



**Nahuel Moreno**

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Lenin**

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Translated from *Contraprensa*, organ of the Socialist Youth of the MAS, 1986

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The article “Four tips by Lenin” was published in 1986 in *Contraprensa*, the magazine of the Socialist Youth of the MAS. In brief pages, Moreno contrasts the Leninist conceptions and practice with the monolithic and vertical bureaucratism characteristic of the communist parties.

## Four tips by Lenin

Once again, the Argentine Communist Party (PCA) has published an address by its Secretary General, Athos Fava, referring to the problems that afflict that organization. And again we see a self-criticism that touches problems of great depth, of great transcendence.

In his address to the Central Committee of the PCA, published by *Qué Pasa* #287, dated 10 September 1986, Fava states that “the exercise of political leadership in itself is a major problem, but in these months appeared with force concerns that had accumulated over decades”. Fava explains that now “it began to be exposed bare our old formation defects, the violations of democratic centralism and the persistence of the remnants of personality cult at the different levels, which is one of the origins of what we call the criterion of ‘infallibility’, of arrogance and of mechanisms of ‘down self-criticism’, that is, after oneself. And this has done a lot of damage to the Party”.

The PCA leader goes on to say:

“We have been dragging behind, and it is the concern that arises in the debate, a high degree of administrativism, of a part of the party looking inwards, with leaders detached from the masses and the problems of the members; more as administrators than as revolutionaries.

“There is also a rejection by the bulk of the party to what is termed as ‘apparatchikness’, that is, oversized apparatuses, that generate their own politics, with a certain degree of bureaucracy, that we are relocating in order to turn all this power to the politics of concentration.

“A no less important methodological deviation is formalism, which denatures the policy of cadres by encouraging personalism and the promotion of comrades for their acceptance of ‘order and command’ and not by their ability, independence of criteria, audacity and creativity. It is an attitude that, at the same time, dehumanizes party life, lowers communist morale and covers everything with a facade of apparent order, with figures that conceal reality and deform it with false, non-scientific information, both from top-down as from down-up.”

### In all parties, including the revolutionary ones, there is a bureaucracy

The problems that Fava poses today — which he himself claims that come from decades of deformations within the PCA — are not new to Marxists.

In all parties, even the most revolutionary ones, even in Lenin’s Bolshevik Party, there was always bureaucracy. There have always been and will continue to be officials, party employees, who attend to organizational and administrative tasks. And necessarily the party has to give a salary to these officials so they can live.

The Marxist revolutionaries we have always taken this issue into account. Lenin, who laid the theoretical foundations for the construction of the revolutionary party, always attached great importance to the question of bureaucracy.

Lenin's great concern was how to prevent officials, the bureaucracy, from taking over the leadership of the party, how to secure control of the bureaucracy by the militants.

## The salary of the officials

In the first place, Lenin said: "The salaries of all officials... not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker".<sup>1</sup>

In the Bolshevik Party, all the employees, all the leaders, had a remuneration that was not higher than the average salary of a skilled worker. And the same thing happened when the Bolsheviks seized power — officials and leaders earned wages never above the average salary of a skilled worker.

The same is true today in the Movement to Socialism (MAS). In our party, from the highest leaders to the administrative employees earn the same salary, which is fixed in what earns, on average, the skilled workers in Argentina.

What happens in the Argentine Communist Party? What happens in the Soviet Union, in Cuba, and in the other workers' states? Do the leaders of the PCA, Gorbachev or Castro live on a salary equal to the average salary of a skilled worker? Is the first Leninist norm for civil servants fulfilled in communist parties and in the workers' states?

Any militant who wants to build a party to make the revolution has to know, if there are privileged officials in their organization, with incomes well above the average salary of a skilled worker, that these officials are a breeding ground for the bureaucracy, for the emergence of a privileged caste, with interests different from those of the workers. And that these privileged officials will inevitably attempt to use the party apparatus to defend their privileges, over and above the needs of the workers.

This is why Lenin insisted that officials should have salaries that do not exceed those of the competent skilled workers, in which the officials of the party (or of the state when taking power) live in the same conditions as the common workers, and have the same needs as the common workers, without special privileges.

## The control of the party leaders by the ranks

The second key rule defined by Lenin to prevent the imposition of bureaucracy in the party is the control of the ranks on the leaders and officials.

In 1902, Lenin proposed in "A Letter to a Comrade on Our Organisational Tasks" a way of avoiding the abuses of bad leaders, even in the most clandestine militancy, under the tsar, when for reasons of security the ranks could not know and vote for all the leaders or meet and vote on many key issues. Lenin said: "Nor can any rules provide means against this; such means can be provided only by measures of 'comradely influence', beginning with the resolutions of each and every subgroup, followed up by their appeals to the CO [Central Organism, or Executive Committee, NM] and the CC, and ending (if the worst comes to the worst) with the removal of the persons in authority who are absolutely incapable".<sup>2</sup>

That is, in the face of "the violations of democratic centralism and the persistence of the remnants of personality cult", in the face of "arrogance and of mechanisms of 'down self-criticism', that is, after oneself", that Athos Fava talks about Lenin proposes a strict control of the leaders by the ranks.

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1 VI Lenin: "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution", *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 24, pp. 19-26.

2 VI Lenin: "A Letter to a Comrade on Our Organisational Tasks", *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 6, pages 231-252.

Lenin, even in the most clandestine conditions, which demanded the greatest centralism, encouraged the cells (the groups or subgroups) to control and criticize the leaders and even to demand “the removal of the persons in authority who are absolutely incapable”.

We are proud that, following Lenin, in our party we encourage the militants to be rebels in every sense, even towards the leadership. One cannot sustain a revolutionary attitude, of uncompromising rebellion towards the bourgeoisie and its servants, and at the same time maintain a submissive attitude, of subjugation, of “personality cult” towards the party leaders. To our militants we encourage them to be rebellious in relation to their leaders, to criticize them, to control them and to demand that they demonstrate their ability every day, not to accept any imposed authority, but only that which arises from the capacity demonstrated by the cadres. And that, “if the worst comes to the worst”, to impose “the removal of the persons in authority who are absolutely incapable”.

For the Communist Party militants concerned about the problems that Athos Fava points out in relation to the regime of their organization, Lenin’s advice raises this key question: Is there within the PCA a strict control by the ranks over leaders and officials?

## The right to tendency or faction

The Bolshevik Party of Lenin developed in a process of continuous internal debates, of convergences and ruptures between different tendencies. Even in the worst moments of repression under the tsar, the Bolshevik party was a hotbed of controversy.

Just as he insisted on the necessity of political centralization and action, of an iron discipline for the intervention of the party in the class struggle, Lenin also asserted the need of a free, ample and democratic discussion between all the tendencies that could emerge within the party, as the best way for the education of the militants and the elaboration of a correct policy.

Thus, in response to an article published in 1903 in the Bolshevik newspaper *Iskra* (The Spark) entitled “What not to do?”, Lenin wrote a letter to the editors of *Iskra* (25 November 1903):

“To anathemise or expel from the Party, not only former economists, but even little groups of Social-Democrats who suffer from ‘a certain inconsistency’ would certainly be unreasonable... We even go further: when we have a Party programme and a Party organisation, we must not only hospitably throw open the columns of the Party organ for exchanges of opinion, but must afford those groups — or grouplets, as the author calls them — which from inconsistency support some of the dogmas of revisionism, or for one reason or another insist upon their separate and individual existence as groups... Precisely in order to avoid being too harsh and stiff-necked... towards ‘anarchistic individualism’, it is necessary, in our opinion, to do the utmost — even if it involves a certain departure from tidy patterns of centralism and from absolute obedience to discipline — to enable these grouplets to speak out and give the whole Party the opportunity to weigh the importance or unimportance of these differences and determine just where, how and on whose part inconsistency is shown.”<sup>1</sup>

And thirteen years later, in 1916, in his article “Tasks of the Left Zimmerwaldists in the Swiss Social-Democratic Party”, Lenin advised: “It is precisely in order to prevent the inevitable and necessary struggle between trends from degenerating into a contest between ‘favourites’, into personal conflicts, petty suspicions and petty scandals that all members of the Social-Democratic Party must see to it that the struggle between the different policy trends is fought openly and on principles”.<sup>2</sup>

Does the PCA have this freedom of criticism and debate, of discussion between tendencies, without resorting to expulsions or sanctions, as advised by Lenin?

1 VI Lenin: “Letter to Iskra”, *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 7, pages 115-118.

2 VI Lenin: “Tasks of the Left Zimmerwaldists in the Swiss Social-Democratic Party”, *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 23, pages 137-148.

## The attitude of the Communist Parties towards the USSR

Following the Bolshevik Party's seizure of power in 1917 and the constitution of the Third International that brought together communist parties from around the world, Lenin warned of the danger that the enormous prestige of the Soviet Union and its leaders would lead to the leaders and revolutionary militants of other countries to an attitude of waiting for orders, to act as mere agents of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Inevitably the Soviet state had (and has) to negotiate with the bourgeois rulers of other countries, to make diplomatic, economic, etc. agreements. The danger was (and is) that, because the USSR had made an agreement with a government of a capitalist country, the communist party of that country decided to stop fighting "its" bourgeois government in order not to jeopardize the diplomatic pact reached by Russia.

A famous case took place as soon as the Bolsheviks seized the power, when they were already three years into World War I. Beset by the military pressure of the German army and the demand for peace of the Russian people who had suffered terrible hardships in the war, the Bolsheviks signed the treaty of Brest Litovsk, by which they were forced to allow the Germanic imperialists to seize immense territories.

Lenin and Trotsky (who had been in charge of the negotiation), harshly criticized German socialist leaders who did not denounce the treaty as an infamy imposed by "their" bourgeois government and that they ratified in parliament, justifying themselves in the fact that Lenin had signed it.

The Bolsheviks pointed out that the first duty of the German leadership was to fight "their" bourgeois government and its treaties, including those signed by Lenin. It is something similar to the policy that revolutionists must have in a trade union agreement or within a company. Suppose a strike led by Lenin is lost and we are forced to sign an agreement which leaves 200 workers out of the factory. If the union leaders of another factory say: "How formidable that agreement that Lenin signed, leaving 200 workers in the street!", that is a betrayal and a deception to the workers. We, on the other hand, should say: "What scumbag bosses who left 200 workers in the street!" In no way should we support and give weight to the agreements imposed by these bosses. Moreover, we must tell the workers the whole truth — the defeat was to such extent that Lenin was forced to sign that agreement. Let us take an example to see what has been the attitude of the PCA in this regard.

Due to the grain blockade imposed by the United States under the Carter administration, the Soviet Union was forced to seek out suppliers to meet its wheat needs. Due to this situation, imposed by the Yankee aggression, the USSR reached an agreement with the dictatorship of Videla and Martínez de Hoz, by which the Argentine government committed to sell wheat to Russia, breaking the Yankee siege. There is no doubt that the USSR was in full right to make such an economic agreement.

At the same time and following Lenin's rule, the Argentine Communist Party had to confront the Argentine dictatorship and call for its overthrow. In no way should the PCA support Videla or soften its denunciations from the signing of the economic agreement between the Argentine dictatorship and the USSR.

However, as the PCA leaders themselves have recognized in their self-criticism, the lack of a fair characterization of the "fascist" features of the military regime, the proposal of "civic-military convergence" with Videla, constituted an "opportunistic" deviation and a yielding to the dictatorship.

What caused this yielding? Did the PCA leaders propose "civic-military convergence" so as not to hinder the economic negotiations of the USSR? Did the leaders of the PCA act as militants of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, contrary to what Lenin advised? Or, on the other hand, did this yielding have nothing to do with the economic agreement of the USSR and Videla?

As we already pointed out in an earlier article, with the advice of Lenin and the questions we raise, we want to invite the Communist militants to a joint reflection, to answer together those questions that today obsess the communist militancy: What is the origin of the deviations that the Argentine Communist Party has had for decades? What is the way to build a revolutionary party with a regime and a policy that will enable it to become the leader of the revolution? We hope that the communist militants will contribute their ideas to this debate that is so educational for the revolutionary fighters of Argentina. §