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The Constituent Assembly and other questions arising from the recent uprisings in Latin America

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Anti-government protest, 22 October, Plaza Baquedano, Santiago, Chile (Photo: Carlos Figueroa, Wikimedia Commons)

PART 1

The Constituent Assembly and other questions arising from the recent uprisings in Latin America.

1 The explosive mass movements which have rocked Latin America, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran and some other countries have opened a new chapter in the struggle against capitalism. These revolutionary movements all have their particularly unique characteristics but many also have common features. They are an expression of the mass anger and opposition to the ruling classes, neo-liberalism, nepotism and corruption which has accumulated over decades. These heroic movements have generally assumed a class character, uniting workers and the oppressed across ethnic, religious and gender divides in a common struggle. A generation of new young workers and students has been at the forefront of these titanic events.

2 These mass movements have included many classic elements of revolution and the traditional forms of struggle of the working class including the call for strikes and general strikes. They have also included new features. They have taken place internationally under the shadow of the consequences of the collapse of the bureaucratic Stalinist regimes of the former USSR and Eastern Europe and the capitalist ideological offensive against "socialism" which followed. They have taken place with no strong parties of the working class or left existing. In the past the former parties of the working class, even if on a reformist basis, defended

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the idea of socialism. In general they have now abandoned any idea of struggling for socialism and embrace capitalism. The hostility towards the former parties of the working class like the Socialist Party in Chile has been palpable as is the loss of authority of the Communist Party in Chile and other countries - especially amongst the younger generation.

3. The social uprisings have been of a spontaneous character, lacking organisation and leadership. The spontaneity in these events, especially in Chile, has on the one hand been their strength. Had the reformist and Stalinist former workers' parties been at the head of them they would have acted as a brake on the movement and probably prevented them from going as far as they have.

4. At the same time, the absence of organisation and leadership has also been the weakness of the movements. They lack a clear programme, organisation and strategy to take them forward. The limits of a spontaneous movement are now colliding with the tasks posed of how not only to oppose the existing government and system but to put an alternative in its place.

5. For four months protests involving millions have shaken Chile to its foundations. Support for the Pinera government has collapsed, with approval ratings standing at a pathetic 6% - mainly amongst its rich friends. It lacks any credibility or authority. According to one poll in January 2020, 56% support the continuation of protests against the government. The government floats like a corpse on the sea of Chilean humanity which has flooded onto the streets. Yet it still remains in power. No alternative has yet crystallised.

6. In many revolutionary situations a period of dual power can develop where both the ruling class and the working class hold each other in check. The ruling class cannot rule in the old way but the working class has not yet seized the power and formed its own alternative government and state apparatus. Such a situation cannot continue indefinitely and one side or the other must eventually prevail. Despite the collapse in authority and credibility of Pinera's regime, however, and the scale of the mass movement, especially in November 2019, the situation did not develop into one of dual power. The lack of cohesion and organisation of the mass movement still permitted the government to continue to function, albeit with little authority or credibility.

7. Elsewhere the heroic unified movements in Lebanon and Iraq, which are still continuing, have to confront the sectarian interventions of Hezbollah in the Lebanon, Sadr in Iraq, and others trying to split and divide the movement.

8. In all of these uprisings the crucial issues of programme, organisation, tactics and strategy are now sharply posed. Related to these is the question of the political consciousness which exists amongst the working class and the masses, and also the middle class. These are critical questions for the workers and youth involved in these struggles, and for Marxists. There are important lessons from these revolutionary movements which need to be applied in the battles that erupt in other countries in the coming months and years.

9. In the revolutionary events which have rocked Latin America three central issues have arisen which it is necessary for Marxists to address.

10. Firstly, the demand for a Constituent Assembly, which has acquired mass support, especially in Chile. This demand is echoed in some other Latin American countries and is relevant to the protests in Iraq, Lebanon, Iran and some other countries.

11. Secondly, there are questions of the organisation of the working class and the oppressed masses in such movements together with the question of a mass workers' party and the need for a revolutionary party to also be built.

12. Thirdly, in Latin America, there is the emergence of the struggles of the 'indigenous' peoples which has been central to the movements in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and also plays a crucial element in Chile through the struggles of the Mapuche people. The scale of this phenomena is a new feature of the class struggle on the continent.

The Constituent Assembly

13. The struggle for a Constituent Assembly has featured in many revolutions – including the bourgeois French revolution of 1789; the Russian revolution in 1917; China in 1927; during the Spanish civil war in the struggle against the Franco dictatorship in Spain in the 1970s and in the struggle against the Pinochet dictatorship in the 1980/90s. In Nigeria it has arisen in the struggle against previous military regimes.

14. The demand for a revolutionary Constituent Assembly or National Assembly is a bourgeois democratic one. It has generally arisen historically in countries like pre-revolutionary Russia or China and others where the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution had not been carried through or fully completed. These tasks - the establishment of a capitalist parliamentary democracy, the development of industry, solution to the land question, abolition of the remnants of feudalism and establishing a nation state - were historically accomplished by the bourgeoisie in a different historical era in what became industrialised capitalist countries. However, in the era of imperialism, this could not be fully completed in the neo-colonial world by the national capitalist class due to its weakness, its ties to and integration with both feudal landlordism and imperialism, and its fear of the working class.

15. As the Russian revolution demonstrated, the completion of these tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution fell to the working class – combining them with the socialist revolution nationally – which, to be successful, had to be international, linking with the working class in the industrialised capitalist countries. These ideas were clarified by Trotsky in the theory of the Permanent Revolution which Lenin after 1917 also agreed with.

16. Under the conditions of semi-feudal or semi-capitalist societies, or under a military dictatorship, democratic demands for a national parliament or assembly are of crucial importance. In those countries where the revolution has a combined character of the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution and the socialist revolution, it can be a vital question. The illusions that 'democracy' will result in the solution of all issues facing the

masses is extremely powerful in such conditions. In pre-bourgeois societies, or where the tasks of the bourgeois revolution have not been fully carried through, the question of a constituent assembly is important as a means to carry through such tasks as land reform and the unification of the nation, and reflects the class relations in those societies between the working class, the peasantry and the middle class.

The Russian Revolution

17. The Soviets in the Russian revolution were a working class phenomena. They later penetrated significant layers of the peasantry. The demand for a Constituent Assembly assumed great significance for a period. However, the delay in convening it resulted in the Constituent Assembly being by-passed and superseded by the Soviets which were based on the working class, later with the support of big layers of the peasantry – especially the poorer peasants. The experience of the Russian revolution illustrated that the demand and struggle for a Constituent Assembly does not always assume the same importance. Under certain conditions, for a time it can be at the forefront of the demands of a revolutionary party. At other moments it assumes less importance, especially where a more developed form of working-class democracy, such as the Soviets, acquires greater support and authority.

18. Why has the demand for a Constituent Assembly now been taken up by the Chilean masses today? Has there not, after all, been a transition from the military dictatorship of Pinochet to the 'democratic' parliamentary system?

19. The call for a Constituent Assembly is also echoed in some other Latin American countries but in Chile it has assumed a mass character during the recent events. This largely flows from the character of the 'transition' which took place at the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. Despite parliamentary and Presidential elections, a fig leaf of parliamentary democracy was established. The constitution bequeathed by Pinochet remains. The brutal state machine of his regime remains intact and has continued to savagely repress protests and struggles – especially of the youth and the Mapuche people in the south.

20. Moreover, since the transition to 'democracy', every party and government, including that headed by the 'Socialist' Michelle Bachelet has continued to apply the same neo-liberal economic and social



Protesters against neo-liberalism, Chile

policies and failed to challenge the state apparatus. All parties – including the Socialist Party and the Communist Party have been implicated in this.

21. In the minds of the Chilean masses, the idea of a Constituent Assembly is linked with the idea of changing the entire political system and putting an end to the neo-liberal model which has dominated since the military coup in 1973. The Constituent Assembly is seen as a means of solving all of the social problems facing the masses. It was taken up along with the demand to eject the Pinera government and all the existing political parties from power and establishing a “new model”.

22. Yet what the “new model” or alternative system should be is not clearly articulated beyond the idea of a more “just” and “equal society”.

23. What attitude should Marxists therefore adopt towards this question? As in all revolutions or partial revolutions there are two dangers present. One, is to buckle to an opportunist pressure and simply support the call for a Constituent Assembly without explaining what it needs to do to resolve the

social issues and demands of the working class and the masses.

24. Alternatively, simply to dismiss it as a parliamentary trap advocated by the “reformist” or “Stalinist” leadership to derail the movement would be to fall prey to sectarianism.

25. Lamentably, the latter is what the grouping, Izquierda Revolucionaria (IR), in Spain has done. In an article “La lucha de clases golpea el mundo”, published in December 2019, they correctly denounce the proposals of the Chilean government and criticise the role of the Communist Party in participating in the governmental “institutional process”. However, they fail to explain what alternative is necessary. They brush the demand for a Constituent Assembly aside and muddle it with the Pinera government’s proposal for a Constitutional Convention. “The leadership of the movement has converted from the beginning the demand for a Constituent Assembly into the central point” ignoring the enthusiastic mass support which exists for this idea amongst the masses.



Protest in Santiago, Chile

26. While IR concede that for the masses the demand has a very concrete content - to break with the current system, they argue that if the new constitution respects the capitalist order nothing substantial will change. Whilst this is true, what position Marxists should adopt towards this central democratic demand of the masses they leave hanging in mid-air.

27. They make the astounding claim that "In the Russian revolution in 1917, the Bolsheviks did not mobilise the oppressed masses with this demand (Constituent Assembly)". They claim "the Bolsheviks raised the demand for peace, bread and land, and the necessity for the workers – leading the mass of the peasants – to take power and establish a democratic socialist regime."

28. They dismiss the demand for a Constituent Assembly and the need to give it a revolutionary socialist content. Implicitly, in the same article they oppose revolutionaries supporting the struggle for it. Yet this issue was crucial for the Bolsheviks at particular stages of the Russian revolution.

29. Their programme was not only limited to the demands for "bread, peace and land" and a democratic socialist regime. Lenin and Trotsky are crystal clear on this question. In his writings on China, Trotsky explains the situation in Russia prior to the revolution and the approach adopted by the Bolsheviks; "The Cadets used every legal trick to drag out the convening of a Constituent Assembly in the

hope that the revolutionary wave would subside. The Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries took their cue from the Cadets. If the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries had had a little more revolutionary drive, they could have convened the Constituent Assembly in a few weeks. Would we Bolsheviks have participated in the elections and in the assembly itself? Undoubtedly, for it was we who demanded all this time the speediest convening of the Constituent Assembly." (Trotsky 'The slogan of a national assembly in China April 1930. Emphasis in the original). Even before the 1917 revolution three central demands known as the "three whales of Bolshevism" were; the eight hour day, confiscation of the landed estates and a Democratic Republic - the latter of incorporating the idea of a Constituent Assembly.

30. Trotsky, drawing on the experience of the Russian revolution, applied this very concretely to the Chinese revolution in the 1920s, and it formed a part of his critique of the programme and methods adopted by the Stalinists.

Relevance for Chile today

31. The approach adopted by the Bolsheviks is extremely apposite for the situation in Chile today. The masses are clamouring for a Constituent Assembly as a means of resolving all of their social and economic demands. Yet the ruling class, Pinera and the entire official political 'opposition' are doing everything in their power to avoid one.

32. They are not proposing a Constituent Assembly but an undemocratic "Constitutional Convention". The current government proposes a plebiscite in April 2020 asking for a 'yes' or 'no' vote to change the constitution. If the yes win, a Convention will be convened composed of 50% from existing parliamentarians and 50% from "civil society". Any proposed changes to the constitution will then require a two thirds majority before being put to a second plebiscite. It is a trap for the masses in order to avoid calling a genuinely democratic Constituent Assembly.

33. The most right-wing parties, UDI (Independent Democratic Union) and sections of Renovacion Nacional (Pineras party) have declared they will support a 'no' vote regarding any changes to the Pinochet constitution. The 'radical' Frente Amplio has split, with a section of it supporting the Constitutional Convention. Far from diverting the movement towards a Constituent Assembly, the Communist Party, "with doubts" and "reservations" is participating in the fraudulent process proposed by the government. It has called for a 'yes' vote to change the constitution while making its own proposals about the composition of the Convention. It is thereby giving legitimacy to the undemocratic Convention and procedure initiated by the government in response to the mass protests. All the main political parties are doing everything possible to channel the movement away from a Constituent Assembly for fear of what it would mean. If convened, it could expose them and potentially open the road to a greater questioning of their rule. In order to avoid this they are attempting to divert the movement into an institutional dead end which they control.

34. Such a manoeuvre to try and contain the revolutionary movement of the masses was undertaken by the ruling class and reformist and Stalinist leaders in the past. In Spain, the revolutionary movement against the Franco regime was consciously channelled by the Stalinists into a

vote to change the constitution in order to head off revolution. The same was done in Chile at the end of the Pinochet dictatorship through a referendum to allow a "transition." This was used by the leadership at the time to head off an uprising, especially by the youth.

35. Marxists and the CWI support the mass movement and the demand for a Constituent Assembly. It reflects different levels of political consciousness amongst the working class, the peasantry and sections of the petty bourgeois. It is necessary to support it on a revolutionary basis, and link it with the need for the working class to build its own independent organisations to convene it and establish an alternative power – a government of the workers and the poor.

36. Even if a Constituent Assembly is convened by the ruling class - which under certain circumstances it can be - it can become a crucial instrument in the education of the working class and the masses, preparing them to take the revolution to a higher stage.

37. Trotsky emphasises this point again in his writings on China when he speculates that, had the Constituent Assembly been convened earlier in Russia, hypothetically in April, all of the social issues would have confronted it. The ruling class would have been compelled to reveal its position and the treacherous role of the conciliators would have been exposed. This would have assisted the Bolsheviks to win greater support and strengthen their position in the soviets which had been formed in the factories and workplaces. However, as the Russian revolution demonstrated, the demand and struggle for a Constituent Assembly can be overtaken by events. The importance it assumes during a revolutionary process can vary. The speed of events in Russia in 1917 resulted in the struggle for the Constituent Assembly becoming redundant as the tremendous authority and power of the Soviets increased. By the time the Soviets took power in November, the Constituent Assembly had become redundant and represented a previous stage of the class struggle.

38. The demand for a Constituent Assembly directly poses the question of who or what organisations will convene it? It can thus become a bridge to assist workers and the masses to draw the conclusion of the necessity to build their own independent organisations of struggle which can potentially become an alternative power for the working class. In revolutionary Russia in 1917, the working class had, following the 1905 revolution, formed Soviets. These were based on the factories

and workplaces with elected delegates subject to immediate recall. They became the decisive instruments of struggle, and in October the basis for the establishment of a workers' and peasants' government.

39. In Chile today there can be no trust in Pinera or any other government to convene a Constituent Assembly on a democratic basis. The regime clearly has no intention of convening anything more than a fraudulent sham which will be dominated by the hated existing parliamentary parties and political blocks. At the same time, there are no Soviets or similar bodies existing at this stage. It is this aspect of the organisation of the mass movement that now urgently needs to be strengthened in order to take the struggle forward.

The mass movement and independent workers' organisation

40. The only forums so far to emerge at a local or community level in Chile have been the 'Cabildos'. These are local assemblies of residents and neighbours in the local communities or communes. These ad-hoc meetings are not as yet in general established or stable structures.

41. They are not comparable to the Soviets in Russia, or the 'Cordones Industriales' which were formed in the factories in Chile under the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende in 1970-73. The Cordones Industriales were powerful organisations, established by the workers and in opposition to the reformist trade union leaders and the mass Communist Party. In essence, they were embryonic soviet-type structures. Coupled with these, in the local communities JAPs - local councils - were initially established by the government. These became strong community-based organisations, which took measures to control prices and prevent hoarding and speculation during the economic blockade and sabotage imposed by the capitalist class.

42. Today, the absence of such organisations is a weakness in the movement which will need to be overcome if the revolutionary upsurge is to be

successful. The lack of such organisations in part flows from the effects of the collapse of the former Stalinist regimes and the throwing back of political consciousness which flowed from it. It also reflects the changes in the economic structure of capitalism and changed composition of the working class which has affected Chile and many other countries.

43. The decline in the workforce in manufacturing industry in some countries, the absence of large factories and the growth of workers in the service and precarious sectors means that the building of such organisations is more complicated for big sections of the modern working class. This element of a partial change in the composition of the working class is present in many countries. However, on a global scale the industrial working class in manufacturing industry remains the most potentially powerful force. At the same time, new layers of the working class in logistics, transport and other sectors, and big layers of proletarianised former sections of the middle class, are also beginning to adopt the methods of struggle of the working class.

44. It is important that Marxists do not have a fetish about the form of organization that can emerge during revolutionary upsurges. Trotsky, after all, did not insist that the Russian Soviet model be exactly replicated. During the German revolution, for example, he saw the crucial importance of the factory committees which existed in 1923 following the fall in the effectiveness of the trade unions due to economic collapse and hyper-inflation. In the Paris commune of 1871, prior to the development of the modern industrial working class as we know it today, the working class was an emerging force and included a large plebian element. With limited trade unions and larger workplaces, the crucial role in organising the movement was initially played by the Central Committee of the National Guard. This declared itself the legitimate power as opposed to the official mayors of Paris. In March it convened elections to a 92 member council - elected on a geographical basis of one member per 20,000 residents which declared the Commune in March 1871.



mayday chile 2019

Crucial role of the trade unions and working class

45. Today, trade unions, despite their numerical decline and bureaucratic control, remain a crucial and central part of the workers' movement. They can play a decisive role if they have a fighting leadership. It is essential that workers and Marxists fight to transform the trade unions into combative instruments in the hands of the working class. At the same time, other forms of organisations can emerge alongside them. The Soviets in Russia and the Cordones Industriales in Chile also existed alongside the trade unions. The traditional sections of the working class, although weaker numerically in many countries today, can still wield crucial economic power. They can act as

a vital reference point for other social movements and sections of the working class. In Chile, this was illustrated by the dock workers in Valparaiso in 2019 who acted as a powerful reference point for the broader social movement which erupted in the city. Potentially, other layers of the industrial working class, in transport and others sectors, can play a similar role.

46. At the same time, changes in the workforce into smaller workplaces, the expansion of the precarious sector and changes in social conditions, can result in the emergence of other forms of organisation, such as the social and community organisations which have developed in Chile. These can play an important role in organising the struggle, especially when linked together with the trade unions and the workplaces - and this task can assume an important part of the process of rebuilding the workers' movement during revolutionary upsurges such as that in Chile.



Socialism Revolucionario (CWI) supporters participating in 13 November general strike protest in Santiago

47. The emergence of the 'Cabildos' in the local communes (neighbourhoods) in Chile potentially can play a crucial role in the next stage of the struggle. These still need to be consolidated on a more structured basis with the election of organising committees of struggle. The building of local assemblies and democratically elected committees on a structured basis, linked together on a commune, citywide, regional and national level is the urgent task facing the movement.

48. In Chile on January 18, an important step was taken. The first meeting of Coordinadora de Asembleas Territoriales (CAT) took place in Santiago. Over 1,000 delegates assembled representing 164 assemblies in the Santiago area and 30 more from Temuco and Antofagasta. This potentially is an important step which now needs to be consolidated.

49. It is urgent that 'Cabildos' are formed in the workplaces as well as in the local communities. If CAT is consolidated, strengthened and widened to the workplaces and centres of study, it could potentially take the necessary steps to convene a Constituent Assembly and lay the basis for an alternative government of the workers' and poor.

50. Supporting the struggle for a revolutionary Constituent Assembly using the transitional method links this demand with the need for the working class to build its own independent organisations, and that can lay the basis for the formation of an

alternative government of the workers and poor. These organisations have not yet been established in Chile. This reflects the spontaneous character of the movement and one of its weaknesses.

51. The revolutionary explosion which has shaken Chile is unfolding as a process in which the masses have taken the first tentative steps towards beginning to rebuild their own independent organisations. The convening of CAT represents a significant step forward in the consciousness of the masses. Contained within it are some features of the 'Poder Popular' which developed in Chile during the revolution of 1970-73, and included an attempt to build an alternative power based on the working class and the poor.

52. In Chile today, this process is at a very initial tentative stage and has not yet advanced to anything as developed as existed in 1970-73. The revolution in Chile 1970-73 under the mass pressure of the working class developed to the point that it terrified the ruling class and imperialism. One year after the government was elected, it was taking steps to establish an 'internet' – Project Cybersyn – to coordinate production of the nationalised sectors of the economy throughout this vast country. Significantly, Allende in 1973 proposed a new constitution which he was initially considering putting to a plebiscite on September 11, 1973 – the eventual day of the military coup. His proposals included recognising Chile as a state created by the

workers; the judiciary to be structured to enable the construction of socialism; recognition of the rights of the Mapuches and the establishment of a Chamber of Deputies elected one per thirty thousand, and a Chamber of Workers elected directly by the working class! However, the leadership of the movement was imprisoned by its refusal to decisively break with capitalism and confront the capitalist state machine, allowing the military to seize power and crush the revolution.

53. Today the task of Marxists, like the CWI section in Chile, Socialismo Revolucionario, is to intervene with concrete proposals to assist workers and youth to take the process forward.

54. The spontaneous character of the Chilean movement is also reflected in the other social explosions which have taken place in some other countries. They include the absence of a party that represents the interests of the working class and all those exploited by capitalism.

55. The absence of a mass party of the working class, the lack of organisation and absence of the idea of socialism as an alternative to neo-liberalism and capitalism are a reflection of the throwing back of political consciousness following the collapse of the former Stalinist regimes and the ideological offensive by capitalism. The movement in Chile, and in some other countries, represent a vital step forward in the class struggle. At the same time, they also illustrate that further steps forward are needed to achieve a lasting victory, and the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a government of the workers' and the poor.

The questions of political parties

56. Following decades of betrayal by all political parties in Chile, as elsewhere, there is a deep hostility and opposition to the idea of political parties. This is understandable given the depth of degeneration of the Chilean Socialist Party, sections of which have been involved with drug trafficking, and betrayal by the Communist Party. The hostility towards the idea of political parties in varying degrees exists in many other countries. In Chile, it is particularly strong at this

stage. The popular chant, "The people united will never be defeated" has been modified by some layers to "the people united will advance without a party"! The anti-party mood was also evident during the 'Indignados' movement in Greece in 2011, in Spain during the '15-M' protests in 2011, and the mass movement in Brazil in 2016 against the Olympic Games. Yet the IR in Spain attempted to prettify the situation and simply deny that this problem existed at all!

57. Political consciousness is not fixed or static. On the basis of experience it can take leaps forward, especially when assisted by the active intervention of Marxists. In Spain, the hostility towards the idea of a party eventually gave way to an attempt to form a new radical left political party – Podemos. This followed the victory of the Partido Popular in the general election following the Indignados movement in Spain. The convening of a Constituent Assembly in Chile could assist the masses in drawing the lessons of the need for them to create their own party. Elections to an assembly would force the issue of which party to support and the need for a party to represent the working class and the poor.

58. Podemos failed to develop into a genuine party of the working class offering a socialist alternative. Its active layer was dominated by the newly impoverished layers of the petty bourgeois, semi-working class layers and the youth. It included some workers, but was not based on the traditional working class. It had a limited programme which assumed a radical left populist character with a top-down bureaucratic method of leadership. Internationally, these new forces of the radical left did not go as far to the left as the powerful left reformist or centrist parties or currents did during the 1970s and 1980s. Podemos went on to move to the right and has now entered coalition with the pro-capitalist Socialist Party, PSOE.

59. Marxists need to evaluate each stage of the revolutionary process with a realistic assessment of the strength and weaknesses of the movement. These include the political consciousness of the masses. It is fatal for a revolutionary organisation to romanticise or prettify the situation. During the compressed time scale of the Russian revolution between February 1917 and October, the Bolsheviks, particularly Lenin and Trotsky, assiduously assessed the real situation at each stage. The tactics and slogans they advocated in February, April, July, August corresponded with the maturing processes and outlook of the masses in the revolution, and assisted them in taking the next steps forward.

60. The IR forget this elementary Marxist approach. In their article they correctly state that the revolutionary movements in Latin America - Argentina 2001, Bolivia

2003-5; Ecuador 2004-7 Mexico 2006 - all showed the favourable correlation of forces for a "break with the capitalist order". The same article features the revolutionary movements during the 'Arab Spring' and their international consequences. Yet it simply brushes to one side the weaknesses and deficiencies revealed during these movements. Why were these movements defeated, it asks, in a barbed attack on the CWI without naming us; "Was it the 'absence of a socialist consciousness' or the 'maturity of the masses' or was it the betrayals of the Stalinist, reformist and nationalist leaders and lack of existence of a revolutionary party capable of offering a strategy to take power". The difference with the Russian revolution, it continues, was not "consciousness" of the masses "but the role of the Bolsheviks in Russia".

61. The absence of a mass revolutionary party in these movements was a major factor that prevented the masses from taking power. However, IR fails to pose the next question which arises from it – why a revolutionary party was not present and did not develop? Moreover, why was there not even the existence of strong parties of the working class even of a reformist or left reformist nature? In the same article IR refers to Egypt and the overthrow of the regime and the counter-revolution which followed. Yet it fails to comment that in this process the absence of a workers' party, even of a reformist character, initially allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to step into the vacuum.

62. Following the global crisis of capitalism in 2007/8 there was an upsurge in struggle in many countries, and a political radicalisation and polarisation took place. This was reflected in the emergence of Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, the surge in support for Sanders in the US and later the election of Corbyn as Labour leader, and in other developments. These represented a significant change in political consciousness amongst a significant layer. However, this had its limitations, reflecting the class character of those involved and the political weakness of the 'new left' which had more of a radical populist character than that of a combative socialist left. These processes were a reflection of the political consciousness which existed as a consequence of the continuing effects of the collapse of the former Stalinist regimes. These movements failed to face up to the challenge posed by the depth of the capitalist crisis. As a result, in many countries a vacuum opened up into which the right-wing populist forces managed to step in for a period. The 'new left' of Podemos, Syriza and others capitulated to capitalism.

63. The absence of workers' parties, the weakness or lack of independent organisation and lack of a clear socialist consciousness at this stage, even amongst the majority of the most active layers, are complicating factors in the revolutionary movements which have erupted. The collapse of the former Stalinist states still casts a shadow over the revolutionary movements which have erupted, preventing them so far from going further to fight against the capitalist regimes.

64. The existence of a mass revolutionary Marxist party is critical to complete the revolution and enable the working class to take power into its hands. However, this subjective factor is not schematically separated from the revolutionary objective conditions – (a split amongst the ruling class, a willingness to struggle by the working class and the vacillations of the middle classes - together with the broad political consciousness of the masses).

Objective and subjective factors interlinked

65. Like ostriches the IR buries its head in the sand and pretends that these obstacles simply do not exist. Everything is schematically reduced to the absence of a revolutionary party. Yet the existence and development of a mass revolutionary party does not take place in a vacuum. There is not a Chinese wall between the political objective conditions and political consciousness of the masses and the building of the subjective factor - a revolutionary party. They are dialectically interlinked. One affects the other. This was demonstrated during the Russian revolution when the Bolsheviks had to struggle as a minority to eventually win a majority amongst the working class. Through experience in struggle, with the onset of a new deeper crisis of capitalism and the intervention of Marxists, these obstacles will be overcome. But to deny they exist is to stumble blindly into the turbulent sea of capitalist crisis and class struggle. A relatively small Marxist party can rapidly make giant leaps forward and become a large or mass force when the right objective conditions exist. With correct slogans, programme, tactics and strategy, a relatively small revolutionary force can have a decisive impact and assist the mass movement to take the steps necessary for taking power and breaking with capitalism. Yet this cannot be done by denying the obstacles which exist and denying reality. This is the method of sectarianism not Bolshevism. Wishful thinking is a fatal flaw for a revolutionary.

66. The revolutionary upsurge in Chile reflected an advance in consciousness even without a large Marxist party. However, the process is still maturing. The demands for an end to neo-liberalism, for the



Protest in Chile

government to go, for an end to the existing system, are widespread, as is the heroic mood amongst the youth to confront the state machine. These have been positive steps forward. However, they remain limited to demands for a more "just," "dignified" and "equal" society. The idea of the alternative of socialism to the current system has not yet emerged. Denying that such complications exist will not assist the Chilean workers and youth in drawing the necessary conclusions of how the hated Pinera regime and the entire system and economic model can be overthrown, or of what it should be replaced with.

67. The issues which have arisen from the revolutionary movement in Chile have important lessons which apply to the revolutionary upsurge which has swept Latin America, Haiti, Iraq, Iran, the Lebanon and other countries.

PART 2

The struggle of the indigenous peoples

1. Another feature that has also emerged in Latin America, which is a new phenomenon, is the large-scale movement throughout the continent of the indigenous peoples. It is vital that Marxists and the working class recognise the importance of this question and adopt a correct approach to it.

2. Throughout Central and Southern America there are an estimated 50 million indigenous peoples. In Latin America 62.2% of the Bolivian population are from indigenous communities and in Peru the figure is 24%. In Mexico, an estimated 15% of the total population are from the indigenous communities, amongst whom sixty eight different languages are spoken. In Chile, an estimated 11% of the total population are Mapuche. As in many Latin American countries the Mapuche people are based in their own territory (in the south) but many or most have migrated to the urban centres where they mainly form part of the working class. In addition to this, there is the question of the black population, overwhelmingly working-class and poor, descendants of slaves and migrants from Africa and the Caribbean, especially in Brazil, Venezuela and some other countries.

3. To this must also be added the 'mestizo' - or mixed indigenous/European population. The indigenous peoples, originally from the rural areas, together with the 'mestizos' comprise the majority of the working class and poor in many or most Latin American countries. The 50 million size of the indigenous population probably makes it numerically the largest since the arrival of the Spanish 'conquistadores'. On the other hand, the ruling classes in Latin America are overwhelmingly drawn from European descent.

4. In the recent movements in Ecuador and Bolivia, the indigenous peoples have been in the front line of the struggle. In Ecuador, the CONAIE, organisation of the indigenous peoples of Ecuador, has played a crucial role in toppling four Presidents since the 1990s.

5. In Chile, the Mapuche flag has been adopted as the banner of resistance for all those involved in the struggle. The mass movement against the recent right-wing coup in Bolivia was conducted under the Wiphala flag of the indigenous peoples - which Morales had instated as one of two national flags of Bolivia.

6. All of the movements have featured the struggles of the indigenous peoples, together with the class struggle and the mass movement of the working class against the regimes and governments.

7. One of the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution is the formation of a nation state and independence from imperialist domination. In Latin America, as in the rest of the neo-colonial world, this task has never been fully achieved. All of the Latin American countries remain tied and integrated with the major imperialist powers through the banks and multi-national conglomerates which control the economy.

8. At the same time, within some of these countries the issue of unification of the nation has not been fully resolved, with repression, exploitation and marginalisation of the indigenous peoples by the ruling classes which are themselves tied to the major imperialist powers. Neither of these elements of dual exploitation can be resolved under capitalism and landlordism or by the national capitalist class of these countries.

9. Although this issue has exploded during the recent movements, it has always been present in some of the Latin American countries. The Peruvian Marxist and writer, José Carlos Mariátequi, developed this question in a series of essays, "Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality" in relation to Peru in the 1920s. In his writings, he identified the issue of the indigenous peoples with the question of the class struggle and property relations - especially the land question. He linked this to the ideas of the permanent revolution and argued that the cultural traditions of common ownership of land and communal culture amongst the Andean peoples would make it easier to combine the struggle against feudalism and capitalism with socialism. This valid point remains true today.

No es una película, no es Venezuela ni Ecuador... Es Santiago, Plaza Ñuñoa, hoy 18/02 hace pocas horas.... Sin palabras...

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10. The communal land, combined with the strong bond of community and solidarity, is in bitter antagonism with capitalism and especially neo-liberalism. The powerful identity with the land as the provider of food, water and sustenance of life has meant these communities have a long tradition of protection of the environment. This has brought them into bitter conflict with the logging and forestry monopolies which are destroying these precious natural resources.

11. Mariátequi mistakenly considered the ancient indigenous societies of the Incas and others as primitive communist. Despite commonly held land and strong communal bonds, with their highly rigid, hierarchical social structures and divisions, they were not primitive communist societies at the time of the Inca empire.

12. Mariátequi played a crucial role in the formation of the Socialist Party in Peru which soon became the Communist Party. He had conducted a struggle in the radical populist nationalist movement, APRA, and clashed with its leader, Haya de la Torre who opposed it including socialism. He made an

extremely valuable contribution to linking the struggles of the indigenous peoples to the ideas of socialism and the permanent revolution which is relevant to the struggles which have emerged recently. However, he also had a chequered history, having opposed the formation of the Communist Party. He also adopted an ambiguous position in the struggle between Trotsky and Stalin, failing to oppose Stalin. However, this chequered history does not detract from his contribution in his early life.

13. In general, the struggle of the indigenous peoples today for land and territories, language and cultural rights, is an inseparable part of the struggle of the working class in many countries throughout Latin America. It is a component part of the struggle of the working class in general, as has been shown by the revolutionary events which have shaken Ecuador, Chile and other countries. The struggle for land and territories in Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia today bring these communities into direct conflict with the big national and multinational companies, and the capitalist state. It is essential that the demands of the indigenous peoples are incorporated into the programme and struggles of the working class in general. Only then can their demands be fully realised.

14. In general, the indigenous peoples have not taken up the demand for separation or independent states. The demands for territorial, language and cultural rights have mainly been advanced to be won within the framework of existing states. Throughout Latin America the demand for "pluri-nations" – i.e. nations fully inclusive of all peoples has been the main demand in the recent period. The election of Evo Morales was seen as a great victory for the indigenous movement. The first time somebody from the indigenous peoples had been elected President. One of the reforms he introduced, reflecting the demands of the movement, was to change the name of Bolivia to the Pluri-national Republic of Bolivia.

15. The demands of the indigenous peoples can of course change in the future on this question especially if their demands are not realised. Should the indigenous peoples decide they want to establish an independent, autonomous or semi-autonomous state or area, Marxists, would support their right to do so. At the same time, it is important to unify the struggles of all the oppressed into a united movement of the working class to break with capitalism and establish a democratic voluntary socialist confederation of Latin American states, in which all the cultural, linguistic and territorial rights of all its peoples are respected.

16. The election of Morales and the role of the CONAIE in Ecuador have clearly illustrated that simply having an indigenous leadership is not sufficient to ensure a victory for the revolutionary movements. Morales, despite implementing significant reforms, attempted to find an accommodation with capitalism, which repaid him with a coup backed by US imperialism. Despite the mass mobilisation of the working class and indigenous peoples, Morales fled the country, for the sake of "avoiding conflict", and allowed the reactionary racist right-wing back into power. In Ecuador, the leadership of CONAIE, after the government of Lenin Moreno was compelled to flee the capital Quito, failed to take the initiative and establish a government of the working class and poor, and take power.

17. The revolutionary eruptions in Latin America have demonstrated a new era of struggle has opened. It is necessary to draw all the lessons from these new movements and address the weaknesses and new features present in order to overcome the obstacles which exist in order to defeat the ruling class and resolve the social horrors capitalism is imposing throughout the continent.

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