

# **The New Global Wave of Class Struggles and the Slogan of the Constituent Assembly**

*How to apply a crucial revolutionary democratic tactic (and how not) – a critique of the opportunist deviations of the Argentine-based PTS/FT and PO/CRFI*

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## **Contents**

### **Introduction**

**I. The central role of democracy and constitution in the current mass protests**

**II. Reasons of the central role of democratic demands**

**III. Marxism and the slogan of the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly**

**IV. Is the Constituent Assembly a road to socialism?**

**V. A kind of “constitutional cretinism”**

**VI. A socialist transformation without armed struggle?**

**VII. A “de-revolutionization” or “social democratization” of Marxism**

## Introduction

A wave of class struggles is spreading throughout the globe. In Iraq <sup>1</sup>, Iran <sup>2</sup>, Lebanon <sup>3</sup>, Egypt <sup>4</sup>, Algeria <sup>5</sup>, Chile <sup>6</sup>, Bolivia <sup>7</sup>, Ecuador <sup>8</sup>, Haiti, Honduras <sup>9</sup>, Hong Kong <sup>10</sup>, and Catalunya <sup>11</sup> – popular

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. RCIT: Iraq: Victory to the Popular Insurrection against the Government of Abdel Mahdi! Build Popular Councils! For a Workers and Poor Peasants Government! 04 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/iraq-victory-to-the-popular-insurrection-against-the-government-of-abdel-mahdi/>; ISL: The Revolution in Iraq Continues, 12 November 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/the-revolution-in-iraq-continues/>; Yossi Schwartz: On the Background of the Popular Uprising of the Iraqi People, 04.10.2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/background-of-popular-uprising-of-the-iraqi-people/>; see also various reports on solidarity activities on the RCIT's website.

<sup>2</sup> RCIT: Iran: Long Live the Popular Uprising against the Mullah Regime! Unite with the popular insurrections in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria etc. to a single Intifada! Down with the US sanctions against Iran! 18 November 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/iran-long-live-the-popular-uprising-against-the-mullah-regime/>

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. ISL: The Revolution in Lebanon as Part of the International Uprising, 29 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/revolution-in-lebanon-is-part-of-international-uprising/>; Yossi Schwartz: Lebanon: A Revolutionary Situation, 20.10.2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/lebanon-a-revolutionary-situation/>

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. RCIT: Egypt: Bring Down the Tyrant Sisi! Spontaneous mass protests shatter the military dictatorship of General Sisi, 23.09.2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-bring-down-the-tyrant-sisi/>

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. RCIT: Algeria and Sudan: Two Important Victories and a Warning. No trust in the army command and the old elite! Continue the Revolution! 11 April 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/first-victories-in-algeria-and-sudan/>; RCIT: Algeria: Bouteflika Retreats! Now Let Us Defeat His System! Organize Committees of Action! For a General Strike and Popular Insurrection to bring down the regime! For a Workers and Poor Peasants Government! 12 March 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/algeria-bouteflika-retreats-now-let-us-defeat-his-system/>; RCIT: Algeria: Victory to the Popular Insurgency against Bouteflika and his System! 9 March 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/algeria-victory-to-the-popular-insurgency-against-bouteflika-and-his-system/>

<sup>6</sup> ALS: El pueblo chileno se levanta. ¡Por la huelga general indefinida hasta lograr echar abajo el estado de emergencia y derrocar el gobierno de Piñera! 23.10.2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/home/espa%C3%B1ol/el-pueblo-chileno-se-levanta/>

<sup>7</sup> Bolivia: Defeat the Right-Wing Coup! Build democratic popular assemblies and self-defense committees! For a broad anti-coup united front! But no political confidence in Morales! Joint Statement of RCIT and PRT (Costa Rica), 12 November 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/bolivia-defeat-the-right-wing-coup/>

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. RCIT: Ecuador: For a Popular Insurrection to Bring Down the Lenin Moreno Regime! For a workers, indigenous, peasant and popular government! 12 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/ecuador-for-a-popular-insurrection-to-bring-down-the-lenin-moreno-regime/>; Joint statement of the RCIT and the PRT (Costa Rica): Ecuador: For an Indefinite General Strike against the Neoliberal Austerity Pack! Build democratic popular assemblies to defeat the government of Moreno – servant of the IMF! For a workers, indigenous, peasant and popular government! 06 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/ecuador-for-an-indefinite-general-strike-against-the-neoliberal-austerity-pack/>

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Tomás Andino Mencía: Del auge al ocaso de la dictadura de “JOH”, 18 julio, 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/forum/del-auge-al-ocaso-de-la-dictadura-de-joh/>

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Hong Kong / China: “...While Their Elders Cheer Them On”. Prominent pro-Beijing pundit prepares public for bloody counter-revolution while admitting that people in Hong Kong support militant youth fighting in the streets, 16 November 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/hong-kong-china-while-their-elders-cheer-them-on/>; RCIT: China: Solidarity with the General Strike in Hong Kong! For an international solidarity movement as the Stalinist-Capitalist regime in Beijing prepares a brutal crackdown! 01

uprisings in the past few months have resulted in many cases in the opening of pre-revolutionary or even revolutionary situations. Add to this the ongoing heroic liberation wars of the Syrian people against the Assad dictatorship (since March 2011)<sup>12</sup> and of the Yemeni people against the Saudi-led invasion (since March 2015).<sup>13</sup> In Kashmir, a de facto general strike against the evocation of autonomy rights by the right-wing Hindu chauvinist government of Narendra Modi could provoke another great intifada at any time.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the ongoing Israeli aggression against Gaza could easily result in another war.<sup>15</sup> In addition, there is an ongoing global mass movement led by youth against

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August 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/solidarity-with-the-general-strike-in-hong-kong/>; RCIT: China: Long Live the Popular Uprising in Hong Kong! After protestors storm the parliament: general strike against the extradition bill and the Lam Administration! 03 July 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/long-live-the-popular-uprising-in-hong-kong/>; RCIT: China: Mass Protests against Reactionary “Extradition Law” in Hong Kong. For an indefinite general strike to kill the bill and to bring down the Administration of Carrie Lam! 18 June 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/china-mass-protests-against-reactionary-extradition-law-in-hong-kong/>

<sup>11</sup> For the RCIT’s analysis of Catalonia’s struggle for independence, we refer readers to numerous documents which are collected in a special sub-page on the RCIT’s website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/collection-of-articles-on-catalunya-s-independence-struggle/>; on the recent developments see e.g. RCIT: Spanish State: Freedom for Catalan Political Prisoners! 15 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/spanish-state-freedom-for-catalan-political-prisoners/>; Javier Cadenas: Cataluña: ¡Libertad para los Presos Politics!, 14.10.2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/home/esp%C3%B1ol/cataluna-libertad-para-los-presos-politics/>

<sup>12</sup> The RCIT has published a number of booklets, statements, and articles on the Syrian Revolution that can be accessed on a special sub-section of this website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/collection-of-articles-on-the-syrian-revolution/>. In particular we refer to: RCIT: Syria: Assad Regime and Kurdish YPG Strike a Reactionary Deal. Assad, Putin, Trump, Erdoğan and the PYD/YPG leadership are all reactionary enemies of the Arab and Kurdish masses in Syria! 15 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/syria-assad-regime-and-kurdish-ypg-strike-a-reactionary-deal/>; Yossi Schwartz: Syria: US Imperialism Deserts the Kurds ... Once Again. The fruits of the collaboration of the Kurdish YPG/SDF leadership in Syria with Washington, 08.10.2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/syria-us-imperialism-deserts-the-kurds-once-again/>; RCIT: Save the Syrian Revolution! A call for international solidarity with the Syrian people in Idlib suffering from the barbarous onslaught by Assad and Putin! 04 June 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/call-save-the-syrian-revolution/>

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. RCIT: Yemen: Another Humiliating Blow for the Saudi Aggressors! Yemeni popular resistance eliminates three pro-Saudi military brigades, 02.10.2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/yemen-another-humiliating-blow-for-the-saudi-aggressors/>

<sup>14</sup> We have collected the RCIT’s statements and articles on Kashmir in a special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/collection-of-articles-on-the-liberation-struggle-in-kashmir/>. Our statement on the latest escalation by the Indian Modi government can be read here: India: Defend the Kashmiri People against Modi’s “Israel-Style” Attack! India’s ultra-chauvinist BJP government abolishes decades-old autonomy rights of Muslim-majority province, 6 August 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/india-defend-the-kashmiri-people-against-modi-s-attack/>; see also the following essays by Michael Pröbsting: The Kashmir Question and the Indian Left Today. Marxism, Stalinism and centrism on the national liberation struggle of the Kashmiri people, 26 September 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/kashmir-question-and-indian-left-today/>; Revolutionaries and the Slogan of “Azadi Kashmir”. Should Marxists advocate the independence of Kashmir? 13 September 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/revolutionaries-and-the-slogan-of-azadi-kashmir/>; India: A Prison House of Nations and Lower Castes (On the Reasons for Modi’s Coup in Kashmir). Essay on the social and national contradictions of Indian capitalism and the rise of Hindutva chauvinism, 16 August 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/india-is-a-a-prison-house-of-nations-and-lower-castes/>

<sup>15</sup> ISL: The Israeli Government Plays With Fire, 12 November 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/the-israeli-government-plays-with-fire/>

climate change. <sup>16</sup> In short, the world situation is extraordinary volatile – more than it has ever been before in the past decades!

The RCIT has characterized this phase as a “pre-68” period in which the possibility of the emergence of a *pre-revolutionary world situation* exists. <sup>17</sup> This is particularly the case since this massive upswing of the class struggle goes hand in hand with the opening of another Great Recession in the capitalist world economy as well as a massive domestic political crisis of key leaders of the counter-revolutionary offensive like U.S. President Donald Trump or Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. <sup>18</sup>

## I. The central role of democracy and constitution in the current mass protests

As we did already observe in our essay on the current wave of uprisings, a “*common characteristic is that these mass revolts have an elementary character. They usually focus on economic attacks (austerity packages, price rises, higher taxes, etc.) and/or democratic demands (corruption, authoritarian laws, dictatorships, etc.)*.”

In a number of these uprisings, it is not only democratic demands in general but, in particular, the issue of the constitution which plays a central role. This goes often hand in hand with calls for the overthrow of the whole government. Let us give a few examples.

In Iraq and Lebanon, demonstrators are demanding radical changes in the constitution and the abolishment of the religious sectarian system. <sup>19</sup> In Algeria and Sudan, the issue of the constitution has also played a central role as we discussed already in another essay published some months ago. <sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. RCIT: Revolutionary Change to End Climate Change! Only expropriation of the capitalist corporations opens the road towards the end of climate change, 20 September 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/revolutionary-change-to-end-climate-change/>

<sup>17</sup> Michael Pröbsting: Are We Nearing a New “68 Moment”? A massive upsurge of global class struggle in the midst of a dramatic shift in the world situation, 22 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/are-we-nearing-a-new-68-moment/>

<sup>18</sup> See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Another Great Recession of the Capitalist World Economy Has Begun. The economic crisis is an important factor in the current dramatic shift in the world situation, 19 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/another-great-recession-of-the-capitalist-world-economy-has-begun/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Gang Leaders of Western Counterrevolution Are Faltering. Some observations on an interesting historic moment in the world situation, 25 September 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/the-gang-leaders-of-western-counterrevolution-are-faltering/>

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Dana Taib Menmy: As Iraqi calls to amend constitution rise, Kurds fear loss of political gains, November 18, 2019 <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/11/iraq-kurdistan-constitution-protests.html>; Robert Fisk: Hezbollah threatens the peaceful and non-sectarian protests in Lebanon, 25 October 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/lebanon-beirut-protests-whatsapp-tax-hezbollah-michel-aoun-a9170716.html>

<sup>20</sup> Michael Pröbsting: The Slogan of the Constituent Assembly in the Great Arab Revolution. Defending the Marxist approach against ultra-left and opportunist criticism, 23 April 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-slogan-of-the-constituent-assembly-in-the-great-arab-revolution/>; see also Middle East Eye: Algerian army chief moves to limit protest movement, 19 September 2019 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/algerian-army-chief-moves-limit-protest-movement>

The importance of the constitution has also become visible in Egypt after General Sisi came to power in a bloody military coup in July 2013. Within a few months, he overthrew the constitution and imposed another one which serves his military dictatorship.<sup>21</sup> In Syria, the ongoing popular insurrection against the tyrannical regime of Assad raises by its very nature the issue of the constitution – to which the counter-revolutionary alliance of Putin, Rouhani and Erdoğan (plus the leaderships of some treacherous FSA factions) react with imposing a so-called “*Syrian Constitutional Committee*”.

We see the same picture in Latin America. From early on, demonstrators in Chile drew their fire on the reactionary constitution which stems from the days of the notorious Pinochet dictatorship which ruled the country in 1973-1990. More than 80 percent of Chileans are in favour of a new constitution, according to recent polls.<sup>22</sup>

Hong Kong’ mini-constitution, called *Basic Law*, has also been a central issue in the mass protests which shake the region since nearly half a year. This became even more the case when Hong Kong’s High Court ruled the government’s mask ban against protesters as unconstitutional in mid-November. In response, the Stalinist-capitalist dictatorship in Beijing suggested that the High Court had no remit on determining whether a law was in accordance with the Basic Law and threatened to overrule the decision.<sup>23</sup>

Likewise, the issue of constitution plays a crucial role in Catalunya as the ruling class in Madrid denies the Catalan people their elementary right of national self-determination by referring to the constitution of the Spanish State. Furthermore, the draconic prison sentences for leading representatives of the pro-independence movement – which triggered the most recent uprising – had a legal basis in Spain’s bourgeois constitution (which was the result of the counter-revolutionary deal of the reformist leaders with the monarchist institutions of the Franco dictatorship).<sup>24</sup>

Another example is Kashmir where the latest escalation has been provoked by the Modi government’s decision to revoke Article 370 of India’s constitution on 5 August. We could continue with providing many more examples but we think this brief global overview is sufficient to demonstrate the crucial place which the issue of constitution plays in the current wave of popular uprisings.

In cases where the government feels strong enough, it attempts to violently suppress the mass protests. In other cases, the ruling class has been pushed on the defensive. In such situations, the regime tries to pacify the mass protests by hijacking the demand for radical constitutional reform. The

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<sup>21</sup> Egypt constitutional referendum approved, cementing Sisi's power to 2030, 23 April 2019 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-constitutional-referendum-approved-cementing-sisis-power-2030>

<sup>22</sup> Natalia A. Ramos Miranda: Explainer: Chile's constitutional conundrum - To change or not to change? November 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-chile-protests-explainer/explainer-chiles-constitutional-conundrum-to-change-or-not-to-change-idUSKBN1XG2WV>; Sandra Cuffe: Chile protests: Chileans demand new constitution amid unrest, 2019-11-05 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/chile-protests-chileans-demand-constitution-unrest-191105005906927.html>

<sup>23</sup> Joyce Ng, Chris Lau, Tony Cheung, Nectar Gan: Hong Kong mask law: Beijing claim on ‘unconstitutional’ ruling could spell end of ‘one country, two systems’, legal heavyweights warn, South china Morning Post, 20 Nov, 2019 <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3038479/hong-kong-mask-law-beijing-claim-unconstitutional-ruling>

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Wilson: Separatists clash with police in Barcelona after huge rally, 2019-10-27, <https://apnews.com/1511cfb6b7214b679c92028acfe10042>; Joan Faus, John Stonestreet: Police, Catalan separatists clash as day of protest ends in violence, October 26, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-catalonia/police-catalan-separatists-clash-as-day-of-protest-ends-in-violence-idUSKBN1X5096>

government formally agrees to such demands and starts a process of constitutional amendments under the control of their state institutions. In Iraq, for example, the parliament decided to form a temporary committee to propose amendments to the constitution.<sup>25</sup>

In Chile, the right-wing government of the billionaire Sebastian Pinera initially proposed to open a process of amendments of the constitution which should have been elaborated by a commission created by the government itself. After massive protests, the government brokered a deal with all parliamentary opposition parties (except the Communist Party PCCh) which includes a long-term process of a referendum in April 2020, election of a new convention in October to elaborate a new constitution within one year, and after this another referendum on such a draft constitution.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the ruling class tries to win up to two years time in order to delay and to institutionalize the process of a new constitution. It obviously hopes that it can pacify and liquidate the popular uprisings with such methods.

## II. Reasons for the central role of democratic demands

It is not surprising that democratic demands and the issue of constitution play such an important role in the current global wave of class struggles. This is related to several fundamental characteristics of the current historic period – a period of capitalist decay resulting in the acceleration of the contradictions between the classes as well as the states. It is a highly explosive period pregnant with wars, revolutions and counterrevolutions. It would go beyond the scope of this essay to comprehensively deal with the character of the current period. We refer readers interested in this issue to other works which we have published in the last decade.<sup>27</sup>

At this point we want to limit ourselves to emphasis only the following features which are relevant to the subject of this essay. The crisis-ridden character of the capitalist world economy and the onset of

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<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Alissa J. Rubin: Iraqis Rise Against a Reviled Occupier: Iran, New York Times, Nov. 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/world/middleeast/iraq-protests-iran.html>

<sup>26</sup> Sandra Cuffe: Chile agrees to hold referendum on constitution: 5 things to know, 2019-11-16, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/chile-agrees-hold-referendum-constitution-5-191115221832042.html>

<sup>27</sup> See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Catastrophic Failure of the Theory of “Catastrophism”. On the Marxist Theory of Capitalist Breakdown and its Misinterpretation by the Partido Obrero (Argentina) and its “Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International”, RCIT Pamphlet, May 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-catastrophic-failure-of-the-theory-of-catastrophism/>; RCIT: Advancing Counterrevolution and Acceleration of Class Contradictions Mark the Opening of a New Political Phase. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries (January 2016), Chapter II and III, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 46, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2016/>; Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism, RCIT Books, Vienna 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>; Michael Pröbsting: Imperialism, Globalization and the Decline of Capitalism (2008), in: Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: The Credit Crunch - A Marxist Analysis, London 2008, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-and-globalization/>.

another Great Recession push the bourgeoisie all over the world to accelerate their austerity attacks against the workers and popular masses. These austerity programs inevitable go hand in hand with systematic attacks on democratic rights and the expansion of authoritarian and dictatorial features of the bourgeois state. Lenin's famous statement remains completely valid: *"Both in foreign and home policy imperialism strives towards violations of democracy, towards reaction. In this sense imperialism is indisputably the "negation" of democracy in general, of all democracy, ...."*<sup>28</sup>

Hence, the RCIT has repeatedly pointed to the significant relevance of the democratic question in the present historic period.<sup>29</sup> We therefore noted in our programmatic Manifesto: *"The struggle for democratic rights has become one of the most important issues in this age of capitalism in decay. In this context, the ruling classes inevitably violate and trample on democratic rights and strive to replace even limited bourgeois democracy by capitalist Bonapartism and dictatorship."*<sup>30</sup>

In addition, Marxists have to recognize that while the popular masses heroically rise up against the ruling class, they lack political experience as well as an advanced consciousness on the political alternative to the rotten capitalist system. Years and decades of misleadership – by Stalinist and social democratic forces, Bolivarian and left-populists, petty-bourgeois nationalists and Islamists – have resulted in a situation where the masses have an underdeveloped political consciousness.

We can observe these developments in various countries. In Iraq and Lebanon, the people demand the ouster of the whole political elite and radical changes in the constitution. However, when it comes to the issue of a political alternative, we see widespread illusions in a "non-political, technocratic government". In Chile and Hong Kong, we see the combination of heroic struggles against the repression apparatus and, at the same time, strong petty-bourgeois libertarian tendencies resulting in the opposition against any centralized political struggle and leadership. The same development can be observed in the global climate change movement.

All these developments result in a situation where the issues of democracy and constitution play a massive role in the consciousness of the workers and oppressed. Marxists must not take a sectarian approach but rather take the actual conditions of the struggle and the mass consciousness into account when they elaborate their slogans and tactics. As we stated somewhere else: *"Without understanding the revolutionary potential of the democratic question and its relationship to the strategy of permanent revolution, one is incapable of finding a correct political orientation in the current events in the Arab world (or anywhere else). Ignoring the challenges of prevailing mass consciousness, with all of its initial petty-bourgeois democratic limitations, leads directly to the cul-de-sac of sectarian isolation. Revolutionaries must champion the democratic question and not leave it to the petty-bourgeois leaders and bourgeois traitors! This was the approach of the Bolsheviks and Leon Trotsky... and this is our approach too!"*<sup>31</sup>

The task of Marxists is not to ignore the democratic demands but rather to pick them up and to give them a revolutionary dynamic. We certainly don't view the democratic question as less important as

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<sup>28</sup> V.I. Lenin: A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism (1916); in: LCW 23, p. 43

<sup>29</sup> See on this Michael Pröbsting: The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today. The Marxist Theory of Permanent Revolution and its Relevance for the Imperialist Metropolises, August 2015, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 39, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/democracy-vs-imperialism/>

<sup>30</sup> RCIT: Manifesto for Revolutionary Liberation (2016), p.12, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-program-2016/>

<sup>31</sup> Michael Pröbsting: The Slogan of the Constituent Assembly in the Great Arab Revolution. Defending the Marxist approach against ultra-left and opportunist criticism, 23 April 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-slogan-of-the-constituent-assembly-in-the-great-arab-revolution>

the masses do. We only emphasize that the methods of struggle for such demands should be that of revolutionary class struggle. It is not sufficient to demonstrate every day and to occupy some bridges and public places. It is necessary to bring the economy to a halt via an indefinite general strike. The occupation of the Tahrir Square is excellent. But this should be combined with the occupation of factories and governmental buildings in order to pose the question of power.

The masses are right to have no confidence in the established political parties. But this should not result in the lack of structures, organization and leadership. Quite the opposite, it is necessary to counterpose the organizations of the working class and oppressed to the organizations of the ruling class. Against their government and institutions, we need to organize in committees of action in workplaces, neighbourhoods and universities. Such committees should elect delegates so that there can be a national coordination of the struggle. When we are strong enough, such committees can become the basis for the overthrow of the regime and for the building of an alternative power. Against their police and army, we need to organize workers and popular self-defence committees.

Furthermore, Marxists need to explain that the question of democracy cannot be separated from the question of power. Those who own the economy and who command the gun – they have the power. As long as they continue to have the power, it is not possible to safeguard any substantial social or democratic achievements. Only if the workers and popular masses expropriate those who control the economy – the big capitalists – and dispose those who control the state apparatus – the ruling elite and the generals – only then will it be possible to achieve a lasting victory.

In other words, as Trotsky emphasized repeatedly, it is necessary to combine the struggle for minimal demands – like the defense of social gains or democratic rights – with a transitional program directed at the conquest of power.<sup>32</sup>

Such a victory can only be achieved via a successful socialist revolution. But this will not happen spontaneously but requires an organized and experienced leadership. Such a leadership is called a revolutionary party, i.e. an organization of the vanguard militants on the basis of a common program and perspectives. It is evident that such a party can only be constructed via the conscious and systematic efforts of a dedicated group of militants who spread the programmatic lessons and organize supporters on a democratic and centralist basis. It cannot be build outside of the struggles of the masses but only within that. The RCIT calls all revolutionaries who share such an approach to unite so that we can build together such a revolutionary party nationally and internationally!

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<sup>32</sup> *“The Fourth International does not discard the program of the old “minimal” demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective. Insofar as the old, partial, “minimal” demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism — and this occurs at each step—the Fourth International advances a system of transitional demands, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime. The old “minimal program” is superseded by the transitional program, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution.”* (Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program* (1938); in: *Documents of the Fourth International*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 184)



### III. Marxism and the slogan of the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly

As we have demonstrated above, the issue of the constitution plays a central role in the current class struggle. We have said that it is only possible to fight for a socialist perspective by taking a revolutionary stance on the democratic question, i.e. by consistently defending all democratic demands and by fighting for their most radical implementation. This must necessarily also include the issue of the constitution.

We do not intend to elaborate at this place in detail the approach of Marxists to the issue of the constitution. For this we refer readers to other writings of the RCIT where we elaborate on this issue in more detail.<sup>33</sup> In this chapter, we will only summarize our most important conclusions.

The slogan of the *Constituent Assembly* has played a central role in revolutionary democratic struggles already in the epoch of bourgeois revolutions. As the great historians of the French Revolution in 1789-94 demonstrated, the Constituent Assembly was already a focus of the liberation struggle at that time.<sup>34</sup> This was also the case in the revolutionary upheavals in Europe in 1848 as well as in the Russian Revolution in 1905 and 1917. The writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin at that time are ample testimony to this fact. And it has continued to play an important in numerous revolutions since then.

In itself, the Constituent Assembly is basically a body that is elected for the sole purpose of elaborating and deciding on the constitution of a state. It is therefore a place where the representatives of the antagonistic classes can present their competing programs of how society should be run. Hence, a Constituent Assembly is the most radical democratic form within bourgeois democracy as it involves the popular classes in a debate over the political and economic structure of society.

As Marxists we don't entertain any illusions that socialism can be peacefully introduced via such an assembly. The overthrow and expropriation of the capitalist class is a question of power which ultimately will be decided by means of an armed confrontation between the ruling and oppressed classes.

However, this does not mean that Marxists should ignore such bodies. We are in favor of utilizing all possible institutions in order to advocate the full program for a revolutionary transformation of society. Such work can also help to demonstrate to the popular masses who entertain illusions in such bodies that these institutions cannot solve the fundamental problems of the society.

In order to make such Constituent Assembly as democratic and radical as possible, Marxists propose that deputies should be elected on the basis of local popular assemblies; they should be perpetually recallable by their constituents, and they should receive the salary of a skilled worker.

The recent events in Chile as well as numerous other examples before have demonstrated that democratic slogans in general and the slogan for a Constituent Assembly in particular can be posed in either a revolutionary way or a reformist way. Reformists raise democratic demands as an appeal to

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<sup>33</sup> See our essays mentioned above: *The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today; The Slogan of the Constituent Assembly in the Great Arab Revolution*

<sup>34</sup> See e.g. Jules Michelet: *Geschichte der Französischen Revolution*, Hoffmann und Campe, Hamburg 1931, Vol.1-5; Pjotr Kropotki: *Die Französische Revolution 1789-1793*, Verlag Theod. Thomas, Leipzig 1909; Albert Soboul: *Kurze Geschichte der Französischen Revolution.*, Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin 1988

the bourgeois state and focus on the parliamentary road instead of mobilizing the working class and popular masses. The demand for a Constituent Assembly is usually posed by the reformists and centrists as a proposal to the ruling class to convoke such an assembly. However under such circumstances a Constituent Assembly can only be an instrument of the ruling class since it will be controlled by them.

In contrast to reformists and centrists, revolutionaries call not for a conciliatory Constituent Assembly that can only end up pacifying the masses but rather for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*. This means a Constituent Assembly that is convened and controlled by the fighting masses organized in councils of action and armed militias. In other words, such an assembly will be the result of a revolutionary upsurge in which the working class and the oppressed take power or have at least initiated a period of dual power.

Under which conditions should Marxists raise the slogan of a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*? We don't think that this is a universal slogan which can or should be applied in all countries or under each and every condition. In our founding program – “*The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*” – we defined our approach to this slogan as follows:

*“Where there are basic issues of political sovereignty on the agenda and there is still no awareness among the masses about the superiority of proletarian council democracy, in certain phases the slogan of a revolutionary Constituent Assembly can be important. Bolshevik-Communists advocate that the delegates should be controllable and open to recall by its people. Thus such a Constituent Assembly cannot easily become an instrument of the ruling class, they should not be called by a bourgeois government, but by a revolutionary government of workers and peasants’ councils.”*<sup>35</sup>

Hence, we propose to raise this slogan in situations where the struggle or the objective conditions of the capitalist political type of rule pose fundamental questions of democracy. This can be the case in countries where military dictatorship or less authoritarian forms of bourgeois rule exist (e.g. various forms of Bonapartism or semi-Bonapartism) or where the class struggle puts fundamental questions of the country's political constitution on the agenda (e.g. the excessive powers of bourgeois state apparatus in Chile, the sectarian constitutions in Lebanon and Iraq or the long-lasting conflict on Brexit in Britain). As long as the workers and popular masses still entertain illusions in bourgeois democracy, Marxists should advocate in such situation the slogan of the *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*.

#### **IV. Is the Constituent Assembly a road to socialism?**

Before we begin with elaborating our critique of several Argentine-based organizations which stand in the tradition of Trotskyism, we want to make a brief remark on some other groups which denounce the application of the slogan of the Constituent Assembly in Latin American countries in a sectarian way. There are various organizations, usually based in Western imperialist countries, which have stated that the slogan of the Constituent Assembly must not be applied in Latin America. Among

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<sup>35</sup> RCIT: *The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto* (2012), p. 46, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/revolutionary-struggle-for-democracy/>

them are the IMT led by Alan Woods, Jan Norden's Internationalist Group, the Spartacists of the late Jim Robertson or the US/New Zealand-based CWG. We refer readers for a comprehensive criticism of the wrong positions of these organizations to other works which the RCIT has published in the past.<sup>36</sup> At this point we limit ourselves to draw attention to the obvious fact that the issue of constitution plays a prominent role in the current global wave of class struggles. This demonstrates very powerfully how important it is for revolutionaries not to ignore this issue but to relate to these democratic struggles by raising the slogan of the Constituent Assembly in a revolutionary way (instead of renouncing it altogether)!

However, in this essay we rather want to deal with the approach of some sizeable Argentine-based Trotskyist organizations and how they are applying the slogan of the Constituent Assembly in the current conjuncture. In particular, we want to deal with two essential questions:

- 1) What is the role of the Constituent Assembly in the strategy of socialist revolution?
- 2) Under which conditions can the Constituent Assembly play a progressive role in the class struggle and under which conditions is this not possible?

Let us begin with the question of the role of the Constituent Assembly in the strategy of socialist revolution. There exists a long tradition among several Trotskyist tendencies based in Latin America to view the slogan of the Constituent Assembly as one of fundamental and strategic importance for the road to socialism. The late Nahuel Moreno, one of the historic figures of post-war Latin American Trotskyism, arrived at the conclusion that revolutionaries should fight for a Constituent Assembly not only in Latin American countries but in all countries around the globe. In his famous *Theses on Trotsky's Transitional Program*, Moreno stated in 1980: "*Hence the enormous importance the slogan of Constitutional Assembly or something like that, has acquired in all countries of the world.*"<sup>37</sup>

Hence, organizations in the tradition of Moreno have always attributed a strategic and universal significance to the slogan of the Constitutional Assembly.<sup>38</sup> Here is not the place to deal in more detail with the strength and weaknesses of the tradition of Morenoism and we refer readers interested in this subject to other works.<sup>39</sup>

Today, most significant organizations of Latin America-based Trotskyism have adopted Moreno's methodological approach to the question of the Constitutional Assembly. One can see this very clearly in Argentina which is the country where most of these currents have their strong base. The platform of the "*Frente de Izquierda y de Trabajadores - Unidad*" (FIT-U) for the national elections held in late October 2019 demonstrates this very clearly. FIT-U is an alliance which unites most self-proclaimed Trotskyist organizations and which is dominated by the two largest forces in that country – the *Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas* (PTS) and the *Partido Obrero* (PO). The PTS is the dominating section of the

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<sup>36</sup> We have criticised the positions of these organizations in more detail in chapter 8 of our pamphlet "The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today" (IMT, Spartacists, IG) respectively chapter IV of our essay "The Slogan of the Constituent Assembly in the Great Arab Revolution" (CWG).

<sup>37</sup> Nahuel Moreno: *The Transitional Program Today* (1980); in English: Ediciones El Socialista, Buenos Aires, 2014, p. 72

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. chapter 8 of Michael Pröbsting: *The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today*.

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. LRCI: *Barbaric Trotskyism: a History of Morenoism* (Part 1); in *Trotskyist International* No.1 (1988), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/morenoism-part-1/> and *Barbaric Trotskyism: a History of Morenoism* (Part 2); in *Trotskyist International* No.9 (1992), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/morenoism-part-2/>

international organization called *Fracción Trotskista - Cuarta Internacional* (FT-CI)<sup>40</sup> and the PO runs the (effectively defunct) “*Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International*” (CRFI).<sup>41</sup>

The electoral platform of these organizations raises, after listing a number of democratic and economic demands, the following slogan: “*For a Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly that discusses and decides emergency measures necessary to satisfy the most urgent needs of the working-class population and push for a transformation of the whole country on a new social basis.*”<sup>42</sup>

This slogan reflects the fact that both PTS/FT as well as PO/CRFI broadly agree on the same approach. This becomes evident from the way how these two organizations raise the slogan of the Constitutional Assembly in Argentina as well as other countries. Matias Maiello, an academic at the University of Buenos Aires and also a leader of the PTS, wrote in an article debating with the PO the approach of this slogan for Argentina: “*When we say that a free and sovereign Constituent Assembly has “power,” what we mean is that there is no institution of the bourgeois regime that can limit it, review it or veto its decisions, that it has full freedom to address all the nation’s problems, to address popular demands and to adopt emergency measures that make the capitalists pay for the crisis and solve these problems in a sovereign fashion. With all this we can only agree. In this sense, the free and sovereign Constituent Assembly that is proposed does not only replace the government but all institutions of the regime.*”<sup>43</sup>

The same methodological approach is put forward by the PTS/FT in Chile today. In a central article by its section in Chile, the comrades raise a kind of transitional program – including the expropriation of core sectors of the bourgeoisie – for adoption by a “*Truly Democratic, Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly*”.<sup>44</sup>

“*Only via the methods of class struggle, a political general strike (...) can Piñera be removed and a solution in the interests of the workers be imposed. As Juan Valenzuela (a leader of the FT in Chile, Ed.) stated, we revolutionary socialists propose in this spirit a truly free and sovereign Constituent Assembly on the ruins of the inherited regime to solve all fundamental measures while, at the same time, we fight for a government of the working people to finally overthrow the capitalists.*”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For a critical discussion of the PTS/FT’s approach on several important international issues like the class character of China and Russia as well as the Arab Revolution see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* (see chapter X); Michael Pröbsting: *Syria and Great Power Rivalry: The Failure of the „Left“*. The bleeding Syrian Revolution and the recent Escalation of Inter-Imperialist Rivalry between the US and Russia – A Marxist Critique of Social Democracy, Stalinism and Centrism, 21 April 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/syria-great-power-rivalry-and-the-failure-of-the-left/>

<sup>41</sup> A critical discussion of the PO/CRFI current can be read here: Michael Pröbsting: *Some Thoughts on the Split in the Argentinean “Partido Obrero”*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/split-in-argentinean-partido-obrero/>; Michael Pröbsting: *The Catastrophic Failure of the Theory of “Catastrophism”. On the Marxist Theory of Capitalist Breakdown and its Misinterpretation by the Partido Obrero (Argentina) and its “Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International”, RCIT Pamphlet, May 2018, https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-catastrophic-failure-of-the-theory-of-catastrophism/*; Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* (see chapter IX. as well as chapter XXV).

<sup>42</sup> *20 Points: The Workers Left Front in Argentina Presents its Platform*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.leftvoice.org/20-points-the-workers-left-front-in-argentina-presents-its-platform>

<sup>43</sup> Matias Maiello: *Argentina: The National Crisis and the Proposal for a Constituent Assembly*, October 12, 2018, <http://www.leftvoice.org/Argentina-The-National-Crisis-and-the-Proposal-for-a-Constituent-Assembly>

<sup>44</sup> Pablo Torres: *Chile: What Kind of Constituent Assembly is Needed?* 1 November 2019, <https://www.leftvoice.org/chile-what-kind-of-constituent-assembly-is-needed>

<sup>45</sup> Matias Maiello: *Chile y el nuevo ciclo de lucha de clases en América Latina*, 27.10.2019, <http://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Chile-y-el-nuevo-ciclo-de-lucha-de-clases-en-America-Latina> (our translation;

While they differ with the PTS/FT on some secondary issues, the PO – or more precisely both wings of PO since they experienced a devastating split recently <sup>46</sup> – essentially share the same approach. It raises the slogan of a “*sovereign Constituent Assembly*” as the central tactic for Argentina as well as for Chile: “*This puts a sovereign Constituent Assembly at the order of the day, aimed at removing and putting an end to the inheritance left by the Chilean dictator and taking all the steps towards an integral transformation of the country upon new social bases. This undertaking can only be the work of the workers and must be enforced by striking and popular demonstrations.*” <sup>47</sup>

We remark, as an aside, that the PO/CRFI and its historic leader Jorge Altamira view the slogan of a “*free and sovereign Constituent Assembly*” as a universal slogan which should be raised not only in Latin America but even in countries like North and South Korea. <sup>48</sup>

The essential problem is, as we can see, that both PTS/FT as well as PO/CRFI agree on a fundamental issue: that they designate such a “*truly democratic, free and sovereign Constituent Assembly*” with the task to “*transform the country upon a new social bases*” respectively to “*solve all fundamental measures*”.

## V. A kind of “constitutional cretinism”

We consider such a method as a fundamental reformist deviation from the Marxist approach to the slogan of a Constituent Assembly. It is certainly true that revolutionaries have to raise a socialist program when agitating as deputies within a Constituent Assembly. This is effectively true for all institutions in which Marxist work. For example, a revolutionary deputy in a bourgeois parliament would also be obliged to raise such demands. However, the purpose of raising such demands – from the right of abortion to the expropriation of the big bourgeoisie – in such institutions is to demonstrate what the Marxists stand for and, in contrast, what the reformists and populists stand for since the latter usually would not be ready to support such measures. However, it is a kind of *parliamentary cretinism* – or, more precisely, it is a kind of *constitutional cretinism* – to spread the illusion among the working class and the popular masses that such a Constituent Assembly could *solve* all the fundamental problems!

In fact, what we see here is a kind of Latin American version of a similar opportunist method for which the Britain-based tradition of Ted Grant, Peter Taaffe and Alan Woods has become infamous (today this tradition is represented by the two wings both claiming to represent the authentic “*Committee for a Workers’ International*”, by the “*International Marxist Tendency*” and by other smaller

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to our knowledge, this article has not been translated in English but only in German (<https://www.klassegegenklasse.org/chile-und-der-neue-zyklus-des-klassenkampfes-in-lateinamerika/>).

<sup>46</sup> See on this e.g. Partido Obrero: Altamira y su grupo rompen con el Partido Obrero, 30 June 2019, <https://po.org.ar/comunicados/2396-altamira-y-su-grupo-rompen-con-el-partido-obrero>

<sup>47</sup> Partido Obrero: Working-class and rural Latin America against the IMF’s austerity, November 2, 2019 <http://redmed.org/article/working-class-and-rural-latin-america-against-imfs-austerity>

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Jorge Altamira: World Panorama, in: World Revolution / Revolución Mundial Issue 1 (Autumn 2018), p. 19

groupings). As we have discussed somewhere else, the CWI/IMT tradition has over decades defended the reformist idea that a transformation towards socialism can be accomplished via parliament.<sup>49</sup>

Unfortunately, PTS/FT and PO/CRFI apply the same reformist method to the Constituent Assembly. In one case it is the parliament, in the other the Constituent Assembly – but essentially they are both applying the same methodological opportunist deviation from authentic Marxism!

In contrast, revolutionaries view a Constituent Assembly not as an instrument to accomplish the socialist transformation but as *the freest possible arena for the open struggle between the representatives of the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between the reformists and the Marxists*. In an essay on this issue, we wrote:

*“What is a Constituent Assembly? Basically it is a body that is elected for the sole purpose of elaborating and deciding on the constitution of a state. It is therefore a place where the representatives of the antagonistic classes can present their competing programs of how society should be run. Marxists don’t have the illusion that socialism can be peacefully introduced via such an assembly. In contrast to the centrist confusionists like Peter Taaffe’s CWI or Alan Woods’ IMT, we are fully aware of the fact that the transformation of capitalism into socialism is not possible via a peaceful road – neither by a Constituent Assembly, a parliament, nor any other institution. This is a question of power which ultimately will be decided by means of an armed confrontation between the ruling and oppressed classes.*

*However, revolutionaries advocate utilizing a Constituent Assembly to propagate the full program for a revolutionary transformation of society and in this way expose the treacherous reformist and openly bourgeois leaders. Calling for a Constituent Assembly takes into account that the popular masses still retain illusions concerning the realization of their legitimate aspirations within the terrain of bourgeois democracy. A Constituent Assembly is the most radical democratic form within bourgeois democracy as it involves the popular classes in a debate over the political and economic structure of society. To ensure such participation the deputies of a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly should be elected on the basis of local popular assemblies; they should be perpetually recallable by their constituents, and they should receive the salary of a skilled worker.”<sup>50</sup>*

In short, the Constituent Assembly can be a useful instrument in order to unmask the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois traitors and thereby help to win the majority of the working class for the task of the socialist revolution. However, such a socialist revolution will have to be carried out by workers and popular councils and militias and via the road of armed insurrection and civil war.

This is also how the Marxist classics approached this issue. Lenin opened his famous document on the Constituent Assembly at the end of 1917 with the following theses:

*„1. The demand for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly was a perfectly legitimate part of the programme of revolutionary Social-Democracy, because in a bourgeois republic the Constituent Assembly represents the highest form of democracy and because, in setting up a pre-parliament, the imperialist republic headed by Kerensky was preparing to rig the elections and violate democracy in a number of ways.*

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<sup>49</sup> See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Five days that shook Britain but didn’t wake up the left. The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 1 (2011), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/>; see also our comprehensive pamphlet on the CWI which can be downloaded as a pdf here: <https://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revolutionarycommunism-new-series-20-21/>

<sup>50</sup> Michael Pröbsting: The Slogan of the Constituent Assembly in the Great Arab Revolution

2. While demanding the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, revolutionary Social-Democracy has ever since the beginning of the Revolution of 1917 repeatedly emphasised that a republic of Soviets is a higher form of democracy than the usual bourgeois republic with a Constituent Assembly.

3. For the transition from the bourgeois to the socialist system, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Republic of Soviets (of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies) is not only a higher type of democratic institution (as compared with the usual bourgeois republic crowned by a Constituent Assembly), but is the only form capable of securing the most painless transition to socialism."<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, Trotsky explained in a letter to Chinese revolutionaries that the experience of the Russian Revolution in 1917 demonstrated the following:

*"Even if the Soviets were a fact – which is not the case in China at present – this in itself would not be cause enough for the abandonment of the slogan of the National Assembly. The majority in the Soviets may be (and at the beginning will certainly be) in the hands of conciliatory and centrist parties and organizations. We will be interested to have these parties exposed in the open forum of the National Assembly. By this method the majority of the Soviets will be won over to our side sooner, and much more certainly. When our conquest of the majority will become a reality, we will counter-pose the program of the Soviets against the program of the National Assembly, we will gather the majority of the country around the banner of the Soviets, which will give us the possibility, in deed and not on paper, to replace the National Assembly, this parliamentary-democratic institution, by Soviets, as the organ of the revolutionary class dictatorship.*

*In Russia, the Constituent Assembly existed only for one day. Why? Because it made its appearance too late, when the Soviet power was already in existence, and came into conflict with it. In this conflict, the Constituent Assembly represented the yesterday of the Revolution. But let us suppose that the bourgeois provisional government had been sufficiently decisive to convene the Constituent Assembly in March or April (1917). Was it possible? Naturally it was. (...) Would we Bolsheviks have participated in the elections and in the Assembly itself? Undoubtedly, for it was we who demanded all the time the speediest convening of the Constituent Assembly. Would the course of the revolution have changed to the disadvantage of the proletariat by an early convening of the Assembly? Not at all. Perhaps you remember that the representatives of the Russian possessing classes and following them also the conciliators were postponing all the important questions of the revolution "until the Constituent Assembly", at the same time also dragging out the convening of it. This gave the landowners and capitalists a possibility to mask to a certain extent their property interests in the agrarian question, industrial, etc. If the Constituent Assembly would have convened let us say in April 1917 then all the social questions would have been raised before them. The possessing classes would have been compelled to show their cards, the treacherous role of the conciliators would have been apparent, the Bolshevik faction of the Constituent Assembly would have acquired the greatest popularity and have assisted the Soviets to elect a Bolshevik majority. Under these circumstances the Constituent Assembly would have existed not one day but possibly several months but that would have enriched the political experiences of the laboring masses and not only would not have retarded the proletarian revolution but would rather have accelerated it."<sup>52</sup>*

To avoid any misunderstanding: Marxists are definitely not indifferent to the specific bourgeois political superstructure formation under which the working class can organize and fight. Even the smallest democratic achievement should not be dismissed by Marxists as it improves the conditions

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<sup>51</sup> V. I. Lenin: Theses on the Constituent Assembly (1917), in: LCW Vol. 26, p. 379

<sup>52</sup> Leon Trotsky: The Slogan of the National Assembly in China (1930), The Militant, Vol. III No. 23, 14 June 1930, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/04/china.htm>

for the working class and oppressed to organize and to fight. We prefer bourgeois democracy to fascism, we prefer more bourgeois democracy compared to less bourgeois democracy. Hence, as the RCIT has explained many times, the working class has to defend without hesitation bourgeois democracy against any form of reactionary military coup.<sup>53</sup> But this does not mean that Marxists have the right to spread petty-bourgeois illusions about advancing towards socialism via a Constituent Assembly!

This has also been the approach of Trotsky, In an essay written in 1937 on the Spanish Revolution he stated: *“Before 1934 we explained to the Stalinists tirelessly that even in the imperialist epoch democracy continued to be preferable to fascism; that is, in all cases where hostile clashes take place between them, the revolutionary proletariat is obliged to support democracy against fascism. However, we always added: We can and must defend bourgeois democracy not by bourgeois democratic means but by the methods of class struggle, which in turn pave the way for the replacement of bourgeois democracy by the dictatorship of the proletariat. This means in particular that in the process of defending bourgeois democracy, even with arms in hand, the party of the proletariat takes no responsibility for bourgeois democracy, does not enter its government, but maintains full freedom of criticism and of action in relation to all parties of the Popular Front, thus preparing the overthrow of bourgeois democracy at the next stage.”*<sup>54</sup>

We conclude this chapter by drawing attention to an ironic incident. More than 25 years ago, the comrades of the Argentinean PTS wrote in a polemic against LIT that the Morenoite tradition is advocating *“the Constituent Assembly as a privileged way to socialism in Argentina”*.<sup>55</sup> This was and remains obviously true. However, today the PTS comrades have forgotten this criticism and have adopted the same approach!

## **VI. A socialist transformation without armed struggle?**

Furthermore, while we think it is correct to apply the Constituent Assembly as a crucial slogan for countries like Chile today (for reasons outlined above), we consider it as utterly wrong to do the same in Argentina today. In Chile, we have a constitution inherited from the era of the military dictatorship of Pinochet, a revolutionary situation with militant mass mobilizations to which the state apparatus responded with killing dozens of people as well as the widespread popular demand for changes in the constitution. In such a situation, it is absolutely necessary to raise the slogan for a Constituent Assembly. However, in Argentina, there exists a completely different situation. Neither is there a (pre-)revolutionary situation, not even any significant mass mobilizations, nor is there a widespread popular demand for changes in the constitution. Even if one would say that it is legitimate to raise this

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<sup>53</sup> See on this e.g. the essay by Michael Pröbsting: Military Coups and Revolutionary Tactics. Some Theoretical Thoughts on Different Types of Coups in the Present Period and the Consequential Tasks of Marxist Revolutionaries, 5 December 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/military-coups-and-revolutionary-tactics/>

<sup>54</sup> Leon Trotsky: Is Victory Possible in Spain? (1937), in: Leon Trotsky: The Spanish Revolution (1931-39), Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 257

<sup>55</sup> Manolo Romano: Polemic with the LIT and the Theoretical Legacy of Nahuel Moreno, PTS; in: Estrategia Internacional N°3 (December 1993 / January 1994), [http://www.ft.org.ar/estrategia/ei3polemica\\_con\\_lit\\_english.html](http://www.ft.org.ar/estrategia/ei3polemica_con_lit_english.html)



slogan in Argentina today, it is definitely wrong to put it forward as the central, crowning slogan – in combination with an opportunist version of the workers government slogan – of an electoral program!

The comrades of the PTS/FT might point out that they also warn in their articles that the bourgeoisie will rally their forces against such a transitional program adopted by a Constituent Assembly. Such they wrote in one of the articles mentioned above: *“If an emergency program like the one we are proposing is implemented, it will likely come up against the violent opposition of the big capitalists, who will defend all their privileges tooth and nail alongside their repressive state. That is why it is more urgent than ever to form assemblies and coordinating committees at workplaces, schools and universities, and in neighborhoods. These must be bodies of genuinely democratic self-organization, such as the Emergency and Protection Committee of Antofagasta, bodies of the rank-and-file who are opposed by the union and social bureaucracies of the Social Unity Roundtable, led by the PC and the FA. These bodies are the only ones that can impose a solution that is favorable for working people and allow these emergency measures to be carried out. The struggle to defeat the resistance of big business leaders will form the basis for the struggle for a workers’ government that confiscates the wealth of the capitalists; a workers’ and people’s government that, based on the masses’ organizations of self-determination, can fully and effectively realize our social and democratic aspirations, and refound the country on new social bases.”*<sup>56</sup>

However, this does not solve the problem but rather opens an additional opportunist trap. First, if the bourgeoisie would not accept any radical transformation originating from the Constituent Assembly (as the PTS/FT says), why do they claim in their propaganda that such a Constituent Assembly indeed could embody the fundament for starting such a transformation to socialism?! This is, to put it diplomatically, a non-dialectical contradiction in itself.

Secondly, the last long quote which refers to the workers government reflects another opportunist deviation of the PTS/FT (as well as the PO/CRFI). If the ruling class will mobilize its forces against any radical transformation (which is obviously a correct assumption), how does the PTS/FT plan to counter this threat? In this article – as well as in the other documents cited above – they talk about workers government as well as workers and popular councils. This is all fine and well, but none of this will stop a military coup or any other forceful attempt of the ruling class to defend their power!

A Marxist organization has to explain that a socialist transformation cannot take place in a peaceful way. In order to defeat the bourgeois counterrevolution it is necessary to organize workers and popular militias so that the reactionary forces can be defeated in the inevitable civil war. The RCIT has stated in its *Manifesto*: *“Contrary to the illusions of the left social democrats, Stalinist and various centrists (e.g., CWI, IMT), the socialist transformation cannot take place via parliamentary elections or in a gradual, peaceful way. All historic experience - both of successful socialist revolutions like Russia’s in 1917-21, bureaucratic social revolutions (e.g., Cuba in 1959-61, China in 1945-49), unfinished democratic revolutions (e.g., Nicaragua or Iran in 1979), or even stranded revolutions like the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, Chile of 1973, the Arab Revolutions since 2011, etc. - demonstrates that the ruling class will never give up its power peacefully. The working class and the oppressed can only take power and overthrow capitalism if they organize themselves - under the leadership of a revolutionary party - in popular militias and prepares for armed insurrection, civil war and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only means by which the struggle for liberation can be advanced.”*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Pablo Torres: Chile: What Kind of Constituent Assembly is Needed?

<sup>57</sup> RCIT: Manifesto for Revolutionary Liberation (2016), p. 22, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-program-2016/>

Unfortunately, the need for workers and popular militias and the warning of the inevitable armed confrontation with the ruling class is nowhere mentioned in all these documents of PTS/FT and PO/CRFI! They simply suggest that a transitional program and the socialist transformation would be possible to achieve without arming of the working class and without a violent struggle! Again, we see that Ted Grant, Peter Taaffe and Alan Woods have found new opportunist pupils in Latin America!

We agreed above with the PTS criticism – stated more than 25 years ago – about the mistaken approach to the Constituent Assembly as a privileged road to socialism. However, we need to go a step further. The tactic of the Constituent Assembly is no road to socialism at all! It is an important tactic of revolutionary democracy which, under specific circumstances, can help to prepare the road of struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie. In other words, it is a side track which leads to the road to socialism – no more, no less.

## VII. A “de- revolutionization” or “social democratization” of Marxism

What is the basis of such opportunist deviations? The reason is not very difficult to identify. The major Trotskyist organizations in Argentina experienced some electoral successes since 2011. They managed to win several deputies in national as well as regional parliaments. This has undoubtedly increased the illusion among their leaders that they can achieve a significant breakthrough via electoral work. As they are lacking a clear programmatic and theoretical Marxist fundament, they hope to become a respected force – respected by the bourgeois media, the academic world and left-wing sectors among the trade union bureaucracy – by moderating their program and making it more “acceptable” for a “broader audience”. Such pressure on left-wing parties who experience some success in parliamentary elections is a phenomenon which one could observe many times in the history of the revolutionary workers movement. As said above, Marxists have a category for this – *parliamentary cretinism*.

However, the hopes of the FIT leaders to achieve an electoral breakthrough suffered a serious setback at the last elections in October 2019. Not only did it lose a quarter of the votes which it received at the PASO elections two months earlier. It also experiences a long-term decline in electoral terms as an Argentine group reports:

*“In the presidential elections, the FIT-U, made up of four groups that declare allegiance to Trotskyism (PO, PTS, IS and MST), have gone from 3.23 percent (812,000 votes) in 2015, to 2.16 percent (580,000 votes) at present. In the elections for national deputies they have fallen from 4.90 percent (1,156,000 votes) in 2017 (5.4 percent and 1,250,000 votes if we include the MST, which stood separately that year) to three percent (760,000 votes) at present. Almost half a million votes have been lost. In 2013 (their historical election campaign, with a lot of media visibility, in which they won 5.25 percent and 1,224,000 votes, without counting the MST) they won three deputies. In 2015 they reached four, in 2017 they were reduced to three and now they only have one deputy.”*<sup>58</sup>

True, FIT still has a sizeable electoral support. However, it is a sheer illusion to imagine that a revolutionary party could be built primarily via such electoral work. Participation in parliamentary

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<sup>58</sup> Corriente Socialista Militante: Argentina: 2019 elections – prepare for the future! 08 November 2019, <https://www.marxist.com/argentina-2019-elections-prepare-for-the-future.htm>

elections can be absolutely useful and justified. It can help to raise the prestige and spread the ideas of revolutionary Marxism. However, all this can only help to prepare for the real class battles – the (pre-)revolutionary events as we see them currently in various countries around the world. These are the struggle – and not the electoral work – which can enable a revolutionary organization to achieve breakthroughs!

We conclude this essay by drawing attention to the following situation. We don't think that the *constitutional cretinism* of PTS/FT and PO/CRFI is an exceptional phenomenon. It is rather part of a general crisis of leadership. Numerous organizations claiming adherence to Trotskyism have undergone a process of political degeneration. In our founding *Manifesto* we noted: *"In this deep crisis of leadership - combined with the possibilities of the imperialist bourgeoisie for the systematic bribery of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy - the ultimate cause can be found in the extraordinary bourgeoisification of the labour movement and the De-revolutionisation of Marxism, as is has been distorted by left reformism, centrism and the left-wing academics in recent decades."*<sup>59</sup>

The following characterization put forward by the Argentinean *"La Marx"* group – a split from the PTS – is also an appropriate formulation: they talk about a *"process of social democratization"* of these Trotskyist organizations.<sup>60</sup>

Whatever categories one uses, the essential issue is the deep crisis of leadership of the working class. Trotsky has always emphasized the significance of this question. It is a tragedy of history that today many self-proclaimed Trotskyist organizations have themselves become part of this problem!

This is even more tragic given the fact that the class struggle is experiencing extraordinary leaps forward. If we don't advance in overcoming the crisis of leadership, our class will inevitably suffer serious defeats and setbacks!

Hence, it is of utmost importance that revolutionary militants in PTS/FT, PO/CRFI as well as other self-proclaimed Trotskyist organizations break with all forms of opportunist deviation and return to the path of revolutionary Marxism! The RCIT is ready to discuss these issues and to listen to the experiences, insights, and arguments of these comrades. We are committed to working hand-in-hand with you in the construction of a healthy, revolutionary international based on authentic Marxist principles!

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<sup>59</sup> RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto (2012), p. 24

<sup>60</sup> Declaración de La Marx y Reagrupamiento hacia el PST! 23.05.2019, <https://wwwprotagonistascomar.blogspot.com/2019/05/declaracion-de-la-marx-y-reagrupamiento.html>