Conquering a New Popular Hegemony
Marta Harnecker on 21st Century Socialism

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“In recent years, and in increasingly more countries, growing multitudes have rebelled against the existing order and without a defined leadership have taken over plazas, streets, highways, towns, parliament, but, despite having mobilized hundreds of thousands of people, neither the magnitude of its size nor its combativeness have enabled these multitudes to go beyond simple popular revolts. They have brought down presidents, but they have not been capable of conquering power in order to begin a process of deep social transformation.” — Marta Harnecker.

By Marta Harnecker
Translated by Federico Fuentes, via LINKS

This article seeks to reflect on the issues raised during the roundtable discussion, “State, revolution and the construction of hegemony”, that occurred at the VI International Forum on Philosophy, held between November 28 and December 2, 2011, in Maracaibo, Venezuela. Logically, here I once again repeat some ideas that I have expressed in other writings, but have ordered them differently, while further refining some of them. It was written in July 2012 and first published in English at Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal with permission.
1. Our goal: a different socialism[1]

1) A new socialism, far removed from the soviet model

1. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet Union, Latin American and world leftist intellectuals fell into a state of confusion. We knew more about what we didn’t want in socialism than what we did want. We rejected the lack of democracy, totalitarianism, state capitalism, bureaucratic central planning, collectivism that sought to standardize without respect for differences, productivism that emphasized the expansion of productive forces without taking into account the need to preserve nature, dogmatism, intolerance towards legitimate opposition, the attempt to impose atheism by persecuting believers, the need for a single party to lead the process of transition.

2. So, why talk about socialism at all, if that word carried and continues to carry such a heavy burden of negative connotations?

3. To answer this question, we need to consider some important issues. On the one hand, just as Soviet socialism was collapsing, democratic and participatory processes in local governments began to emerge in Latin America, foreshadowing the “kind of alternative to capitalism that people wanted to build.”[2] On the other, by demonstrating in practice that people could govern in a transparent, non-corrupt, democratic and participatory manner, the political conditions in several Latin American countries were thus prepared to make possible the coming to power of the left through democratic elections.

4. These beacons that began to radiate throughout our continent were aided by the resounding failure of neoliberalism during the 1980s and 1990s and, more recently, by the global crisis of capitalism. An alternative to capitalism is more necessary than ever. But what should it be called?

5. It was President Chávez who had the audacity to point to socialism as the alternative to capitalism. He called it “21st-century socialism,” reclaiming the values associated with the word socialism: “love, solidarity, equality between men and women and equity among all,”[3] while added the adjective “21st century” to differentiate this new socialism from the errors and deviations present in the model of socialism that was implemented during the 20th century in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries.

6. Aware of the negative connotation associated with this word, Chavez dedicated himself to explaining to his people, through numerous public speeches and interventions, all the benefits that this new society would bring with it, in contrast to the situation created by capitalism. His interventions have been so successful that, according to various polls, more than half of Venezuela’s population prefers socialism over capitalism.
7. However, it is worth remembering that 35 years earlier in Chile, the victory of President Salvador Allende in the early 1970s, with the support of the leftist Popular Unity coalition, marked the beginning of the world’s first experiment in a peaceful transition to socialism. Although it was defeated by a military coup three years later, the experience left us with some important lessons. If our generation learned anything from that defeat, it was that peaceful progress towards our goal required us to rethink the socialist project applied until then in the world, and that it was therefore necessary to develop a project that was more in tune with the reality of Chile and the peaceful path towards socialism. Allende’s folkloric expression, “socialism with red wine and empanadas,”[4] seemed to capture this idea, pointing towards the building of a democratic socialist society rooted in national popular traditions.[5] So I believe that the Chilean experience should be considered the first practical experience that attempted to move away from the Soviet model of socialism and towards what we now call 21st-century socialism.

2) Returning to the original socialist ideas

8. This socialism, that guards its distance from the practices of 20th-century socialism, has returned to the original ideas of Marx and Engels.

9. According to the Marxist classics, the future society was supposed to allow the full development of human potential, something that could only be thought in a cooperative society. Capitalism only produces fragmented human beings.

10. As Engels said in his “Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith,” an early draft of The Communist Manifesto, the goal is “to organize society in such a way that every member of it can develop and use all his capabilities and powers in complete freedom and without thereby infringing the basic conditions of this society.” In Marx’s final version of the Manifesto, this new society is presented as “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”

11. Canadian Marxist Michael Lebowitz has amply elaborated on this idea in a number of his books dedicated to the issue of 21st-century socialism.[6] He has been the most consistent in emphasizing full human development as the goal and the relationship between this development and revolutionary practice (whereby transforming their circumstances, people transform themselves).

12. But, how did Marx imagine this alternative society to capitalism – one which would allow for the full development of human potential — to look like?

13. He imagined it would be a “cooperative society, based on common ownerships of the means of production”, in which labor would no longer be an obligation but instead become
the individual’s prime want, where it involves the “all-around development of the individual.” At this point society has totally exceeded bourgeois right; each person gives to society all he/she can according to their abilities, and receives according to need.[7]

14. But where do Marx’s ideas about the nature of the future society comes from?[8] They do not fall from the sky, nor are they the result of speculative thought; rather, they arise from an analysis of the internal contradictions of capitalism itself. Marx argues that capitalism creates the material conditions of this new society. One of these is the technical need for the existence of the collective worker; another is the increase in the productive capacity required to respond to the most pressing human needs.

15. But Marx not only indicated the conditions that favored the emergence of an alternative society; at the same time, he studied the contradictions and negative effects of capitalism on workers and the environment, to indicate what must be negated, either reversed or transformed into their opposite, if socialist construction is to move forward.[9]

16. Thanks to these inversions, Marx could envision the new society that would replace capitalism.

17. It is necessary to end capitalist private property of the means of production, which has come into conflict with the increasingly social nature of production. [10] This socialization of production in fact reveals the need for property to become collective or common property overcoming economic anarchy of capital production; on another hand, the economy should not be orientated toward self-interest but towards the interests of society as a whole.

18. It is necessary to end the growing division between manual and intellectual labor — the result of capitalist dispossession of the workers’ knowledge and skill — thus making work a comprehensive manual and intellectual activity at once. It is necessary to end the alienated and mandatory character of labor, under which, in order to achieve the maximum productive potential of a worker, they are fragmented and transformed into one more screw in a machine. These inversions establish the centrality of workers as protagonists in the production process.

19. Marx also stated that is was essential to end capitalist relationships of production and the antagonism between city and countryside because they produced an “irreparable rift” in the interdependent process of social metabolism between the human being and nature.[11] He noted that only in a communist society[12] would “the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control, [...] “[13].

20. I want to briefly expand on this topic, given the misrepresentations that have arisen based on a selective reading of Marx’s and Engels texts that have been taken out of context, and
that ascribes to these authors a position of positive appreciation for capitalism’s ability to develop productive forces and a perspective of promoting an even greater development of these forces within the socialist society. I say “taken out of context” because when they speak of the necessity of pursuing industrial development on a grand scale within the new society, they are not proposing limitless development but a level of development sufficient to produce “enough products to be able so to arrange distribution that the need of all its members will be satisfied.”[14]

21. We must remember that Marx lived through a time of crisis of land fertility provoked by the capitalist’s “blind desire for profits”; a crisis that provoked a desperate search for natural fertilizers such as guano and then saltpetre, and that underpinned the second agricultural revolution associated with the notables advances made in the science of soil. [15] Early on, Marx believed that these innovations would contribute to solving that crisis, but soon after he reached the conclusion that the second agricultural revolution would only worsen the problems. [16]

22. Having lived through this period more than 150 years ago, the author of Capital developed “a critique of the environmental degradation that anticipated much of the present day ecological thought. “[17]

23. In his masterpiece, Marx wrote: “[...] Moreover, all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility. The more country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development, as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the worker.”[18]

24. From all this, we can conclude that only an alternative society to capitalism will be able to re-establish the natural metabolism between man and nature; a socialist society in which the people and not a privileged elite decides — through their delegates — what to produce and how to produce to satisfy the population’s true needs, and not the artificial wants created by capitalism in its crazy pursuit of greater and greater profits. And moreover, that in making these decisions, consideration is given to the necessity of preserving nature.

3) Participatory planning: a fundamental characteristic of socialism

25. If we examine the characteristics that we have noted of the new society we want to build, we see that that transferring ownership over the strategic means of production to the state is not enough, as this does not mean anything other than a juridical change of property. The sub-
ordination of workers to an external force continues; there are new socialist managers, but the alienated status of the workers in the production process remains unchanged. This is formally collective property, because the state represents society, but real appropriation (ownership) is still not collective.

26. That is why Engels argues “state-ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict [between the increasingly social character of production and private ownership over the means of production],” although he adds that “concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution.” What is the solution? He maintains that “this solution can only consist in the practical recognition of the social nature of the modern forces of production, and therefore in the harmonizing of the mode of production, appropriation and exchange with the socialized character of the means of production. And this can only come about by society openly and directly taking possession of the productive forces, which have outgrown all controls, except that of society as a whole. […][19]

27. But what does it mean for society to take possession of the means of production? Society is a highly abstract concept: it may mean all of humanity. In my understanding what we need to determine is who should have effective possession of those means of production — i.e., who should be entitled to use, enjoy and dispose of those assets. It is here that Pat Devine’s contribution of distinguishing among different levels of social ownership seems important to me. Each level is associated with who is “affected by decisions over the use of the assets involved, in proportion to the extent to which they are affected.”[20]

28. According to this logic, who should be the owner of a bakery that produces bread and sweets for a given geographic area, for a commune, for example? If the bakery workers live in that area, if the raw material needed for the bread comes from local farmers, and the bread and sweets that are produced are also consumed locally, there is no sense in the bakery being property of the nation; it should be owned by that commune.

29. In contrast, in the case of a strategic enterprise such as oil, it would be absurd for the oil workforce to claim ownership of these resources, which belong to all inhabitants of the country (or even to humanity as a whole). This doesn’t mean however that those workers should not play a decisive role in the management of the enterprise. The surplus that is produced cannot be dedicated solely to improving the lives of its workers, but should also be devoted to new investment in the enterprise, to improving the living conditions of surrounding community, and, due to its status of wealth that belongs to the nation as a whole, should provide a substantial contribution to the national budget. The legal ownership of this enterprise should be in the hands of the state in representation of the nation, the effective control of the production process should be in the hands of the enterprise’s employees, but the destination of the wealth obtained — once the investments necessary for the reproduction of the productive process and labor remuneration have been deducted — should be defined by society as a whole.
30. How, then, does the commune (in the first case) and society (in the second) define what is to be done with the fruits of productive activity? Here is where an essential role must be played by the participatory planning process — which will be very different from bureaucratic planning – as it is only via this process that society – in its different levels – can really appropriate for itself the fruits of labor that it generates.

31. I share with Pat Devine[21], the idea that the actors in participatory planning will vary according to different levels of social ownership. In the case of the community bakery, decisions on how much to produce with what raw materials, what quality, what variety, when the product should be ready, how to distribute it, how much to invest in maintaining or expanding the enterprise, etc., should be made not only by those who work in the bakery but also by the people who produce the raw material used and by the consumers of bread and sweets. In the case of the oil enterprise, while its workers must participate in management, decisions concerning reinvestment, new investment, marketing, the destination of the rest of the surplus, must involve the entire society. In both cases: the local society or the national society should be present through its various representatives or spokespersons.

32. I wanted to focus on this issue as participatory planning is often neglected as one of the central characteristics of socialism. In my opinion, there can be no socialism if there is no participatory planning, that is, if society does not “openly and directly” take possession of the means of production – as Engels put it — through the exercise of participatory planning.[22]

33. But if 21st-century socialism is about returning to the ideas of Marx and Engels, this does not mean that we shouldn’t carry out a rigorous criticism of the experiments in so-called “real socialism” in order to learn from them and avoid repeating its errors and deviations. These weigh too heavily in the minds of the people for us to pretend we can raise the socialist flag without dealing with our own past.

34. For some this process will last decades. For others, such as Samir Amin, it will take centuries – just as capitalism took centuries to consolidate itself – and there are those, such as myself, who see it as a utopian goal that lights the path, that orientates the struggle, but one that we will never fully achieve. This is not being pessimistic, as some might think. On the contrary, a utopian goal that is well defined helps us chart our course, strengthens our resolve to struggle and each step which brings us closer to the horizon, as small as it maybe, is considered positive.

4) Socialism, direct democracy and delegated democracy

35. We have said that the society we want to build – which we have called 21st-century socialism — seeks to create the conditions for full human development in a cooperative society and that full human development can only be achieved through practice, that is, people
transform, or fully develop themselves at the same time as they struggle to change their circumstances, to create the conditions for the new cooperative society, thereby overcoming the inherited culture and practicing new values such as solidarity and respect for differences.

36. As such, democratic participation, popular protagonism, is one of the essential features of socialism.[23]

37. That is why Alfredo Maneiro – a Venezuelan intellectual and political leader – maintained that it was not simply about injecting bourgeois democracy with a social content, by placing emphasis on the resolution of social problems: food, health, education, etc. Rather, the focus had to be on transforming the inherited form of democracy, creating spaces that enabled people to struggle to change their circumstances, while in the process transforming themselves.

38. It is not the same, said Maneiro, for a community to win a footbridge having organized themselves and fought for it, than for them to receive the footbridge as a gift from the state. The paternalism of the state is incompatible with popular protagonism. It ends up transforming people into beggars. It is necessary to go from a culture based on citizens that beg towards a culture based on citizens that conquer, that make decisions, that execute and control, that self-organize, that self-govern. We have to move from a government for the people to the self-government of the people, where the people really take power, as Aristóbulo Istúriz said.

39. This participatory and protagonistic democracy is not a democracy solely for the elites, as bourgeois representative democracy is; it is a democracy for the great majority of the people. Within it, the common citizen can participate in a variety of manners, not only in formulating demands and supervision, but fundamentally in making decisions and ensuring they are carried out.

40. As Pablo Anzalone[24], a Uruguayan political leader said, it is about constructing democratic processes where the great popular majorities are incorporating into the political arena, both within institutions as well as in practice. This requires a reformulation of the idea of politics, recuperating and emphasizing participatory mechanisms from the local to the national level.

a) Decentralization: essential for real participation

41. But participation does not come out of thin air, nor can it occur anywhere, it is necessary to create adequate spaces for its exercising, that is, spaces where people can not only discuss and express their opinions but also make decisions.

42. That is why, there can only be real participation if there is a profound process of decentralization, which implies decentralizing competencies and resources. [25]
43. However, along with creating spaces, it is necessary to give people the instruments with which to make decisions. Although it is true that one learns to participate by participating, it is equally true that it is also important, even if not essential, to be able to count on facilitators that help people take the first few steps, and it is necessary to have at hand the information needed to allow people to make informed decisions.

44. Here we must clarify that in saying popular participation is a central feature of this new society that we want to build, we do not mean that everyone must participate at the same level. If we respect differences, we have to understand that, on the one hand, there are people with greater or less vocation towards actively participating in the construction of the new society and, on the other, that there are many different ways people can participate: there are parents that are willing to participate in parent meetings organized at the start of the school year, there are young people who are willing to participate if they are called upon to discuss sporting issues in their local area, but neither may be interested in participating in community meetings; there are other people however, who do want to participate in a more active and constant manner in meetings where they live, work or study. What we should aim for is that, regardless of the level of participation, at decisive moments these people are willing to manifest their support for this project of the new society that they want to build, through their vote (election of authorities, referendums) and through their presence in the streets when the situation requires it.

45. Moreover, for people to feel like they want to participate, they have to feel that participation can help change their lives. That is why it is so important to avoid routinism. People need to have time for rest and recreation, and each meeting that occurs has to leave people with the sensation that it was worth attending, that they achieved something for themselves, whether materially or spiritually, where something touched their heart (a video, a song, a gesture). What matters is that a person leaves the meeting feeling personally enriched for having attended.

46. Finally, we have to understand that people transform themselves through participation. They may first come to a meeting simply to obtain a solution to a material problem they face, but when they discover that by attending meetings they can feel better about themselves because they obtain information of what is happening, because by involving themselves in acts of solidarity they feel satisfaction in seeing how they have contributed to making others happy, all this goes some way to changing that person. They begin to understand that it is more important to be than to have, and will therefore surely be more willing to participate for reasons that are not purely material.

b) Direct democracy and delegated democracy

47. We also have to understand that direct democracy, that is, democracy whereby people debate and decide in assemblies, is not the only acceptable form of democracy. Direct democ-
racy is one form of democracy, undoubtedly the richest and most protagonistic form, but it has its limits.

48. The direct democracy is without a doubt the richest and protagonistic type of democracy, but she has limits. For everyone to be able to fully participate, the size of the group cannot be excessively large. It is difficult to imagine direct municipal democracy in a municipality with 200,000 people, much less direct democracy in large capital cities made up of millions of people.

49. Democratic participation cannot remain limited to experiences on a small scale; it has to transcend the community, the factory, the classroom: it must go from local levels of power all the way to the national level. The same must occur in a factory: along with workers councils in each workshop or sector, there must be workers councils in each factory, and each branch of industry; the same must occur in centers of study (by classroom, faculty, university, and across all universities).

50. We have to create a system that allows citizens to participate in all decision-making processes, concerning specific and general issues that affect their lives, and this requires establishing some form of delegation of power that does not reproduce the limits and deformation inherent in classic bourgeois representative politics.

51. In this regards, revolutionary Venezuela has taken transcendental steps which mark a new high-water in Latin American political history. They have abolished the classic idea of political representation in order to begin creating a political system that combines direct democracy with delegation or voceria (spokespeople), as they have rightly referred to it. There, those that are elected to take part in the communal council[26] are called voceros (spokespeople) because they are the voice of the community, and when they cease to be so, because the community no longer feels that they are adequately transmitting the ideas and decisions of the community, these people can and should be recalled.

52. In short, it is about building a new political system of popular power or self-government that combines direct democracy on a small scale with a whole system of assemblies of voceros or delegates at different levels, which should elect, orientate and control the different organs of government.

53. A correct critique of bourgeois representative democracy should not lead us to reject all types of representation. What we reject is that democracy which is limited to five minutes of voting every few years; that elitist democracy that made invisible important sectors of the population who today are beginning to appear on the political scene in different parts of the world, expressing an open or implicit critique of the current political system.
54. If we believe that the big decisions have to be made by the people, we have to be coherent and point out how millions of people, that live hundreds of kilometers away from each other, are going to make decisions. I see no other alternative than delegating some people to represent the positions of their communities at higher levels. Moreover, we have to be clear that if they – in representation of their base – do not make the decisions, others will.

55. Denying the possibility of delegation is denying the possibility of participation in decision-making on issues that transcend our local reality (community, workplace, classroom).

56. Those that today are made invisible will not become visible unless they themselves make their presence felt. This was the error committed by the Zapatistas who, despite having made themselves visible in 1994 through their armed insurrection, have subsequently marginalized themselves from national politics and have to a certain extent become invisible once again.

57. Given this, it is possible to conclude that we need to create a political system of representation, or delegation, but one that is very different to the bourgeois democratic system. The latter views representatives as professional politicians and therefore believes they should be remunerated for their role; at the same time, their mandate is exclusively a personal one, which does not reflect their voters, who they only reach out to at election time. The alternate system of delegation or voceria is the anti-thesis of this conception and practice: elected representatives, delegates or voceros must remain tied to their base, which in turn must supervise and guide the work of their delegate and prevent their bureaucratization.

58. They are not given a blank check for a certain period of time like bourgeois representatives are, rather they must be guided by the decisions and orientations of their electors who should evaluate their performance in accordance with the tasks they have been assigned. This is what the Zapatistas meant by their idea of “governing by obeying.”

59. Here we have to clarify that this is not the same as saying that their mandate is binding. They are not robots that receive messages and simply transmit them; they are responsible and creative people that, faced with the realities of other communities, must be able to modify the mandate they have received once they have seen, for example, that a neighboring community is in a situation worse off than their own and should therefore be supported rather than simply defending ones own community. As they must account for their mandate in their community, the delegate will have to return home and explain their decision. They will have to carry out a pedagogical labor among the community so that it is understood why, based on reasons of solidarity that justified the decision taken, the delegate chose to not comply with the mandate that was given to them. If the community is not convinced, they have the right to revoke the delegate because the delegate no longer represents their wishes. In this case, it could be said that the community has yet to mature and take onboard the value of solidarity, and therefore
do not deserve a delegate that reflects those values. Let’s recall that old saying: the people get the government they deserve. We could say the same about this community.

60. In some ways, Bolivian Vice-President Álvaro García Linera, explains this using other words, in this case referring to those governing at the national level: “To govern by obeying is to affirm every day that the sovereign is not the state, that the sovereign is the people who do not express themselves only every five years by the vote, but rather they express themselves, they speak, they put forward each day their needs, expectations and collective requirements. What is required of the ruler is to synthesize and to unite, because the voices of the people can be discordant. The people are not something homogeneous. No sir! There are social classes, there are identities, there are regions. The people are very diverse. The role of those in government is not to substitute for the people but to harmonize the voices of the people, only to synthesize in a sense their concerns. But that does not mean that they substitutes for the people. To govern by obeying is that: the sovereign is the people and the leader is simply a unifier of ideas, someone who articulates their needs, and nothing else.”[28]

61. In order to comply with their role as vocero, these people should be elected from their workplace or community and, as we said above, can be recalled once they have lost the confidence of their electorate.

62. Moreover, they should not receive a salary, but instead continue working as they had done until then. And if it is necessary at certain times for them to dedicate themselves full-time to community work, it should be the community – via their own resources – which pays them a certain sum of money that allows the delegate to cover their basic living costs. In this way, it would be even clearer why the delegate should report back to the community. This also avoids transforming community work into bureaucratic tasks that are carried out simply to obtain a salary.

63. Finally, some communities have taken a healthy approach towards rotating cadres so as to avoid a situation whereby certain people eternalize themselves in certain roles, impeding the ability of others in the community to learn how to carry those tasks.

64. And, of course, it is very important that delegates are correctly selected. Once again, the Venezuelan experience has provided us with some important insights. There, we have seen just how important it is that the election of delegates is carried out properly, with the people knowing the candidates, as they have seen them in actions and are not just reliant on what the candidates have to say. For example, the experience whereby, before voting, candidates who self-nominate themselves for election to the communal council collaborate in carrying out a socio-economic and demographic census in their community has been very positive, as through the process they are obliged to contact each family in the community. The elaboration of a brief history of the community, together with the people, has also been useful, allowing
them to become more acquainted with the reality they have to deal with. Another constructive
activity has been the organization of a participatory diagnostic which allows them to know the
real necessities and dreams of the people that live in the community. It is therefore not enough
to be able to deliver beautiful speeches to be elected; the people in the community have seen
just how dedicated each candidate is to their community. This helps avoid electing people that
are simply looking of a launching pad for their own political career.

65. Up to this point we have talked about participatory democracy at the local level and
the system of voceria, but – as we have already noted – this should not be the only form of
peoples’ political participation. The Bolivian investigator, Luis Tapia, has an interesting pro-
posal that would further refine political participation and deepen democracy. He proposes the
creation of public political spaces to deliberate over issues of general interest.

66. These would be political spaces for direct democratic participation, not only over local
and municipal issues (which is what they tend to be for), but also national or plurinational
issues such as how to advance towards a policy of economic development that respects nature
and the interests of indigenous communities, or how to tackle crime. Living in remote areas
should not be an impediment to participating in discussions on issues of national interest.

67. In a similar fashion, the 15M movement in Madrid and the Chilean student movement
have used public spaces for debates, and have transformed themselves into a mass process of
popular self-education.

68. But it is not enough to discuss national problems at the local level. The results of these
local discussions must travel upwards, ratifying once again the need to establish a system of
delegation or voceria.

69. Moreover, the agenda for debates in the national legislative body – a new type of parlia-
ment – must be public and a focus of discussion in each one of these spaces of direct democ-
rracy, which in turn feed into the discussions happening in parliament. [29]

70. And alongside the system of collective construction of opinions and policies, where those
that are the most committed tend to participate, we should not rule out the use of mechanisms
for carrying out popular, nation-wide consultation, as already occurs in some Latin American
countries. However, we must be clear that these mechanisms for consultation are based on in-
dividual acts and lack the richness of collective discussions, which is why they should be seen
as complementary instruments, not ones that can substitute for collective discussions.

71. I believe that all this leads us to conclude that the democratic system we want to build has
to combine direct democracy and indirect or delegated democracy.
5) A new society that is not decreed from above

72. Finally, a new society based on the aforementioned characteristics cannot emerge through the decision of a government or an enlightened vanguard. It cannot be decreed from above. It is not a gift, it is a conquest. It is a democratic process of cultural transformation that is built by the people which, while transforming its circumstances, transform themselves.

2. Transition to socialism using the government as a lever

1) Neoliberalism bred 21st-century socialism in Latin America

73. We have repeatedly stated that an alternative to capitalism is today more necessary than ever. But, why was Latin America the place where this alternative proposal first emerged?

74. I think our situation in the 1980s and 1990s was in some way comparable to that experienced by pre-revolutionary Russia in the beginning of the 20th century. What the imperialist war and its horrors was for Russia, neoliberalism and its horrors was for Latin America: the extent of hunger and misery, increasingly unequal distribution of wealth, destruction of nature, increasing loss of our sovereignty. In these circumstances, our peoples said “enough!”, and embarked on a new path, resisting at first, and then going on the offensive, making possible the victory of left-wing presidential candidates with anti-neoliberal programs.

75. These Latin American political leaders faced the same dilemma that confronted the Bolsheviks in Russia: either use capitalist measures to try to take our countries forward, which would mean more suffering for our people, or begin to build an alternative to capitalism, heading toward another model that makes our people the main builders of the new society.

76. In other words: faced with the evident failure of neoliberalism as it was being applied – and which had demonstrated itself as being incapable of resolving the problems of the people – there emerged the following dilemma: or the neoliberal capitalist model is rebuilt, evidently with changes such as a greater focus on social issues, but still motivated by the same capitalist logic; or advances are made in constructing an alternative project.

77. I agree with the view of Bolivian Vice-President Linera, that it matters little what term we use to refer to this alternative to capitalism: we can speak of “communitarianism,” “communitarian socialism,” “the society of the good life,” “the society of the full life,” “21st-century socialism,” and so forth. What matters is its content.

78. In advancing towards this alternative project, there are great differences between the diverse “left” governments in Latin America. Some have limited themselves to adopting im-
79. Others have decided to embark on a truly alternative path – a path towards socialism – knowing that the objective economic conditions in which they find themselves obliges them to co-exist with capitalist forms of production for a while to come.

2) A dilemma: how to advance having only conquered governmental power

80. For this second group, the dilemma exists as to how to move toward socialism through government when, as noted by Bolivia’s Vice-President Linera, the cultural and economic conditions that could serve as a basis for such progress do not exist. That was the dilemma faced by Lenin in 1917, and is now facing many of our current leaders, with the aggravating circumstance that in our case we have not yet conquered state power.

81. In our countries, not only are the economic, cultural and material resources to build socialism weakly present, but in addition, we also lack the most important and, until now, considered the essential condition: we do not have the entire power of the state at our disposal, instead we only control a small part of it. It must be remembered that state power is not limited to the executive; it also involves the legislature and the judiciary, the armed forces, local government bodies (mayors, governors), and many other institutions.

82. Therefore, taking hold of state power is not the same as having access to the government. This was one of the mistakes that some sections of the left made in Chile. It was said there that the Allende government had to take more radical measures, without considering the existing balance of forces, as if Allende winning elections was the same as having taken state power.

83. I agree with those that believe achieving state power is a complex process, one of whose most important aspects is to achieve control over the armed forces, or what has been called “the monopoly of violence.” Hence Hugo Chávez insists that there is a fundamental difference between the process led by Allende in Chile and the Bolivarian revolutionary process: the first was an unarmed peaceful transition, whereas Venezuela’s is an armed peaceful transition, not because the people are armed, but because the great bulk of the armed forces support the process.

a) Using the inherited state to promote the creation of a new state built from below

84. On the other hand, we should note that our governments inherit a state apparatus with characteristics that are functional for the capitalist system. These characteristics are therefore unsuitable for advancing towards a humanism and solidarity society, a society that puts hu-
man beings at the center, not only as the object of development but also as the fundamental agent of transformation towards a socialist society.

85. However, experience has shown, contrary to the theoretical dogmatism of some sectors of the radical left, that a revolutionary government can use the apparatus of the inherited state, transforming it into an instrument to assist in the construction of the new society.[30]

86. But we must be clear, this does not mean we can simply limit ourselves to using the inherited state, it is necessary that the foundations of the new political system are built up by the revolutionary government using the power it is able to employ, creating adequate spaces for popular participation, preparing the people to exercise power at all levels, from the most simple to the most complex, and by doing that promoting the creation of the new state from below, or a non-state, that will replace the old state, the government of persons replaced by the administration of things, as Engels wrote.[31]

b) Transforming the armed forces

87. This process of transformation, of advancing towards the new society we want to build from the government is, as can be seen from what we just said, a process full of challenges and difficulties. Nothing ensures that it will be a lineal process; there is always the possibility of retreats and failures.

88. We should always remember that the Right only respects the rules of the game as long as it suits their purposes. To date, there has never been a single example anywhere in the world of a ruling group that willingly gives up its privileges. The fact that they agree to withdraw from the political arena when they think their retreat may be in their best interest shouldn’t deceive us. They may tolerate and even help bring a Left government to power if that government implements the Right’s policies and limits itself to managing the crisis. What they will always try to prevent, by either legal or illegal means – and we should have no illusions about this—is a program of democratic and popular deep transformations that puts into question their economic interests.

89. It may be deduced from this that the Left must be prepared to confront fierce resistance. These sectors will oppose and maneuver to recover their lost power. The Left must be capable of defending victories achieved democratically.

90. And that is why of the most important tasks facing our governments is that of transforming the armed forces.

91. This is not an easy task given their historical support for the dominant groups, but we think that in some countries of Latin America conditions exist today that could help. One
of the main functions of the armed forces is that of defending the existing established order. But, what order are we talking about? Well, the order that has allowed capital to reproduce itself and which is enshrined in the inherited constitution. To change the way of organising society should be our governments’ high-priority task. This is what was achieved through the constituent processes in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. The new constitutions point to new rules for the institutional game that could serve as the framework to build the new society. They look to a social order that will serve the majority of the population; that will ensure that the natural wealth of these countries, which was ceded to transnational companies, will be returned to the hands of our states and will ensure the construction of independent and sovereign states. The military, by defending this new order will thus be defending the homeland and the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population and not the interests of the elites.

92. When the Venezuelan military rebelled against the coup-plotters (golpistas) in the high officer ranks, they did it with the new Constitution in their hands. They became an important ally of the process because defending the constitution meant nothing if not defending the changes undertaken by Chávez’s government.

93. With respect to the concrete measures that can help the transformation of the armed forces, I have discussed these thoroughly in another work.[32] Here I want to refer only to an aspect that I find crucial: in the face of the loss of internal support, the only thing that can return power to the previously dominant elites is foreign intervention through the most diverse forms: economy, media and, ultimately, military. In the face of this possibility, I share the opinion of Álvaro García Linera, vice-president of Bolivia who said that our only option for living or resisting if faced with a possible invasion is if there are “strong links between the military and social structures.” He explains that it is with that logic that the Bolivian military doctrine is building the military of this country. They are rediscovering a tradition of struggle from the past: something they referred to as ‘las republiquetas’ (the little republics). These emerged to fight against Spain during the struggle for independence. In these republiquetas, the military was merged into the local community structure. That was how they stood firm and developed during the 15 years of the battle for independence and were able to build the Bolivian state.[33]

94. The history of many countries has shown that, confronted by the elevated combative moral of our peoples risen up in arms, there is no empire that can be victorious.

c) A development model that respects nature

95. We have previously addressed Marx’s ideas on the environment question. He could never have imagined however, the depth acquired by the ecological crisis occurring a century and half after he wrote Capital. According to authoritative sources[34] the earth had lost a fifth of
its arable surface, a fifth of its tropical forests and tens of thousands of plant and animal species. Great tracts of earth have become deserts, a large number of forests and lakes had been acidified, drinkable water has begun to become scarce. This alarming situation has led to the emergence of a consensus among even increasing numbers of people that the growth rates experienced by advanced countries in the second half of the 20th-century cannot be maintain or imitated by other countries. This would “have irreversible and catastrophic consequences for the natural environment of this planet, including to the human species that is part of him.”[35]

96. Turning around this situation has become more and more urgent if we want humanity to have a future. The solution won’t come however, from advanced, developed countries, which are at the same time the most polluting nations. The recent Rio+20 Summit[36] is further proof of that.

97. That is why another great challenge that our left governments face is to raise their people out of poverty and attend to their basic needs, but in a way that respects nature.

98. To question the limitless development intrinsic in capitalism, should not mean opposing all development. A “growth zero”, as some proposes, to avoid the consumption of polluting energy and its degrading consequences for the environment, would mean enshrining existing inequalities between rich and poor countries, that is, among developed societies that have reached a high standard of living, and the majority of humanity that are a long way from reaching those conditions.

99. Moreover, although our goal should be to advance toward an economy that is less and less extractivist, we must understand that this cannot be achieved from one day to the next. Even Alberto Acosta, an Ecuadorian intellectual who is very critical of extractivism has made clear that one cannot think of “closing the oil fields currently being exploited, but we must seriously discuss whether it is useful to continuing expanding to new oilfields” given the environmental devastating impacts this would entail.[37]

100. To limit oil exploitation, in 2007, the Ecuadorian government presented to the world an interesting and defiant project known as the “Yasuni-ITT project”. Ecuador has committed itself to keeping underground proven crude oil reserves in three oil fields located in the Yasuní National Park and equal to 20% of the countries existing reserves, and in return has asked that the international community contribute financially to this project to the tune of 3.600 million dollars, equivalent to 50% of the resources that the state would receive if oil exploitation went ahead.

101. We have to confront the challenge of finding a strategy that allows us to build the Good Live (Buen Vivir), taking advantage of non renewable natural resources and transforming them into “a blessing” as Nobel Prize winner, Joseph Stiglitz, has recommended, but without
depending exaggeratedly on them. Only in this way will we be able to leave the trap of pov-
erty and underdevelopment.[39]

102. The environmentalist and American economist, Herman E. Daly, has established three
basic operative criterions that should be applied with a ecologically sustainable society: “1) not to exploit renewable resources at a rate over and above that at which they renovate; 2) do not exploit non-renewable resources at a rate over and above that at which they can be substi-
tuted by renewable resources; 3) Do not emit into the air, water and soil an amount or com-
position of residues over and above the capacity of ecosystems to absorb them.” [40] We should
add a fourth criterion: respect the biological diversity or biodiversity of different ecosystems.

103. It is not then about saying no to development, but instead of “conceiving and making
reality genuinely human models of developemt” or what several authors call “sustainable
development” or “ecologically sustainable society”, that is, a society that satisfies “in an equal
way the necessities of their inhabitants without putting in danger the satisfaction of the neces-
sities of the future generations [41], a society in which it is the organised people who decide
what is produced and how it is produced.

d) Other challenges

104. Another smaller, but no less important challenge, has to do with the electoral cycle that
these governments have to submit themselves to in order to re-legitimize themselves in the
face of constant opposition attacks, while giving continuity to the process of change under-
way.

105. On many occasions, this agenda can clash with the agenda of building participatory
democracy. The process of construction popular power tends to be postponed or weakened in
order to make way for electoral campaigning. These tend to be carried out in a populist man-
ner where priority is given to solving problems for the people rather than encouraging people
to organizing themselves in order that they solve their problems themselves.

106. To this we must add that candidates do not always compete on an equal footing: those
that have access to the media, or use the state apparatus for their campaigns have an important
advantage in relation to everyone else.

107. At the same time, it is not easy to resolve the dilemma posed by the contradiction be-
tween political conjunctures and democratic processes. On many occasions some have wanted
to extend the time to debate laws or new constitutions, which could have helped enrich the
democratic discussion, but which could also have put at risk the future of the democratic
process.[42]
108. These are all realities that we will need to face up to in the future. The great challenge we face is how to build alternative institutions, how do we maximize the positive aspects and minimize the negative ones, in order to accumulate the forces we need to continue advancing down the path of change and avoid returning to the past.

109. In this sense, one of the first things that we must do is avoid using the same techniques used to sell candidates in the bourgeois electoral system when seeking votes, and instead focus on educational, pedagogic campaigns that help raise peoples’ consciousness and organizational capacity.

110. Moreover, advances come at a slow pace and confronted with this, many leftist tend to become demoralized. Many of them saw the capture of governmental power as a magic bullet that could quickly solve the most pressing needs of the people.

3) The need for a pedagogy of limitations

111. That is why I believe that, just as our revolutionary leaders need to use the state in order to change the inherited balance of forces, they must also carry out a pedagogical task when they are confronted with limits or brakes along the path – what I call pedagogy of limitations. Many times we believe that talking about difficulties will only demoralize and dishearten the people, when, on the contrary, if our popular sectors are kept informed, are explained why it is not possible to immediately achieve the desired goals, this can help them better understand the process in which they find themselves in and moderate their demands. Intellectuals as well should be widely informed so they are able to defend the process and also to criticize it if necessary.

112. But this pedagogy of limitations must be simultaneously accompanied by the fomentation of popular mobilizations and creativity — thereby avoiding the possibility that initiatives from the people become domesticated — and with the knowledge that this will lead to criticisms of possible faults within the government. Not only should popular pressure be tolerated, it should be understood that it is necessary to helping those in government combat errors and deviations that can emerge along the way.

3. Constructing a new hegemony

113. Previously, I referred to the fundamental characteristics of the new society we want to build. I specifically focused on the issue of participatory and protagonistic democracy as one of its essential features. I also took up the characteristics of the transition in those countries whose governments have decided to advance towards socialism via the peaceful or institutional road.
114. Now, I would like to briefly focus on how we can achieve the necessary balance of forces in order to advance towards the society we want to build and its relationship with the issue of hegemony.

**1) Defining hegemony**

115. Let’s begin by defining what we mean by hegemony, given that this word has many meanings and can be used in different ways depending on the context. It can be used to refer to economic hegemony, political hegemony, cultural hegemony. Here, we use the term to refer to the issue of consciousness, of cultural.

116. My starting point, just as it was for Marx, is that the ideas and values that prevail in a determined society and rationalize and justify the existing order, are the ideas and values of the ruling class. While in previous times these were fundamentally transmitted via the family, the church and the school system, today they are more and more transmitted via the media, and in particular television, whose soap operas have become, as Chilean sociologist Tomás Moulián said, the modern-day opium of the masses, with a strong influence among those sectors of society that are least likely to be armed with critical ideas and thinking.

117. For me, a class becomes hegemonic when its values, its proposals, its societal project are accepted, looked upon sympathetically and taken up as their own by broad sections of society. Hegemony is the opposite of imposition by force.

118. Moreover, we should not confuse the word hegemony with dominion, because a class can be dominant when its interests are imposed on society by force and can also be dominant when its interests are taken up by the people as their own. Therefore, a class can dominate through terror or dominate through consensus or through a combination of both. Furthermore, hegemony is not something that can be conquered forever, it can be lost. It tends to occur that when governments that rule through consensus begin to lose their social base of support, they will increasingly rely on authoritarian methods to maintain their dominance. It can therefore be said that there exists a dialectic between the weakening of the capacity to convince and an increase in the need to use force.

119. When a social class becomes hegemonic, one of its achievements is that it is able to form a social bloc; that is, it can unite a heterogeneous social conglomerate that is normally marked by, in some cases very profound, class contradictions. The ideas and proposals of this hegemonic social class serve as a cohering element and helps mitigate existing contradiction between different social sectors.

120. There also exists a relationship between hegemony and the capacity to resolve peoples’ problems. There must exist at least the illusion that measures being adopted will
resolve problems, because once people realize this is not the case, hegemony begins to break down.

a) Bourgeoisie achieves popular approval for capitalist order

121. In a number of countries, bourgeois sectors have been able to embed their values, generate broad acceptance for the capitalist social order, and achieved cultural leadership over society, that is, they are able to govern by consensus rather than by using force. There, propaganda tends to be well refined and is not only able to manufacture artificial necessities but also create the illusion among important sections of the population that their problems can be resolved by implementing the existing economic model.

b) Bourgeois hegemony begins to break down

122. Nevertheless, the global crisis of capitalism, its incapacity to resolve the most acute problems of our peoples, the rapid rise in misery, and the social exclusion of the great majority of the population while less and less people hoard the majority of the wealth, has led to a growing number of people across the world beginning to reject this model. This was the tipping point that, in many countries in Latin America, created the condition in which our people elected leaders who proposed alternatives to neoliberalism, and that today is the cause of the current mobilizations and popular uprisings occurring in different parts of the world.

2) The need for a political instrument and a new culture within the left

123. This breaking down of bourgeois hegemony does not necessarily mean that a new popular hegemony has emerged in its place. This will not occur spontaneously, we need a political instrument, a political organization to help us construct it.

124. Some could argue that the big mobilizations occurring in different parts of the world demonstrate that we can fight without political organizations. I believe that these mobilization show that in order to take the struggle to the next level, we require a political instrument, but one which does not have to be a traditional left-wing political party

125. This mobilizations, as well as the social explosions that occurred in various countries across Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, have demonstrated that the creative initiative of the masses is not enough on its own to defeat the existing regimes.

126. In recent years, and in increasingly more countries, growing multitudes have rebelled against the existing order and without a defined leadership have taken over plazas, streets, highways, towns, parliament, but, despite having mobilized hundreds of thousands of people, neither the magnitude of its size nor its combativeness have enabled these multitudes to go
beyond simple popular revolts. They have brought down presidents, but they have not been capable of conquering power in order to begin a process of deep social transformation.

127. On the contrary, the history of successful revolution ratifies the fact that in order to not waste popular energy and instead transform it into a force capable of bringing about change, a political organization is need. One that can help overcome the dispersion and atomization of the exploited and oppressed by proposing an alternative national program that can serve as a cohering instrument for broad popular sectors, and strategies and tactics that allow for unity in action so as to most effectively deal blows to the powerful enemy that must be confronted in decisive moments and decisive places.

128. This is even more the case today when the potentially revolutionary popular subject is so heterogeneous and fragmented, and diverse in each country.

129. Solid organizational cohesion not only gives people the objective capacity to act, it also creates an internal climate that facilitates energetic intervention into unfolding events and the making use of opportunities that are available to us. We must remember that in politics it is not enough to have reason; we must also have time and the necessary force to make it a reality.

130. On the contrary, the lack of clear ideas as to why we should struggle and the sensation of lacking solid instruments that can helps us put into practice the decisions we have made, can negatively impact by having a paralyzing effect.

131. A recognize that these ideas go against the current grain. There are many who are not even willing to discuss them. They adopt this attitude because they associate such ideas with the anti-democratic, authoritarian, bureaucratic, manipulative political practices that have characterized many leftist parties.

132. I believe it is fundamental that we overcome this subjective blockade and understand that when I speak of a political instrument, I am not talking about any political instrument; I am talking about a political instrument adapted to the new times, an instrument that we all have to build together.

133. But to create or remodel the new political instrument, we first have to change the political culture on the left and its vision of politics. This cannot be reduced to institutional political disputes for control of parliament, of local governments, to pass laws or win elections. This form of conceiving politics ignores the people and their struggles. Politics can also not be limited to the art of what is possible.

134. For the left, politics must be the art of making the impossible possible. This is not some kind of voluntarist statement. What I am talking about is understanding politics as the art of
constructing social and politic forces that are capable of changing the balance of forces to the benefit of the popular movements, so as to make possible in the future what today appears to be impossible.

135. The vision I have of this political instrument is one of an organization capable of raising a national project that can bring together all those sectors afectados por la crisis and act as a compass for them. An organization that directs its efforts toward society, respecting the autonomy of social movements, that refuses to manipulate them, and whose members and leaders are true popular educators, capable of unleashing the wisdom that exists among the people – both that which comes from their cultural traditions and struggles, as well as that which they acquire through every day life – through the fusion of this knowledge with the global ideas that the political organization can contribute. An orientating and cohering organization at the service of the social movements. A organization that understands politics to be the art of building forces. We have to overcome the old and deeply-rooted error of attempting to build political force without building social force.

3) Political strategy for current situation: a broad front[44]

136. We need a political organisation that is capable of making use of the depth of the current crisis and the broad-ranging nature of the variety of sectors affected by it. A highly favorable scenario has emerged for bringing together this growing and disperse social opposition into one single column, in order to form an alternative social bloc with an extremely broad social composition and enormous force, and which is sure to continue growing if it has the capacity to convoke legions of potential followers.

137. In cases where a left government exists, the strategic task is to cohere and mobilize all those social sectors interested in defending and deepening the changes that the government has begun to carry out and which are fiercely resisted by those sectors that oppose the changes.

138. The characteristics of this social bloc – which could unite the immense majority of the population – will vary from country to country. The weight of each social sector, of each ethnic group, etc, will be different in each one of them. In Latin America, they will include not only traditional groups such as the urban and rural working class, and the poorest and most marginalised sectors; but might also involve: impoverished sections of the middle classes, the constellation of small and medium-sizes business-owners and shopkeepers, informal workers, small and medium-sized agricultural producers, the majority of professionals, the legions of unemployed, cooperative members, retirees, the police and subaltern military cadres (sub-officers and subordinate cadres).

139. I also believe that those capitalist sectors whose business dealings have come into objective contradiction with transnational capital could also form part of this social bloc. I am not
here referring to those sectors of the bourgeois that are able to propose their own project for national development, rather those sectors that, in order to survive in the context of neoliberal globalization, have no other choice but to insert themselves in a national-popular project that can assure them support in the forms of loans and an increased internal market, the product of the social policies of such a government.

140. And just as neoliberalism impoverished the great majority of the peoples of our countries, not just in the economic sense but also in their subjectivity, we should not only talk about economically affected sectors but also all those that are discriminated against and oppressed by the system: women, youth, children, old people, indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, certain religious groups, different sexual orientation, etc.

141. This bloc should also house all those that suffer the consequences of the system and are willing to commit themselves in the struggle, firstly, to putting a halt to its advance and, afterwards, to reversing its course.

142. Moreover, in a world in which the exercise of domination is carried out on a global scale, it is more necessary than ever to establish conditions and strategies for struggle at a regional and intra-regional level. The World Social Forums and other gatherings of an international character have enabled notable advances in this sense, although much is still to be done.

143. What Uruguayan Senator Enrique Rubio wrote in 1994 remains as true today as it did then: we need to unite all those that as “excluded, left-behind, dominated and exploited at the global scale, including those that live in developed countries. It is necessary… to put capitalism in check from the political, both inside and outside the state, whether militant or not, where pro-party or not, from the social movements, from the scientific-technical complexes, from the cultural and communicational centers where views are molded in a decisive sense, and from self-managed organizations… To put it in a slightly schematic and perhaps confronting fashion, the revolution will be international, democratic, multiple and profound, or it will not be.”[45]

144. I believe that in order to build this bloc it is necessary for us to be capable of proposing concrete and specific tasks that prioritize points of convergence, and that we be able to correctly deal with the contradictions that necessarily will emerge between such diverse sectors of society.

145. It is important to elaborate a program or platform of accumulation for the political conjuncture, which plays the role of a cohering instrument for all the “losers” of the neoliberal model. A platform that proposes halting the development of the neoliberal project and offers concrete alternatives to the grave problems currently being faced by the people.
146. A platform that should be drafted with the participation of all those who want to be part of this process. I agree with Rafael Agacino that “the democratic exercise of elaborating policies, of building consensus around popular demands” is very important. “What we are dealing with” he said “is the opening up of spaces for politics from below, stimulating the most elementary act of communicating face to face, and from there advancing the practice of social processing of diverse interests, congenial minds and willing people around general rights of all those who live off their own labor.”[46]

147. This platform cannot be confused with the program of the political instrument. This must delve more deeply into the goal that is to be achieved and the path to reaching it.

a) Winning the hearts and minds of the immense majority [47]

148. Moreover, if our project for an alternative society to capitalism is essentially democratic, we have to be clear that we must win the hearts and minds of the immense majority of the people. We cannot impose our project, we must convince people that this is the best project for them and encourage them to participate in the building of this new society.

149. What can we do to achieve these objectives?

150. Firstly, we must understand that it is not enough to lecture people. As President Chávez says, the hearts and minds of the people are won in practice, creating opportunities for the people to understand the nature of the project at the same time as they become its own builder. [48]

151. Our call must be broad, and not exclude anyone. All good-willed people that want to work for the benefit of the collective, for their well-being, to build solidarity with others, should be included, regardless of their political stripes or religious beliefs.

152. Our attitude must be one where the people feel that their opinions, information, criticisms, reflections and initiatives are taken into consideration.

153. This also implies understanding that we cannot govern simply for our own, for our supporters. How many people have we been able to win over to the process because they have seen the government help those that are worse off, regardless of whether they are government supporters or not!

154. That is why I believe it is fundamental that we differentiate between the destructive, conspiratorial opposition and the constructive opposition, and avoid putting all of them in the same basket. I think it could help win over many of those that are not currently on our side if we show that we are capable of recognizing the positive initiatives of the opposition rather
than condemning everything they do. We must combat their erroneous ideas, the mistaken proposals, but we must destroy them with arguments and avoid verbal aggression. Perhaps this verbal aggression is well received by the most radicalized popular sectors, but it is rejected by large sections of the middle classes and in many popular sectors. People tend to not feel comfortable with these types of attacks.

155. We have to ask ourselves, why is it that despite our project for an alternative society to capitalism being a beautiful, profound, transformational project that reflects the interests of the great majority of the population, the governments that have proposed such a project do not count on the support of all those that should be supporting such a project.

156. I think that in large part this is because an important part of the population does not know the true nature of our project. The opposition media has entrusted itself with disseminating misinformation, creating false alarms and, on many occasions, terrorizing the people in regards to what the future holds for them. But they are not the only ones responsible for this situation. We have also contributed to this situation. We tend to have big problems in adequately communicating the nature of our project. We do not dedicate sufficient time, resources and creativity to this task. And, worse yet, on many occasions they very way we act negates our own project. We propose the creation of a democratic, solidarity-based, transparent, non-corrupt society, and yet we implement authoritarian, clientalist, egotistical, non-transparent practices. Many times there is a wide gap between what we say and what we do, and so what we say becomes less credible.

157. So we should not be surprised that important sections of society do not yet identify with our project and that it is necessary to win them over. We have to work on correcting our errors and overcoming deviations, as only in this manner can we win hegemony over society.

b) A new culture of the left

158. Finally, to end this article, I want to once again repeat what I have already said on numerous occasions: to win hegemony we need a new culture of the left. A pluralist and tolerant culture that prioritizes what unites us and see as secondary what divides us. We need left activists that promote values such as solidarity, humanism, respect for differences, defend of nature; that reject the pursuit for wealth and the laws of market as guides for human activity; that understand that radicalism is not about raising the most radical slogans nor carrying out the most radical actions – in which only a few participate, as the rest are too afraid – but is instead about being able to create spaces for encounters and struggle for broad sectors. A left that understands that it is in the struggle that we grow and transform ourselves and that understands that many of us are in the same struggle, which is what makes us strong, and what makes us more radical.
Notes

[1]. This section is based on paragraphs taken from my article “Latin America and Twenty-First Century Socialism, Inventing not to Avoid Mistakes’, Monthly Review in its July-August 2010. It was also published in Spanish in Spain, Bolivia, Venezuela and Guatemala in 2010, and is available on the web at Rebelion http://www.rebelion.org/docs/101472.pdf. I have also taken some paragraphs from a text I have written on socialism which appeared in the April 2012 special issue of Science and Society.

[2] Tarso Genro, a Workers Party (PT) mayor in Brazil said: “I believe that the experiences of our administrations, due to their seriousness and importance, are fundamental to the reconstruction of a new political project.”


[4]. A typical Chilean dish.


[8] We should note that Marx dedicated himself to the scientific study of the capitalist mode of production and that he was never able to fully develop all his ideas or deal with all the issues that he proposed to tackle, which is why it is difficult to find references to socialist societies in his writings. Similarly, even if he had had the time to carry out this work, he would not have been able to develop his ideas much further, given that scientific knowledge cannot precede reality.

[9]. I have taken his idea from Michael Lebowitz. He writes: “Read Capital with the purpose of identifying the inversions and distortions that produce truncated human beings in capitalism and we can get a sense of Marx’s idea of what is “peculiar to and characteristic of” production in the “inverse situation,” socialism.” (The Socialist Alternative, Real Human Development, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2010, pp.56-57).

[10]. If the fruits of labor are increasingly more so the product of a collective worker and increasingly depend on various branches of production, it is logically that property must increasingly become more collective.


[12]. This is the name Marx gives to society based on associated producers.

[13]. Marx, Capital, Vol.3. ibidem, p. 959. Bellamy Foster says that a large part of Marx’s ideas on the metabolism between humans and nature are contained in his earlier, more philosophical works.

[15]. Lo que más técnicamente se llama edafología.


[20]. “Social ownership is best defined as ownership by those affected by decisions over the use of the assets involved, in proportion to the extent to which they are affected. It has much in common with the green concept of stakeholding. Following the principle of subsidiarity which underpins, at least in theory, the multi-layered governance structure of the European Community, the social owners will differ according to the degree of generality, the reach, of the decisions to be made. Decisions made at higher levels of generality will involve more assets and affect a wider range of people and interests than those made at lower levels. At each level, the social owners need to negotiate with one another to agree on the use of the assets that will further their collective social interest, as defined by them. This multi-layered process of negotiated coordination is what is meant by participatory planning.” (Pat Devine, “Social ownership and democratic planning”. This chapter is a revised version of ‘The political economy of twenty-first century socialism’, Soundings, 37, Winter 2007, pp.105-115).


[22]. In this topic I recommend Pat Devine’s book: Democracy and Economic Planning…., ibid.

[23]. This issue if further developed in Marta Harnecker, Latin America and Twenty-First Century Socialism, Op.cit. paragraphs 189 to 280.

[24]. In his comments on a previous version of this article.

[25]. Decentralization is technically used to refer to power and de-concentration to indicate the transfer of functions and service creation.

[26]. The communal councils are community-based bodies that encompass 200-400 families in urban areas and 20-50 families in rural areas. Decisions on which problems to prioritise and how to tackle them are made in citizen assemblies open to the entire community.

[27]. “What they are electing” says the Bolivian investigator Luis Tapia “is a person that will substitute for the citizens, for a period of time, in carrying out executive or legislative tasks within the state, be that at a municipal or national level. What the representative does after being elected may have no relation to what the citizens that voted for them want, in the sense that there is no space for citizens to participate and feed through their political opinions to the supposed representative…” Luis Tapia Mealla, Gobierno multicultural y democracia directa nacional en: La transformación pluralista del estado, de Álvaro García Linera, Luis Tapia Mealla y Raúl Prada Alcoresa, Muela del diablo editores/Comuna, Bolivia, pp.126-127).

[28]. Concluding words at a press conference given in Maracaibo, Venezuela, during the VI International Forum on Philosophy.

[30]. See some of the concrete measures that have been implemented in Marta Harnecker, Latin America and Twenty-First Century Socialism, Op. cit, Cap. IV. Task that can begin to be undertaken from government, pp.56-61.


[32]. See Latin America and Twenty-First Century Socialism, Op. cit. paragraphs 309-332. There I develop the following measures: a) Giving the military responsibility for social projects to help the most destitute, b) Provide educational schools and courses that are in accordance with the spirit of the constitution, c) Give the armed forces the responsibility for big infrastructure projects that will strengthen national sovereignty; d) Democratise access to the top ranks and change selection criteria, e) A military doctrine which includes the people in national defence work.

[33] Marta Harnecker, Interview with Álvaro García Linera, op. cit.

[34]. Data from the World Institute, 1990.


[36]. The Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, between June 20-22, 2012.

[37]. Marta Harnecker, Tiempos políticos y procesos democráticos, Entrevista a Alberto Acosta, 21 sep.2010, párrafo 148.

[38]. ITT stands for Ishpingo, Tambocoha and Tiputini the name of the three oilfields within Yasuni. Within the park there exists reserves equivalent to 846 million barrels of oil.


[40]. H. E. Daly, Criterios operativos para el desarrollo sostenible, citado por Enric Tello en Economía y ecología. Economía y ecología en el camino hacia ciudades sostenibles, en Papeles de la FIM N°8 (Alternativas al desarrollo), Madrid, España,.., op. cit. nota 7, p.136.


[42]. I believe that intellectuals are the ones that most intensely feel this dilemma, which is why I want to recall what Carlos Matus wrote in his book El líder sin estado mayor: “While the dilemma of some intellectuals is to occupy themselves with thinking without renouncing action… for some politicians it is occupying themselves with action without renouncing theory. This dilemma faced by both leads to mutual denigration, which makes impossible the ability to recognize the capacities and contributions that each group must make.” (La oficina del gobernante, Fundación ALTADIR, La Paz, Bolivia, 1997).


[44]. Regarding this issue see La izquierda después de Seattle available online in Spanish at http://www.rebelion.org/docs/95169.pdf.; and Rebuilding the Left , which is also available online http://www.rebelion.org/docs/97076.pdf.


[47]. I have further elaborated on this idea in: Hacia la construcción de una nueva hegemonía anticapitalista. Tareas de nuestros gobiernos y de la organización popular, Ponencia en la UCA, El Salvador, 21 octubre 2011.

[48]. Hugo Chávez, Primer Aló Presidente teórico sobre el tema de las comunas, 11 de junio 2009.
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