

DYNAMO

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Drawing by Ramiro Alonso

The Latin American Left at the Crossroads

En remojo*

* "If you see your neighbor's beard catch on fire, you should soak your own", meaning to take precautions when bad things happen to someone else in a similar situation

· PRESENTATION ·

Start pedalling!

When *La Diaria* newspaper first came out, Uruguay and several other Latin American countries were starting on a period of “progressive” governments. Today, we tend to call this period “a cycle” because, contrary to the expectations of many, these governments were not here to stay indefinitely. Instead, in recent years, they suffered electoral defeats or are now facing various crises. The conception of history as an inevitable and upward process towards socialism, driven by the development of productive forces and with a single, predetermined subject, does not hold up anymore. But the neoliberal dream of reaching the end of history with globalised capitalism has not proven valid in any way.

To this, one can add a certain level of discontent with the results of these progressive governments’ performance. This is not due to a lack of progress in numerous areas: for instance, poverty and extreme poverty were reduced substantially; economies, employment and real wages grew, and social policies were expanded. It is because in some cases, it would appear that the advances can more easily be reversed than originally believed. Also, they have generally been accompanied by a lack of changes in some crucial domains, whereas in others, there has been a consolidation of policies, institutional criteria or ideological approaches that do not correspond to what one could call progressivism. And it is not merely a reaction to the consequences of the crisis of central capitalism since 2008. There were obviously the limitations of the “progressive” project itself, errors made by the political groups promoting them, the shortcomings of social movements and the lessons the right has learned, among other factors.

At the same time, and probably due to the circumstances mentioned above, we have been noticing a growing thirst for a debate on ideas among our readers. For example, a column by the economist Fernando Isabella published in the last edition of *Anuario* (*La Diaria*’s end of the year review) sparked a fruitful exchange on economic growth and redistribution, which involved economists, political scientists and political leaders. Before and after this, we had elements that confirmed the importance of promoting these discussions on a wide range of issues, such as university extension policies, the role of the State, feminist demands and the proposal to modify copyright laws, to name a few.

This is where the proposal emerged to launch a monthly supplement dedicated to political reflections on the current times, the ones probably to come and also the ones we want to come (while we accept uncertainty, we do not renounce to choosing a path to follow). It is difficult to assess advances and setbacks without revisiting and redefining our long-term projects: there is still a need to come to terms with the experiences of the 19th and 20th centuries and to study the processes currently underway and reflect on the 21st century.

These tasks appear both difficult and fundamental. To take them on, we have called on a group of people who, as we have proven over the years, share a certain way of looking at the world, with nuances that complement each others’ ideas.

When the time came to give this initiative a name (which is always complicated), the first proposals revolved around notions of criticism and resistance. Then, we realised that since developing critical thought - in crisis for several decades - was as necessary now as ever and there was a lot to resist, we were not happy with the idea of identifying these pages only with words of complaint, rejection or condemnation. On the contrary, we wanted to emphasise the desire to learn from experience in order to broaden horizons and set projects into motion.

This is not a speech at a wake or the beginning of a period of mourning. It is not merely a painful assessment of the end of a cycle, nor an attempt to simply put the blame on others in order to distance ourselves from the setbacks. We feel we are part of the problem and we want to be part of the solution. This is why we have chosen the name of a generator: we were not thinking about a hydroelectric dam, much less a nuclear plant, but rather a modest dynamo, which is consistent with our desire to travel lightly and be self-sufficient. Perhaps it will help us to find our path, now that it is dark out and we are pedalling uphill. ■

History, with no end in sight



El pueblo (the “people”) are no longer in the streets. In their place, *la gente* (the “multitude”), an abstraction capable of destabilising governments, have burst on the scene. Its spokespeople are the “media”: the declared and self-proclaimed representatives of the entity that, while in this role, denounce, make demands and judge. None of it is true and yet, it seems like it is.

In Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, the large majority of mass media is owned by a few families with political and/or economic interests belonging to a certain social class. They are biologically or economically related to

the main corporate groups in their countries and therefore, it is not surprising that they dance to the same tune. *La gente* - the entity that gets its shape from public opinion polls (whose methodology, in some cases, is questionable) - appears to be framing the issues on the agenda and making decisions with more legitimacy than the population has when it uses mechanisms of representative democracy (i.e. the vote).

The media, public opinion polls, the media commenting on the public opinion polls. Intermediaries and interpretations proliferate. Certain social

sectors’ contempt for or rejection of left-wing parties and what they represent suddenly becomes the rejection of the majority and it is difficult to trace the genealogy that led to the current state of affairs.

At a crossroads, left parties fail to understand the new ways of thinking and oscillate between frenzied diatribes against large media groups, timid legal reforms or the ones that were not implemented to “democratise” the media, the confusion between institutional communication and journalism, the moralising focus of good and bad news, ultra-left politics, or simple resignation.

In Brazil, on March 29th, the major newspapers published an advertisement with a yellow background and white letters that demanded “Impeachment now!”. No one had signed it. Some newspapers thought it was enough to clarify, several pages later, that the advertisement had been paid for by the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo. Others, not even that. The story of the escalation of corruption in the Workers Party (PT) could only have one ending: the destitution of the president. Dilma Rousseff and the PT denounced the media campaign against them. Even so, the impeachment process continues. In Brazil, the media has much more credibility than the political system does.

In Argentina, the *Grupo Clarín* became the main opponent to the Cristina Fernández government, which was willing to take on the battle against media concentration since the beginning. The confrontation lasted for years. Fernández lost the last elections. Argentinean media could finally, and shamelessly, publish photographs of the prototype of a successful soap opera family: Mauricio Macri (the president), Juliana (the first lady) - the “enchantress” that charmed her way into his heart - and their daughter, the “sun” that nearly injured her dad after some fun loving games.

The media builds narratives. We all like stories and the media has the power to tell them. The left gets angry with the media, but it does not understand them. One exception worth highlighting is that of former president José Mujica who took the story of his political career to places as far away as Japan. It is the story of an ex-guerrilla, an old, frugal man free from attachments who says what he thinks and lives the way he thinks he should. Obviously, it is a one of many possible stories, but it proved to be more effective than thousands of abstractions.

It is good for the left to worry about the channels it will use to disseminate its stories. But above all, it should ask itself what tales it is thinking of building. How does the story start? Who are the main protagonists? What traits do they have that should be emphasised? What is the breaking point? And the most important one of all: what image, example or dream will they use to move us? ■

Natalia Uval

The Left and Public Policies

It has become commonplace in analyses of the current situation in Latin America and the Caribbean to classify the experiences of leftist governments into two groups or categories: moderate left or “social democratic” regimes and radical left or “populist” regimes. In the Southern Cone, Brazil, Chile (under the *Concertación* government) and Uruguay belong to the first group, whereas Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela represent the second category. At the rhetorical level or when looking at the presence (or absence) of partisan support structures that have been consolidated over time, there may be solid bases for this division. However, it does not reflect the differences in the economic and social policies adopted in recent years.

I will present here a brief overview of the characteristics of the fiscal and monetary policies, public investment, tax systems and social policies. From this overview, patterns of similarity emerge that are quite different from those that appear when the moderate-radical or social democratic-populist taxonomy usually used to simplify the discussion is applied.¹

In relation to macroeconomic management, there are important differences among countries in the region and the classification of the recent regimes is of little use. Bolivia and Ecuador have maintained strong fiscal and monetary discipline to consolidate balanced public accounts. Ecuador adopted, by law, a rule on the budget that prevents contingency funds from being used to cover current expenditures and reserves extraordinary revenues - coming fundamentally from oil - for the financing of public investment. Uruguay is in a similar situation. Its fiscal deficit is manageable, but it is facing difficulties in consolidating adequate aggregate results due to a significant slowdown in the economy. Brazil, whose fiscal situation has been deteriorating, has been unable to implement measures capable of reversing the situation and its current deficit is close to 10% of gross domestic product (GDP). Venezuela is experiencing multiple and critical macroeconomic imbalances. Argentina's situation was compromised further by the lack of transparency in the management of information on public statistics.

However, the structural weaknesses of the region, which are fundamentally associated to its structure of production and patterns of foreign trade, generate a scenario of high vulnerability in which the slowdown in growth and the fall in terms of trade cause public accounts to deteriorate. Deficit and debt accumulation is a natural consequence of anti-cyclical policies. The problem is their magnitude and their use by the State to sustain economic activity.

A delicate fiscal situation is a political problem, and not just an economic one. It determines the State's capacity to intervene in adverse situations: a greater increase in the deficit casts doubts on the sustainability of public accounts, which limits the planning horizons and imposes systemic risks. It also shifts the focus of the policy agenda from changes to the management of inflationary imbalances and public accounts in order to prevent economic and social crises from emerging.

Again, Bolivia is a paradigmatic case of the opposite situation, which is rarely mentioned in public debate. It succeeded in consistently generating fiscal surpluses between 2006 and 2014 and is now capable of using public investment to counteract the reversal of the cycle of growth. Dani Rodrik, an economist specialised in development issues, cites Bolivia as an example of the preponderance of public investment as a leverage for development. Sound fiscal management and the political decision to expand the capital expenditures of the State (which climbed from 3% to 15% under Morales) allowed Bolivia to be one of the few countries that succeeded in maintaining economic growth (4% in 2015, one of the highest rates in the region) when the cycle was reversed. Ecuador registered a similar increase in public investment. Effective fiscal management allowed the State to be established as the central motor of the economy, with major structural changes to the behaviour of public investment, which is costly for the left. The effects of this on long-term economic development - which will depend on the quality of the investment, and not only its magnitude - will only be seen a few years from now.

Public accounts are not neutral. The way the State obtains resources and allocates them is an important component of the left's political identity. Tax systems are mechanisms of redistribution *par excellence* and they define specific incentive structures for resource allocation. There is a sizeable tax burden in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay and therefore, the challenge there has less to do with collection and more to do with the general distributive effects. Public accounts in Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela fundamentally rely on revenues from mining; in these countries, tax collection is one of the State's structural weaknesses. There, the challenge was to reduce the dependency of extractive activities on public financing - an issue that previous governments refused to address.

While Uruguay adopted a general tax reform with a progressive bias, similar structural reforms cannot be found in Argentina and Brazil, with the exception of withholding taxes on exports, which can easily be reversed. Ecuador and Bolivia introduced important reforms that increased tax collection: from less than 15% of GDP at the beginning of the century to close to 20% in 2015. These reforms led to higher collection rates and are progressive, but their redistributive effect is limited.

Social expenditure is clearly a priority, especially in the areas of health, education and social protection. The difference lies in the programmes' characteristics and their level of institutionalisation. Venezuela relied on semi-public apparatuses associated to the political force in government to implement a large part of its social policies. In Argentina, one finds a situation somewhere in the middle: it has both highly institutionalised programmes - health care, education, contributory social security and family allowances - and programmes managed directly by social organisations. Uruguay and Brazil register high levels of institutionalisation: the State manages all major programmes.

Increasing public spending is not synonymous with advances. The qual-

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ity of public spending - understood as efficiency in designing programmes that are well-suited to the objectives - is a key issue. Judging this dimension is complicated and it is still early to do so. Increased spending on education can lead to changes in paradigms or discrete leaps to improve access to and the quality of all levels of education. However, its effects on the structure of production - and there can be no change in the production matrix without improvements to the creative and productive potential of citizens - and on well-being will only begin to be visible a few years from now.

Transfer policies, tax reforms and labour reforms account for an important part of the recent decline in inequality. Another part is due to specific market conditions: the production of primary goods, which drove growth, involves the intensive use of unskilled labour. As a result, there was a more than proportional increase in the wages of those on the lower rungs of the wage distribution ladder. Even so, it is important to recognise that, in a region where no significant advances were achieved in this area in the second half of the 20th century, political decisions are responsible for the recent reduction of inequality.

An agenda for the future

The institutionalisation of changes to public policies can determine whether they will be long-standing or temporary. Rules of the game that are known to everyone, which establish that access to the benefits of public policies is provided on an anonymous basis and does not depend on connections to parastatal entities or networks of influence, give stability to policies. Otherwise, alterations to the composition of the group in power can result in the reversal of reforms. The generation of new rules of the game - that is what institutions do - the guarantee of their stability against political change are a clear indication of the extent of the changes.

Raising the problem of macroeconomic management to the level of principles is a mistake. It is one instrument, albeit a key one for making an agenda of profound and lasting changes possible. Dismissing its instrumental importance leads to systematic setbacks: it causes the political weather vane to turn back to the problem of stabilisation, away from structural change and equality.

Economic growth is a key ingredient for development; without it, the channels for promoting social well-being will be profoundly limited. The image of a bucolic State where assets are distributed equally looks like something from the socialist utopias of the 19th century, but as Karl Marx himself observed, they lack material and social bases. The capitalist economy as we know it is unsustainable, not in the long term, but for the next generations. Yet, the emergence of an environmental agenda is not an alert against growth, but rather against this kind of growth. Growth will not exist unless the State shows it has the muscle to drive the accumulation process

and technological change. The answer is political: private interests must yield to public needs.

The agenda of equality and productive change should be signs of the distinct identity of leftist policy. Equal access to productive and human assets is a requisite for advancing towards greater equality, as is the promotion of changes to the structure of production that broaden access to more productive jobs.

Some progressive sectors see the changes to the tax systems as the finishing line, or a new status quo that does not require further elaboration. There is no economic theory or empirical evidence to sustain this position. In the most unequal region in the world, where the richest 1% of the population appropriates between 14% (Uruguay) and 20% (Colombia) of all national income, the distributive bias of taxation should increase its incidence on wealth (taxes on assets and inheritance) and the higher income brackets. Good news comes from abroad: there is a growing critical mass in the academic world advocating for this aspect to be reincorporated into the debate on public policies.²

In other areas, taking action is more complicated due to the left's own links to different sectors operating in the political arena. Education and social security are two examples of this. Introducing radical changes to boost access to social protection mechanisms throughout people's lives and to education based on a universalist approach and to improve quality are at the heart of the left's political programme. Making it viable is not simple and the coalitions that restrict or block changes are not only those outside of the left.

Where the actions of the leftist governments have been the weakest are their efforts to transform the structure of production. It continues to clearly depend on primary goods, which maintains these countries in a vulnerable position in the world economy. Making changes in this area is not simple. It is not a problem of “political will”. It requires support for innovation and technological change and it is imperative that public policy create clear incentives for these processes. However, it also requires firm commitment to quality education. Advances in this area are not very encouraging, with perhaps the exception of Ecuador. Without decisive changes on this level, change to the structure of production will remain a pipe dream.

It is likely that these policies' effects will not be temporary. The changes to social protection or the tax reforms adopted have had tangible effects on equality and have ensured that large sectors of society have access to certain minimum living standards. However, the agenda cannot simply be focussed on preserving what has been won. The left in the region needs to engage in a profound debate on programming that locates and identifies, clearly and without dogmatism, where the key to promoting sustainable development and equality lies. ■

Rodrigo Arim

1. Relevant areas that have not been included are labour policies and policies on innovation and technology.

2. Anthony Atkinson's book *Inequality*, published in 2015 by Harvard University Press, is an excellent example.

“It’s time to start all over again”

Diego León Pérez and Gabriel Delacoste interview Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Boaventura de Sousa Santos is a sociologist and professor at the University of Coimbra, in Portugal, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in the United States. His work seeks to produce analyses that respects and incorporates knowledge created within popular struggles, and are useful for social movements. He has written on Latin American politics and society, the problems of the contemporary left and the constituent processes. He has been an active promoter of the the World Social Forum and the People’s University of Social Movements.

–How do you see the situation in Brazil after the impeachment vote against President Dilma Rousseff?

–At the time of our talk we still don’t know what will happen, but anyway I think it’s going to be a fairly turbulent period politically. Impeachment is clearly a political act that should be understood as a parliamentary coup, especially because the alleged ‘crimes of responsibility’ that would justify it have not been demonstrated. We should be aware that President Rousseff is perhaps the least corrupt politician in Latin America and those who have been trying to depose her are some of the most corrupt in the region. This is very bad for democracy in Brazil and for the continent as a whole. So I think that what is at stake at this time is the democratic system.

If the impeachment is approved, it will have some consequences. Clearly, social polarisation in Brazil at this time is already very high, and I think that neither the social movements nor the citizens, nor the working class, will accept this act, especially since it would result in a government led by the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), which is known to be one of the most corrupt parties in the history of Brazil. And on the other hand, because the most important issue that is behind all this is the *lava jato* affair, meaning a massive anti-corruption investigation, which perhaps will be cancelled, because, according to all indications that we have, there are many people involved in corruption that belong precisely to that party that will access national office.

The current situation aggravates the problem of democratic legitimacy, with consequences that are difficult to predict. But the impact of what will happen will be very important for the entire region, because if the impeachment succeeds, it will strengthen the assertion that the democracies that currently exist in the continent are easily manipulated and that, if someone wins the elections and therefore obtains the right to rule, when important antidemocratic forces decide that she or he should no longer govern, they will find their ways to overthrow the government through a combination of means. They might use a conservative judiciary at the service of the antidemocratic forces, or might request the support of external forces. My impression is that the imperialist hawks in the United States are not interested in favouring a democratic path in Brazil, which although currently has a government that is not anticapitalist (Dilma is not an anti-capitalist, and obviously there are reasons to criticise her government for not implementing the programme that she had promised before being elected), it is certainly

post-neoliberal, in the sense that it has managed to preserve important state-owned or state-controlled public enterprises (such as Petrobras) and significant natural resources outside the international market.

–The ruling Workers’ Party (PT), before the launch of the process of impeachment, had already carried out an export-oriented policy based on extractivism, and had already strengthened forces that are now part of the conservative opposition. What are the impacts of those political choices, now that we see that many of the forces that are conspiring were developed by the government itself?

–It’s true that, over the years, all these popular Latin American governments, many of them emerging from social movements, have committed numerous errors.

What were the mistakes in the case of Brazil? My understanding (and the same interpretation could also be applied to other governments, such as the one led by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina) is that the government took advantage of a completely exceptional situation, which is what some of us refer to as the commodities consensus, meaning that due to the economic rise of China the prices of raw materials increased and enabled significant gains for the countries of the region. The popular governments decided then to deepen the extractivist model of development, with the objective of using some of the income resulting from the rise in commodity prices for social redistribution. In other words, they didn’t change the economic model and allowed the rich and the oligarchies to continue enriching themselves as before. The banks, for instance, never profited as much in Brazil as during the times of *Lula* da Silva presiding the country, but, since prices were high, there remained a significant surplus that could be used for redistribution. This was unprecedented. Through mechanisms such as social bonuses, scholarships, family grants and other social policies, the PT governments achieved to lift more than 45 million people out of poverty, which is undeniably an important political accomplishment. But it was not socialism, because it depended totally on the fluctuation of international prices on which Brazil had no influence whatsoever.

By accepting this model of development, therefore, they also accepted a political model that is strongly rooted in the past: the colonial model. There is huge continuity with the colonial model, which had been interrupted in some countries during the years of industrialisation and import substitution. During these popular governments, there

were no changes in the political system, or in the system that organises the media, or in the tax system, eventually leading to left parties being trapped in a process of government controlled by oligarchies and the traditional right, who have always used corruption, who have always used the media, who have always used illegalities to consolidate their power. And there was an implicit assumption: perhaps, if the rich were allowed to become even richer, they would permit the country to slowly change in social terms. The problem was that the commodities consensus only lasted until prices fell, after the crisis reached China, and has since ceased to be money available to guarantee the implementation of public policies.

When money runs short, what can governments do? There was only one real solution, and that was a different fiscal policy, making the rich pay more and higher taxes. But due to the fact that the political system has not been changed, that is prohibited. Therefore, in Brazil and elsewhere, the government decided to further broaden

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the scope of agribusiness, expanding the agricultural and mining frontiers, which contributed to the dispossession of local populations, water pollution, an environmental crisis, in strange complicity with private armies made up of paramilitary organisations that kill indigenous and peasant leaders across the continent while governments look the other way. Thus, the cycle of popular governments exhausted itself.

This has been a way of governing not that different to the way countries have been always ruled in Latin America, in favour of the ruling classes and to the detriment of the working classes, but within the framework of a favourable context a significant share of wealth could be utilised for social redistribution. That’s no longer possible. That possibility is untenable for the governments. So, the crisis that Brazil faces today is the crisis of Ecuador, or Argentina, where a revanchist right managed to destroy, in a few months, all the social gains that had been won in the past twelve years. So, it’s time to start all over again.

–Didn’t progressive governments make it a little easy for the right to come back? In this scenario, the conservative forces will return to power and will find themselves with a more powerful and militarised police, both in material and legal terms, with more repressive laws and other changes which would have been harder for the right to implement.

–I understand why you ask this question. Progressive governments ensured many continuities with the past, and therefore the political rupture may seem more dramatic than it really is. In reality, indigenous leaders have continued

to be murdered in Brazil under the PT governments, as they were killed before. Now there is a division within the Latin American critical current of thinkers (within which I have placed myself by adoption, because I was not born in this region), with some analyst arguing that these governments are reactionary. For instance, some colleagues believe that Evo Morales is a reactionary. I’m not able to give a clear-cut judgement, and I say ‘I’m not able’ because this issue is beyond the limit of my intelligence or my analytical skills. But it’s true that progressivism was built using the materials previously used by old politics, and therefore the results are not surprising. And they really facilitated the resurgence of the right. This was the big mistake that the Latin American left committed, or at least parts of it.

One of the greatest intellectuals of this continent, Alvaro García Linera, the current Vice-President of Bolivia, after the results of the most recent election declared many times that if the right returned to power in his country it would have to recognise that the political axis has shifted to the left, because the left forces have achieved many advances that can’t be reversed. He said the right could try to reduce those advances, but always taking into account that the political field as a whole has moved to the left. As you know, that’s not what has happened in other places where the left was in government. Let’s have a look at the presidency of Mauricio Macri in Argentina. In three weeks, he swiftly destroyed almost everything that had been built in twelve years. The right, when it comes back, is vindictive. It returns with the decision to remove everything that was made possible during the left governments, with the idea that, on the one hand, those changes are unsustainable, and, on the other hand, that the popular classes are undeserving. They think that popular classes have accessed too many privileges. And the crisis will be the perfect excuse for reversing everything.

So, I think the popular governments have committed many mistakes. They didn’t transform the economic model, and even much less the model of development or the political system. They were perhaps victims of their enthusiasm. I have to say that at the beginning I was totally in favour of these processes. I participated in the drafting of the new constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador. I had dinner at the home of the Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa and ended up singing revolutionary songs about Ernesto Che Guevara, as if revolution was next. I could not imagine that, years later, the alternative would be that if you don’t have American investments to dispossess you, you will have China, which charges you the same and destroys your territories in the same way. So, I believe many intellectuals have to do some self-criticism and be less arrogant. Perhaps some may argue that now they have the key to epistemologies for the South: to go slow, with less confidence that new ideas will create new realities. No, the new realities decant some new ideas, but you are not the one who creates new realities. It’s the people who are on the street,



Boaventura de Sousa. * PHOTOGRAPHY BY CECILIA VIDAL

struggling; they are the ones who really innovate; it's not you with your theory.

-Let's imagine a scenario where things are 'back to normal'. The United States is once again interested in Latin America, commodity prices are again low, and the current political cycle has ended. You've been a protagonist figure of this cycle currently ending. How do you imagine the future? What cycle will come next? What kind of things should be the focus of our reflections vis-à-vis the process that's now ending?

-I'm convinced that we are not going back to normal. At best, we will have a 'new normal', but quite turbulent. It will be a facade democracy, increasingly hollowed out; no longer a low-intensity democracy, but one of the lowest intensity. We can't think of this as normal. We should think of it as the result of an historical failure that should be analysed, in order to gain strength to build a new, less fragile, more durable cycle in which the gains become less reversible. We don't know under which conditions it will happen, but it will imply some institutional turbulence and a political reform that will perhaps be demanded on the streets, claimed by social movements, by the social organisations. Maybe we need another cycle of constituent processes. A new series of constituent or re-founding assemblies, to enable strong political reforms that could give us the tools to defend democracy against the capitalist that have hijacked it.

This will require, for example, that we accept once and for all that in the present conditions of the world no socialist alternatives can be foreseen in the political agenda, that there are no possibilities for a revolutionary rupture, unlike previous times in history. Democracy is the only fighting instrument that remains for the left. This means that democracy has to be reinvented as a revolutionary democracy. It can no longer be just representative democracy. The central idea of the current political era is that it will be necessary to articulate

participatory democracy with representative democracy. And that articulation will have to be combined with extra-institutional and peaceful political actions on the streets and other public spaces. This means that political parties will cease to have a monopoly of political representation. The associations, social organizations, social movements, gathered in assemblies, organising at the level of the neighbourhood or the community, in the countryside, in the city... will have to find ways to participate, not just for deliberation or consultation, but also at the level of implementation of public policies. We need people's councils active in the areas of education, health, infrastructure, as a way for citizens, in addition to electing representatives, taking some decisions by themselves.

We must invent new political institutions based on a better articulation of representative democracy and participatory democracy. To be effective, it will be necessary to extend this idea even to the way political parties operate. We must re-found the existing parties or invent other left parties built upon a different logic, and that logic must include participatory democracy from the outset. In Spain we now have Podemos, which is representative of a new political will aimed at creating new types of hybrid movement-parties. With many and diverse articulations among circles of citizens or citizens' assemblies deliberating on the aims and structures of the party or the way to choose the candidates, and making decisions that are then assimilated by the leadership. This is a completely different way of doing politics, and is also the only one that can avoid that money continues to dominate politics and stop corruption being endemic.

There is a huge space for expanding democratic creativity. So I fight in my work for what I call Epistemologies of the South, aimed at changing the way we create knowledge. Because I don't think it'd be possible to achieve global social justice without global cognitive justice, meaning a democratic balance

between different forms of knowledge. At the root of the entire political system there's a prevalence of academic knowledge that controls the universities and is Eurocentric, such as political science, sociology and anthropology. These have been the instruments that produced the policies and forms of political representation that exist today. Those must be challenged, and we must accept that there are other ways of knowing, that the representation of the world should be much broader than the European representation of the world. There are other forms of social transformation that

"We must invent new political institutions based on a better articulation of representative democracy and participatory democracy".

will never be called socialism or communism, but they will be called respect, dignity, protection of territories, rights of women and their bodies. This is what I call an ecology of knowledge, which also involves a reform of the university.

If you ask me how to define this new cycle in progressive terms (because we could also end up in a new barbarism, or worse), I'd say it will require a very strong epistemological dimension, and that universities will play a substantial role in such an epistemological revolution. Universities will have to accept the internal circulation of different forms of knowledge. Other conceptions of life are possible, but in our Engineering, Sciences, Biology or Physics departments academics laugh if we talk about Pacha Mama, Mother Nature or the rights of Mother Earth.

-Should we reclaim the reflection on ethics in the universities?

-I think so, but not ethics as understood by northern epistemologies, with their emphasis on individualistic ontologies, as evident in the way political science or sociology perceive the individual as the fundamental unit of analysis. We must

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follow other ontologies, for example, to rescue the concept of community, which has been lost in the social sciences.

Throughout the evolution of modern social science... thinking on the works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke or Jacques Rousseau... we always see a tension between the principle of the market, the principle of the state and the principle of the community. The community of life, of citizens, of the horizontal obligations between citizens who are not merchandise; my care for you, my friend, to help you when you are in difficulties... Over time, the concept of community has disappeared. Universities and social sciences have reduced its meaning to something that doesn't exist, called civil society, a concept that I have never used in my own work, as it refers to a set of individuals hostile to all other individuals. Today, students are told: "you must be an entrepreneur"; that is, for you to succeed, it'd be necessary that others fail. Your success becomes perfectly symmetrical with their failure. It implies that there's no possibility that we all win. This system is a permanent praise of individualism. An ethic based on this idea is the ethics of autonomy, for example. We need to be autonomous, we're told. But how can you be independent if you don't have the conditions to be? Does entrepreneurialism mean that you have to work without rights and without money, perhaps for a long time? That's not what we want. We need to find another ethics, based on other ontologies.

The ontologies of the South are much richer. Here, on this continent, they can be found in the streets, in the villages. These ontologies have a great respect for the ancestors, who are still considered living within the community. So the land is sacred. It is the territory where they have buried their dead. In Mozambique, where I do research, I met people whose cemeteries have been lifted and the remains of their ancestors have been placed elsewhere because mineral resources had been discovered beneath them. That's an enormous offense to the ontology of local people! Their ancestors are with them and, on the other hand, future generations are also alive for them. We, in the European world, can't understand that having rights do not necessarily require having obligations. For example, we tend to think that future generations have no rights, because they have no obligations. Nature has no rights, because it has no obligations. That symmetry is totally disastrous. You have to understand that future generations have rights and that we should respect those rights today, as guarantors of their future. And the same idea applies to nature. If we don't change our ontology and our epistemology, sooner or later your ethics will be the justification of a more possessive individualism, a wilder form of entrepreneurialism, with the implicit idea that you are an anti-social being and that in order to be successful in life you must ruin those around you. You become then a creator of ruins. ■

Gabriel Delacoste and Diego León Pérez

Rise and fall of attempts to democratise the media

The government of Cristina Fernández did not demonstrate the same democratic will to enforce the Law on Audiovisual Communications Services as it did to get it passed: instead, it concentrated on its futile battle with the *Grupo Clarín*, did not launch a tender for community radios nor elaborate a technical plan on frequencies. What is more, it used state-owned media for its own benefit and co-opted regulatory authorities while following the logic of party politics.

The government of Mauricio Macri has not yet completed 150 days. In the usual discussions and debates on economic and social policies, a profound rift can be observed between those who defend Kirchnerism and the new government's supporters. However, there is one sector in which radical changes have been made without society even picking up on them: communications policies. Right after Macri assumed office, on December 10th, 2015, a series of measures led to a 180-degree turn in the regulation of the audiovisual sector. There was almost no public debate. The Congress consented to the changes in a session where the results of the vote and who voted for or against the proposals are unknown. With the adoption of the new regulation, several restrictions on the concentration of ownership were eliminated and cable television no longer falls under the audiovisual law (it

is now considered part of the telecommunications sector). Clauses on enforcement authorities were also reformulated: they remained directly linked to the government and spaces for civil society participation were abolished.

This leaves one to ask how such a major change could happen in so little time. If the Law on Audiovisual Communications Services (LSCA, for its acronym in Spanish) was one of the trademarks of the Cristina Fernández administration, the facts appear to indicate that she had feet of clay. To understand the situation, it is worth reviewing the communications policies from the Kirchnerist period. During the presidency of Néstor Kirchner, the private business model was maintained. While the state-owned media registered a few debates on what was being published by the large private media outlets, especially the *La Nación* newspaper, during this period, it extended licenses and facilitated processes of concentration. Social movements began to consolidate a proposal for a new policy by launching the *Coalición por una Radiodifusión Democrática* (CRD, or Coalition for Democratic Broadcasting); it did not, however, arouse much interest in the government. Shortly after Fernández took office, a public confrontation erupted between the government and the *Grupo Clarín*, which the conflict over agricultural export taxes helped to amplify.

One of the measures the new president took was to raise the discussion on the need to approve a new law on broadcasting. To do so, she used the proposals put forth by the CRD as a reference.

In October 2009, the National Congress approved the LSCA for radio and public and pay television services. The new law established communication as a social right and recognised three types of service providers: the state, private businesses and private non-profit organisations. For the not-for-profit sector, the government followed Uruguay's model and reserved 33% of the spectrum. The law created an institutional framework that allowed minority parties in the parliament to participate in the enforcement agency and on public media stations' board of directors. It also imposed stricter limits on concentration and defended a policy on content production at the national level. The LSCA respected international standards on freedom of expression and had the broad political and social support of various human rights, trade union, university and artistic organisations and indigenous communities.

The private media groups strongly opposed the law and the *Grupo Clarín* (the largest multimedia corporation in the country) managed to block the implementation of some articles through the courts. Recently, in 2013, a ruling

handed down by the Supreme Court of Justice declared that the law was fully constitutional. The court's decision is very important because it establishes a high-level precedent on the concept of freedom of expression. The ruling takes both dimensions into consideration: one of an individual nature based on the personal right to make one's ideas public, from which property rights are derived; and one of a social and collective nature that is based on guaranteeing the right of the population as a whole to exercise its freedom of expression.

After the court ruling, the government was free to advance with the process of implementing the law with the goal of democratising the media further. However, some moves in the opposite direction, which began to surface in 2010, were taken further. The Fernández government did not demonstrate the same democratic will to enforce the law: it focused its energy on a futile battle with the *Grupo Clarín*, did not launch a tender for community radios, did not elaborate a technical plan on frequencies, used the state-owned media for its own benefit and co-opted regulatory

authorities according to the logic of party politics. These moves ended up weakening the consensus on the LSCA and five years after the law was sanctioned, society noted few structural changes. In the meantime, "*Macrismo*" and the large media groups kept insisting that the only objective of the LSCA was to control the press. With the change in government, the changes to the law were so major that they altered its meaning. In the end, Argentina's experience is extremely interesting due to its splendour and failure. The unprecedented levels of social debate, the interest of all three branches of the State in the issue, court rulings that support progressive visions on communication and a social mobilisation on the importance of democratising the media - they all shine light on an initiative that is exemplary for Latin America. From a political-partisan perspective, it teaches us the importance of collective organising, which goes beyond the political context of one government. In Argentina, at least, it will take years to repeat the experience. ■

Guillermo Mastrini

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I hate you, I fear you, I need you

The communication policies of progressive governments in the Southern Cone

Progressive parties have demonstrated that they can win elections even when the media is concentrated in the hands of a few owners whose economic and political interests are contrary to their projects. However, it must be clear that society cannot be transformed without making cultural changes, and in order for these changes to occur, a diverse and plural media system is needed, among other things. When the progressive parties came to power, this goal was more or less explicit. Nonetheless, the power of the groups that hoard media, advertising revenues and political influence has hardly been touched. By using pressure, coercion or complicity, they have made it through several terms of progressive governments without losing influence and have even consolidated their dominant position in the market.

But this was not all thanks to their own efforts. There were also serious errors and a lack of clarity and conviction on the governments' part. The Fernando Lugo administration in Paraguay was unable (and did not want) to take on a fight. With the exception of its endeavours to set up a few independent public media outlets, it did not adopt any measures to democratise the communications sector. I.

Argentina approved a good Law on Audiovisual Communications Services (LSCA, for its

acronym in Spanish), but it implemented it poorly, except the aspects linked to the promotion of national audiovisual production. It did not make much progress in ensuring that frequencies were reserved for community media and the *Grupo Clarín* did not lose any of the ones it had. The challenges in court was one of the reasons for this, but it was not the only one: no advances were made even after the Supreme Court ruled that the government was right. A short while later, Mauricio Macri did not come up against any consolidated changes that would complicate his efforts to implement his policy to restore the situation to the way it was before the LSCA was adopted.

The situation in Brazil is dramatic. The anti-concentration clauses of the constitution have not been regulated. There has been no support for the community sector and no push for legislation to modify the laws from the 1960s. The disagreement between the government and the Workers Party (PT) was so big that the PT had to work with the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* to gather signatures in order to present a draft bill as a citizens' initiative.

In Uruguay, after nearly 12 years of government by the *Frente*

Amplio, some minor advances have been made, such as the legal recognition of community media. However, the oligopoly that controls television remains intact. The same media outlets from 60 years ago continue to broadcast on open TV and we are about to lose our only chance to have new commercial operators capable of competing with "the three giants" enter the sector with the arrival of digital TV in the country. The lack of progress was not due to an oversight, but rather a political decision of the progressive governments on their relationship with the media. The title of this article is an attempt to sum up the complex set of dilemmas that have been present in nearly all of them. The "hatred" or rejection towards the media that generally worked to prevent progressive forces from gaining access to power was mixed with the "fear" of the media's capacity (real or not) to undermine these forces' agenda. The new authorities feared that information on their achievements and other priority issues would not reach people if the media felt they were under attack and put spokes in their wheels. The governments saw the "need" to be able to count on their cooperation. The time will come for us to fight,

they thought. But the conditions will never be ideal.

These governments complain about mistreatment by the media or the lack of coverage of positive news, but they seem to forget that this situation is determined by a structure of ownership linked to previous right-wing governments, which must be changed. They also brutally direct their criticisms towards the media, owners and journalists, as if they were one in the same, as they confuse democratic criticism of the government (even if it is unjust and unfounded) with attacks and manoeuvres.

They attempt to establish direct contact with the population and create their "own" media, whether it be public and pro-government or set up through alliances with private media whose owners - even ones from the right - circumstantially consent to accompanying them, or at least to not attacking them. The notion of public communication policies (a policy of the State that defines what to do to ensure that the media system works adequately in

a democracy and respects the freedom of expression) gets confused with the political communication of the government (a government or party policy on how to ensure that people know about and approve one's performance).

In Uruguay, there is still time to learn from mistakes. A look at the situation in the region illustrates that what does not get done at the beginning of a term of office cannot be done at the end, when vulnerability to pressure from the media increases. We have already achieved something that other countries have not: approve a participatory, transparent and balanced Law on Audiovisual Communications Services which is based on guarantees and seeks to ensure equal access and greater diversity in the media without trampling fundamental freedoms. It has yet to be fully implemented, even though it has been in effect since January 2015.

Rights that are not exercised and laws that are not enforced can be easily wiped off the map by a vindictive right-wing government. We should learn this lesson from Argentina's experience. ■

Gustavo Gómez

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An open, yet muddy playing field

The strategy proposed was basically to open up the playing field and establish new game rules in order to strike a new balance in the country's media system. The idea was to open up the playing field to new actors that are emerging - independent audiovisual producers and community media - and strengthen other older and historically weak ones: the public-state-owned media. The strategy was also to establish new rules for the sector that had always dominated the field - privately owned commercial media - in order to inhibit concentration in the hands of the few. This was especially meant to apply to open television services, where an oligopoly of three corporate groups concentrated more than 90% of the audience and advertising revenues (which is, in turn, half of the total invested in advertising). The playing field was also to open up to social participation in the design and implementation of communication policies, which required new state institutions. We will now look at what happened in each of these lines of action.

Opening up the playing field

Passed in 2007, the Law on Community Broadcasting allowed many small radio stations, which up until then had been persecuted for being illegal, to regularise their situation and stimulated other similar experiences. It also served as the testing ground for new, clearer and more transparent game rules that allowed for social participation and were to define to whom the possibility of using a part of the radio spectrum would be given. Today, there are more than a hundred community radio stations operating legally throughout the country. However, for many, it is difficult to keep a programme of interest to its potential audience on the air all of the time. This is partly due to their own weaknesses, but also to the lack of robust policies to support the sector. PIT-CNT, the only community television project presented thus far, is still a mystery in terms of its development and coverage. My assessment is: it is still valid to invest in the social-community sector, but not much effort has been put into it. Also, apart from some very valuable local experiences, it has not produced particularly important results in terms of the establishment of a new balance in the media system.

The area of independent audiovisual production has grown in recent years, both on its own momentum and with the help of promotional policies. These policies included support to strengthen the Uruguay's Film and Audiovisual Institute and the 2008 Film Law. However, it has never occupied an important place on the screen that has the power to tip the economic scale and move audiences: television. The biggest wagers in this area were, perhaps, the calls for new digital channels in 2013 and the television ratings and support funds foreseen in the Law on Audiovisual Communications Services (LSCA) adopted in 2014. The first appears

Between 2003 and 2004, the Frente Amplio did an assessment and prepared a programme to address the situation in the country's media sector. Now is a good time to take stock of what has happened since.



to have failed for reasons that I am unable to analyse here due to lack of space. The second was put on hold, as the government preferred to wait to see how the complaints filed to challenge the constitutionality of several articles of the law would play out. Therefore, it is not possible to make definitive assessment at this time. In any case, the recent cuts to the existing promotional funds are not an encouraging sign, nor are

the difficulties to comply with the 2015-2020 Audiovisual Commitment promoted by the previous administration.

The state radio and television - the historical underdogs of the media system - were strengthened significantly in these years with new equipment, programming and geographical coverage, and in the case of radio, the diversification of its profiles. Even so, the management

problems continue and the institutional framework that does not guarantee their independence from the government is still in place. The LSCA contains valuable elements on this, which are waiting to be implemented. *TV Ciudad* has benefited from the arrival of digital television, as it has dealt with it better than the country's national television station, the *Televisión Nacional de Uruguay*, whose screen remains rather lacklustre in this context. The audience of the state media has grown over the years, but continues to be a minority in relative terms.

Changing the rules

In 2008, progress in this direction was made thanks to a decree that established clear rules for the assignment of new commercial frequencies, similar to the ones that already existed for the community media sector. The decree also included mechanisms of social participation such as an advisory committee and public hearings. In 2010, steps were taken towards the adoption of the LSCA, also in a participatory way: a technical advisory committee composed of actors from the business sector, civil society and academic world was set up. This first attempt culminated with president José Mujica 'shooting himself in the foot', as he rejected all of the work carried out on the last day (the famous "trash bin" where he said he would throw the project if it were to fall into his hands). Three years later, however, he submitted the project to parliament, which turned it into law in late 2014. The law is still waiting to be implemented.

On the path to digital television, there were also advances and setbacks, which may have harmed the credibility of the process of assigning new channels. This may be one of the factors explaining why policy has not been very productive in this area, but it is not the only one. Among other things, society is lacking basic information on the process: the majority of Uruguayans still do not know that they can watch digital television for free and how to access it.

One of the difficulties the first leftist government experienced early on was the lack of appropriate institutions. The National Directorate for Communications (DNC for its acronym in Spanish) was still part of the Ministry of Defence. Although the creation of the Regulatory Unit for Communications Services was a step forward, there was no clear reference on policy design. The elimination of the DNC in 2005 and

the creation of the National Directorate of Telecommunications and Audiovisual Communications Services under the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining appears to be a step in this direction. However, it only became operational in 2008 and it is highly understaffed. It was strengthened in 2010 and took on a very active role in policy design. Since 2015, though, it appears to have fewer resources once again. In the meantime, the existing social participation mechanisms were deactivated, as the LSCA provides for the creation of others, which still have yet to be implemented. The creation of the Audiovisual Communications Council was an advance towards achieving greater independence for the regulatory bodies in this area. One of the results of this impasse is that the final decisions have still not been made on the calls for new commercial and community radios in the interior of the country in 2013, which even involved public hearings, and there are people who have become very discouraged due to the long wait after high expectations were generated.

The ball in midfield

In sum, the playing field was opened up to new players (public, community and independent ones), but not as much and without the necessary momentum for generating a new balance in the media system. It is possible that part of the problem lies with the players themselves, but there has been a lack of clear and firm direction on public policy. The playing field is a bit more open, but continues to be full of mud. New game rules were promoted, but until now, they too lacked the clarity and decisiveness needed to alter key aspects such as concentration. Even some of the old rules, if enforced properly, would have been sufficient to intervene in this area: the legislation that was already in place before the LSCA stipulated that no one could own more than three media outlets and no more than two of each kind (AM, FM, television). Various factors contributed to failure to comply with this regulation; apparently, one of them is the fear of enforcing it. This fear can be attributed to the governments, but perhaps also to the fact that there was not enough mobilisation in society to push for changes such as these. Social power must be built, then, by strengthening existing spaces and creating others, constructing broader alliances and bringing many of those who naively still believe that the only media system possible is the one that already exists on board. ■

Gabriel Kaplún

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How to reboot the operating system of emancipation

On 13-14 February 2016, a group of researchers and activists from fifteen countries met in Amsterdam. Their aim was to jointly draft the research agenda of the *New Politics Project*, an initiative promoted by the Transnational Institute (TNI). The participants came from political parties, trade unions, social movements, universities, research centres and universities of Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia.

In the opening session, Christophe Aguiton, an academic and trade unionist linked to Attac France, offered an analysis of the main characteristics, challenges and opportunities for new politics. Aguiton argued that despite recent setbacks, the left might be today stronger than before the global crisis of 2008. This is visible, for instance, in the rise of new counter-hegemonic parties and movements and in the emergence of dissident voices within the establishment. Beyond abstract discussions about its relative strength, “the left is, however, still very much tied to the doctrinaire framework of the past century”, he said.

New Politics in the North

Vedran Horvat, the Director of the Institute for Political Ecology (IPE), a Zagreb-based think tank, argued that “the left must challenge the assumptions about permanent growth and takes into account the planetary boundaries, reappraising the significance of the environmental dimension”. Looking at European politics, he pointed at “the aggressive re-emergence of identity politics around immigration, which shifts the attention away from social and economic struggles”.

Andreas Karitzis - a former Syriza central committee member - focused on the options for building popular power, instead of “just managing the seriously depleted, if not already exhausted traditional political institutions”. Based on the recent experience of the Greek left in government, Karitzis claimed that across Europe the scope of democracy has been greatly limited. Therefore, “the left needs to redesign its operating system” by shifting its priorities: “from political representation to setting up autonomous networks of production of economic and social power”.

Moving to the other side of the Atlantic, two participants analysed current changes in politics in North America. Patrick Barrett, from the University of Wisconsin-Madison - focused on the meaning and prospects of Bernie Sanders’ campaign. “While difficult not to be enthused, there are serious limitations and risks posed by Bernie’s politics”, Barrett said. “Sanders’ rise is symptomatic of a political crisis, and Bernie’s supporters express a generalised outrage on class inequality and corporate power”. Barrett also clarified that “Bernie is not a hawk

in foreign policy, but neither is he an anti-imperialist”.

Laura Flanders - a journalist and political commentators - agreed with Patrick that “there will be no Sanders’ revolution”. Counter-hegemonic politics in the United States seem to be shifting from disruption to convergence, but there is no clarity around the focus of convergence. “The protests in Wisconsin, first, and then Occupy in New York and other cities, were real spaces for convergence, but there is still no common agenda”. Nevertheless, she identified positive trends in social mobilisations evolving across the country, processes such as “the series of urban demonstrations on wages, the Black Lives Matter initiative, new kinds of labour practices and the emergence of leftist unions, the activism against the Keystone Pipeline, and multiple other examples of social mobilisation against white supremacy, corporate power, and austerity and conservative policies”.

New Politics in the South

“One might get the impression that the left is still strong in sub-Saharan Africa, because many former militants are now in power across the region, but in fact the left is today weaker than ever”, explained Olmo von Meijenfeldt, the Executive Director of the Democracy Works Foundation - a Johannesburg-based think-tank. In the African context, former national liberation movements have implemented a shallow form of democracy, while the state continues to be configured around the same structures of the colonial period. The political stagnation is aggravated by “growing inequality and the youth’s lack of access to both economic opportunities and political spaces for meaningful engagement, which leads to permanent instability”, von Meijenfeldt reasoned.

Dinga Sikwebu, the Coordinator of the United Front (UF) and a member of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), analysed the country’s development path and the current unravelling of the national liberation project. “The meaning of ‘development’ in South Africa has been reduced to exacerbated mineral extraction and energy production controlled by a few corporations, in the framework of the so-called mineral-energy complex. In recent times we suffered ups and downs in the international price of commodities, followed by a severe energy crisis. We witness today the fracture of both the ruling party (the ANC) and the labour movement, triggered by workers’ struggles and the Marikana massacre of miners in 2012”, Sikwebu explained. NUMSA has been expelled from the main union federation, COSATU, and together with other unions is building a new labour federation.

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According to Brian Ashley, the Director of the Alternative Information and Development Centre - a research and advocacy institute based in Cape Town - “the African left is still very much trapped in the 20th century”. Africa is “a huge and internally disconnected continent, in which there is a resurgence of civil society mobilisations, but mediated by the neoliberal agenda. There are some new left parties, but not necessarily ‘new left’, he said. Ashley explained how “in South Africa, in the context of the ongoing rupture with the ANC and the already evident exhaustion of the national liberation project, the current struggles of mineworkers, farmworkers, students and the unemployed constitute the space for the emergence of new social and political actors”.

In Asia, the left is currently facing a serious crisis that affects both parties and movements, according to Meena Menon - an independent journalist. India is now coping with Narendra Modi’s right-wing government, but the left is no longer an electoral alternative. The current picture also includes ultra-sectarian Maoist guerrilla groups and neo-fascist movements structured around religious beliefs. There are, however, a lot of progressive movements at the grassroots level, ranging from radical Dalit activists to feminist organisations and farmers fighting land grabs.

According to Edgardo Lander - a professor at the Central University of Venezuela - to talk about the left in Latin America today is complicated, because the subject of analysis is internally heterogeneous. Lander identified several types of struggle that do not necessarily converge into a common vision: “anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist tendencies, as well as others that focus on *alternatives to development*”. Lander clarified that these different types of struggles are not necessarily mutually-exclusive, as they represent tendencies and imaginaries that are closely intertwined in current political confrontations.

Ana Dinerstein, from the Centre for Development Studies of the University of Bath, addressed the dichotomy ‘autonomy versus statism’. “We need to recast this question beyond binary thinking”, she argued. Since John Holloway published his famous book in

2002 inspired in the Zapatistas’ experience, two antagonistic approaches divide the left. On the one hand, “advocating autonomy as a political strategy based on direct democracy, anti-bureaucratic forms of self-management, and a rejection of extractivism”. On the other hand, “the defenders of the strategy of taking the power of the state”. Dinerstein reasoned that “this divide replicates the historical left debate between anarchists and Marxists, yet there is potential for cross-fertilisation”.

The strategic project of the left

Erik Olin Wright - Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison - stressed “the need to re-discuss the question of strategies”, rethinking “what we might achieve, what are our goals and what are the ambitions of anticapitalist strategies”.

Wright identified four logics of anticapitalism: “smashing, taming, alleviating and eroding capitalism, which often co-exist”. Smashing capitalism focuses on revolution; the central idea is to hit the core of the current system and seize state power. Taming capitalism means a reformist strategy, changing the rules that regulate how capitalism operates to mitigate the worst of its harms, so that capitalism remains capitalism but less damaging. Alleviating capitalism means focusing on changing the players and the rules to alleviate some of the harm, but not aiming to change the system. Eroding capitalism is a less familiar form; it addresses the problem of transforming the rules of the game by building alternatives”.

Eroding capitalism, as Wright explained, “begins by recognising the fact that all socioeconomic systems constitute a complex mix of many diverse types of economic and political structures, relations, and activities” and that “there has never been anywhere in the world a purely capitalist society fully structured around the three critical components of capitalism: private ownership of capital, profit-oriented market production, and employment of workers who do not own the means of production”. Since every socioeconomic system is a hybrid that includes some entirely non-capitalist and even anticapitalist structures, “we can erode capitalism by developing more democratic, participatory and egalitarian relations in the spaces and cracks of the system and struggling to expand and defend those alternatives”.

Tomislav Tomasevic, from Croatia’s Institute for Political Ecology, highlighted the importance of the commons for reinventing the left, internationally. Tomasevic analysed how the idea of the commons is expanding as a very useful framework for emancipatory struggles that integrates the essential values of the left with environmental concerns and other urgent issues of our times. The new and autonomist left has ex-

panded the original and narrow understanding of the commons “well beyond natural resources, to include cultural, knowledge and digital commons”, he explained.

Sol Trumbo - a Spanish campaigner active in a wide range of European networks - contributed a young activist’s perspective. “In the same way that other people refer to *the 1968 Generation* I recognise myself as a product of *the 2011 Generation*”. Trumbo highlighted many social and political events that have taken place since 2011 until today, which should be considered by the New Politics Project in order to understand the new meanings of activism and emancipation for younger activists. “We must re-evaluate the significance of the ‘Arab Spring’, the 15-M movement in Spain, the Occupy mobilisations and the global narrative built around the we are the 99% protests”.

Another Spanish activist, Alfredo Ramos - a technical advisor for the Podemos’ bloc at the Legislative Assembly of Madrid - also analysed the characteristics and significance of new forms of social mobilisation and political organisation, in particular in metropolitan contexts. Ramos rejected “romantic interpretations of the rise of Podemos that explain the creation of the new party as a direct result of the 15M and other related movements”, and proposed “to re-discuss whether political parties are still necessary to represent social interests and address the issue of internal democracy in these parties, including those who are supposedly more democratic than parties of the old left”.

Many participants referred to the dramatic challenges that the left faces today. It is increasingly clear that the converging crises of global capitalism threaten the survival of people and planet. Throughout the world, climate change is causing catastrophic environmental and social impacts. The global financial crisis has led to reinforced neoliberalism, weaker democracies, and more austerity and dispossession. Wealth and power are increasingly concentrated in fewer hands. Corporate interests are dismantling the welfare state and national borders are knocked down by secretive trade and investment deals, while militarised walls keep unwanted people out. Around the world, the breakdown of the old models of production and the intensification of technological innovation lead to a more decentralised configuration of both economics and politics. Meanwhile, the left faces the threats of deeper fragmentation, an organisational crisis and ideological disorientation. The New Politics Project aims to promote new thinking and international exchanges among researchers and activists to contribute intellectual ammunition to respond to such challenges. ■

The cycle of impugnation to neoliberalism in Latin America and its crisis

Since the beginning of the XXI century, the Latin American political map has been transformed by the parallel rise of several governments whose defining character – progressive, post-neo-liberal, leftist, popular-nationalist, neo-developmental or neo-extractivist – has been the subject of heated debates. Some of us – researchers based in the region – prefer to characterise this trend as *ciclo de impugnación al neoliberalismo* (cycle of impugnation to neoliberalism, or CINAL in the Spanish acronym), in order to underline its fluid and contested nature and include common features that can be observed in each country beyond the national specificities of each political process. The strength of the cycle has weakened since 2013, after the death of the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, and the exacerbation of economic problems as a result of drastic changes in the global economy in the framework of the post-2008 international crisis.

This cycle emerged as a product of, and in response to, the intensification of popular struggles that had been growing in previous years. With the advent of governments that challenged the neoliberal paradigm there was a significant change in the correlation of social forces at the national and regional levels, configuring a new scenario of dispute for hegemony. The CINAL governments incorporated in their programmes of action many popular demands that had become very visible in the context of electoral campaigns, enabling a range of economic, political and social transformations that had been generally defined as “progressive” in comparison to the neoliberal policies implemented by previous governments. However, only in Bolivia the government was won by a political force that had emerged from within the struggles of social movements. But in all the cases, across the region, social forces were already putting pressure on state institutions when the left took office.

The CINAL was deployed in an international economic context characterised by a boom in commodity prices. The rise of China, as a massive buyer of soybeans, oil, gas and minerals exported by the region, produced significant economic growth in most countries, including those that remained anchored in the neoliberal phase (such as Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile). The CINAL governments broadened and deepened the drift towards a re-primarisation of production and consolidated the already existing extractivist trend, but also provided the economic basis for new policies of income redistribution, as well as extending the coverage of programmes of social welfare and actively promoting consumption and employment in the formal sector.

As part of this process, the nation-state was reinstated as an economic and political player with higher margins of relative autono-

my vis-à-vis the world market. While during the neoliberal times, in the 1990s, the role of the state had been reshaped to favour the market as the main articulator of social life, in the new century there was a strong reaction against the primacy of the market logic over the political will.

The exports bonanza gave CINAL governments greater leeway to confront both external powers (mainly the United States) and the dominant groups that had historically been in control of politics and economics at the national level. Thus, the state strengthened its role as arbitrator between opposed classes and factions and mediator in the conflict between capital and labour. By ways of re-nationalisation or creation of national public enterprises, the re-appropriation and management of the extraordinary income derived from the export of commodities, or new forms of taxation over agricultural and mining exports, the CINAL governments (unlike those anchored in pure and simple neoliberalism) were able to generate resources to finance social policies for the most vulnerable sectors, increase and sustain the employment rate, and expand domestic consumption. The positive result was a substantial expansion of rights and tangible material improvements in the living conditions of large sectors of the population and better prospects for local businesses to develop.

However, by not having touched the inherited economic structures, the economic and political sustainability of such transformations was not guaranteed. During the CINAL the previous configuration of production based on the exploitation of natural resources (extractivism), aligned with the model of global accumulation, was deepened. Brazil is a case in point: the country's main exports shifted from industrial products to primary products, twisting the pattern of growth of the South American giant. The proposed makeover of the productive matrix stated as desirable by several CINAL governments was subordinated to the immediate use of resources derived from exporting commodities, and thus all Latin American countries remained firmly set in the neoliberal cycle of world capitalism.

During the CINAL, the governments encouraged ‘social pacts of consumption and employment’ based on securing work and expanding the purchasing power of the popular sectors, with paradoxical consequences. Meeting social demands unjustly neglected during the previous decades of neoliberal adjustment was the source of its popular legitimacy and the justification for deepening extractivism. But history teaches that when better access to living conditions is an achievement of popular struggles, its legitimacy should be unquestioned. But when it becomes an



* PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICOLÁS CELAYA

element of the current model of capitalist production it is necessary to question its relevance as a way to promote radical processes of social transformation. The CINAL shows therefore a clear contradiction between the legitimacy and justice of meeting demands that had been postponed, on the one hand, and the simultaneous promotion of uncritical and unsustainable consumerism, on the other. Beyond the appeal to the principles of *buen vivir* (good living) and some undoubtedly sincere efforts to generate higher levels of awareness around the importance of the commons, a notorious shortcoming of the CINAL governments was that they did not really engage in a major intellectual and moral battle against the values of capitalist consumerism.

Moreover, these governments also decided to maintain the liberal representative democracy as the undiscussed institutional framework, with regular elections that marked the rhythms of political legitimacy and the possibilities of moving towards deeper changes. In this context, they had to face a situation that, following the concept of *passive revolution* originally proposed by Antonio Gramsci, we can characterise as *passivation*. Massimo Modonesi has argued that the dynamics of protest and the spirit of antagonistic confrontation deployed by the popular classes against neoliberal recipes were metabolised by the CINAL govern-

ments to ensure stabilisation and systemic continuity, while incorporating some of the demands of the subaltern classes. With the exception of Venezuela, where an alternative scheme of communal power aimed at developing new forms of popular participation has been attempted, there has been little progress in the transformation of the institutional framework of politics and governance in Latin America. In general, the traditional structures of the state were preserved, although with an ethnic and social renewal of the managerial teams in government (in Bolivia), a visible commitment to modernisation based on technical training and meritocratic and efficientist goals (in Ecuador), or the launch of governmental programmes to meet specific social demands but under precarious and reversible institutional conditions (in Argentina). At the same time, the social movements had to overcome many and very evident difficulties to sustain their level of mobilisation as governments began to meet some of their demands. This reality reflects the complexity of the cycles of rise, stag-

nation and decline of popular struggles in the Latin American region.

When, from 2011 onwards, the effects of the global crisis began to be felt in the region, with the sharp fall in commodity prices, the accumulated problems enabled the right to launch an offensive against the CINAL governments. The cycle of governments that had challenged neoliberalism arose from political conditions favourable to the popular sectors; but the original correlation of forces was not frozen, and the reaction of the ruling classes altered the initial positions. The right has not stood still during this cycle and has used its large arsenal of resources to make sure that its economic and social supremacy is also reflected in unrestricted political dominance. The crisis deepened the hatred against leaders that the media usually refer to as ‘populist’, and has facilitated the crafting of institutional fictions to conceal coups (first in Honduras, then in Paraguay and now in Brazil) and diverse attempts of manipulation of electoral politics by the mainstream media (in Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia and Argentina) in order to support the traditionally dominant sectors to regain control of the national government.

The CINAL experiences have shown that the arrival into government and the control of the state apparatus by political forces based on popular support are not sufficient conditions to transform the economic, social and political structure in the current context of global capitalism. Occupying the state can even lead to the domestication of transformative politics and the subordination to institutional dynamics that ensure systemic continuity. However, these experiences have also demonstrated that the strategy of not engaging in the struggle over state power does not guarantee success nor (even less) the creation of more favourable prospects to improve the living conditions of the popular sectors, as shown by the cases of Colombia, Mexico and Peru. The regressive policies that the government of Mauricio Macri is currently implementing at full speed in Argentina, since December 2015, provide strong evidence of the kind of impacts to be expected in the new political climate after the return of the right. The state, with all its complexities and contradictions, remains a central factor to engage with and within, in the framework of the political, economic, social and ideological struggles to come in Latin America. ■

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A New Politics from the Left?

Based on the analysis of recent mutations in the political and economic structures of capitalism in crisis, the influential thinker and feminist and eco-socialist activist proposes a radical rethinking of the theories and practice of the European (and global) left, redefining the understanding of power and knowledge and reappraising the potential of new networks and collaborative spaces.

Most politicians think voters are stupid. Many voters, being intelligent, have disengaged from the politics associated with this presumptuous political class. Some, however, have rallied round the rare politicians who treat them as equals, from Ada Colau in Barcelona – originally leader of those fighting evictions by the banks, now mayor of Barcelona – to Jeremy Corbyn, formerly rebel MP and now leader of the Labour Party.

Corbyn says he “never held in awe those who have had higher education [nor had] a sense of superiority over those who don’t. Life is life. Some of the wisest people you meet are sweeping our streets.” My intention is to take this *new politics* seriously, whether it is coming from Spain, Greece or the UK and to ask what political institutions, of state and party, would be like if the practical knowledge of the public were built into their decision-making.

I’m partisan. I’ve long wanted a new politics of the left but the idea has always been marginal. Now it has moved centre stage. Are there social and economic trends that favour it as a serious possibility? And what is it anyway? How far can it be achieved from within existing political institutions and how far does it require new sources of power to be built in society and the economy as a base for new political institutions? What alliances are necessary?

The idea of a “new politics” is contested. It has been so since at least the rebellions of the 1960s and the economic crisis of the 1970s. In the UK, some notion of it appears in the rhetoric of Tony Benn, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair and now Jeremy Corbyn alike. From their different perspectives, radical left and neo-liberal right have struggled to create a new order to replace the post-war settlement of a regulated, “mixed” economy based on a paternalistic nation state, mass production and full employment.

It was the mainstream parties of the right, led by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, that broke first from that settlement. Their dominant positions enabled them to appropriate many of the half-sown clothes of an emerging new left, itself a rebellion against the paternalism and narrow horizons of the post-war consensus. In its response, the left either accepted neoliberalism as the *de facto* new order in the belief that they could manage it more humanely (Tony Blair and Gordon Brown) or positioned themselves defensively as custodians of the old (Labour) order (most trade union leaders, many allies of Tony Benn).

Beneath the radar of mainstream political institutions, however, activists, often influenced by the earlier new left, had been taking initiatives in a new direction, experimenting with new principles of organisation. Some were defeated, others marginalised, others incorporated into the dominant neoliberal framework. I intend to explore what these experiments illuminate about the current search

for a feasible alternative, and what new trends are leading new generations to spread and develop their principles of political organisation.

I argue that what has been revealed, from the feminist movement of the 1970s, through radical trade unionism, community organising and co-operative business experiments, to political breakthroughs such as the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone and, more recently, the problems faced by a radical government in Greece, has been the need for new understandings of power and knowledge to help generate a new politics of the left. These are focused, in particular, on the notion of power as transformative capacity (most frequently, the power of civic social change) rather than exclusively pursuing power as domination (the power conventionally sought by political parties through governmental office).

This transformative capacity has its roots in the sharing of the practical – and often tacit – knowledge that institutions based on power as domination tend not to value. The ruling institutions of the post-war order have tended to presume that the knowledge that matters for government is the professional, science-based expertise of the civil servant. (Beatrice Webb, one of the Fabian founders of the welfare state, summarised this view when she said: “We have little faith in the ‘average sensual man’. We do not believe that he can do much more than describe his grievances, we do not think he can prescribe his remedies... We wish to introduce the professional expert.”)

In contrast, the understanding of knowledge implicit in the new politics of the left is based on a recognition of the importance for public policy of its tacit as well as codified forms – which in turn provides an answer to the neoliberal narrative of the free market as the only alternative to the so-called “socialist” command economy. In terms of its implications for politics, this understanding of knowledge as both practical and tacit as well as theoretical but also (in contrast to the free market theorists) *social*, points to forms of collaborative, co-operatively-managed production, in which state institutions at all levels act as facilitators, aware of the limited nature of their knowledge and recognising that they cannot pursue social goals with predictive certainty and therefore always need feedback and experiment. Hence the importance of participatory democracy being built into the institutions of a new kind of state and a new kind of party.

This break from past mentalities will mean strengthening initiatives for change arising outside the existing political system, which

may not necessarily see themselves as political. This approach underpins a distinct vision of socialism that does not hang on the notion of a centralised, “all-knowing” state. Rather it envisages the state as a facilitator and support for networks of autonomous, collaborative production, already prefigured in the many co-operative, peer-to-peer and social enterprises stimulated by the revolution in information and communication technologies. The need for a new politics is converging with the opportunities (still precarious and contested) now opening up for a new economics. I will suggest below how their decentralised / distributed, yet co-ordinated, organisational logics converge.

New politics on the left

For the past forty years or so, since the late 1960s parts of the left have been breaking, in theory and in practice, from the mainstream post-war consensus around state-led welfare and economic policies based on the presumption that maintaining growth must be the overriding goal. There have also been strong trends towards a further break from the idea of the political party and state as the main instruments of radical social change towards them being facilitators for autonomous, collaborative production and democratically managed welfare.

These trends have until recently – until Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and Corbyn’s Labour Party in the UK – been mostly subterranean and marginal. The backcloth to these tendencies is the periodic and increasingly frequent economic, social and political crises in the institutions of the old order and its neoliberal successor. The following two parts of this essay outline the foundations of a new political mentality on the left, referring to key examples to illustrate its importance.

Rethinking power

The recent experience of Syriza, Greece’s radical left party, as an elected government facing the institutions of the EU and the IMF, which explicitly refused to let elections interfere with existing economic treaties, and also of many decades of the Labour Party in government, indicate that electoral success is an insufficient source of the power – and practical economic knowledge – required to achieve the social transformations that both left parties and social movements desire.

Problems in the relations between parties and movements cannot therefore be resolved by plumping for electoral politics over autonomous social movement activity or vice versa. An adequate strategy involves understanding the relationship between the two,

and designing institutions through which to achieve the most effective balance, combining to maximum effect their different sources of power.

Here I distinguish between two kinds of power. Later I explore how they might combine. On the one hand, there is “power over”, which could also be described as power-as-domination, involving an asymmetry between those with power and those over whom power is exercised. On the other hand, there is “power to”, the power to transform, or power-as-transformative-capacity.

Historically, social democratic and communist parties have been built around a more or less benevolent, paternalist version of the understanding of power-as-domination. Their strategies have been based on winning the power to govern and then steering the state apparatus to meet what they identify as the needs of the people.

The notion of power-as-transformative-capacity emerged out of widespread frustration at the workings of power-as-domination exercised by political parties of the traditional left. The distinctive feature of the rebellions of the 1960s and 70s was that people took power into their own hands, discovering through collective action that they had capacities of their own to bring about change. These were not simply exerting pressure on the governing party to do something on their behalf. Their approach was more directly transformative, as I will illustrate. They were turning away from representation as the main focus of radical politics.

The distinction between the two forms of power is central to today’s experimental search for new ways of organising. At a time when older methods, such as mass workplace-based labour organisation, have either been defeated or are inadequate to changed circumstances, this distinction helps us to focus on the most appropriate forms of democratic political organisation in a context of extreme fragmentation, precariousness and dispersal of working people.

The politics of knowledge

A central and common theme of the rebellions of the 1960s and 70s involved overturning conventional deference to authority. They broke the bond between knowledge and authority. This break was combined with a pervasive and self-confident assertion of people’s own practical knowledge, as well as their collaborative capacity. It was pitched against the claims of those in authority to know “what people need” and accompanied by an inventiveness about the forms of organisation that would build that capacity.

These movements embarked on an uncertain, experimental process of democratising knowledge. In practice this led to them to create (before the internet) decentralised and networked organisational forms, sharing and developing knowledge horizontally and breaking from hierarchical models that presume an expert leadership and a more-or-less ignorant membership.

The radically democratic approaches to knowledge they pioneered in the 1960s and 70s laid the organisational and cultural foundations underpinning many subsequent civic movements, from the “alter-globalisation” movement to Occupy and the *indignados*, and now, in a cautious and peculiarly British form, the movement stimulated by Jeremy Corbyn.

Converging logics

One implication of the fundamental importance of recognising power as transformative capacity is that it enables us to think systematically about making collaborative human creativity central to our strategies for new kinds of political institutions. Here I will explore its implications for the economy. I intend to analyse a shift in emphasis away from the traditional centrality in left thinking on the nationalisation of key industries, towards a new collaborative, co-operative economics, in which state institutions play a facilitating and protective role. (This would no doubt involve the public ownership of utilities and infrastructure, though with significant degrees of decentralised management – for example, in energy.) I will also explore how power as transformative capacity applies to production.

Power as transformative capacity arises from both our individually creative capacity and our character as social beings. It rests on the importance of collaborative human creativity. But if collaborative human creativity is fundamental to how we understand political power, this raises questions for how we understand labour and production, where power as domination is the basis of capitalist production. Are relations of production in which the capacity to labour (in effect human energy and creativity) is sold as a commodity from which private shareholders profit compatible with the idea of citizens working together to transform society (exerting their power as transformative capacity)?

I aim to outline the possibility of an economic transformation based on treating collaborative human capacity as a common resource to be nurtured and realised for the benefit of all. This will lead me to consider how the increasingly widespread framework of the “commons” can be applied to human creativity, noting its distinctively individual as well as social characteristics.

Human creativity is a necessary condition of the life of many other commons – water, land, knowledge, culture – and, though individual-centred, it is also socially shaped. Dependent in good part

on the nature of education, culture, and the distribution of wealth, it can be nurtured and developed, or suppressed, undeveloped and wasted, realised and benefited from. Just as natural resources of fundamental importance need protection and nurturing, so it is with human creativity.

Having acknowledged the severe weakening of workers' traditional means of struggling for the dignity of labour and the conditions for collaborative human creativity, I intend to explore contemporary tendencies that favour a collaborative, co-operative economics. This requires a critical examination of the ambivalent consequences of the revolution in information and communication technology (ICT).

The nature of organisation and control around ICT, and the potential of open software and distributed production, is now a highly contested sphere in which leading corporations are successfully monetising and profiting from the voluntary, socially-driven activity of social media users and open software creators. The individualised nature of these creators, and creative users, militates against unionisation but they are becoming organised as producers, forming co-operatives and other hybrid networks.

They use their high levels of technological understanding and the new ICT tools for connection, co-ordination and collaboration to organise in a productive and sometimes self-protective way. And they are doing so in a manner that is increasingly self-conscious and ethically, sometimes politically, conscious of the new social and economic relations they are creating as they work. Some of those engaged in and analysing these trends argue that a new mode of production is emerging around what they call "commons peer-to-peer production". I am not able to make definitive claims as to the systemic importance of these trends. But there is strong evidence that there is a new economic, social and potentially political force at work within this generation of individualised yet collaborative workers in ICT. It has both the potential and the desire to be transformative, and though it lacks the collective power of the traditional working class, it derives a diffuse but significant power from the fact that its skills and knowhow are at the heart of the new forms of capital accumulation, cultural production and communication, and political control and decision making in a globalised context.

The experience of the collaborative commons as a production model provides living evidence of the possibility of sharing and socialising practical and tacit knowledge – thereby challenging in practice the entirely individual entrepreneur model of the free market. Indeed, at least three of the eight design principles for managing a common resource set out by the Nobel prize-winning commons theorist, Elinor Ostrom, point to the importance of sharing practical knowledge through systems of participation and collaborative rule making.

While the social movements of the 1960s and 70s broke the bond



Demonstration in Amsterdam against TTIP, October 2015 * PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL CHAVEZ

between authority and knowledge, and established the social importance of tacit knowledge, the ICT revolution created the conditions for an economy based on collaborative knowledge. In other words, these technological tools for effectively infinite sharing and collaboration created the conditions for power-as-transformative-capacity to be productive.

I want to stress, however, the protective and supportive function of state institutions in this new productive paradigm, for though the trend towards a sharing economy seems unstoppable, the social and economic form it takes is contingent. For these reasons I will explore the importance of the state and politics in both challenging the corporate appropriation of collaborative human creativity and in creating material conditions for such creativity to thrive (for example, a basic, universal citizens' income).

Institutions of a new politics

After decades of failed attempts at rethinking/renewing/refounding, it is necessary to step back and take a long run at the challenge. This takes us as far back as theories of knowledge and the way they underpinned post-war ideologies. These theories still influence the mentalities that animate the left and weaken the processes of renewal. For instance, the presumption that socialist planning is about centralising knowledge about production, and a left party is therefore about winning national office to take control of the commanding heights of the economy, still influences many left activists. Movements are understood as the foot soldiers of the election process, in exchange for which the party voices their demands.

By contrast, the notion of strategy and organisation that flows from my understanding of knowledge and of the individualised but also collaborative nature of creativity

sees the party as more of an outsider, a base for experiment and capacity building, than simply a means of winning electoral office. It acts more as a catalyst to building power as transformative capacity in the here and now than as an army bent on capturing the citadels of power in the future. I will explore the practical implications of this for how a new kind of party is organised. Its work would need to be rooted in daily production and reproduction, and its task becomes to build and realise citizens' capacities for self-government and social and economic transformation.

Production and reproduction

Additionally, if power as transformative capacity is understood to include political economy and to recombine politics and economics in new ways, then a new kind of radical party would need to shift exclusive attention from both macro-economic flows (the supply of money, levels of taxation and the regulation of trade) and the purely national institutional framework of ownership towards questions of the content and social organisation of production. Production for what purpose? With what technology? With what environmental and social consequences? And drawing on whose knowledge, with what relations to its workers and users?

The planetary imperative towards a low-carbon economy gives added impetus to the creation of transformed relations of production in the present from which national policies for state support might be generated and popularised. The ICT revolution and the web have opened up opportunities for a new socially and ecologically driven economy. A new party, in its policies and its practice, would need to be immersed in the development of these new possibilities. It could act as a political space for those engaged in the new production, there-

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by overcoming the rift between politics, economics and society that has held thought and institutions in its vice since the early 19th century.

This would imply a party membership that is self educated and practically involved in the many social innovations emerging globally: open source software, co-operative platforms, collaborative consumption, new ways of growing and eating food, producing and using energy, transport, trade and finance, "soft" care and health-enabling systems, cultural production and all the other aspects of a sufficient life. These contemporary forms of citizen participation would be the life of a prefigurative, catalytic party.

Transformation of the state

Implied earlier that power-as-domination is exercised most distinctively through government. A new politics of the left would imply turning aspects of state power into resources for power as transformative capacity. But state institutions, like all institutions, depend on social relations that people can reproduce or refuse and, under some conditions, take action to transform. (One damaging result of the narrow understandings of knowledge typical of the original architects of the welfare state was that public services were delivered paternalistically without the participation of those involved in either their delivery or their use.

The tendency of political leaders to treat production – of goods, infrastructure or services – as a

matter only for the professional engineer (mechanical or social) meant that little consideration was given to the practical importance of involving citizens as knowing producers or users with a vested interest in the social efficiency of those public bodies. As a result, there was no foundation for effective mobilisation to defend and develop these public organisations, among others, as a basis for a wider decommodification of the economy.

As public services and utilities have faced wave upon wave of privatisation and cutbacks, workers and users have been mobilising in new ways, not simply to defend wages and conditions but to improve and democratise those services. Here again would be an opportunity for a transformative party to support prefigurative change, as a way of preparing for more widespread systemic change when it eventually won government power. One special opportunity for experimentation and prefiguration would be at the level of municipal government. Cities also tend to be both where citizens are regularly engaged in formal and informal self-management and where the mechanisms are most easily invented for supporting them and acknowledging their capacity. City government can be an institutional space where a radical party can consolidate its power and improve its ability to gain national governmental power. ■

Hilary Wainwright

Frente Amplio and Batllismo: so close, but so far away (Or redefining the Uruguayan left during the Latin American progressive era)

A few days before he assumed office, the current President of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez, affirmed that the *Frente Amplio* (FA) would be the *Batllismo* of the 21st century¹. In recent years, this idea became part of common sense. Now, it is an idea that various analysts, Frente Amplio politicians and even their opponents are defending. Even Julio María Sanguinetti (who was the president from 1985 to 1990 and 1995 to 2000) had to admit that there is some truth to it.

There is enormous historical evidence. In relation to the economy, one could say that in Vázquez's previous term in office (2005-2010), economic growth made income distribution possible. In both cases, growth was vulnerable and based on raw material exports that are linked to highly concentrated rural sectors. The public enterprises currently being defended are those inherited from Batllismo. A large part of the social and labour policies in place were based on the institutional mechanisms for resource reallocation that originated in the Batllista state. To give an example: the wage councils and the family allowance regime were created in 1943 and were key elements in the social development policies implemented during this period. Furthermore, there are certain links between the new agenda on rights and the cultural agenda of the first Batllismo government. Finally, even in the area of foreign policy – where certain differences such as the anti-imperialism of the left and the Batllismo's traditional Panamericanism are quite visible – there is one similarity: the FA government has maintained very close relations with the United States. Even José Mujica, the president with the strongest Latin Americanist calling since the return to democracy, was proud of having maintained excellent relations with the White House.

The political and cultural history of Montevideo reflects these similarities. Since 1989, the city council has been run by either the Colorado Party or the Frente Amplio; the National Party held municipal office only once. The transition from Batllismo to FA during the said period could also be seen in the diverse cultural phenomena in the city.

There are differences that have not been highlighted. In relation to economic policies, while in government, the FA showed itself to be closer to the fiscal concerns of the National Party than to the industrialist and protectionist drive of Batllismo. In terms of political discourse, Batllismo, while in office, developed a discourse that was more antagonistic towards certain high classes in rural areas than the one developed by the FA. These differences have not been studied, but they undoubtedly explain the changes that took place in the second half of the 20th century to the way the different economic actors relate to the political system.

While analysts are free to demonstrate and explain many continuities and some differences between the two, for actors of the FA, the matter is a little



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more complicated. This self-identification with Batllismo calls for greater reflection within the political coalition, especially since the FA was conceived to be an alternative to or an improvement over the Batllista model.

Since the 1950s, the left has developed two types of critiques on Batllismo. On one hand, there is the egalitarian critique based on the traditional ideologies of the left: socialists, communists and anarchists denounced Batllismo as a form of "gatopardism" whose ultimate objective is to preserve a capitalist society – something that the left aspired to eliminate. Furthermore, in the vision of the left, through its use of popular language, forms of clientelism and demagogic use of state resources, Batllismo drew popular sectors away from their real class interests.

Furthermore, in 1955, when the economic recession began to expose the limits of the Batllista model, the left came closer first to developmentalist and then dependency theory discourse, which proposed a programme of radical changes to end stagnation. According to this discourse, Batllismo was responsible for maintaining a dependent economic model sustained by a traditional agrarian structure marked by the concentration of land ownership, which explained the stagnation in the country and the corrupt and inefficient state. El Batllismo had had the historical opportunity of modernising the economy by transforming the agrarian structure, but it was not up to the challenge. From the People's Congress of 1965 up until the FA's 30 government measures proposed during the electoral campaign in 1971, an alternative model was built, which pretended to go beyond the Batllista model by adopting the agrarian reform, nationalising foreign trade and the

banks and energetic state interventions in the industrial sector.

On March 26th, 1971, in his inaugural speech for the FA, General Liber Seregni stated that the movement aimed to go beyond the Batllismo's attempts at industrialism and the National Party's focus on livestock raising, since "neither of the paths taken confronted the decisive obstacle for national development and this obstacle is the oligarchy – that is, the banking-landowning-export intermediating trio; the social group that dominates and seizes land, credit and the marketing channels for our products. Their centres of power have remained intact, as they continue to determine our economy, strangle the country, profit from the energy of our people, appropriate and deviate the national effort".

Later came the dictatorship, between 1973 and 1985. It was in that context that the democratic values of Batllismo began to be valued once again. The experience that had been strongly criticised in the 1960s rose from the ashes of the dictatorship as an inspirational imaginary that the main preponderant political actors attempted to appropriate for themselves in various ways. But it was between the 1990s and the coming of the new century that this tendency in the FA appeared to become consolidated. The ideological crisis of the left in the post-Cold War period tended to sweep away the egalitarian proposals linked to socialist ideas. In the context of the neoliberal offensive, the developmentalist proposals that had survived since the 1980s, which demanded structural changes, were replaced by a defensive strategy that proposed defending what was left of the Batllista model. During the attempts to privatise public enterprises, it was no longer a matter of proposing a new state economy to replace that model, which had previously been considered obsolete, but rather a question of defending the remains of this one.

This did not only happen in Uruguay. In Brazil and Argentina too, the

left made amends with the reformist or populist pasts of the 1950s, which it had been questioning since the 1960s. In Argentina, those from the Peronist left and some of the left from the 1960s began to value Peronism's developmentalist statist tradition once again. In Brazil, the moderation of the Workers Party was similar to the national experience with Vargas populism. As neoliberalism advanced, the "new left", which began to emerge back in the 1960s, made peace with the old Latin American populist politics, with all of its problems and virtues. In Uruguay, Mujica's phrases such as "swallow a frog" or "hug a snake" sum up this reconciliatory spirit.

This strategy had its advantages. It broadened the popular bases of the left parties, which made historical electoral victories possible. At the same time, it reduced certain economic and political elites' mistrust towards the left. In contexts of economic growth, these governments implemented social redistribution plans in ways that governments of other ideological traditions would not have done. However, in Uruguay, in an adverse economic situation, the Batllista identity does not appear to be a good option for thinking about the future. After several years of growth, we are approaching a situation similar to the one that Batllismo faced in the 1930s or in the 1950s and 1960s, when the country's dependency on foreign markets limited the possibility of redistributing income. It was precisely in these contexts that the main weaknesses of Batllismo were exposed. Some sectors opted for a conservative reaction and the left questioned why it was impossible to radicalise its model. This is why, from the perspective of the left, vindicating the Batllista phenomena has its limits. If the FA defines itself as the Batllismo of the 21st century, we will have to ask ourselves what we might expect next as the inevitable result of a reformist project that (like Batllismo in the past) do not make it all the way. ■