The final goal can refer to, for example in the case of a war of national liberation, successfully defeating the colonialists.

179. And in the case of Cuba, we could say that the final goal was to defeat Batista.

180. There are also partial goals: to beat the enemy by encircling or defeating one of its bases. These can be partial goals.

*f) The need to prepare a strategic plan*

181. Now, a military strategy has to develop actions in order to change the correlation of forces and to do that it has to prepare a strategic plan.

182. For each strategic plan there is a time for designing a plan, a time for applying the plan, a time for analysing the results, and a time for re-adjusting the plan according to the results obtained.

183. These are fundamental elements to take into consideration. It is not enough to make a plan; we must evaluate the results of that plan.

184. We often act without a plan, and more often than not, when we have a plan, we do not evaluate how it is going so as to be able to rectify it in a timely manner.

185. The principal method in general is that of learning to fight during the course of the war itself.

186. Now, we cannot plan every little detail of every battle, because in fact each action that is taken changes the reality and therefore, the plan needs to be adjusted, as do the measures that we have adopted, etc.

187. And without a doubt, the art of politics is the art of flexibility in tactics, as we will see.

188. The initial stage of strategic planning is very important. Already we have said we have to analyze the concrete situation and the forces that are struggling to reach the same goals we are seeking.

189. A good strategist is principally the one that takes advantage of all existing resources in order to change the correlation of forces in the course of the struggle.

190. We are talking about strategy and tactics and we are using military examples. This should not be a surprise because Lenin thought, and I believe, not only Lenin, that political struggle or revolutionary struggle is a war, a class war.

191. As you know Marxism considers the history of humanity — that which emerged with the appearance of classes — to be the history of the struggle between the ruling classes who are exploiters, and the dominated classes, who are exploited and tend to rebel.

192. It is for this reason that these concepts of military strategy and tactics can be applied perfectly to political struggle.

*h) We can not always be on the offensive*

193. It is important to consider that we, the revolutionary forces who confront the enemy, cannot always be on the offensive.

194. At times, we have to go on the defensive, something which often the most radical sections of the left do not understand.

195. They believe that to be revolutionary one must always be on the offensive, and that anybody who goes on the defensive, or anybody who retreats, is a reformist, someone who is betraying the revolution.

196. There are times when the enemy has gained the upper hand and can go on the offensive.

197. At those times, when the enemy has gained the offensive, we have to be capable of retreating so as to reorganise our forces, and enable them to survive in order to launch an offensive in the future.

198. Because, if we do not retreat, what can happen is that they could all die in battle. And if they all die in battle, as heroic as that may be, there will be no possibility of building the future, which is what all political forces strive to do.

199. Just as it is opportunism to not take advantage of the conditions to advance when they are favourable to the revolutionary process, it is adventurism to proceed when conditions do not exist for the struggle to be successful.

*i) A platform for struggle which unites broad sectors of the population*

200. The art of revolutionary political leadership is to promote a struggle that is so broad that all sectors opposed to the conservative forces can join together and lend mutual support in the struggle to defeat that enemy.

201. A good political strategist is one who promotes the broad articulation of sectors.

202. Lenin considered it was fundamental, in order to succeed, to attain what he called a positive program of action.

203. We can say: a platform for struggle that unites those broad sectors of the population.

204. Therefore this platform for struggle or this positive program of action — as Lenin called it — has to contain issues which bring all those people together.

205. If our program of action, if our platform for struggle, is a very radical platform, many sectors will be scared off, and they will marginalize themselves from the struggle, and instead of adding we will subtract forces.

206. This is important, because at times we believe that to be revolutionaries we must put forward the most radical positions.

207. But that can produce the opposite effect, because it does not allow us to gain forces, those forces which in the future will make possible what today seems impossible.

208. We have already noted that it is important to determine who are the opposing forces, how are they organized, what are the ways in which they are organized, and the path to follow.

209. Now, we will provide a specific analysis of this in a later course dedicated to this issue. We will see that the foundation for this analysis is the analysis of class society, but we do not want to go into this analysis just yet, because we think it very important that we free ourselves from schemas and that instead we are capable of analyzing opposing forces.

210. When we come to analyzing class we will see what lies behind these forces, but for the moment we can accurately describe these opposing forces.

*j) Who can be counted on for support and who must be fought*

211. Lenin pointed out that revolutionary strategy ought to indicate those who can be counted on for support, those who must be fought and in what precise conditions.

212. That is the most important element.

213. One needs to determine — as we said before— the general strategy and tactics at each new conjuncture.

214. And I say that this has to be done at each new conjuncture because the situation is constantly changing: in Venezuela, the situation after the Constituent Assembly was very different than the situation before the coup in April 2002.

215. Then, after making a diagnosis of the specific situation, we must work out tactics, which are the actions by which we can accomplish our strategic aims.

216. Tactics must include a reference to organizational structures, that is, how we organize ourselves. We must keep in mind that if we are in a war against an armed invader, our approach to such a challenge is very different than if we are fighting an enemy in the electoral realm or in the media.

217. We then have to distinguish between the different organizational structures we must adopt, and the methods for fighting we are going to use. For example, will we use insurrectional or electoral means?

*k) Take advantage of the contradictions within the enemy*

218. The specific form used to take advantage of the contradictions within the enemy is very important, because it is not only a question of evaluating the strength of the enemy forces, but of estimating both the strengths and weaknesses. And among the weaknesses are the contradictions which arise internally within the enemy forces.

219. It was said – for example – that in the 2012 Venezuelan presidential elections Chavez was going to win because, among other things the enemy — Chavez’ rivals — were totally divided.

*l) Forms of agitation and propaganda*

220. And ultimately, there is the issue of what kind of agitation and propaganda should be carried out because people are driven by various motivations, and the political instrument should be able to address those motivations so that people are energized, move in action and fight. Into all this comes the important role of what we call “political slogans”, which are precisely those strong ideas needed to motivate people to fight for certain goals.

221. Political slogans are short phrases that function as powerful ideas which synthesize the meaning and specific orientation of an action.

222. Here I will give you a very clear example. When the Russian revolution took place in February, there were two forces that overthrew Tsarism: on one hand there were the people organized in the workers’ and soldiers’ Soviets and on the other, the bourgeois forces that took over the State apparatus.

223. When Lenin was outside the country — because he was exiled — he thought the basic slogan should be: “Down with the provisional bourgeois government, so that the people, organized in the Soviet, would win and take the government into their own hands.”

224. But when he arrived in Russia, he realized the people believed in that government because, unlike the Tsar, it had opened up democratic spaces. As the police had been eliminated, the people could freely organize meetings. People felt that they had been liberated from tsarist oppression, and they were convinced that they would have peace. At that time there was peace.

225. The people had many illusions, but Lenin and the Bolsheviks knew that the new government was not going to maintain peace, that it was interested in continuing the war, due to the class composition of that government and its relations with imperialism, etc.

226. So, what did Lenin say at that precise situation? We cannot raise the slogan: “Overthrow the provisional government”, the people will not understand, the people believe in this government, what must we do?

227. The task at that time, assigned to the Party was to educate, to explain to the people that the government they believe in was going to go to war. And so it was: a little time later the government declared war.

228. At that time, the popular sectors and the workers who had heard the Bolshevik message realized they had been right.

229. They began to change their minds, their way of thinking and now wanted to defeat that bourgeois government because what they did not want to continue fighting.

230. It was then that the slogan “Down with the provisional government” had to be raised.

231. This is important, because a slogan can seem to be correct, but if it does not correspond to the views and the emotional state of the people at that time, it can be incorrect.

232. We have to be able to detect when an apparently correct slogan is really a strong statement which will unite wide sectors against the principal enemy, which in the case of 1917 Russia, after the revolution of February, was the provisional government.

#### IV. STATE OF MIND OF THE PEOPLE

233. Now we will turn to an issue that is very important, the issue concerning the state of mind or political consciousness of the people,

*a) The term “masses” seems too homogenizing.*

234. It is critical that we take into account the state of mind of the people, that is, the grass roots. We speak of the “state of mind of the people” rather than the “masses”, the term most associated with Lenin and 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxist-Leninist literature.

235. The problem is that the term “masses” is not as helpful as it once seemed to be because our 21<sup>st</sup> century vision of the revolutionary subject is one that is differentiated, whereas the term “masses” —regardless of intent— seems homogenizing.

236. We prefer to speak of “the people” or of “the popular base”.

*b) The danger of subjective analyzes*

237. Notice that we have said that it is fundamental to analyze the correlation of forces, but in analyzing the correlation of forces we cannot be subjective.

238. If we put all our heart and our passion into the struggle, we often think there is more strength than actually exists in the revolutionary camp, and that is a mistake.

239. It is not more revolutionary to assume our forces are greater than they are, why? Because we plan our battles on the basis of how we analyze the forces we have. If we go into combat and think we have an army of ten thousand soldiers, and we plan on the basis that ten thousand soldiers will fight but we only have five thousand or two thousand soldiers, there is little doubt that we will lose, because we cannot win a battle with two thousand soldiers if the planning is for ten thousand.

240. And this mistake is one that seems to frequently occur within the Left. We fall victim to failing to objectively diagnosing how much strength we actually possess. And what do we do then? We make bad assumptions and misinform our leaders and plan battles without having either the resources or the people necessary for such an undertaking.

*c) The state of mind of the people*

241. We have to be capable, then, of knowing what the state of mind of the people is, and we have to know what the state of mind of the enemy is. That is very important.

242. We also have to know what is the actual international context in which we are fighting.

243. With these assessments we must then set out lines of action.

*d) Leaders must learn to listen*

244. But to be able to gain a clear perception of the state of mind of the people, we have to learn to listen, and unfortunately, many of our leaders do not know how to listen. They know how to plan politically, they know how to give orders, but they do not know how to listen.

245. To rule by obeying, something that Evo Morales often speaks of and which originates from the Zapatistas, is rarely achieved. In reality, orders are given to be obeyed. Ruling is not based on obeying the people.

*e) Giving wrong information is a major political error*

246. We said that leaders often do not know how to listen, but subordinates of these leaders — the middle ranks— also misinform their leaders. In order to make them happy or for political opportunism they give wrong information, making the situation sound better than it really is.

247. I believe this is a major political error that deserves a serious penalty, because the danger of non-objective information is that it leads to incorrect decisions, strategies or tactics which result in failures and discourages the people.

248. When we do this, we are committing an act of grave irresponsibility.

249. Therefore, it is a revolutionary duty: to be accurately informed and to inform leaders accurately.

*f) The need to recognize what it is that we are doing wrong*

250. And I think what Facundo Guardado, a Salvadorian leader, said during the revolutionary war is important: “If the people do not follow you at the level you want, you have to ask yourself why. What is it that I am doing wrong? And not put the responsibility on others.”

251. Often we say of our failures: Ah no! It was the people who did not act, it was the people who did not mobilize, and we do not realize that we ourselves were the ones who were incapable of planning the battles correctly.

252. There is a tendency toward subjectivism. At times, due to the revolutionary passion of the leaders, this can lead to them being misinformed, to thinking that the state of mind of the people around them reflects the state of mind of the people in general.

253. For example, the leader of a very combative neighbourhood tends to think that other neighbourhoods, and the rest of the country, have the same enthusiasm for struggle as his neighbourhood, when often his neighbourhood is the exception.

254. This happened in guerrilla zones in Colombia. When the guerrilla commanders saw, in zones controlled by the guerrillas, that the discipline imposed by them — solidarity attitudes, a series of measures and standards, etc. — was being respected, their view of the zones was projected onto the whole country. One of the consequences of this was that a policy for the cities was made using the same criteria as was being applied in zones they controlled in the countryside.

255. And it is for this reason that so many people died in the cities, whether sympathizers or those who were urban guerrillas, because these urban militants had to confront a repressive regime with its entire strength in the city, a situation which did not exist in the guerrilla-controlled zones in the countryside.

256. These subjective decisions led not only to the failure of the revolution but also to the loss of many lives.

257. To think that everything said by the party was correct, that everything it did was good, and that it was necessary for reality to adapt itself to the proposals of the party (and not the other way around), was all part of the Stalinist method, and it cost us dearly.

258. Along with Isabel Rauber, a colleague of mine for many years, we adopted a method for trying to avoid subjective judgments and to help to attain accurate analyses regarding specific situations. We created an outline or methodology for analyzing concrete situations or what we call the “conjuncture”. That will be the subject of another pamphlet because it takes quite a lot of time to outline. There we emphasize a series of basic components whereby people might look at a series of aspects of reality so as to achieve an accurate analysis of the existent situation.

*g) Distinguishing the different levels of consciousness among the population.*

259. In speaking about the state of mind of the people, we have to be able to perceive the different states of mind that exist within the people as a whole.

260. Not everybody has political consciousness, so it is important to distinguish those sectors of the population who have more political consciousness from those who have less.

261. There are some sectors that have revolutionary consciousness, but there are others who only want a democratic struggle, a peaceful struggle.

262. It is important to distinguish the different levels of consciousness of different sectors of the population.

263. Also, we need to know what interests motivate the different sectors of the population. One must find this out.

*h) Sketching a territorial map of the distribution of forces.*

264. It is helpful to sketch a territorial map of the distribution of forces.

265. We have said it is important to analyze forces, but these forces do not exist in a vacuum; in the case of war, these forces are located in specific territories, and the same is true for struggles that occur in state institutions.

266. For example, in our most progressive governments in Latin America, the older economic power continues to have enormous strength. On the other hand, if we make an overview of the parliaments, we see that in many of our parliaments we have the majority, at times also in the judiciary, in the neighbourhoods and in the universities, and so we are seeing that our forces have won specific territories.

267. Yet, conservative forces still dominate many things: the media, for example. Despite the strength of the official media, it has not succeeded in defeating the opposition media.

268. This territorial map then is very important and not only a map of the country, but also one reflecting the situation of the various regions, and reflecting the situation inside state institutions.

*i) Determining which are the strategic territories for leading the battle*

269. And we have to determine which are the strategic territories for leading the battle to victory.

270. So, for example, when the insurrection in Tsarist Russia succeeded, it did not do so throughout the country; it won in the large cities, Moscow and Petrograd, where the revolutionary forces were concentrated.

271. It is important to take that into account because, after the victory, Lenin said: "We have to win the support of the peasants, who represent the immense majority of the population."

272. They had not participated in the revolution directly, except those soldiers that were in the Soviets who were peasants by origin.

273. So we have to map this, we have to know what are the strategic territories.

274. Obviously to win an insurrection it was strategic to promote it in the large cities.

275. Half the army was concentrated there, as were the most combative groups of workers.

276. It was they who made the revolution victorious.

277. If that had not been so, if only very distant cities had of been taken over, it would not have been possible to overthrow Tsarism.

278. Now — as we said — each time the territorial map changes, each time the correlation of forces change, the strategy has to be adapted.

279. And we have to be very careful, because when we are in the countryside, in guerrilla zones, work is easier.

280. We do not realize the issue is that at times we can control a lot of territory, like the guerrillas in Colombia, but they do not control the city of Bogota or other large cities. The guerrilla controls quite a lot of territories, but less important ones. So we have to elaborate this map paying specific attention to strategic territories

281. We have said that it is important to start from what motivates the people. We have explained what Lenin understood by that and why he did not call for the overthrow of the provisional government at a conjuncture when a critical mass of the oppressed were not prepared to listen to such a suggestion, let alone act upon it.

282. We have said in an earlier talk that Lenin well understood that the slogan “Peace, land, bread” was the correct slogan for mobilizing the majority of the people in the struggle against Tsarism. The people identified themselves with the slogan used by the Bolsheviks: “Peace, land, bread.”

*j) Be careful with quantitative analysis!*

283. The other thing is: Be careful with quantitative analysis! If numbers are taken out of context, they can result in a totally incorrect political analysis being made. You can conclude, for example, that the workers’ movement is on the rise because there were 40 or 100 strikes in the year, many more than in the previous year, and yet in the following year, when there are only 20 strikes, you deduce the workers’ movement is on the decline.

284. But therein lies the problem: what was the context in which the strikes occurred? Why were there 40 or 100 strikes in the past year and not now? The situation had changed, the army had gone out in the streets, and had assassinated countless number of leaders of the workers. There was a brutal repression. Therefore, the struggles of that year occurred in this changed context. So, did the fewer number of strikes mean that the workers’ movement was on the decline or that the workers have no will to struggle? Not necessarily. For example, in Nicaragua, the workers were prepared to struggle as guerrillas or in clandestine ways in the neighbourhoods but not in the factories, because there they would lose their jobs or be taken prisoner.

285. So one has to be careful with numbers; one has to look at the context.

*k) Active and passive popular grassroots*

286. Finally, and this is important, one has to distinguish between active and passive popular grassroots.

287. That is, at times we make calculations, for example, of how much support a government has by the number of our supporters that demonstrate in the street and if we mobilize 100,000 people or more we conclude: “Ah, given that, we will win the next elections,” but we have not taken into account that the elections do not mobilize the same kind of people. There can be many revolutionaries demonstrating on the street, but those who will vote against the government will vote quietly in the voting booth.

288. That is why big surprises can occur, as happened in the Nicaraguan case: masses of people in the street supported Ortega in 1990 but he lost the elections.

289. A lot of care must be taken with that.

290. On the other hand, one must take into account that many people, due to opportunism, can be mobilized to support the government. They wear our t-shirt that day, but at the voting booth — where no one sees them — they vote the other way.

291. Here we finish the section on the state of mind of the people.

## V. ENEMIES, ALLIES AND POLITICAL FRONT

292. We are now going to talk about a specific theme that we have titled “enemies and allies”, and we can add political fronts, because we want to speak extensively about political fronts.

### *a) The immediate goal of the revolutionary struggle in Russia*

293. Remember Tsarist Russia at the end of the XIX century? What was the immediate goal of the revolutionary movement at that time? What was it that the people so strongly desired?

294. Well, the people, the revolutionaries, the Bolshevik party, wanted to get rid off Tsarism.

295. The immediate goal was to overthrow Tsarism.

296. In February 1917, thanks to the uprising of the workers’ and soldiers’ soviets and the participation of bourgeois forces, Tsarism was overthrown.

297. Thanks to the coming together of those two large opposition forces, the Tsar was defeated.

298. A new conjuncture was opened — as I said previously — the provisional government on one hand, representing the bourgeois forces, and on the other hand, the soviets of workers and peasants. There was a situation of dual power.

299. Who was the most immediate enemy in these new circumstances?

300. The provisional government became the most immediate enemy, because the people’s great anxiety was for peace and that government continued the war.

301. At the time it was evident that the enemy that had to be destroyed was the provisional government, and the slogan that the Bolsheviks raised was: “Down with the provisional government!”

302. Before continuing I want to remind you that the revolutionaries in Russia wanted the transformation of society, the suppression of exploitation. They wanted a non-capitalist society, a society that would defeat feudal and bourgeois power.

303. A socialist society: that was the strategic goal for the Bolshevik party, and initially the main obstacle that prevented them from reaching that goal was Tsarism. So the main enemy in the first stage of the revolution was Tsarism. In the second stage of the revolution, it was the provisional government of Kerensky, because it was he who blocked the workers’ and peasants’ soviets from coming to power.

304. And note that, in the case of the provisional government of Kerensky, the Bolshevik party used two tactics: The first tactic was to **not** raise the slogan “Down with the provisional government!”, but to dedicate themselves to working on raising the consciousness of the people, in the factories, in the army, explaining to people what that government was all about, so that the initial support for that government could be transformed into repudiation once the provisional government had showed its true interests.

305. Education, consciousness raising and **not** raising the slogan “Down with the provisional government!” until the point at which the provisional government was unmasked, that was the first tactic.

306. Once the provisional government showed its true colours and reinitiated the war, then the second tactic was used, the slogan “Down with the provisional government!” was raised, and they organized to overthrow it.

*b) The strategic and immediate enemy in Cuba*

307. In the case of Cuba, who was the strategic enemy?

308. The strategic enemies of the movement to transform that society into a society free from exploitation and for the full development of the people — a socialist society — were North American imperialism, Cuban landowners and the local bourgeoisie. These were the strategic enemies of the revolutionaries, but the most immediate enemy of the revolutionary struggle was the Batista regime.

309. Batista was the principal obstacle: the one that blocked the revolutionaries’ advance.

310. It is very important to determine *what is the principal obstacle*, because clearly, Batista was overthrown thanks to the skills of Fidel’s leadership.

311. He understood that he had to be very flexible in order to bring together all the sectors of Cuban society that had contradictions with Batista.

312. And among those sectors there were bourgeois sectors, middle class sectors, etc., that were unhappy with the way Batista was governing.

313. The art of politics is that of determining exactly who is the most immediate enemy and, in defining the most immediate enemy, to set out a path of struggle against that enemy, in accordance with the state of mind of the people.

314. Part of the intelligence of Fidel Castro was in his understanding that the armed struggle could not be launched until the electoral route was shown to have been exhausted.

315. The assault on the Moncada Barracks was a gesture that catapulted him into public view, but when he went to Mexico to prepare for armed struggle, knowing the Cuban people’s trust in the electoral way, he requested that Batista call a general election. Having demonstrated his willingness to go to elections, it was only when Batista refused, that he organized the invasion, the arrival in the Sierra Maestra.

*c) The strategic and immediate enemy in Nicaragua*

316. In the case of Nicaragua something very similar happened. There was a dictator, Somoza. Who were the strategic enemies of the Nicaraguan people? North American imperialism, the large landowners and the pro-imperialist bourgeoisie. And who was the immediate enemy? It was Somoza.

317. The skill of the FSLN, the leadership of the Sandinista Front, was to unite all internal sectors that were opposed to Somoza and win extensive international support.

318. It was extraordinary because in the Nicaraguan era, the imperialists had already been alerted to the possibilities of such revolutions occurring. There were people like Regis Debray who said that in some ways the Cuban revolution was a surprise, and therefore could win without facing the opposition of the US, but after that, there would not be another such surprise.

319. The Sandinistas would have to struggle knowing that they could have to confront US intervention, and therefore they needed to win international support. In fact, they had the support of the European countries, and leaders such as Carlos Andres Perez in Venezuela.

320. So the important lesson is that we have to be very skilled in defining *who is the immediate enemy*.

*d) Taking advantage of the contradictions in the midst of the enemies*

321. We not only have to be capable of determining who is our immediate enemy, but we have to be capable of taking advantage of all the contradictions that occur between enemies, stimulating those contradictions where possible, because what we have to do is concentrate our fire on the principal enemy.

322. We have spoken of the enemy, we have spoken of the principal enemy, we have spoken of taking advantage of the contradictions in the midst of the enemies.

*e) Revolutionaries alone cannot make a revolution*

323. We have spoken about a lot of things, but we have not yet spoken about alliances. Now we will turn to the question of alliances.

324. We need to make alliances in order to concentrate the maximum amount of forces against our immediate enemy or the principal obstacle, in order to advance.

325. It is a fundamental error to think that we can make the revolution alone. Revolutionaries alone cannot make a revolution.

326. When does this idea arise? Generally the idea that “we can make the revolution alone” does not come up when we are a small group, in an obvious minority, because it is clear that in those conditions we cannot win; instead it arises when we are a majority.

327. For example, we have the case of what happened in Bolivia. After a very fierce struggle against separatist regions, the opposition of the Senate and a series of actions by opposition forces, the forces that support the government succeeded in winning thanks to the mobilization of the people. Evo Morales headed a hunger strike, there were mobilizations going to Santa Cruz, one of the bastions of the opposition. Evo succeeded in winning the referendum and the Constituent Assembly succeed in its goal, and with all that, the panorama of forces in the regions changed, and Evo won the 2010 presidential election with a wide margin.

328. Then, according to my analysis, an over-estimation of their own forces happened, and sectarianism emerged among the comrades of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS): they thought they were so good that they did not need to broaden out to include others.

329. I believe that was a major error.

330. I am going to try to illustrate that idea: if revolutionaries alone are those that do what is needed, it seems obvious that we will go more quickly, but just like a locomotive if the carriages are disconnected and fall behind, clearly the locomotive without carriages will go forward, and much more quickly than if it was carrying a number of carriages. The problem however, is that the revolution has to arrive with all the carriages, not just with the locomotive, or in this case, with all the people, not only with the revolutionaries

*f) How to build alliances*

331. How do we build and consolidate alliances with others?

332. For that, it is very important to take into account propaganda, action and agitation.

333. What do we mean by propaganda?

334. When you make an alliance with someone who you do not agree with on everything, you can emphasize what you share in common or you can emphasize what you disagree on.

335. President Chavez himself established alliances with sectors of the middle bourgeoisie, with a group of business people.

336. So he obviously emphasized the good character of these business people, saying that these businesspeople were willing to collaborate to create jobs, that they were willing to give work to the people, etc. He did not refer to the fact that these businesspeople are exploiters.

337. It's not that these people stop being capitalists, they continue being capitalists. What happens is that propaganda accentuates those things that are positive for the process.

338. As for action, when those sectors that are not ours are attacked by conservative forces because they are supporting us, we should act in solidarity with them.

339. Regarding agitation, it is very important to expose everything the enemy does, everything the conservative sectors do, everything that is rejected by those sectors allied to us.

340. There are many things that we should be able to point out, such as, the inhuman behaviour of conservative sectors.

341. For example, the Venezuelan Catholic Church, which defends a student on hunger strike against Chavez, but is not worried enough to give shelter to victims of a storm. We must point this out so that the most perceptive sectors among our temporary allies see the contradictions (differences) they have with more conservative sectors and the affinities they have with us.

#### *g) Agreements and compromises*

342. Now, when forming alliances one must distinguish between agreements and "compromises".

343. 357. We can make agreements with other forces without anybody renouncing their own interests. For example, in the case of war, bourgeois sectors can support the guerrillas, giving them food to succeed in assaulting a barracks. Here there is an agreement: the bourgeois sectors will feed them and in doing so they are not renouncing anything, it is simply an act of collaboration.

344. But there are other alliances that imply compromises. We understand compromises to mean the renouncement of some of our own demands in order to reach a political agreement with other actors.

#### *h) Can revolutionaries accept compromises?*

345. There are comrades in the more radical sectors of the left who say that they will not accept any compromises; that doing so means being reformist, not being revolutionary enough or being a traitor to the revolution.

346. But Lenin strongly insisted that one has to understand that sometimes one must accept compromises.

347. There are compromises that help the revolution and are revolutionary, but there are compromises that are clearly treasonous and we must be able to differentiate between them.

348. What are the compromises that really help the revolution?

349. I wanted to give an example, which was very controversial at the time and continues to be so: the Peace Agreement of Brest Litovsk that ended the war in 1918 between revolutionary Russia and Imperial Germany.

350. Some continue to think it was a mistake that Lenin decided on the necessity of signing that peace accord, failing to take into account that it was a situation where revolutionary Russia, since the October victory, had been suffering under a civil war and imperialist intervention.

351. At the time, the situation of the Red Army was very complicated.

352. The treaty was signed in March 1918. That was clearly a retreat, territory was given up, and why was it signed? Because it was thought that only by ceding territory could the revolution be preserved.

353. It was a question of the survival of the revolution.

354. The alternative was that you could either continue the struggle and the revolution would die, because there was the danger of the death of the revolution, or you could retreat, abandon part of your territory in order for the revolution to survive.

355. Lenin said that it was not true what those opposing this policy said, that regardless of when we advanced or retreated, the revolution would die.

356. He said: “We are going to retreat, we will conserve our forces, and afterwards we will advance.”

357. You can agree or not with Lenin’s statements, but nobody can deny he was an extraordinary strategist.

358. In a text called **The chief task of our day**, which he wrote in March 1918<sup>1</sup>, Lenin said: “We have betrayed nothing and nobody, we have not sanctified or covered up any lie, we have not refused to help a single friend or comrade in misfortune in every way we could and with everything at our disposal. A general who withdraws the remnants of his army into the heart of the country when it has been beaten or is in panic-stricken flight, or who, in extremity, shields this retreat by a harsh and humiliating peace, is not guilty of treachery towards that part of his army which he is powerless to help and which has been cut off by the enemy. Such a general performs his duty by choosing the only way of saving what can still be saved, by refusing to gamble recklessly, by not embellishing the bitter truth for the people, by “surrendering space in order to gain time”, by taking advantage of any and every respite, even the briefest, in which to muster his forces and to allow his army to rest or recover, if it is affected by disintegration and demoralisation.”

359. Lenin clearly knew that this was an unpopular measure. Who is happy to give up part of ones own territory?

360. But knowing the correlation of forces, the condition of his own army, he saw that by ceding territory, and signing a repugnant peace accord — as he described it — it would enable the survival of the revolution. History shows he was right.

361. That is, the army recuperated and the country was transformed into the great Soviet Union.

362. I wanted to give this example to show that in some cases, it is correct to compromise.

363. We have spoken of allies, that there can be agreements or compromises.

364. Now let’s see what kind of allies there can be.

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1. Lenin, *Collected Works*, volume 27, p.161

*i) Strategic and tactical allies*

365. There can be strategic allies and tactical allies.

366. Strategic allies are those popular forces who support revolutionaries in achieving the strategic transformation of the country.

367. Tactical allies are those forces that support us at one stage of development because they have more affinity with us than with the conservative forces. But we know that at some point in the course of events, they will opt for an alternative way.

368. It is very likely — for example — that bourgeois sectors which support the process at one stage, but will oppose it when that process is radicalized toward socialism. They are allied with us in this stage because they believe they can improve their position in order to better fight in other conditions.

369. Also we have to distinguish between internal and external allies.

370. We must remember that it is fundamental to have external allies — as Chavez always did.

371. We can have a large national majority in support of our process, but if external forces in opposition are sufficiently powerful they can crush us. Clearly there is no revolution that can succeed in one country alone.

372. Just as we can with internal allies, we can distinguish between strategic and tactical allies among international allies.

*j) Potential and real allies*

373. It is also important to differentiate between potential allies and real allies.

374. If you are a good strategist, you can predict who will be with you if you do good work with them. They may be opposed to us now, but working politically with them, they can be won to an understanding that we share common short-term objectives; that they can be ours allies.

375. So a political strategist is capable of changing those potential allies into real allies.

376. And a good strategist is one who is capable of integrating into the struggle all those who still have not joined us but who could be willing to do so.

377. Remember we mentioned the idea of a positive program of action or a platform for struggle?

378. The idea therefore, is to create a platform for struggle against the main enemy, a platform with which the maximum number of sectors of the country can identify.

*k) The policies of alliances*

379. Now let's look at the policies of alliances.

380. First let's define the concept: The policies of alliances are the orientations that guide alliances. The policies of alliances are the guidelines that establish alliances.

381. We cant not simply have a policy of alliances oriented towards winning sectors over, that is, winning over a section of the bourgeoisie or a section of the left or a section of workers to supporting us. This is a policy of alliances for winning sectors.

382. We also need a policy of alliances for neutralizing sectors.

383. If we know that a sector cannot be won over, a policy can be followed which at least stops that sector from supporting the enemy, attempting to keep those sectors on the sideline.

384. That is called a neutralizing policy.

*l) Tactical flexibility*

385. All of these things of which we have spoken about — tactics, alliances, commitments —, require tactical flexibility.

386. Unfortunately, there are sections of the left who do not understand the necessity for tactical flexibility. As they work a lot with strategic slogans, with big ideas, they do not know how to conduct themselves in complex reality, with different shades, with the different tones of grey that exist, when dealing with concrete situations.

387. And, given that generally, these sectors are admirers of Lenin, it seems important to me that they should listen to the Lenin they admire so much, so that they see how he posed the question of tactical flexibility.

388. In **Leftwing Communism: an Infantile Disorder**<sup>2</sup>, Lenin wrote:

“The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and by the most thorough, careful, attentive, skilful and obligatory use of any, even the smallest, rift between the enemies, any conflict of interests among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries, and also by taking advantage of any, even the smallest, opportunity of winning a mass ally, even though this ally is temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional.

Those who do not understand this reveal a failure to understand even the smallest grain of Marxism, of modern scientific socialism in general. Those who have not proved in practice, over a fairly considerable period of time and in fairly varied political situations, their ability to apply this truth in practice have not yet learned to help the revolutionary class in its struggle to emancipate all toiling humanity from the exploiters. And this applies equally to the period before and after the proletariat has won political power.”

389. I believe it is clear that Lenin insisted on the necessity of tactical flexibility.

*m) Alliance is not merger*

390. Ultimately, we must understand that an alliance is not the same as a merger. When two forces join to create a future unity one can speak of a merger: for example, when two parties of the left merge into one political organization.

391. Mergers happened in the case of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), when Chavez called for the formation of a revolutionary party and where, in addition to the Movement of the Fifth Republic, other left parties joined the PSUV.

392. So a merger is one thing; alliances are another.

393. A merger is a permanent unity, two forces that were separate establish themselves as a single unit.

394. An alliance is a temporary unity where each force maintains its profile, its characteristics, and its autonomy.

*n) Incidental alliances, agreements and political pacts*

395. There can also be different types of alliances. There can be incidental alliances that simply involve joint actions: we can agree, for example, to carry out a large mobilization against Carlos

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2. I. Lenin, *Selected Works in three volumes, Vol 3*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967, pp. 379-380.

Andrés Pérez (former president of Venezuela). Bourgeois forces, middle classes progressive parties, leftist parties, can agree to demonstrate together in the street.

396. Those are incidental alliances or joint actions. Incidental but not unimportant.

397. Agreements are more organized alliances, even if they are not necessary formalized: “I make an agreement with you on one point: for each of us to speak for 20 minutes in the meeting.”

398. A political pact is something more formal. A document is drawn up in which both parties are committed to certain objectives, actions, etc.

*o) Permanent alliances: the political fronts*

399. Lastly, there are permanent alliances, alliances around a long-term project, those that become political fronts.

400. Political fronts are not parties in the sense that they are not a unified political organization.

401. A front is a type of political organization in which different political organizations participate while maintaining their autonomy. But these different political organizations have a common platform, a common program, and a discipline to enable them to function.

402. The Broad Front of Uruguay is a political front, as was Popular Unity in Chile. Both were political fronts.

403. What is the difference between these political fronts, that of Popular Unity in Chile and the Broad Front of Uruguay?

404. I think it is very interesting to examine the differences.

405. In the case of Chile, Popular Unity was made up of the sum of parties on the left: there was the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Radical Party, and the Christian Left Party. The Chilean Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) did not join Popular Unity. The MIR was opposed to the Popular Unity front, as it considered it reformist, but it did however support Allende.

406. In Chile we could say that we had a political front, composed of parties, and at the same time, an alliance between that political front and the MIR.

407. The character of the Chilean political front, Popular Unity, was that it was fundamentally the sum of parties and, in fact, its strength was in the sum of militants of those parties.

408. The Broad Front of Uruguay is something quite different.

409. The Broad Front of Uruguay was also composed of parties, perhaps of a much wider spectrum of parties, because in addition to the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, there were some progressive sectors of the Conservative Party that participated in that Front. There was also the Uruguayan Christian Democrats, who are Christian Democrats with a position I consider more progressive than that of the Chilean Christian Democrats.

410. The interesting aspect of the Uruguayan political front — the longest surviving front in Latin America, as it arose in 1971 and has lasted for 42 years — is that at the same time that it unites these parties, it calls upon the citizenry to establish grassroots committees. The result of this approach was that, given the huge amount of support for the program of the Front, two thirds of the people in these grassroots committees were not militants of parties, but individuals who were attracted by the program and platform of struggle.

411. I think that this experience is very important. I always say: There are sums that add, as was the case of the Chilean Popular Unity, with the parties and their militants; and there are sums that multiply, as in the case of the Broad Front of Uruguay.

412. Two thirds of the people who came to the Uruguayan Broad Front were not party militants themselves. The Broad Front sought to give them space and representation and a say in decision making, because their role is not limited to being voters and in mobilizations at the grass roots. No! They are also allowed to take part in decision-making.

413. Alliances do not always have to be established just between the leaders or executives of different organizations or different sectors; alliances can be made with grassroots organizations, informal alliances perhaps, but clearly alliances.

414. For example, when Lenin and the Bolsheviks assumed power, they did not advance the Bolshevik agrarian program but instead adopted the program of the Socialist Revolutionary party, a party rooted among the peasants. The reason for adopting the program of a party that represented the majority of the peasants, without having established a formal alliance with the party, was to attempt to establish an alliance with the social base of that party, over the heads of its leaders.

415. That can be done and must be done when leaders do not understand the necessity for these alliances.

416. Lastly, we have to understand that if the alliance is not made up of equals there will be contradictions at the heart of the alliance, and therefore there will be both unity and struggle.

417. But clearly the struggle over those ideological or programmatic elements that are not shared, cannot be a struggle between enemies. It is a struggle within the people and, therefore there must be rules to prevent division and separation of the allies, and ensure respect for differences so that unity is not broken.

418. Here again, the Broad Front is an example of the culture of debate, of the acceptance of differences, that is needed.

419. There are people who go to Uruguay and believe that the Front will disintegrate, because the discussions are serious and public. But the Broad Front continues to exist, in large part, thanks to that tolerance.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What criticisms would you make regarding the definition of politics as the art of the possible?
2. To be a good politician, must one be a realist or a dreamer?
3. What role does the correlation of forces play in politics?
4. What must a revolutionary politician do when faced with a negative correlation of forces?
5. Explain why we say politics is the art of making the impossible possible. Isn't this simply wishful thinking?
6. Explain why we say power is not simply the occupying of positions in the state apparatus.
7. Explain why we believe that revolutionary politics depends upon popular organization.
8. Does scepticism in relation to politics and politicians exist in your community? What is the reason?
9. How can we detect a qualitative change in the political situation?

10. Choose a Latin American head of state as an example, and indicate what correlation of forces existed at the international level when they were elected?
11. What was the correlation of forces internally?
12. What was done to change the internal correlation of forces?
13. What were the most important factors that contributed to the emergence of a new political conjuncture?
14. Who forms part of the oligarchic bloc and who is part of the revolutionary bloc?
15. Why is the Venezuelan army different?
16. Why can people learn more in times of revolution than in years of educational courses?
17. What factors do we need to take into consideration in order to plan out well our battles?
18. Do you know of any example of a political struggle in your country that was poorly planned?
19. What do we mean by the correlation of forces? Give an example.
20. Give an example of a specific strategy and the tactics used in it.
21. Why do we need tactical flexibility?
22. Give an example of political opportunism.
23. When can we say that a certain position is voluntarist?
24. Can you point to any political struggle in which more people have been hurt than should have been?
25. Why is a correct analysis of a concrete situation so important in politics?
26. Is the use of armed struggle always right?
27. Give an example of the right way to take advantage of contradictions amongst the enemy.
28. Why must we avoid using the term “masses”?
29. Why must we not be subjective in analyzing the correlation of forces?
30. How can we obtain a reliable perception of the people’s state of mind?
31. Explain why misinforming a leader is so serious?
32. Do you believe our leaders listen to the people?
33. Give an example that shows there are different levels of consciousness among the people.
34. Draw a territorial map of the forces opposing your president of the Republic and why they are specifically positioned in those areas.
35. What kind of slogans are capable of mobilizing people?
36. Explain why care must be taken with quantitative analysis by giving an example.
37. What was the strategic objective of the Bolshevik party?
38. Who was the immediate enemy in the first and second stages of the Bolshevik revolution and why?
39. Who is the strategic enemy and who is immediate enemy in your country? Why is it important to be clear about the difference between such enemies?

40. When Lenin returned to Russia, why did he – knowing the provisional government would continue the war – reject the slogan “Down with the Provisional Government!”? Isn’t it contradictory to have rejected it in February and accepted it a few months later?
41. Can you give an example of how any Latin American political leader has been able to exploit contradictions between the enemies of the revolution?
42. Can a government claim to be building socialism when allied with the bourgeoisie? Give an example where you believe this to be the case.
43. Can a revolutionary accept compromises that obstruct the immediate implementation of their program?
44. Can a dogmatic leader, who speaks always of principles but know little of the concrete reality about them, be a good strategist? Do you know of any such leader?
45. Should a militant accept that at times the revolution may have to retreat on some of its policy?
46. Why is it important to be clear who are our potential allies?
47. Could you give an example of a policy of alliances that wins over sectors for the project, and another which neutralizes some opposition forces?
48. Give an example of mergers.
49. What different types of alliances exist?
50. Give an example of joint actions.
51. Give an example of agreements.
52. Give an example of a political pact.
53. Give an example of a political front.
54. Why did the Bolsheviks take on the agrarian program of another party instead of implementing their own?
55. Why do we say that all alliances involve unity and struggle?