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The Tiger of Pobladora

Unpublished dialogues with

Nahuel Moreno

Interviews by Raul Veiga



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Interviews by **Raul Veiga**

1984

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To my hundred assassinated comrades

Foreword to the 2021 edition

In 2006, Ediciones El Socialista published this work in print for the first time. As explained in the 2006 foreword by Miguel Lamas and the introduction by the author (Raul Veiga) from 1989, the original was from 1984. For several months that year, Moreno recorded interviews on most personal aspects of his life and career. This work was interrupted. First, because of Moreno's turn to the elaboration of the book that was published as *Conversations...* (available for downloading at www.nahuelmoreno.org). And later for his death in January 1987.

In 1989, the author resumed the work of transcribing the recordings and preparing the text for publication, which obviously could not count on the correction by Moreno himself and which was again postponed. Finally, in 2006, more than 20 years after the interviews had been conducted, the leadership of Izquierda Socialista in common with Raul Veiga decided to publish it. Although there were no possibilities to enrich it, to cover any gaps or some error, the material amply justified that decision. In these pages appears a Moreno almost unknown in many aspects, speaking as he had never done about his family, his youth, his beginnings in the militancy in the workers' movement and Trotskyism, his virtues and defects and many other aspects of everyday life.

Additional notes for this digital edition were added by the editors.

The Editors

March 2021

Foreword to the first Spanish edition (2006)

This book remained unpublished for two decades. Written before the computer age, it was known only to a few friends and disciples of Moreno. It circulated from hand to hand in the form of photocopies increasingly blurred by the passage of time. But, although the pages became blurred, the ideas and teachings of Moreno are still valid after so many years. Thus, we felt that publishing this book was a debt we owed to all the thousands of comrades who knew Moreno, who at some point accompanied his passionate revolutionary socialist political militancy, and also to the thousands of workers, students and intellectuals who today seek a socialist alternative.

Twenty years after his sudden death, on 25 January 1987, how can we synthesise what Moreno meant in our country and the international workers' and revolutionary movement?

Perhaps the tribute that this man passionate about the workers' struggles would have valued the most would be to know that several of the most important labour leaders of today's Venezuela, leaders of the National Workers' Unity (UNETE) proudly claim to be disciples of Moreno. The same could be repeated by hundreds of militant union leaders in Brazil, strike leaders in Panama or Costa Rica, and many of those in our country who lead combative delegate committees, in railways, subways, bus lines, branches of the teachers union from Buenos Aires Province (Suteba). Also, several of the founders of the PT (Workers' Party) in Brazil in the late 1970s, who were breaking up or were expelled by Lula for opposing his increasingly neoliberal policy.

The well-known Belgian Trotskyist Ernest Mandel, who for years debated with Moreno with opposing political and theoretical positions within the framework of the Fourth International, in the message of condolences over his death, stated "He was one of the last representatives of the handful of leading Trotskyist cadres who, after the Second World War, maintained the continuity of the struggle of Leon Trotsky, in difficult circumstances. We remember Moreno, above all, for his struggle to forge workers' cadres capable of fighting for the class independence of the Argentine proletariat, one of the most militant in the world, and for his effort to spread the writings and thoughts of Leon Trotsky."

Hugo Blanco, the great Peruvian peasant leader, in his book *Land or Death: The Peasant Struggle in Peru* states that "Nahuel Moreno is the main theorist of Latin American Trotskyism". And, in the message he sent to his funeral, he states: "I recognise him as my greatest teacher of Marxism and I have always recognised him this way, despite that the vicissitudes of the revolutionary struggle have separated our paths for years. Latin America has lost a tireless and intelligent fighter for the revolution. When we come to a victory, one of the names remembered in the future will undoubtedly be Nahuel Moreno."

In Argentina, Moreno managed to see his party become the main left force. On May Day 1986, a joint rally with the CP was held at the Ferrocarril Oeste Stadium in Buenos Aires. When the speaker for the party was announced, the stadium shook, the vast majority of the thousands of

attendees standing there cheering. Moreno could not withstand the emotion and had to withdraw. He was already ill of his heart.

However, his death was unexpected. He remained in full intellectual and political activity until a few hours before the heart attack that ended his life.

Moreno died on the eve of decisive events in the world and national class struggle. On a world scale, in 1989 there was the beginning of a political revolution that swept away the Stalinist regimes, a fact foreseen by Leon Trotsky and its background studied by Moreno in his later years. The economic and social data of the USSR, which heralded the imminent historical events, were one of his last obsessions that he presented in the cadre schools and leadership meetings.

In Argentina, the events of Easter took place a few months after Moreno's death. The MAS was enormously strengthened by confronting the laws of impunity for the genocide perpetrators of the Full Stop and the Due Obedience¹ of Alfonsin.² Moreno could no longer see it.

Three years later there was a crisis and split in the MAS. Taking into account what Moreno says in this book about the role of personality in history, it can be assumed that if this great leader had not died so prematurely, the history of his organisation would have been different, since he was, by far, the most respected, experienced and proven leader.

His numerous writings are published (also in electronic form at www.nahuelmoreno.org and www.marxists.org); also published are the first three volumes and Volume 4 Part I of the work of Ernesto Gonzalez, Moreno's lifelong comrade, *Workers' and Internationalist Trotskyism in Argentina*, a history of the current that Nahuel Moreno led from its origins. The book that we now present attempts a much more personal approach to Moreno, of his opinions about everyday events, events in his life, and characters of his time.

In agreement with the author, we have added explanatory notes on facts and characters mentioned in the interview, many of them today almost forgotten, but that had historical importance or importance in Moreno's personal and militant life.

Miguel Lamas

November 2006

1 In December 1986, the Radical president Alfonsin promoted and the congress approved the Law of **Full Stop**, which closed the possibility of filing complaints for violation of human rights against members of the Armed Forces and prescribed existing causes that had not been initiated. In June 1987, the Law of **Due Obedience** was passed, which was in fact an amnesty for most of the genocidaires who were tried and imprisoned. Both laws were repealed in 1998.

2 **Raul Alfonsin** (1927–2009) was one of the main leaders of the bourgeois Radical Civic Union (UCR). He was the president of Argentina between 1983 and 1989, following the military dictatorship.

Introduction by the author (1989)

Hugo Miguel Bressano Capacete, better known as Nahuel Moreno, was a stout and elegant man, of refined manners, possessing a fabulous universal culture and a great sense of humour. The son of President Agustin P. Justo, Liborio (alias “Quebracho”, who was the initiator of Trotskyism in Argentina) nicknamed him Nahuel, which in Araucanian means Tiger. The “Tiger” lived in Villa Pobladora (Avellaneda) his baptism of fire as a revolutionary leader of the workers. The Tiger of Pobladora became a scientist of Marxism who, hating the politics that prevented him from dedicating himself passionately to mathematics and philosophy, lived immersed in his fights to the bitter end.

Of Italian blood on his father’s side and Spanish on his mother’s side, Nahuel Moreno was born on 21 April 1924 in America, a small town in the province of Buenos Aires that is part of the Rivadavia district. He died at the age of 62 on 25 January 1987 in Buenos Aires, asking for a little more life to round out his work. For his family, friends and disciples his death was a devastating blow. World Trotskyism paid tribute to him by recognising him as one of the most stubborn followers of the Soviet revolutionary. Twenty-four Argentine labour unions and branches, 16 union groups and 76 internal commissions sent condolences to his funeral. So did the Workers’ Commissions of Spain, the Unified Workers Central (CUT) of Brazil, the Bolivian Workers’ Centre (COB), the Unified Workers Central (CUT) of Colombia and 45 other Latin American unions, in addition to practically all the Trotskyist parties in the world, some of which attended. with delegations to his funeral. According to the newspaper *Clarín*, 10 thousand people attended to see off his remains, escorted by the red flag to which he consecrated his existence. And such repercussion, however, does not hide the certainty that Nahuel Moreno, to a great extent, was and is, a stranger.

There are many explanations for why Moreno always remained in a state of semi-anonymity. Some have to do with his characteristics as a leader, as reflected throughout the present interview.

When the genocidal dictatorship fell, he surreptitiously returned to the country in July 1982, five years before his death, after a pilgrimage that began in 1976 and led him to reside for a few months in France and Colombia, the latter a country he especially loved, perhaps because it symbolised his qualitative leap as a leader. If Moreno had always had an international vision of the problems and educated the cadres of his organisation in that sense, until the end of the 1970s he had not managed to forge an international tendency that deserved, such as the IWL (International Workers League), “league” status. His struggle within the Fourth International to reunify it on “principled bases” took place before and after the creation of the IWL, but the formation of his international current emerged and developed with great dynamism as of 1976 with the incursion into Colombia. There he managed, in a short time, to win an entire party to his positions: the Socialist Bloc. His influence then spread to Central America, Mexico and the United States, he consolidated various groups in Europe, mainly the Spanish and Swedish, and gave great dynamism to the Peruvian, Bolivian and Brazilian parties. Colombia meant his leap from a national leader with internationalist positions to an international leader. As a result of this personal development, he achieved some resounding successes for the

young history of his current: the participation in the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979 through the Simon Bolívar Brigade, an experience practically unknown for the Fourth International; and then the formation in Argentina of a powerful workers' party, the MAS.

In addition to his loyal followers and a fairly prolific written work (over 20 books and dozens of documents and theoretical works), Moreno left in this world three Argentine children, David, Eleonora and Clara, and a Colombian one, Arturo, the result of his marriages with Rita (died 1974) and Amelia. During his more than 40 years of militancy, as the artist who seeks his masterpiece, he carried forward the obsession of his life: to lay the foundations for the formation of a great mass revolutionary party, capable of overcoming the dramatic crisis of leadership denounced by Trotsky in the first paragraphs of the *Transitional Program*.

Though he has been known through his writings and talks, his conferences and courses, few have had the opportunity of a personal approach to Nahuel Moreno. His figure, therefore, remains covered with a certain myth and a certain mystery. Because of his militancy, we know he was a great polemicist, possessor of a theoretical battery and a personality that is difficult to counter, but not many of those who have followed, admired or observed him know the person. To that strongman who broke the jaw of Nazis at the Belgrano National School showing off his boxing skills; the man who was recruited into Trotskyism by a young man named Faraldo and impacted by a semi-illiterate Bolivian worker from Alpargatas named Fidel Ortiz Saavedra. The one who met with Che in Punta del Este, who was imprisoned in Lurigancho, Peru, for his support of the peasant struggles in Cuzco led by Hugo Blanco, and who was captured by the Brazilian intelligence services in 1978. To the man who frequented the great personalities of world Trotskyism and, coming from a wealthy family, changed his original status for the extreme poverty of Villa Pobladora. The one who "invented" the strikes with factory occupation, a method that Augusto Vandor¹ called "the Moreno tactic". The one who befriended the writer Roberto Arlt² and admired Luis Franco,³ the one who loved philosophy and mathematics and who at the age of 15 gave talks on Kant and Hegel. Moreno, in short, the same one who, being general secretary of the United Hearts Club of Villa Pobladora, was defended from the police by 150 armed workers; the one who had a fascist uncle whom, however, he loved very much; the one who as a boy dreamed of being a sailor and declared himself a supporter of old-fashioned love. The man who at the end of the road attributed himself mistakes that no one blamed him for, bitterly missing Angel Vasco Bengochea,⁴ his friend who was recruited by Castro's guerrillaism. The man, finally, who entered the country clandestinely to settle just five blocks from Government House, in an office he accessed through a secret passage, inside an old building. For months Hugo Miguel Bressano Capacete was hiding from the "services" and the curious glances of his comrades in

1 **Augusto Timoteo Vandor** (1923-1969) was a bureaucrat Secretary-General of the Metalworkers Union (UOM). After the military coup that defeated Peron, he promoted within the Peronism a participatory faction willing to agree with the de facto government and proposed a "Peronism without Peron". A month after the Cordobazo, in June 1969, he was executed by a small Peronist armed group, which years later would join Montoneros.

2 **Roberto Arlt** (1900-1942) was a writer, novelist, storyteller, journalist and playwright of Argentine origin, listed by critics as the first modern writer in his country. His works emphasise characters and scenarios of the margin, becoming a true testimony of the immigrant and poor families of Buenos Aires that he had to live while setting a guideline in the use of *lunfardo* in the literature of Buenos Aires.

3 **Luis Franco** (1898-1988) was a poet, essayist, historian, short story writer ... but more than anything else a revolutionary, Marxist and Trotskyist intellectual. Criticism of the bourgeoisie, the churches, capitalism, and the defence of the working class and socialism as a new world system of freedom and plenitude for humanity were always present in his extensive work. This earned him being one of the great ignored and silenced of Argentine letters. Some of his works were *The Human Female*, *Country Biography*, *Prometheus in chains*, *Hudson on Horseback*, *General Paz and the Two Chieftains*, *Animal Biographies*, *The Little Dictionary of Disobedience*, *La Pampa Speaks*. Since the 1950s he was a sympathiser of the Nahuel Moreno group. He collaborated with the magazine *Estrategia* (Strategy). After the dictatorship fell, in 1982 he participated in the launching of the MAS, attending its congresses until his death.

4 **Angel Bengochea**, aka Vasco (Basque), joined the Morenoist organisation in the mid-1940s. Sent to Cuba by Moreno to convince Fidel Castro to support the peasant rebellion in Peru, he was recruited for guerrilla positions and broke with Moreno's organisation in 1963. Shortly afterwards, he died when an arsenal that he had assembled in a department of Buenos Aires exploded. Aires. Moreno always considered him a great leader, and he was a close friend. During the process of political rupture, he wrote an affectionate letter that is cited in "Biographical sketch" (*Correo Internacional*, January 1988).

that office, from which he entered and left through an accomplice corridor. The office was located on the top floor of a party headquarters frequented by hundreds of people who never saw him during this period. Only a trusted group knew his steps, after seven years abroad.

But when, finally, his image became visible and his old Argentine comrades saw him emerge after the dark years of the Military Junta, they recognised him older but with his political authority and power of conviction increased and the myth continued its course.

Possibly, he was aware of the respect his presence imposed. Although tolerant, he was of ruthless judgment. As an astute politician, he often spoke of his ideas of action as the work of “us”. When he spoke of his private matters before the stealth microphone of the recorder, he did so in an almost inaudible voice, as if he felt invaded in territory too intimate to transcend. But that voice, however, grew in strength and passion as he entered the political arena and became sharp, ironic and even aggressive in controversy, a field he knew very well. In the discussions, he fired with heavy ammunition and applying Marxist analysis; he could take a fact to the last consequences. When answering an adverse document in writing, he did not neglect the smallest detail, the most innocent phrase, mercilessly machine-gunning enemy positions.

However, he was ready to shake the hands of any revolutionary even if they had criticised each other for decades since he believed that revolution here, or anywhere, was a task for various parties and currents. He never read the left-wing press nor was he amused by the “thoughts” of Posadas⁵ in *Voz Proletaria*. He listened very carefully to the oral reports transmitted to him by his comrades and avidly read what strictly interested him. He enjoyed reading the classics of Marxism, the works of Jean Piaget⁶ on epistemology and psychology, and the existentialists, but his field of interest was endless and could encompass both a medical treatise and a sociological essay on Japanese family structure. What knowledge he absorbed, he poured into his talks and his political courses, giving them a very personal amenity. The English Trotskyist journalist, Peter Fryer⁷ recalled at his grave three prolonged meetings he had with Moreno shortly before his death: “Our discussions ranged from the origin of tango to the contraceptive practices of the Incas; from the economic roots of racism to the role of women in the British miners’ strike. On all topics, he had something interesting and often original and profound to say.”

Other “historical” Trotskyist leaders, such as the American Joseph Hansen⁸ of the SWP, did not have a good opinion of Moreno as a theoretician, and even they branded him a “charlatan” — perhaps because of the thematic diversity with which he seasoned his conferences and personal dialogues —

5 **Jorge Posadas** (1912-1981). His real name was Homero Cristalli. He was a professional soccer player in Estudiantes de La Plata. In 1937, he began his political activity in a break from the old Socialist Party, the PSO (Socialist Workers Party). Later, Posadas founded the Fourth International Group (GCI). He supported Peronism, which he considered revolutionary anti-imperialism. His opportunism was combined with increasingly delusional sectarian positions. One of his obsessive topics was the imminence of the atomic war and he called for the construction of fallout shelters. He had a certain weight in Trotskyist groups in several Latin American countries. In his last years, he founded his own International and gave directions to apply on an interplanetary scale.

6 **Jean Piaget** (1896-1980). Swiss psychologist who studied the mental development of children, investigating the relationships between the so-called “biological maturation” and the stages of psychic evolution. Since the early 1970s, Moreno began to closely follow Piaget’s work. He gave courses and talks on logic in his party taking research on genetic epistemology, psychology, etc. that the Swiss scientist published.

7 **Peter Fryer** (1927-2006) was an English Trotskyist writer and journalist. Among his most influential works is the book *Hungarian Tragedy and Other Writings on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*, in 1956, where he denounced as a Budapest correspondent the invasion of the Red Army to crush the revolution. This book was published in 1986 by the MAS, when Peter Freyer visited Buenos Aires. He also published *Oldest Ally: A Portrait of Salazar’s Portugal* in 1962 and *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* in 1984, among others.

8 **Joseph Hansen** (1910-1979), joined the Trotskyist movement in 1934 and was an international leader until his death. Between 1937 and 1940 he was Trotsky’s secretary in Mexico. He is the author of Trotskyism reunification document in 1963. He founded *Intercontinental Press* magazine and directed it for 10 years. At the beginning of the 1970s, he formed an international tendency with the current of Nahuel Moreno to reject the guerrilla deviation approved in the Ninth Congress of the Fourth International in 1969. Hansen and Moreno distanced themselves in 1974-75 due to discrepancies about the revolution in Portugal and Angola. Hansen would lead the SWP to unite with Mandelism and, in 1979, as members of the majority of the United Secretariat, they supported the repression of the Simon Bolivar Brigade by the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

but to some extent, everyone recognised that Moreno, with his defects, had created an international current “out of nowhere”; a current that many of them could not even form or consolidate.

Moreno was overflowing with optimism and had blind faith in the working class; however, he denied being a “success worshipper” and self-proclaiming. But, for him, believing in something and fighting for it were activities that exalted man because they allowed him to break the siege of capitalist alienation. It was not fatalistic, in the sense of thinking that socialism would come to this world regardless of the subjective factor.

When he was passionate about a topic, he studied it thoroughly, giving free rein to his concerns over a fact or a situation until it was resolved, and then he closed it and went on to something else. He knew how to take advantage of political opportunities and rally his organisation behind a slogan or campaign. The success of the Simon Bolivar Brigade, for example, has to do with its characteristic of capturing the possibilities of political intervention. “I always have only one concern, not two or three”, he used to say, and he considered this a serious flaw in his leadership role because it made him neglect other often key issues. Residing in Colombia, for example, he neglected the Argentine party that rushed into a critical situation in the dark years, of extreme clandestinity, imposed by the military dictatorship, as Moreno acknowledged in one of the interviews that make up this volume.

Although he manifested himself “to have seen it all before” in the great personalities — which he mistrusted — he liked to train leaders and was always ready to instil confidence in those who were starting in the militancy.

Ever since Faraldo recruited him for Trotskyism, shattering his Hegelianism (“I was Hegelian and when I spoke, Faraldo smiled in a mocking tone. He once told me he laughed because he had never heard so many stupid things together”) and since Fidel Ortiz Saavedra, that Bolivian worker, consolidated the first group. Moreno’s political stature grew for more than four decades, slowly but always rising. Today Moreno can well be considered as the father of Argentine Trotskyism, at least of the Trotskyism that changed the intellectual gatherings of 40 years ago for its insertion into the working class. In recent years, this insertion stopped being a foreign body interned in the proletariat to become part of it, or at least an important part of its vanguard.

Indeed, although Moreno never worked in a factory (during his youth he was a public servant in the Ministry of Finance), his life was closely linked to the working class. Once he broke with Liborio Justo, this turn towards the proletariat deepened: “We read Lenin’s organisational writings about 15 times”, he recalled, “and we came to the conclusion the problem was not one of organisation, as we thought, but one of social type: we had to go to the workers’ movement.”

In 1944, the Marxist Workers’ Group (GOM) of Moreno linked to the Timber Union, whose main leader was Mateo Fossa,⁹ a legendary character, who had met with Leon Trotsky in Mexico and who ended his years as a member of Moreno’s current. This relationship served as a passport to insert themselves among the workers. In January 1945, when the hard strike at the Anglo-Ciabasa, Wilson and Smithfield meatworks began, Moreno’s group, following the advice of Mateo Fossa, began collecting funds to deliver them to the strikers. This allowed that small nucleus not only to carry out the first important “class” experience but also to gain the leadership of the union. A few months later, in April 1945, the second strike of the meatpacking plants was defeated and this caused the loss of the union leadership, obeying a law that Moreno always repeated: the fate of Trotskyism is linked to the fate of the workers’ movement. But this second strike served to gain a new experience. It was a very tough and intense fight. For days, a part of Avellaneda was occupied by the workers; vehicles could not circulate without authorisation from the Strike Committee and a safe-conduct was issued to move from one place to another. Villa Pobladora, a neighbourhood belonging to Avellaneda, located near the Victorino de la Plaza Bridge, was transformed for a few days into a kind of small Petrograd

⁹ **Mateo Fossa** (1896-1973), being a very young worker, he founded the Single Union of Timber and Related Workers. He led the 1935 timber workers’ strike and was its Secretary-General in subsequent years. Of Trotskyist affiliation, in 1938 he met in Mexico with the Soviet revolutionary; the famous pamphlet *Conversation con Leon Trotsky* (published by Accion Obrera, Buenos Aires, 1941) emerged from that dialogue. In the 1970s, as a leader of the pensioners, he joined the PST and was a candidate. When he died, at the age of 77, he was collaborating with the editorial staff of *Avanzada Socialista*.

run by the Trotskyists. Until recently, the safe-conducts were jealously kept in party archives: “We kept them with pride, because we rarely saw similar examples of organisation in a strike”, recalled Nahuel. Subsequent experiences, in the Textile Workers Association and the Meat Workers Union, were positive, but Tiger Moreno and his current had their initial examination in Villa Pobladora.

At that time, those few blocks crossed by the commercial Uruguay Street had one of the largest concentrations of workers in the country and the internal commissions of the main factories were run by Trotskyism. Pobladora, as Moreno himself said, “was the most beautiful stage of my life, the one I love the most.”

Villa Pobladora was the baptism of fire but the group had formed a year before (1943) in Villa Crespo. The first meeting was held at the home of Rita Galub, Moreno’s partner, located on Corrientes Avenue, between Rio de Janeiro and Yatay Streets. There they were, in addition to Moreno and Rita, her brother Boris, Daniel Pereyra, Abrahancito, and Mauricio.

Participation in the meatworkers’ strike allowed the group to cross the Riachuelo and settle in Pobladora. Ramon Britos, nicknamed “*Chueco*” (Bandy-legged) was the first activist won by the group in the strike of the meatpacking plants. The group then settled in the tenement of 1362 Oliden Street, in an enclave of factories and railway detours that became one of the largest workers and industrial concentrations in South America.

Almost all of them came from a working-class family, except Moreno. But for him, the privilege of coming from a well-off middle-class family soon disappeared. At the age of 20, he was already living with “Chueco” Britos, who would be a close friend from then on, in the Pobladora tenement.

About this book

These lines should not fail to make some warnings and clarifications about the form and content of this work. The first one is that neither this introduction, which contains personal considerations about Nahuel Moreno, nor the lines that follow, constitute an official position of the party that Moreno led at the time of the interview, that is, the MAS. The second is that the author has not intended to make a political-didactic book or a biography. The first objective was fulfilled in *Conversations with Nahuel Moreno*,¹⁰ made by a group of those close to the interviewee, and a story about his life with a *Biographical Outline* has also already been attempted. For intellectual honesty, it must be said that a biography has not been attempted here, in the conviction that this is a task of many and complex studies, which can only be successfully undertaken by a group of biographers with solid Marxist training and a level of knowledge much higher than the author on Trotskyism.

In this case, it is simply a journalistic book, with questions that only obey a personal concern and that attempt, through four chapters, the result of three months of talks, to show part of the life, concerns and thought of Nahuel Moreno. The chapters have been divided not according to the chronological flow of the dialogue but with the criterion of grouping themes. Nahuel talks about his family and his adolescence, his characteristics as a leader, the origins of Trotskyism and Trotsky’s mistakes; of the couple, psychoanalysis and the role of the personality (the role that, with his death, seems more evident today). He talks about Fidel, Mao, Che and the revolutionary leaderships; about the Malvinas War and the Argentine decadence; He talks about his personal tastes and the nuclear danger. It is, in short, an approach to the character, without neglecting some political definitions.

The first interview of the present work was held on 5 May 1984 and, from then on, meetings were held for three months, once or twice a week, until the last interview that took place on 7 August of that year. Each interview lasted an hour and a half or two hours. Moreno, although very convincing, was terribly sloppy to speak and there is nothing more unbearable for a journalist than to transcribe an interview where the interviewee begins a sentence and does not finish it or chain the events that he narrates in an almost baroque ramification of ideas and anecdotes. Moreno always did that. But his personal charm was in other ingredients, in his friendliness and in his great wealth

¹⁰ Available for downloading from www.nahuelmoreno.org.

of lived experiences and theoretical knowledge. Another of his flaws, acknowledged by himself, was speaking very fast and taking certain issues for granted. But, besides, it was not much fun for him to speak in front of one-person and recorder. He preferred the auditoriums; hence it was necessary to form a small “tribune” to encourage him to illuminate his speech and pour his political grit into each sentence.

After three months of working on these interviews, another project came up that gave rise to the aforementioned *Conversations ...* and the present work was discontinued. Moreno died before the author decided to resume it. Anyway, the trophy of his answers was already on the tapes, although countless questions had remained unasked; hence this book is incomplete and even shallow. But the die was cast and the option was to let the cassettes sleep the sleep of the righteous or to publish what was there, as it was, with all its defects included. In July 1989, the second path was taken, the author guided by the same original obsession — discovering something more about the Moreno known for his books and masterful political lines.

Talking with Moreno was always a pleasure, whether in an official meeting, in an informal chat or an interview. Apparently, the obsession to produce a book about his life and ideas has been going on for at least 15 years. In 1974 someone recorded a dialogue with him about the history of the party, for some leaflets that never came out and were to be called “Tradition”. Two years later, shortly before the military coup in 1976, the now-famous writer Juan Jose Sebreli — who was a Marxist at the time — restarted that 1974 dialogue with an idea similar to the present book. From the writings that are preserved from the dialogue of 1976, it is evident that Sebreli was the victim of two typical vices of Moreno: dodging the account of his personal life and linking the facts together by adding anecdotes. To such an extent was Sebreli a victim of this, that when he began the dialogue, he told Moreno: “I read the report (from 1974) and I would like to give it a more personal tone.” That tone could not be achieved because Moreno insisted on telling the story of his party and very superficially some anecdotes from his early youth. However, some replies from that 1974 and 1976 dialogue were interesting, at least from an anecdotal point of view. Moreno’s opinion on Evita and Peron belong to those statements to Sebreli and also some parts of responses — strictly speaking very few — included in chapters I and II. All the rest of the material — that is, 99 per cent — belongs to the answers given in 1984, a year and a half before his death.

Throughout the book, the verbatim statement has been respected to the maximum, although the oral language dumped in a text always has defects of form. These defects, however, find compensation in the method used: on the one hand, it allows to faithfully respect Moreno’s thinking and, on the other, to give the work a more pleasant and less stiff tone. It is to be hoped that in the future, this work will serve as an “input” for a well-deserved political biography of the Tiger of Pobladora.

Raul B. and the psychologist Sunny, one of the main disciples of Enrique Pichon Riviere, father of Argentine psychology, collaborated with the author in some sections of the interviews. Some of the more personal questions that appear in Chapter I were asked by Sunny, as were all the references to psychoanalysis. In those intimate mid-morning dialogues, while Sunny scrutinised his adolescence, Moreno spoke in an inaudible voice, leaning back in his armchair as if to get away from the microphone of the recorder. Days after that interview, Nahuel commented to a collaborator between scared and surprised: “They brought a psychologist to my interview!”

Raul Veiga

March 1989

Chapter I

Infancy

Early youth

Loves and mistakes

The role of the founding leader in any party is key, thus it is worth starting this dialogue, which will lead us immediately to the origins of Argentine Trotskyism, with some facts from your political and personal biography. Let's talk about the social structure of your family.

My family has a somewhat complex social origin. On our mother's side, we come from a wealthy Spanish family that bears the surname Capacete. They were quite important Freemasons and a great-uncle of mine, who later came to Argentina, took part in a republican revolution in Spain, back in 1870, and became a high official in the Canary Islands.

My father's, on the other hand, was an ordinary very conservative lower-middle-class Italian family.

My father was linked to commerce because he worked as an accountant.

It was a middle-class family that, however, I understand, had some connection with the oligarchy.

Yes, it is contradictory. I was born in a tremendously oligarchic town (Estacion America), which is in the region where the finest livestock is produced, such as Shorthorn, and which includes Rivadavia, America and Meridiano Quinto. The most powerful *estancieros*¹ in the country belong to that area. Back then, my family was contradictory, it was middle class but it was influenced by the oligarchy. We had a car and sometimes when my parents would send us to Buenos Aires, they would put a driver on us; but at the same time, I don't remember, for example, having been to Mar del Plata for the summer.

On the other hand, it was a political family. My father was a Radical leader and was a candidate for deputy in the 1930s. An uncle of mine, Aristides Capacete, was a journalist and politician; he became an important fascist leader and also a founder of Argentine Labour. Believe it or not, he was the uncle I loved the most.

Did Aristides influence you?

Yes, when I was a kid and until I entered high school. Even in the first year of high school, I retained his positions of criticism of capitalism and bourgeois democracy. Later on, I became a frantic anti-fascist. He was a conservative and a fascist but he also had had a socialist influence; years

¹ *Estancias* are large landholdings spread over extensive areas, often 10,000 ha or more. In the Argentinian grasslands, the pampas, estancias have historically been estates used to raise livestock (cattle or sheep). *Estanciero* is the owner of the estancia.

later I discovered this was not as strange as it seems. Many socialists, who were anti-Radical, were affiliated with conservatism. Conservatism at the time was very liberal and anticlerical. My uncle, then, had a certain influence of this kind. As for me, the biggest influence I received was not so much from my uncle as from the family political environment. Since I was born, I heard about politics. Ah! I do not know whether you know that in my family home in America they voted, they would do the famous “patriotic fraud” by opening the ballot boxes. All of that, when I was 9 or 10 years old, caught my attention.

When do you come to Buenos Aires?

When I was in the first grade of primary school, at 6 years old. At that time, the primary school began at the age of 8 in the province of Buenos Aires and at 6 in the Capital and my family forced me to go ahead, that’s why they brought me to the Capital, to start earlier. It was only when I was in third grade that they moved to Buenos Aires, perhaps worried because I repeated the third grade and also because my father had a somewhat dissipated life — he was a gambler — and my mother wanted to come. There was tension in that couple and they separated. I must have settled permanently in Buenos Aires when I was 9 or 10 years old but until 1940 every year I returned to my town during the holidays.

How do you start your radicalisation?

One of the suspicions I have is that I had acute social and “environment” contradictions. Maybe this led me to the revolutionary movement. My life in Buenos Aires was also of the middle class. I lived in a “posh” boarding house. It was a time of great economic crisis, in the 1930s, and my family tried to maintain their status. Here we lived in a high-level German boarding house that was in Bulnes and Santa Fe Streets that’s why I know the military so much. Important military men lived in the same boarding house, including the founder of the country’s war aviation.

At the age of 14, you join the Vergara Association, a discussion circle. What did you do in that association?

At the Belgrano High School where I studied, I met Federosky in those years, a boy who at the time was my closest friend. He belonged to the Vergara Association, which was directed by a reactionary teacher who applied new pedagogical methods: Marisa Serrano Vernengo. Also attended Rita, Boris and others who later formed our original group. Marisa Vernengo gathered the kids, made them study and give lectures. I joined the Association through Federosky. Marisa, although she was from the right, was closely linked to Nicolas Barletta and the Teatro del Pueblo,² which was the highest intellectual institution at that time. The group demanded great frankness and was very strict on matters of morality and with the older, they studied philosophy, especially Kant and Hegel.

At the same time, as I told you, I was at Belgrano High School, where I began to radicalise. At 14 or 15 I was a furious anti-fascist and a very good boxer for my age. That is why at the High School when there were confrontations between the fascists and the Jews, I took the side of the Jews and taking advantage of the fact that I fought well, I smashed the fascists’ heads.

Besides being in the Carlos Vergara Association and the Belgrano High School, you were linked to the theatre.

It is all related. Marisa Vernengo took me to the Teatro del Pueblo and there I met the person who recruited me for Trotskyism, a certain Faraldo. I was a Hegelian and argued a lot, I was pedantic and ridiculous, Faraldo always laughed at me. One day I asked him: “What are you laughing at?” and he replied: “I laugh because I have never heard so many stupid things together.” There he gave me to read *The German Ideology* and *The Transitional Program*, and I became a Trotskyist, but a Hegelian Trotskyist, I did not accept the premises of *The German Ideology*.

2 **Teatro del Pueblo** (People’s Theatre) is one of the first independent theatres in Argentina and Latin America. It was born at the end of November 1930, with the aim of “carrying out modern theatre experiences to save the debased theatrical art and bring general art to the masses, to promote the spiritual salvation of our people.” Leonidas Barletta was a prominent journalist and director of the **Teatro del Pueblo** until he died in 1976. Barletta invited Argentine poets and storytellers to join the dramatic activity; this is how he manages to put on stage works by Alvaro Yunque, Nicolas Olivari, Raul Gonzalez Tuñon and Roberto Arlt, among others.

Do you go to the Teatro del Pueblo exclusively to study theatre?

No, it is an extension of my experience in the Vergara Association, it is part of the same. With Marisa we met on Sundays to “waffle on”, as they would say in Colombia; that is to talk about anything, of philosophy, of Kant, of music; there was a very nice atmosphere, but Marisa was very chatty. Then, she took us to the People’s Theatre to listen, to see different plays, as a way of giving us culture. That experience was very useful for me, to deepen my distrust in the great intellectuals, I saw them very little serious... including also Marisa, who, as I said, liked to talk a lot. She was a teacher in Villa Crespo, which at that time was a very working-class neighbourhood of Jewish workers. The famous La Paloma tenement was in Villa Crespo.

Were there factories in Villa Crespo?

Or nearby. Villa Crespo was a centre of small factories and workshops, there were no large factories. The tenements were full of Jewish workers, afterwards, I saw the whole gentrification process but at that time it was strange for a Jew to be rich. They were all workers, so I always liked them.

I remember that when there was a struggle in our party against the pro-guerrilla wing and especially against Robi Santucho,³ who vindicated everything that was aboriginal, I used the pseudonym Abraham, which was my way to vindicate the Jewish proletariat who gave two of the great martyrs of the Argentine proletariat, who were the ones who attacked Colonel Varela and Ramon Falcon.⁴ To contradict Santucho, I used that pseudonym.

Also, our first little group was Jewish; Rita, my partner, and her brother Boris were Jews, also Abrahamcito, whose name was Abraham Vaisman; Czizik, whose name I don’t remember, and Rosita Bronstein, who carried Trotsky’s surname. The only non-Jews in that first group were Daniel Pereyra⁵ and me.

Let’s go back to the Vergara Association where Faraldo took you, what role did you play in that entity?

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- 3 **Mario Roberto Santucho** (1936-1976). Son of a traditional family from Santiago del Estero, he began his political activity as a student leader. In 1961 he travels to revolutionary Cuba. He already headed a left-wing organisation, based in the northeast of the country, the FRIP (Popular and Indo-American Revolutionary Front). In March 1965 the FRIP merged with Palabra Obrera (Workers’ Word), the organisation headed by Nahuel Moreno, and they founded the PRT. But at the beginning of 1968, the PRT split after a factional struggle. Santucho favoured a guerrilla orientation, while Moreno defended the critical positions of Castroism and Focoism and vindicated the working class and its struggles to build the party. Moreno continued guiding the PRT (*La Verdad*) and Santucho the PRT (*El Combatiente*). In 1969 Santucho was arrested when he tried to set up a guerrilla group in Tucuman. In 1970 he escapes from jail. In July 1970 Santucho founded the ERP, the most important Castroist guerrilla in Argentina. He promotes the urban guerrilla and a rural focus in Tucuman. In 1972 Nahuel Moreno, who promoted the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers Party), together with Ernesto Gonzalez, Hugo Blanco and American Trotskyist leaders, presented the work *Argentina and Bolivia — a Balance Sheet*, harshly arguing with the actions and policies of the PRT-ERP. This organisation even carries out armed actions against military barracks. But, increasingly isolated from the mass movement, it ends up being exterminated by repression. Shortly after the 1976 military coup, Santucho is captured and assassinated. Until now his body has never appeared.
- 4 It refers to **Kurt Gustav Wilckens** and **Simon Radowitzky**. Wilckens, a German Jew and anarchist, who killed Colonel Hector Varela in an attack with a bomb and pistol shots on 27 January 1923. Varela had been in charge in 1922 of the bloody repression of the strikers in Patagonia and he was personally responsible for the shooting of workers. The historical research book *Rebellion in Patagonia*, by Osvaldo Bayer and later the film of the same name, tell these facts. Radowitzky, also a Jew and an anarchist, a metal worker, only 18 years old, in November 1909, avenged the Plaza Lorea massacre. On 1 May of that year, the police had killed 30 workers and injured hundreds. Colonel Ramon Falcon was the police chief who had personally commanded the repression. Radowitzky killed Falcon with a bomb that blew up his carriage.
- 5 **Daniel Pereyra** was won to Trotskyism in 1942 by Moreno. In 1960–1961 he joined the militaristic deviation that arose in the Peruvian POR under the influence of the Guevaraist focoism and Pereyra personally participated in the bank expropriations in Lima. Moreno argued with Pereyra’s positions in a series of letters that were published under the title *Peru: Two Strategies* (available to download from www.nahuelmoreno.org). He joined Santucho and participated in the founding of the PRT-ERP and then left. He went into exile in Spain and maintained his relationship with Mandel’s United Secretariat. He is the author of the book *From Moncada to Chiapas (History of the armed struggle in Latin America)*, Libros de la Catarata, 1994.

Well, the Association had to do with my radicalisation because it led me to an intellectual environment. There, I became quite a prominent figure and when I was very young, at 15, I began to give lectures; I was idealistic and a Kant maniac. If ever a biographer examines my student grades, he will discover I was a rather bad student but mostly because they gave me a zero for behaviour; instead, in some subjects, I was an outstanding student, especially in mathematics and logic.

Was the interest in Kant a family influence?

Yes, and for a fourth-year teacher who had a decisive influence on me; he got me to like philosophy more and more. But also, for a long time, I acted out of repudiation.

What does that mean?

Look: I had Giusti and Ricardo Rojas⁶ as teachers; Giusti was smart and capable but Rojas was a complete fool and yet he was the greatest literary figure in the country. That repudiation was somewhat completed in the Vergara Association with Marisa Vernengo.

I was very studious, I used to go to the Teacher's Library to study eight or ten hours a day and what I was learning made me discover the charlatans around me, like Rojas. For example, the most famous in philosophy in this country is Romero⁷ and until recently I have read his works in Colombia; he is a charlatan. I studied Fender, the French logician, at the age of 15 and discovered a famous book by Romero-Pucarelli that was a direct copy ...

Did Romero plagiarise?

Completely! The same as Silvio Frondizi,⁸ whom I admired and loved so much, Silvio stole 150 pages of the book *We, the People: The Drama of America* by Leo Huberman,⁹ taking advantage of the distributor having gone broke. That is why I tell you: all those things caused my repudiation. I saw many intellectual "great figures" make elementary mistakes, such as miss-defining what was logic or ontology.

Over the years, one becomes more dialectical, relativises, sees in a person what aspect is positive and what is not but when one is a teenager, everything is black or white because one is discovering formal logic. That is why, at that time, I was inoculated against the "great personalities", many of whom were charlatans and liars. I acquired an allergy to personalities, that is why I am a sympathiser of Luis Franco, one of the few personalities in the Argentine intellectual environment that really impacted me.

Let's go back to your story, what do you do after the Teatro del Pueblo?

6 **Roberto Giusti** (1887–1978) and **Ricardo Rojas** (1882–1957) were among the most prominent literary critics of the time. They both taught literature in state schools. Rojas was the head of literature at the University of La Plata; he founded the chair of Argentine literature at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires in 1913, and later he was a professor of Spanish literature; Dean of the house of studies mentioned last and chancellor of the University of Buenos Aires. He was active in Radicalism and, persecuted for his political activities, was confined in the south of the country for several months. Among his works: *The Colonial House*, *Ollantay*, *La Salamanca*, theatre pieces, *The Saint of the Sword*, on the life of Jose de San Martin, *The Prophet of the Pampas*, on the life of Domingo F. Sarmiento, *History of Argentine literature*.

7 **Francisco Romero** (1891-1962). Philosopher, writer, soldier and teacher. Born in Spain, he came to Argentina with his parents at age 14. He was considered one of the most important Argentine philosophers of his time.

8 **Silvio Frondizi** (1907-1974) was a lawyer and historian. He was the founder of the Praxis group in the mid-1950s. One of his main works was *The Argentine Reality*, in two volumes, published in 1955 and 1956, in which he took several of the definitions and investigations about Argentina that Moreno had been working on since the 1940s. In 1960 he visited Cuba and since then that revolutionary process had an important influence on his positions. He was assassinated by the Triple A in September 1974.

9 **Leo Huberman** (1903-1968). An American Marxist, he was a worker from a very young age. He later became a teacher and dedicated himself to economics. He wrote *We, the People: The Drama of America*, a history of the United States from the point of view of the working class; *Man's Worldly Goods: The Story of The Wealth of Nations*, an economic and political history of capitalism. Together with Paul M. Sweezy, they founded the *Monthly Review* in 1949, which became a world reference for the left-wing intelligentsia. In the 1960s Huberman and Sweezy gave great support to the Cuban revolution, claiming its socialist character.

With Faraldo, that young man who recruited me to Trotskyism, and three anarchist friends we founded the Teatro de la Luna (Moon Theatre), in Callao and Corrientes Streets. Great leaders from FORA,¹⁰ like the Saccomano brothers and others, used to attend; anarchists were crazy about theatre.

All that experience of the Vergara Association, the Teatro del Pueblo and, later, the Teatro de la Luna, did you end up leaving it aside to dedicate yourself fully to politics?

No, because I hated politics.

Did you hate politics?

Yes, I hated it and I hate it to this day. It is a contradiction I have. I liked mathematics and philosophy. At the Belgrano High School, as I said, I was quite competent in Kant at 15 or 16 years old. And my other passion was theatre criticism, that's why I founded the Teatro de la Luna to oppose the Teatro del Pueblo, which had become right-wing. But I have hated politics all my life and, in fact, I entered it through a somewhat atypical mechanism: I was greatly impacted by two books that came to my hands; one of them was the *Transitional Program* that Faraldo had given me.

I was already beginning to lean towards socialism but in a very vague way because my concerns were only intellectual. I remember I gave some talks at the Vergara Association about love with a very idealistic conception. My most "earthly" concern was theatre criticism; by doing it, I became friends with Sergio Leonardi, who was a great screenwriter in Argentine cinema.

What were your artistic conceptions when you founded the Teatro de la Luna?

I was eclectic. The Teatro de la Luna had a slogan that the anarchists invented: "Neither art for art's sake nor art in the function of art: art." And this theatrical activity helped me to bring closer to the party Ernesto González¹¹ and others who were a group from Pehuajo and who were passionate about theatre. I brought them together to give them a theatre course and, in this way, I brought them closer to Marxism. But at that time, I was an abstract guy, very intellectual. When Faraldo wins me to Trotskyism, Abelardo Ramos,¹² the historian Rivera and others begin to take advantage of that facet

10 FORA (Argentine Regional Workers Federation), the anarchist labour union, which was the most important union organisation in the first decades of the 20th century. FORA led the insurrection of January 1919, known as the "Tragic Week", among many other general strikes, partial strikes and large worker mobilisations. It organised the majority of European immigrant working class in a union. Moreno wrote that FORA was a "colossal social phenomenon as much or more important than Radicalism (...) Still missing is the young scholar who writes the great book of the history of the Argentine workers' movement and especially this stage, which cannot be called other than 'Long live FORA!' The FORA that came to have half a million members, that got its newspaper to be the most sold in the country, that led to a remarkable cultural development demonstrated by the presence of artists and intellectuals who adhered to their plans (Florencio Sanchez, González Pacheco, Pedro Pico, Enrique Santos Discepolo, Figueroa, etc.), did not rise, however, to the understanding of the national problem or the Radical Party. The schema was simple: they are all bourgeois (Radicals and conservatives) and must be fought in the same way. This is why the anarchist conception of FORA, although revolutionary, was sectarian because it denied politics. The Forista revolutionaries were trapped by an iron dilemma: they made revolutionary politics but refused to have a revolutionary political organisation because that was ... doing politics." (Moreno, *Method of Interpretation of Argentine History*, p. 70, available for download from www.nahuelmoreno.org.)

11 Ernesto González (1924-2007). Moreno's great militant comrade and personal friend since the GOM. With a degree in history, he joined the GOM in 1952 and soon after became proletarian in the meatworks. Born in Pehuajo, he shared the entire political course of Moreno and was a party leader of his current in different regions of Argentina and its international groups. He was as a party delegate to various international Trotskyist Congresses. He held an important role in Argentina as leader of the PST and the MAS. As a political essayist, he published — in Peron's lifetime — an important work that was a reference for more than one generation: *What was and what is Peronism*. In his last years, he coordinated the publication of three volumes of *Workers' and Internationalist Trotskyism in Argentina*, a work that remained unfinished; the last book to be published was part 1 of volume 4, *The PRT (La Verdad) in the face of the Cordobazo and Classism (1969-1971)*.

12 Jorge Abelardo Ramos (1921-1994), was an intellectual and historian who as a young man was part of the PORS, a Trotskyist group that was formed in 1941. He evolved towards the vindication of bourgeois nationalism, which was called the "national left", and supporting the government of Peron. In 1953 he formed together with socialist leaders such as Enrique Dickmann the PSRN (Socialist Party of the National Revolution); Moreno and his group acted in its Buenos Aires Federation. He wrote for the newspaper *Democracia* under the pseudonym Víctor Almagro. In 1963 he founded the PSIN (National Left Socialist Party). In 1971 he formed the FIP (National Left Front). In the 1980s, he turned to the right vindicating the "carapintadas" (painted faces) uprisings of what he called the "National Army" and in 1989 Carlos Menem appointed him ambassador to Mexico.

of my personality and make me write about philosophical questions because it was never thought that I was going to be a politician. Being already a Trotskyist, for a time I continued being an idealist and vindicating Hegel and Kant...

But you, then, came to Trotskyism earlier than to Marxism.

Yes, I hadn't read Marx. The first book by him that I read was *The German Ideology* and I was already a Trotskyist.

What about the *Transitional Program*, what struck you?

Everything, everything... I was blank; I read it and felt passionate about the force, the prose, everything.

When Faraldo recruited you, were you already anti-Stalinist?

I do not remember. What I do remember is that I was removed from practical political problems. It is not by chance I do not remember. I remember small details of that time and not about what I thought of the USSR. I think it was not my concern, I was more theoretical, more abstract. I do remember having been a fan of the Spanish Republic, without distinguishing trends.

In a 1974 interview, you say that Trotskyism at that time was undone and that the militancy consisted "of spending the night arguing in cafes and intellectual gatherings". Did Faraldo take you to the Vergara Association and nothing else, or did he bring you closer to a specific Trotskyist group?

Well, Faraldo took me to the PORS, which had just been unified after Terence Phelan,¹³ an American Trotskyist, came. The young people of the PORS wanted to displace the old Trotskyists; among the young people were Abelardo Ramos, Perelman and others. By then, 1941 or 1942, I was 18 years old and they were a little older. Faraldo took me to a meeting of a cell that worked on La Boca and Barracas. There I began to do some militant activity within the workers' movement and in Alpargatas we met a great Bolivian leader who was semi-literate but had great ability and was a very good speaker. That worker was called Fidel Ortiz Saavedra and we also took him to the Vergara Association. There a decisive event takes place.

When we took Ortiz Saavedra to the Vergara Association, we warned him not to speak and to be careful because Marisa was very reactionary. We knew he had a passion for speeches and we were afraid he would give a speech and ruin all our political work. The young people who were close to us were those who would later form the initial nucleus of the party: Rita, Boris, Mauricio and Daniel Pereyra, of whom three were workers.

The thing is, the meeting at the Vergara Association began and the issue of the war was discussed. I avoided the controversy and did not give any "line" because we planned to do individual political work and touch on some cultural problems. All of the sudden, Ortiz Saavedra asks for the floor and begins to speak: "Comrades!", he says, and it should be clarified that only communists or Trotskyists were addressed like that; among socialists, the address was of "companions". Then he says: "Comrades, this imperialist war ! ..." and begins a harangue. I wanted to die, I got up and went to smoke a cigarette convinced our political work had been ruined, I was also furious with the Bolivian whom we had warned that Marisa was very reactionary, that this was a petty-bourgeois environment, etc. In half an hour I returned assuming Marisa had already kicked him out. But no. When I went in, Ortiz Saavedra had transformed the entire group into Trotskyist; Marisa Vernengo was cornered and all the young people were crazy about the Bolivian. Marisa had tried to defend the Allies in the war but Saavedra crushed her in controversy. This is how our group was born: it was recruited by Fidel Ortiz Saavedra, the Bolivian worker from Alpargatas.

Let's go back to the family topic; let's talk about your brothers.

¹³ Terence Phelan (1904-1961), whose real name was Sherry Mangan, was an American journalist who had joined Trotskyism in 1934 and was active in France under German occupation until he was expelled. In 1941 he toured various Latin American countries as a correspondent for *Life* and *Fortune* magazines. In January he arrived in Buenos Aires trying to unify the different Trotskyist groups, and the PORS (Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party) was formed, which Liborio Justo did not join. It was dissolved in 1943.

I have two brothers, one from my mom and dad and the other just from my dad, who married for a second time and had a son who recently appeared in the newspapers as one of the heads of the State Intelligence Service. I suspect it must be true because he was in the Radical Party.

Are you at odds with him?

Yes, and also with a large part of my family. I also fought with my mother, from a very young age when I was 15 or 16. And the fight started when she destroyed some of my Lenin books. We argued a lot, the family didn't want to receive me, not even when she died; we saw each other a few times but little.

That SIDE [Secretariat of Intelligence] brother that I mentioned to you was the opposite of my brother Eber. He was a very intriguing and friendly guy. Eber, however, was always very ill and did not seem intelligent. I think he suffered a lot from my parents' separation; he never studied; he was always a bit outcast. I was the opposite: I was the son who succeeded. My mother pressured me to become a lawyer at 18, it was her obsession that I had a great career. When she saw that I was leaning to the left, the conflicts began.

What was your relationship with Eber like?

An affectionate relationship but we had nothing to do with each other. I was educated in Buenos Aires and he in the country. When I returned to the countryside, my real friends were the oligarchs of the town and not Eber.

What about your oligarch friends, what were they like?

Friends with *estancias*, tennis courts, paddle courts, bocce courts, swimming pool... oligarchs. And that was precisely one of the contradictions that led me philosophically to the left, in addition to other social causes. The main contradiction was given in that shock of coming to Buenos Aires, spending nine months studying, leading a sad, horrible life, where it was difficult to relate, and then going back to the countryside where I seemed to be Virgilio singing; In the country, I didn't have enough time to have fun! I used to think life in all towns was that easy but later I realised it was like that only in the oligarchic sectors. As a Marxist, I understood that life in the towns, in the lowest strata, is terrible.

As an oligarch, in the town, I was the most hated and I had that complex for many years. I was a good soccer player and when I went out onto the pitch all the oligarchs applauded me and the townspeople insulted me, whistled at me.

In your childhood and adolescence, then, you felt differentiated.

I do not remember it as a feeling but objectively yes, because I belonged to an elite but I did not realise much; I believed that almost everyone was like that.

Do you have other memories of feeling differentiated?

Yes, in Buenos Aires, because I lived in a high-level German boarding house and played soccer on a corner of Arenales Street with humble kids. So, I began to see that "other world" of the projects, the tenement houses. The humble boys, for example, were struck by my way of speaking, because I never insulted, I was educated in a very formal way, like the petty-bourgeoisie of the town. I ate with my elbows close to my body because my dad taught me with beatings. However, my old man was inconsistent. One of the big beatings my father gave me was because he believed I had made a social differentiation. One day the collector from the power station came to my house (my father was doing some activity at the Meridiano Quinto power station) and I said: "Good morning". And for not saying "Good morning, sir", my father gave me a dreadful beating.

Within your party, now, do you feel differentiated?

Maybe a little for the same reason, that is, because of that formal aspect of my education I see myself a little different. In a recent meeting of the Central Committee, a female comrade referring to me said: "Because Hugo, who is a gentleman..." and she caught my attention because she was referring to my kindness; she made me reflect. I thought: but, how come others are not kind to her

like I am? I was always a bit idealist, a bad Marxist in the field of psychology and I had high regard for my comrades. Sometimes I was very wrong.

Do you mean that you usually have a higher concept of people than they really are?

Yes, higher than they really are and sometimes I am very wrong.

That reminds me of a partisan mania for overvaluing a certain newly recruited person. Sometimes it is believed and said of such an individual: “He is an exceptional leader” when he really is much less.

No, but what you say may be the first impression on a person. In me, it is more serious because that “first impression” lasts for years. What you say has to do with the idealisation of all action; it is a tremendous human law.

Only some people can overcome it, as is the case of Darwin, for example, who spent his whole life collecting material to prove himself that he was wrong; but this is very exceptional. The normal thing is that everyone tends to do “ideology”; the “ideology” is that, a well-set-up justification of what is done. But I don’t think it’s my case because mine is more serious. For example, for 20 years I believed that there was no machismo or anything like that in the party, for 20 years I believed it! ... I owe it to Marcela and Mercedes¹⁴ to have finally seen it.

Once again, let’s get back to the family. Was it a believing or atheistic family?

Atheist, especially my mother’s family. In my home, there was hatred of the church and this was a general phenomenon. In my time, no conservative was religious; they were fanatical atheists. When I was young, no men went to Mass, only basket cases. And that was the case until the 1930s; because there the military realised they needed the church. But in my time, I reiterate, the church was hated; this was a country made by the laity, by a very intelligent bourgeoisie who realised that if it was a rabid Catholic and “stuck” to the church, the country would not progress one millimetre. It is the opposite of Colombia, for example, where conservatives are of the vestry and all presidents were elected by the bishop.

Before the age of 12, did you have any idea what you planned to do in the future?

Yes, I thought I would be a sailor. I was quite a friend of the family of Brigadier Oscar Muratorio, who was the founder of the Argentine military aviation. They encouraged me to do a career as an aeronautical pilot but I wanted to be a sailor. Years later, I leaned towards the legal profession.

What were your tastes like when you were 12 years old?

Typical of the social sector to which I belonged; it was a “tacky” taste. I used *rastras*¹⁵ with my name very big, I liked rancheras and huge cockades. I didn’t know anything about classical music, I didn’t listen to it, except “Für Elise”. In my home there was a “reception day” on Wednesdays and the young doctors of the town, the notaries, some clerks with intellectual inclinations and teachers would come, and then the latest plays were read and the latest musical compositions were listened to. My mother always tried to make me cult and then at 9 or 10 years old I read a lot the classics adapted for children. I read Homer; I was a fan of Greek mythology. That is why my first political works are terrible, I quote Aristophanes, Dante ...

What was your character like?

Well, my wife used to say she never saw me in a bad mood.

And how was your character as a child?

14 **Marcela and Mercedes.** It refers to Silvia Díaz and Mercedes Petit, both leaders of the MAS (Movement towards Socialism). Silvia Díaz was a candidate for Vice President of the Nation in the 1983 general elections, integrating the Zamora–Díaz ticket of MAS. Mercedes Petit collaborated closely with Moreno for many years. She wrote *Elementary Political Concepts* and *Our Experience with Lambertism* in 1986, together with Nahuel Moreno (both available at www.nahuelmoreno.org). Today she is a leader of Izquierda Socialista (Socialist Left).

15 **Rastra:** piece, generally of silver, with which the gaucho held his suspenders, formed by a carved central plate and coins or buttons attached to it with chains.

Maybe I was a bit hysterical; I had terrible nightmares and I attribute it a bit to my mother's eating system, which ruined my gallbladder. At that time, there was a fad for calcium and she gave me milk soup. Thus, from a very young age, my gallbladder is riddled with stones.

Do you have any sad memories?

Yes, for many years a memory haunted me. In the German boarding house in Buenos Aires, where I lived, there was a German maid who was from Dock Sur and lived like all the Polish and German proletariat that arrived in Argentina in the first decades of the century. Well, this woman had a daughter to whom she, making a great financial effort, sent to a paid school. In my time, the great school was the public one; it was rare for a rich family to send their children to religious schools, only if they were obscurantists; but in general, they were sent to Buenos Aires, Moreno, Otto Krause, Carlos Pellegrini and other high schools. The paid schools existed so the kids of wealthy families who were brutes or brazen, paid and graduated; the paid school was to graduate without studying.

Well, this German woman one day came very happy to tell me about her daughter's good grades and I told her: "But madam if she goes to a paid school, she gets her grades as a gift." Well, this haunted me for years; right there I realised I had no right to take away the dream of this woman who was killing herself at her job to send her daughter to a private school.

Another tremendous memory of adolescence is related to a scandal carried out by some oligarchic kids I knew. This is why I hate the oligarchy. They paid the police to "select" certain girls from poor families and take them to black parties. One day a farmer, whose daughter had been taken, made a complaint to the governor; the governor spoke to the chief of the police and the police carried out a raid on a black party taking all of them prisoner. It was a national scandal; it was in all the newspapers. This had a great impact on me and made me despise the oligarchy. Because I, when a militant, hated the oligarchy because of books, theoretically; but for that fact, I began to hate them seriously and was horrified to think I had belonged to that despicable nucleus.

Besides those oligarchs, did you have any friends?

Yes, I always had friends; not many but one or two close friends and female friends too. I used to hang out with girlfriends older than me and it was a very ridiculous situation because the *estancieros* and bourgeoisie of the area tried to seduce them. Anyway, my life in those years was very beautiful; sexually relatively good because among very young people there were no relationships. But, for example, we had made a group of four girls and four boys and we had a lot of fun and even bathed naked in Australian tanks. I also had a girlfriend, who belonged to a very bourgeois family, and I did have relationships with her and fell very in love.

What image do you have of that teenager today?

I have the image that while I was in my town it was the most beautiful thing in the world but here, in Buenos Aires, it was the opposite. Leaving aside my studies, which I was very passionate about, life was a cross to bear, very terrible and very sad. I believe this was the biggest contradiction of my adolescence: those nine months in Buenos Aires and those three months in the country. Everything in Buenos Aires was the opposite to the town; if here I proposed to a girl to bathe together... she'd kick me out!

Young people now live in a more open world but the Argentine world at that time was one of terrible hypocrisy. When years later I told some female French friends what relationships were like here, they couldn't believe it. The Argentine family structure was one of the strongest in the Western world.

Here in Buenos Aires, anyway, I also had close friends and in the fourth year of high school, I became friends with Federovsky, the most lucid mind I have ever known. He brought me close to the Vergara Association.

Hugo, if you were not a professional militant, what do you think you would be?

Mathematician or philosopher, it was what I was most passionate about. I always hated politics and I still hate it in a way. I have made numerous mistakes because of that inclination of mine. For

example, here in Argentina, there have been terrible mistakes in the last seven years. When I say this, many may believe it is the petty-bourgeois tactic of a bureaucratic leader for whom everything he does not do is bad; I've seen this attitude. But in my case, it is different. In my heart of hearts, I think that a large part of the mistakes of the Argentine party during the Videla years were because I superficially attended to the political work in the country. I hate three things: politics, my ability to manage people, and my ability to do business. The party has used these three "qualities" of mine and has hurt me, even in my way of life. I was a guy who lived in Avellaneda, Lanus, working-class neighbourhoods, it was my environment; I still have friends in those places and they still remember me; there are even friends who name their children Hugo. But I had to get out of that environment driven by the tasks of the party, a little under pressure.

Did you try to go back to this other life?

I always, always try to return to a simpler and more neighbourhood life. I have had the ability to do small businesses, which the party has used in periods of a financial crisis. About ten years ago the party issued a resolution to prevent the finances of the organisation from depending on me, which I agree with. Besides, in the SWP of the United States, they told us that after 50 years of age we must allow leaders to have their money and even help them, if they do not have it, with the purchase of a house or something like that; because for a leader, there is no pension.

Of the non-political authors, which ones impacted you?

Hegel and Piaget, without a doubt.

What type of artistic expression did you like the most?

Well, I changed a lot... I admit my close friend and admired Angel Bengochea was right. In adolescence and youth, I really liked the classics: Homer, Goethe, Balzac, Cervantes and, above all, Shakespeare's sonnets. I did not like Dante, even though I quoted him in my first political documents. Later, under the influence of my Brazilians comrades, I became a fan of Eça de Queiros; they gave me his complete works in Portuguese, which is the sweetest language there is. Well, Bengochea always told me that I was an intellectual, that the classics were a lie, that today's reality indicated that Shakespeare and Homer were a couple of jerks... He had that "anti-cultural" bent. However, Bengochea did not like soccer and I convinced him it was a very nice sport. From that, he began to observe it and one day he argued with his wife who, like me, was half intellectual and had said there was nothing in the world, in beauty, in art, like the dance of the dancer Nijinsky. And now comes the anecdote. It turns out that there was a great centre forward here, Erico from the Independiente club, who had a very personal style of play and a particular play called "wounded pigeon". Erico jumped in "little pigeon" and made as if he were heading the ball, but instead of a header, he hit it with his heel; the opposing goalkeeper did not understand anything and threw himself to the opposite side to where the shot was going to. Bengochea saw that and he had a discussion with his wife and also with me — and I must admit that he won it. We both told him that Nijinsky was great, until one day the sports magazine *El Grafico* published a photo of Erico with his arms and legs wide open, flying in a "little pigeon" in a spectacular position and then Vasco Bengochea took the photo, stuck it on the wall together with another of the dancer and he showed us, with the comparison, that the Independiente player was ten times higher than that guy... Bengochea was masterful. He always told me that the most comical, most tragic things, infinitely richer than the texts of Homer, Sophocles or Aeschylus, happened in everyday life. Over the years, I had to admit he was right.

Returning to art, what are your current tastes of it?

The art that I like the most is the cinema and also television; the other arts have declined, they are overcome. I believe in poetry; I believe in literature but I believe more in the synthesis of art and cinema has that synthesis. For this reason, I also always liked Nacha Guevara because she is an artist who synthesises singing, dancing and acting.

And the poet Machado, who was a great moderniser of the Spanish language, would not be known without the diffusion that Joan Manuel Serrat gave him. Serrat united singing and poetry enriching Machado, not weakening him as some say. On the other hand, I understand that after

the Second World War that bourgeois-type relationship that the great divos established with their audiences ended.

What do you think of surrealism?

I never liked it, perhaps because my tastes were somewhat conservative during the rise of surrealism. The same happened to me with cubism. I think it was only in 1951 that the wife of a comrade, who was very capable in art, made me understand Cubism...

Trotskyists are normally against the so-called “socialist realism”, the Stalinist artistic schema, however, it is common to see Trotskyist militants evaluate a play or film with a Stalinist criterion... If the working class doesn’t show up on the play, they think it’s a disaster.

Yes, it’s true. For me, however, films like *The Comrades* are deplorable from the artistic point of view; and yet the comrades of the party liked it a lot because they like it when there is a direct or indirect mention of the class struggle. With this criterion, “progressive” interpretations of horrible films have been made. And also, progressive interpretations of films like *Borsalino*, which has a semi-fascist background, and where its real artistic value is not understood.

What movies have you liked lately?

I’ve been going to the movies very little lately. I like Chaplin last movies. Besides, like the whole post-war generation, I have been impacted by the Italian neorealism of the *Rome, open city* type, which, if you see it today, seems frightening because cinema ages a lot. At the time, I liked *Monsieur Verdoux* by Chaplin, with a plot by Orson Wells and also *Limelight*; I think they are Chaplin’s artistic legacy. I also really liked a famous surrealist film by Godard, *Vivre sa vie* (My Life to Live). But perhaps my taste is a bit dangerous because, in that film, each scene is an existentialist category. There is a famous scene where she writes slowly at the bar to offer herself as a prostitute; a slow and boring scene that, however, is very nice for those of us who like to read Sartre and the existentialists for fun. I am one of them.

Have you read Roberto Arlt?

Yes, a lot, I also knew him personally. What I like most about him are *Aguafuertes* (Etchings), I think that he was ahead of his time, but he is not perfection, he has been glorified more than he deserved. He, personally, was a great guy. He wrote in the newspaper *El Mundo*, where I went often because it was one of the centres of the left intelligentsia.

You have also a high appreciation for Luis Franco.

Yes, I have a very high opinion of him.

And of his work?

Also, a high concept, although I think that by being too careful in his sentences, he lost rhythm. But I think he has great merit; recently, reading him, I wanted to write an article because I understand that he recreates the story.

Is Luis Franco a model of an intellectual for you?

First of all, he is a great artist. Then, he has the merit that bourgeois society offered him everything to win him over and he put it all aside. Many years ago, he was much more important to public opinion than Jorge Luis Borges; Borges was nobody. Luis Franco is the only person I know of who once gave a talk at the conference centre of the newspaper *La Prensa* that was broadcast by radio network throughout the country. All the intellectuals and journalists of the time went to listen to him.

Let’s get back to you, do you consider yourself a person with a sense of humour?

Yes, at least in the party bureau and in the central committee meetings they laugh a lot with the things I say. I am cheerful and may have a slightly acid sense of humour. Rita, my partner, thought I was very cheerful. Not when I was young; when I started my militancy, I was very sullen, very serious, for years and years. Until I felt comfortable in a certain place, I didn’t make jokes; that’s why

they talked horrors about me, it was said that I was a machine... the surprise they had when they found out that I danced and that I was practising the American tap!

Once in Bahía Blanca, two female comrades told me: “how good that you dance, make jokes, are so kind and human”. And I replied: “Yes, all good, but as soon as you have a serious political discussion with me or a discussion about discipline, try to remember what you think now because you will say I’m a monster.”

But I repeat, for 10 or more years, I did not make jokes or confidences or anything. I suffered a lot for this reason and my character changed a lot. I am a person that, generally speaking, cannot hate. With Ernest Mandel,¹⁶ for example, I have been fighting very hard for years and yet not only do I not hate him but I love him very much. About this, I have an anecdote to tell you. When I was imprisoned in Brazil,¹⁷ one day the intelligence chief of the police arrived from Brasilia. He appeared before me and told me he had the order to release me, but that there were two things about my statements that did not convince him: “First, you did not come to Brazil to do what you said. Second, I doubt that you, Moreno, after so many years that you know Mandel, hate him.”

And he was right. All my statements, everything I said, took them where I wanted them because I intended to waste their time, otherwise, they could find our central committee, which was in full session in Brazil, and put them all in prison. So, to distract them, I spoke for 10 days in a row.

So, when the police chief told me all that, I answered him that he was wrong, that I had been to Brazil for the reason I had told them. But on the second point, I said: “If it comes from my statements that I don’t have a very high opinion of Mandel, you’re wrong.”

The couple, love, children

Do you remember the first woman you loved?

I think so. Recalling my memories, I remember that when I was a teenager, in my town, there was a family of doctors, very bourgeois, who had two daughters. The youngest of them did theatrical performances and was sexually very liberal; I fell madly in love with her. I had another girlfriend from my early youth, whose name was Evita, and a third at the time when I was living in the German boarding house. It was a romantic type of courtship.

How do you think it is and how do you think the relationship should be?

I see a total crisis in the couple. I am a fan of old-fashioned love. This means monogamous relationships, which last, where one is madly in love. It seems to me crazy and very alienating, the man who hangs out with one woman and another and another. I was like that and thus I speak from experience. I’ve been with many women, that’s why horrible things have been said about me and now, after time, I don’t understand the womanizer guy.

And what can you say about relationships within your party?

In the first place, I am a neophyte on the subject but I have had some ideas, not so much concerning the relationship within the party but more generally; ideas in the sexual and sociological field. I drew some global conclusions, many of them inspired by my own experience, which were later scientifically corroborated. For example, regarding the problem of male frigidity. One day chatting in New York with a specialist who was a comrade of ours, we talked about the matter and

16 **Ernest Mandel** (1923-1994). Known Marxist economist and Trotskyist, leader of the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International and its Belgian section. In the 1970s he was one of the main promoters of the guerrilla deviation in Latin America. Moreno harshly argued with him for decades criticising his revisionist positions on Trotskyism. One of the most memorable works of Moreno’s controversy with Mandel, “A scandalous document”, from 1973, was later published as a book with the title *The Party and the Revolution* (available for download at www.nahuelmoreno.org).

17 The Brazilian police arrested Moreno in 1978 when he was to meet with the clandestine leadership of the Argentine PST. A political campaign was initiated for his freedom that included statements by Felipe González, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Soares, Juan Lechin, the parliaments of Colombia and Portugal and Amnesty International. Once his freedom was achieved, he was able to return to Colombia where he lived in exile. The Brazilian authorities banned him from entering the country until in 1985 the Sarney government lifted the ban.

she brought me a scientific journal that raised it. But the subject, as a whole, has worried me for many years as a reason for reasoning.

I think that all values have been broken; that in the post-war period the entire previous structure of the couple's relationship was completely destroyed. The female sex, for example, has lost value; before it had immense value, yes, in the worst sense of the word, but it made relationships more passionate. This has changed. When I was young, any male comrade who managed to date a member of the party considered her a treasure. Not today, because women, by liberating themselves, have entered a bourgeois-democratic liberation mechanism, as if it were the devaluation of a commodity and not a human valorisation. I think that's one of the causes of male frigidity; of course, there are other causes but they have another origin, as is the case of super-exploitation of labour. But when I was a young man, having a woman was like having a precious stone. All that fell, all that worth ended.

But that it is over is progressive.

Relatively, because machismo was not overcome. While before there was passionate machismo, now there is the same machismo but cold, hypocritical. That's where, I think, the problem of male impotence comes from because it makes the man indifferent. Before, it was a possessive issue. On the other hand, women acquired characteristics similar to men; the roles were changed a bit but it was not a serious liberation, so all the values have been broken.

In your party, isn't that situation getting worse?

The party reflects society, there are no new values in it either. There is a total crisis in the structure of the couple around the world and yet those old destroyed values have not been replaced by others. Look, I don't know if you know the subject of Japan, it is a subject that I am passionate about. In Japan, families prepare everything at home so that mothers can have sex with their children. And this is done so the children do not waste time with girlfriends and can work, study a lot and progress. Well, what I'm telling you is a horror and shows the end of capitalist society because the maternal problem and the affection for children emerge with capitalism. During feudalism, this affection did not exist and children were treated like rags. Japan is a total symptom of the crisis of the bourgeoisie, of the loss of elementary values. Japan is the ultimate expression that no value remains and that no new values have emerged. Nor do I see new values emerging in my party or another party on the left, I don't know why... There are vanguard aspects within the party but no new values. I'm not sure why couples break up too quickly, I think it is for the reason I say: relationships become very "cheap".

This crisis, which is observed in many couples of leftist militants can be attributed to a mixture of messages. On the one hand, there is the moral and oppressive message of society and, on the other, the message of liberation from the party. I believe this dual influence causes very deep crises because antagonistic moral values collide.

I think otherwise because I believe the party reflects society. In Colombia, which is a semi-feudal-minded society, I only knew one married couple because all the people aged 28, 30, are separated.

But the crisis of the partisan couple surprises me, even from a sexual point of view. Anyway, I have begun to wonder whether I'm wrong and I defend old values already liquidated, even beautiful values but already outdated. I mean, I'm wondering if the sexual and sentimental issue is not taking a back seat. But I insist: women's liberation was developed as if it were an exchange value or a use-value; as a commodity that becomes cheaper for oversupply. Then, by becoming cheaper, society -especially at the time of the capitalist economic boom- caused what is called "consumerism" and this mania for consuming is also reflected in the party. The case of many male and female comrades who permanently change partners is unhealthy; it is similar to the desire of the petty-bourgeoisie to change the car model, in other words, fetishism. In the party, instead of new values, the mania of consumerism has penetrated, the desire to change partners like clothes.

Either way, it may be that I don't fully understand the change taking place; a change that tends to make sex like having tea; then sex will be desecrated and perhaps what we are now experiencing

is a transitional stage towards that, then everyone will be more individualistic, relationships will be cordial and sex will be desecrated; it will lose some charm.

Is that a hypothesis or an assertion?

What we are living today is probably the beginning of the road in that direction and then everyone will live in their room, the kids will be raised among all, and so on.

But ultimately, the perspective depends on the class struggle. Sex, the couple, the family are not problems separated from the class struggle. What is happening now, we'll see what result comes only when the social problem is solved globally. Now, I must say that in this field we are living in a transitional stage also in the party. It is not my taste because I think that the couple's relationship allows a much greater balance.

Continuing with your personal and family history. How has your relationship with your four children been?

It seems to me I did not take care of them much, especially the two oldest, who are David and Eleonora. With the two youngest, Clara and Arturo, the relationship was somewhat different.

What were your biggest problems and shortcomings as a parent?

I don't think I've had very important attention to my children. My wife educated them, I... I have loved them very much but I was always very busy, so I did not pay much attention to them. Besides, my first marriage was very conflictive, with many difficulties, I was separated on more than one occasion, so I did not live at home with my children. With David, my youngest son from my first marriage, I had very little involvement in raising him, so he was very close to his mother.

Anyway, I was always a good companion to them; I played soccer with David and Eleonora, unfortunately, was poor in sports. I always liked children very much but I did very little for Eleonora and David's education.

How have they reacted to your political militancy?

Clara and Arturo don't even realise it because they are very young. David and Eleonora reacted well. They joined the party since they were teenagers. Eleonora had certain resistance to joining the party and we never pressured her. In this sense, we never gave her a "Trotskyist education". We always educated her according to her generation; not a "cultured" education or anything like that. We always live in a neighbourhood and my children were educated the same as the neighbourhood kids because I think the only coherent education is social, "laboratory" education is bad.

Was Rita, your first wife, what is called "the love of your life"?

I don't know. Loves in the life of a person there are many. I have had several great loves and I would say that more than the "love of my life", Rita was the great love. She was the greatest female personality I have ever met. She was not a member of the party but a sympathiser but she was still the female personality of the party; a tremendous personality. Adversaries of mine, who had broken with the party, continued to admire and love her very much; they were fans of hers. Rita was extraordinarily correct, truthful, and frank. And she was also very competent; a great organiser. She wasn't very smart on the abstract ground. She was cultured and a very good reader; she came from a working-class family. At 15, she was already a factory leader.

His characteristics as a leader

To conclude this first part of the talk, we'll address Moreno as a leader. Do you, to take the pulse of the party, make contact with the ranks through the organisation's bodies or by more direct methods?

Through personal relationships, I have always had a lot of contact with the rank and file of the party. I like to chat with friends, with people who have nothing to do with the "heights" of the organisation. As a young man, I was very reluctant to have leadership positions; I have hardly ever been the party's secretary-general. I dodged my whole life this task and I continue to dodge it. I have

tended to have contact with the ranks individually and also through the organisms. And many times, being, in fact, the top leader of the party, I have not held any leadership position.

I asked this regarding the fact you once mentioned a great political lesson a comrade from the party ranks had given you.

Yes. I ran a metallurgical cell in General Belgrano Highway, near La Plata, where there was a factory with about 500 workers. I had always turned to the meat industry but from 1956 I dedicated myself to the metallurgical sector. That factory I mention was Domec, of stoves, and there we had a cell of about 12 comrades. And we had practically recruited for the party the entire internal commission of the factory, including a worker who was very backward politically, whom we called “Corrientes”.

The internal commission was run by an Italian named Parrino who later went to the guerrillas with my great friend Bengochea. “Corrientes” adored Parrino, he had great admiration for him. One day Parrino is fired from the factory. I gather the cell and we discuss the problem. I propose to use the fact to make a great political scandal against the metallurgical union bureaucracy of the Avellaneda branch, which served the factory. “Corrientes”, in his simple language, responds to my proposal: “That is useless.” We debate the issue again and I speak to him about the relationship of forces, this and that, using the typical Marxist terminology that he did not understand much. He didn’t want to know anything about my proposal.

We put the issue to a vote and my motion wins, which was to ask that the delegate committees of the Avellaneda branch meet to decide what attitude to take. “Corrientes” voted against; he was the only one. We continued discussing other points and “Corrientes” remained silent, serious, angry. So, when we were going through the third or fourth point, I ask him what is wrong with him. And he tells me: “I’m angry because my friend Parrino was fired and I’m not going to allow the ‘Turk’” — who was the owner of the factory— “to do that.”

And what did “Corrientes” propose? “I will defend Parrino”, he told me. “On Monday, I go to the factory with my knife, I go to the office of the ‘Turk’ and ask to speak with him as a member of the internal commission. When he receives me, I lock the office door and tell him: if he does not reinstate Parrino, I will stab him open.” “No, not that!”, I said, how are you going to do that ‘Corrientes’? That is an individualistic attitude, detached from the mass movement, which has nothing to do with the class struggle or with the methods of the workers’ movement...” Well, I gave him a long political spiel. But he was stubborn: “I don’t care about anything, on Monday I go to the factory and if they don’t reinstate Parrino, I’ll liquidate the ‘Turk’.”

Well, things were getting ugly. And here comes the lesson he gave me because thanks to “Corrientes” I had one of the most important political and theoretical policies. I said to him: “Excuse me, comrade ‘Corrientes’, if you, as a member of the internal commission, give the order to stop the entire factory when the boss arrives, can you organise a strike?” “Yes”, he replies. “Well”, I tell him, “then what do you think if instead of going alone with your knife, you all go together, take over the administration and the factory, go on strike inside the plant and threaten the ‘Turk’, if you like, but everyone together.” “Corrientes” immediately accepted the proposal.

Result: it was one of the first factory occupations in Argentina, previously there had only been the case of Siam but there was no history of such methods in the country. It was also successful because Parrino was reinstated. After this experience, I wrote a little theoretical work and we produced a party resolution so that the strike with plant occupation begins to become popular as a method of struggle. This happened in 1959 and in the following years, to date, the strike with occupation was a method widely used by the Argentine proletariat. For us, it was a great political success but the success was possible only by listening to the ranks, in this case to “Corrientes”, and not being frozen in previous schemas.

Except for Siam, have there been no strikes with factory occupation before?

None, it was not a traditional method of the workers' movement. Later it imposed itself and generalised. A book of mine came out in which I proposed to promote such measures; so much so that the great Peronist union bureaucrat of the 1960s, Vandor, called it "the Moreno tactic."

Now, the previous occupation, that of Siam, was worse and shocked the country. It was in 1955 or 1956. We were against the occupation but we complied because it was decided by all the workers. The fighting took place in Carma, which was owned by Siam and was an experience for the entire metalworkers' guild. Those were the years of the Liberating Revolution¹⁸ and the military comptroller of the Avellaneda branch of the Metal Workers Union was General Gallo. He was a square and monstrous military man. It all happened like this: Carma was not in conflict but received the order of the military comptroller to elect factory delegates. They hold an assembly and elect them. According to the current law, the delegates had to appear before a military official with the list of those elected. They do so and when the military receives the list, he crosses out half. The workers ask him why and he answers: "I crossed out half so you know I'm in charge." The delegates had never dealt with the military, they came from the previous Peronist experience and were used to dealing with the bosses. They did not understand anything of what was happening. This military man did not allow them to sit down, he received them standing; the bosses, on the other hand, served them coffee, treated them well, negotiated. Not this military man; he had a barracks mentality and was always with a lieutenant who was his "aide-de-camp". Then one of the workers, during the talk with the military man, lit a cigarette and the military man yelled: "Lieutenant, aim at him and if he doesn't put out the cigarette, shoot him!" Well, everything like this. The delegates returned to the factory, summoned an assembly and told the ranks everything that had happened, how the military had treated them, that he had crossed out half of the list... What for! ... People became enraged, it was an outburst, the workers shouted "this general son of a bitch doesn't know who he's messing with!" They were furious. So, they occupied the plant, took the managers hostage and surrounded the factory with solvent tanks and said: if the army tries to enter, we will all die, including the managers. Aramburu and Lonardi¹⁹ sent the tanks, surrounded the factory with the army; there was great tension because they were willing to explode the solvent tanks. The government had to relent, Lonardi urgently summoned the delegates and ended up recognising the internal commission chosen by the ranks. It was an extraordinary experience.

Moreno, you still haven't told me much about you as a leader, except that you like to be linked to the rank and file and that you shy away from managerial positions. And of that great lesson that "Corrientes" gave you that contains a clear message: listen to the ranks. Now, many times there is talk, in general, about the weaknesses of your party or the weaknesses of the IWL and I wonder what your weaknesses are as a leader. Some say you have a "conservative" mentality.

No, in politics I am not a conservative. On the contrary, I am quite audacious, at least that is how Hansen, the great leader of the American Trotskyist party, thought. He, on the other hand, had a very bad opinion of me as a theorist. But yes, I am bold, I see enough opportunities. I watch reality a lot and when I see an opportunity, I throw myself headfirst. Yes, I am conservative, for example, in my literary tastes. I also believe a lot in the classics of Marxism but along with that, I must say I was one of the first to question Trotsky. In politics and theory, I am not conservative but maybe I am in artistic or personal tastes.

Okay, but what are your flaws as a political leader?

18 **Liberating Revolution** is the name by which is known the civic-military dictatorship that ruled Argentina after having overthrown Juan Domingo Peron in September 1955.

19 **Pedro Eugenio Aramburu** (1903–1970) was an Argentine Army general. He was a major figure behind the military coup self-named Liberating Revolution against Juan Domingo Peron in 1955. He became de facto president of Argentina from 13 November 1955 to 1 May 1958.

Eduardo Ernesto Lonardi (1896–1956) was an Argentine Lieutenant General who headed the *coup d'état* that overthrew Peron on 16 September 1955 imposing the self-titled Liberating Revolution. He served as de facto president from 23 September to 13 November 1955. The armed forces deposed him and replaced him with hard-liner Pedro Aramburu.

Two or three very big ones. The main one is that I always have only one concern. Because of this tendency, I made political disasters in an “indirect” way. I am not the “culprit” of some of these disasters; they are mistakes that nobody blames me for because formally I don’t have any. But I know I do. Bengochea, who was a great psychologist, always recriminated me for it. Now no one does and it’s terrible. For example, it’s terrible how I end things. When a task is finished, I don’t worry about it anymore; put another way, I am one-sided, I only worry about one issue. While I was in Colombia, for example, I very much neglected the Argentine party but in parallel, I gave the Argentine party great written, correct political lines; Then you read me and say: “Yes, Hugo was right in this question.” But what you don’t know is that I was not deeply involved in the problems of the Argentine party, even seeing the danger of the mistakes that were being made. Bengochea used to say there were solitary elements in me and that, without being an aristocrat or an oligarch, there were aristocratising elements in me. And it is possible. I, for example, speak very fast and sometimes I explain things without much detail, starting from the premise they have to understand me right away and if they don’t understand, too bad, I continue with something else. Bengochea attacked this flaw a lot.

On the other hand, I had a big flaw of sectarianism. They are related flaws. To save time, I study and focus on a single issue that interests me. I don’t follow the left-wing press unless I need it for a controversy; I don’t read anything that takes me away from what I’m studying and I always study what I’m passionate about and nothing else, but, luckily, I’m almost always interested in what should interest me. I have a reluctance to reading other things. I was brought up like that, a bit to do whatever I wanted. That is why I move so much with oral reports because often I do not have the time or desire to read certain things. I never read Posadas, all the leaders read him and laughed a lot at the goose things he said and I could never read him. I don’t read Ernest Mandel, except when I have to reply to a document; then yes, I read him with passion and everything together, I underline it from top to bottom, I work once, ten times on the topic and with great passion and interest.

Another weak point, on which I make efforts to change, is the following: I always went to the end in internal controversies without caring about the consequences, without taking into account the subjective factor and that prevented me from forming leadership teams. I think this is a catastrophe because our entire political current suffers from this flaw of mine. And it is weakened by my eagerness to argue with friends, without taking into account how to avoid friction within a team. Before I didn’t avoid friction, I didn’t care. I criticise myself for that.

Chapter II

Villa Pobladora

Trotsky's mistakes

Meeting Che

“If Hemingway wrote that Paris between 1920 and 1930 was a party when I write my memoirs, I will say that in the early 1940s Argentine Trotskyism was a party.” (Nahuel Moreno, 1974)

When did Trotskyism originate in Argentina?

Trotskyism emerged here in 1928-29. Towards the year 1940 there were three tendencies: that of Liborio Justo;¹ that of Raurich,² which was a bit “gaseous”— so to speak — where he influenced the most for his dazzling intelligence; and Abelardo Ramos’s group called the Leninist Workers Vanguard.

Did Trotsky know of the existence of these groups?

Yes perfectly. Note that a magazine was published — and this is an anecdote and anecdotes must be taken with a pinch of salt — and a copy was sent to Trotsky because he had sent money by subscribing and together with the money, he sent a letter that said: “I hope to see the second issue”...

Number 2 was never made?

As always! The second issues of Trotskyist magazines were an exception.

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- 1 **Liborio Justo** (1902-2003), aka “Quebracho”, son of President Agustin Justo (who ruled from 1931 to 1938) is considered one of the founders of Argentine Trotskyism. Taking Trotsky’s thesis, he stated that the first task of the Argentine and Latin American proletariat was to achieve national liberation, proposing that Argentina was a semi-colonial country dependent on English and American imperialism. In the 1950s he broke with Trotskyism.
 - 2 **Hector Raurich** (1903-1965) was an intellectual who had been expelled from the CP in 1925. In the early 1930s, he travelled to Spain and was influenced by Nin and the Trotskyists. He claimed to be a Hegelian and had a great culture. His talks were at the centre of what was known as “Raurich’s circle”, which met at the Cafe Tortoni and Moreno joined briefly. In 1947, the Raurich group moved away from Trotskyism and joined the Socialist Party. In the discussion about whether or not to defend the USSR unconditionally from any capitalist attack, despite the existence of the Stalin government, Raurich sided with the “anti-defencists”. In 1961 he published the book *Notes for the Currency of Hegel and Marx*.

Before, we talked about the Vergara Association, what do you do next?

They take me to the Teatro del Pueblo and there I become a Trotskyist and return to the Vergara Association to do political work. That's where our group, the GOM, Marxist Workers' Group, emerged in 1944.

And what did you talk about at the always mentioned Café Tortoni gatherings?

We philosophised a bit. But the Tortoni was not the only meeting place. We did a "tour" and we arrived at Tortoni late at night. We started in La Opera on Callao and Corrientes Avenues and in a little cafe next door that has now disappeared.

Nathan Pinzon, the actor, and Leo Salas, the film critic, came there. They were both Trotskyists. Nathan Pinzon was a sympathiser and Salas, instead, was a staunch militant.

This original group, did it have political relations with other Trotskyist groups in the world?

Not until 1947, when a Latin American conference on Trotskyism was held in Buenos Aires. We did establish links there because delegations came from Brazil, Chile, Peru, Uruguay and Bolivia. From Uruguay came the Posadists and, among other leaders, the brother of the one who later became the top leadership of the Tupamaros, Raul Sendic. In any case, we were centrist on an international scale and a national scale very sectarian, almost ridiculous, very comical.

Sectarians in what?

Look, there was a municipal election, I think in 1947, and we carried as an electoral program the slogans of the Paris Commune that appear in the Communist Manifesto ... We were delusional. We had many mistakes like this. This is why I define this stage as of "barbarian Trotskyism" because we formed separated from the international experience, discovering things through a painful birth, where it took us years and years to solve political or theoretical problems that were already solved. Along with what I tell you, we have had great successes for thinking with our head, because we cannot fall into a false modesty either. We have had primitive, ridiculous mistakes and also successes. When we made contact with groups from abroad, we learned a lot.

What was the first success of the group?

One, immense, is the correct characterisation that the Peronist trade union movement had a future and that in dynamics, it would displace anarchism and communism which at that time were the leadership of the workers' movement.

What did the rest of the left think of Peronism?

It thought it was fascist. Those who insisted that the preferential place for Trotskyism's political work were the Peronist unions were us. We denounced the totalitarian, reactionary character of the union bureaucracy and state control. But we knew how to understand the phenomenon. That success, I think, is the fundamental page of our group. The ultimate reason that it subsists to date: having linked to the workers' movement. Apart from what I am telling you, we were wrong in almost everything related to national political analysis. But the historical analyses are good; some of them were taken by the historian Milciades Peña,³ although in a somewhat static and sectarian manner.

Was the group already linked to the working class?

We had the political line of inserting ourselves into the Peronist trade union movement. We failed in our attempt to link ourselves to a great textile strike. Our group was working-class but working-class from the centre of Buenos Aires, from Villa Crespo; garment workers, carpenters. We all went to the Timber Union to listen to Mateo Fossa; with him we discussed a lot about union issues. Our line was to link ourselves to industrial conflicts, which almost did not exist because there was a tough government, the one of Farrel-Peron. But in January 1945, there was a great meatworkers'

3 **Milciades Peña** (1933–1965) was from Berisso, province of Buenos Aires, and as a high school student, he joined Moreno's group. He was very intelligent and capable and collaborated with Moreno in research and training tasks until he left him in 1955. He then returned to collaborate in the publication of the magazine *Estrategia* in 1957–1958, until he left permanently. He was an important historian. He committed suicide in December 1965, at the age of 32, being director of the prestigious magazine *Fichas*.

strike at the Anglo-Ciabasa, Wilson and Smithfield meat processing plants. The timber union meets and approves the issue of a contribution bond to collect funds and deliver them to the strikers. There we display a great solidarity activity. The strike was led by a modern anarchist organisation, the Argentine Anarcho-Communist Federation, FACA, which was against trade unions by trade and in favour of trade unions by industry. But the FACA had a bad relationship with the Meat Workers Union, there were problems; instead, we helped the strikers with loyalty, without speculation and we were well received. The leader of the strike was Lucas Dominguez, who was in hiding. We had a hard time locating him and, at first, he received us badly because he believed we were from the CP and that we wanted to use him politically. We insisted that we wanted to help with no conditions. Lucas was suspicious because the Anarchists weren't loyal to him; they changed the text of the flyers, they gave a different political line, they confused. We took the money to Lucas and began to work for the strike by distributing materials and newsletters. Every day at 7 am we would load a car that we had and we would do the clandestine distribution. Lucas gave us flyers to print and we did it at night, without sleeping, in an antediluvian printing device where we had to place letter by letter until all the text was assembled. But all that sacrifice and that loyalty helped us to gain the total trust of Lucas Domínguez. At one point during the strike, for example, a group of activists began to criticise Lucas and seek that we give them a line, and we nothing, because we did not want to have friction with him. Lucas Dominguez, I want to clarify to you, never became a Trotskyist or anything like that, but he died vindicating our principled and loyal attitude. When the strike ended, we recruited a large group of workers, we took everything, including the union's premises. It was an excellent example of a union tactic.

Is this first small group the one that immediately afterwards created the party in Villa Pobladora in Avellaneda?

Yes, there we entered Villa Pobladora, it was a very rich experience. *Chueco* (Banded-legged) Britos is the one who takes us to live in Pobladora, which at that time was the industrial centre where the largest factories were located. There, another stage opened for us. We won the leadership of the United Heart club in Villa Pobladora, which was an institution. In bulletins of the Socialist Party, they referred to us as the "Pobladora Group". We were the first Argentine Trotskyist group to be full of industrial workers, leaders and activists.

Villa Pobladora, in those years, was the largest industrial centre in the country after Tucuman. They are a few blocks located on the right bank of the Victorino de la Plaza Bridge, as soon as you enter Avellaneda, and it has a commercial street called Uruguay. There will be 12 or 15 blocks that, at that time, were filled with factories like the soap factory Palmolive; Lanera Argentina; France Argentina, which was the most important tannery; Crespi, which was the largest construction firm; Bocazzi; Sanchez and Gurmendi and others. And nearby, next to the Alsina Bridge, were — and many of them still are — Siam di Tella, the Wilson meatpacking plant, Tamet, Ferrum... As I tell you, it was an impressive industrial centre.

Well, in April 1945 there was a second strike that was led by us and was lost. In Pobladora we made a kind of commune, we formed workers' pickets and practically took over several blocks. We controlled the vehicles and nobody could circulate if they did not have a pass signed by the Strike Committee. We handled an entire sector of Avellaneda, something similar was seldom seen. But there was already little support from the rest of the workers' movement and unlike the January strike, the April strike was imposed a bit under pressure. It was lost but we continued to work hard on the workers' movement. That is where what we call the primary or basic course of Marxism emerged; we elaborated it to explain in a few words and with simple examples, what social classes were, how capitalism moved and what Marxism was.

When our group turned our militancy to Villa Pobladora and Avellaneda, *Chueco* got me a room in a tenement to live. We managed to enter, as I said, the United Hearts Club and, in fact, we operated our semi-legal premises there. *Chueco's* friends, all workers, placed me as general secretary of the club and from there, doing courses, giving talks, supporting conflicts, we won the entire neighbourhood for our positions; we were a power in that area. We ran the internal commission of

the Bocazzi factory and we had an extraordinary influence there. The factory had 300 workers and once we organised a talk and 115 came. In the party, we would be about 100 militants or maybe fewer. We recruited the construction union leadership, which was communist, and a whole working-class cell of the CP. We lead the internal commissions of seven or eight large factories in the area; we were very strong. Notice that once the police, who had their eyes on us, tried to raid the building where I lived. I was at that time giving a course with 50 workers from neighbouring factories. The police began to surround the neighbourhood, word spread and, I don't know how, a picket of 150 armed workers was formed who came out of all the tenements. The police left and did not return.

But our main problem was that we had no cadres. If at that time we had had a leadership like the one we have now and we had worked with the youth of the Socialist Party, we would have become a power. The socialist left was very strong but we despised everything that was not workers and within the worker, we were interested in large factories and among these the worst paid, it was a huge sectarian deviation.

I suppose that Peronism, which was taking over all the unions, was not very amused that a Trotskyist group became strong precisely in Avellaneda.

We began to become a very annoying union opposition. With my friend *Chueco* and other comrades, we continued to fight tooth and nail to prevent Peronism from recruiting the entire workers' movement. I have lost years of my life, for example, trying to regain the meatworkers union, for which I always had a predilection, although statistics already showed at that time that it was a union in decline because another type of industry was emerging. We drove Eva Duarte and Peron crazy and especially her, who was very sinister and wanted to bust us. Peron was a very nice guy compared to her. Evita was lumpen; Peron, instead, was a very astute bourgeois with whom one could discuss.

Evita was quite the opposite, she had a fascist mentality, complete lumpen. Mind you, she had a huge personality. When we led a strike at the Anglo Ciabasa meatpacking plant, she called in four or five delegates from the plant linked to us and treated them like rubbish: "You sons of bitches", she told them, "go to work before I break your soul. The strike is over and I don't want to see you around here anymore." I don't know whether you know that that was the language she used, incredibly rude, very gangster-like. But beware, when she supported a strike she acted in the same way with the bosses. So she did it to the Mu-Mu candy bosses. She summoned them, made them wait three or four hours in some armchairs and then she took them out of the office almost shouting and kicking them and if they did not negotiate, she would go with a steamroller over them. She was terrible. That's why the union delegates, the best activists, hated her. She was tied to the corporate union bureaucracy. She once found out that Espejo, who was the CGT Secretary-General, beat his wife. She summoned him and his wife to her office; she grabbed Espejo, who I insist was the top boss of the CGT and insulted him from top to bottom in front of his wife: "Be careful with hitting her again...". That is a famous and proven anecdote.

Peron was the opposite. I remember that in 1945 he made a spectacular move on us because he was very skilful. There was a strike at the Wilson meatworks, led by an anarchist linked to us who we called "Paisano". Paisano lived in a working-class tenement, near Alsina Bridge. Then, in the middle of a strike, one day Peron drops at his home "to drink some mates". Note that Peron was the vice president of the Republic. Peron arrives, drink some mates and says "Look, my friend, I have come to talk man to man, as just another comrade. Tell me, who do you think rules the country? Do you think the president rules it? No, you are wrong and it surprises me because you are a union leader. Here the big monopolies dominate, like Wilson, where you work and they try to thwart my policy of support for the working class. So, you have to move carefully, not give them excuses to overthrow me. So, I'm going to ask you for a favour, lift the strike." He was a master and he got away with it. Paisano came to where the strike committee was meeting, told us all the talk in great detail and told us: "I gave Colonel Peron my word, I don't think he is lying to me" and he lifted the strike. It was not the only time that Peron did something like this to us. In the party, we even prohibited our union leaders from negotiating with Peron because he was very clever and ended up swallowing them.

At that time, did you personally go to work in a factory?

No. I worked hard; I was active in the leadership of the meat union but I was not in a meatpacking plant. At that time, unions accepted students. They were very liberal in a good sense of the word, the opposite of what they are now.

And in general terms, what was that workers' movement like when compared to the current one?

It was weaker. It was just getting organised. As of 1934, 1935 the unions by industry begin and anarchism is overcome. The socialists take over everything all and especially the communists, who become very strong in meat, textiles, metalworkers. The old unions like the Printers Federation or the timber union, where there was no influence from the CP, were wonderful; they held monthly assemblies, there was a great democratic tradition; relations were fraternal and in the printing union, for example, each tendency had its own office. Similar to the student movement now. Great speakers were also being trained. But Stalinism, at the time I am telling you, rotted everything.

In what situation was Trotskyism as a whole at this time we are talking about — mid-1940s — when Peronism emerged unstoppably?

For Trotskyism, there was a clandestine situation. Three groups were to be traditional until the 1950s: the ones of Posadas, Miguel Posse and ours, GOM, which was the smallest. Posadas had been left alone because Abelardo Ramos split, that is, there were actually four groups: one more pro-bourgeois, legal, which was Ramos, an intellectual group with little ties to the working class and which quickly adopted a very favourable position. to Peronism. We, on the other hand, had a very negative position. We did a correct static analysis but this ultimately means that we were doing an incorrect analysis because for Marxism a static analysis is incorrect. But, why do I say static but with correct elements? Now, for example, there is a book that shows how Yankee imperialism, at that time, shot Argentina to kill and we already warned about it at that time; we said that Argentina, under the government of Peron, was more independent but it would become more and more dependent. We said that there were two blocs, one English-Peronist and the other of the Democratic Union and Yankee imperialism and that these two blocs were in conflict. That analysis was good.

Speaking of Trotskyism, what is your explanation for the profound political degeneration of some groups such as Posadism?

There is a fundamental explanation: we Trotskyists are marginal, that is the ultimate explanation. The other is a political explanation and is the breakup of the Fourth International. They are two phenomena that combine. Today, adding all the Trotskyists in the world, let us suppose that we are 25 or 30 thousand militants, at the most. We remain marginal. On the other hand, we, in 1948, believed in the authority of the Fourth. Today each one believes in his current. So, when there is no common framework, something that unifies all Trotskyism, those very marginal tendencies such as Posadism take place.

Which is the most extreme marginality...

No, also Healy, Lambert.⁴ Posadas broke records because he must have been completely crazy, but marginality causes psychologically crazy-like tendencies. I believe, like Trotsky, in a link

4 **Gerry Healy** (1913-1989). Irish. He emigrated to England and there he became a Trotskyist in 1937. Faced with the crisis and split in the Fourth International in the early 1950s, he aligned himself against Pablo and Mandel. He kept an international organisation, called the International Committee, together with Pierre Lambert, which did not participate in the reunification of the Fourth International in 1963. In 1971 he distanced himself from Lambert. In the 1970s, his organisation, the WRP (Workers Revolutionary Party) underwent successive splits, although it retained an important apparatus due to its ties to the Libyan and Iraqi regimes, which financed it. In 1985, it erupted amid political arguments and accusations against Healy of sexual abuse of female WRP members. Healy used brutal bureaucratic methods and carried out personal smear campaigns against Trotskyist leaders who disagreed with him.

Pierre Lambert (1920–2008). French Trotskyist leader. He headed the PCI (Internationalist Communist Party) since 1954. He formed the International Committee with Healy with sectarian positions against the Cuban revolution. They denied Cuba's character as a workers' state. In 1979–1981 he had a unification with the international organisation led by Nahuel Moreno (they formed the International Committee-Fourth International, IC-FI). But they were divided by the support that Lambert gave to the government of the PS in France, headed by Mitterand. Since then, Lambert's organisation went into a steep decline.

between history, politics and psychology. Not long ago, I read a very serious book on absolutism, the transition from feudalism to capitalism and this book corroborates Trotsky's thesis that the Tsar was very similar to Louis XVI of France. In this book, it says that all absolute monarchs had very similar, almost identical psychologies.

Then, uniting psychology and politics, some prototypes are explained such as those of bureaucrats who, for example, have a persecution complex. Stalin is the ultimate psychological expression of this, he has characteristics of a madman but because of social problems. For a very simple reason: the opposite of a bourgeois who has stability, who if he owns a company and earns money, psychologically has to be safe, a bureaucrat is not safe for a minute: if he makes a mistake or falls from grace, he disappears and runs out of privileges. Now, in the case of the Trotskyists, because they were marginal to the mass movement because they had not been able to build parties with mass influence and also with the highly divided Fourth, aberrations occurred; the biggest one I know is Posadas but I have seen other, very crazy things ...

Like what?

For example, the brother of a comrade of ours, who was an almost genius guy, had a naturist group that made political contact with us. There, at Vicente López's German Club, which was called "El Caño", we contacted him in the middle of winter. They were "Trotskyists". We went to see them trying to recruit them because they had good leaders. And well, in the middle of winter, in July and August, they were in loincloths, jogging along the river and we had to chat with them running alongside them in overcoats. But the tragic thing, which according to them was wonderful, was when they got into the river naked in the middle of winter and then ran out like desperados. Well, I refused to continue dealing with them, another comrade attended them. They were naturists "Trotskyists".

Outside of these extremes of madness, which are really comical, I am struck by cases like the SWP, for example. Barnes recently declared that the SWP was no longer Trotskyist and I suppose this has to do not only with the breakdown of the Fourth International but also with economic and political reasons for living in the United States, the great capitalist country.

Sure, yes, and also with the fact that the Yankee proletariat has struggled little. There is a dialectic: it struggled little and this caused them to move away from Trotskyist positions. Barnes, like many members of the SWP, comes from a proletarian family but he had been educated at a prestigious university... A man of great talent, the Fourth has lost a great leader. He is, along with Peter Camejo,⁵ part of an entire petty-bourgeois student generation. Because the current leadership of the SWP has two conformations, but the two conformations depend on which university they come from: some come from Chicago and others from Massachusetts, and they are all students who grew up in the heat of the triumph of the Cuban revolution. So, the SWP, which was one of the most workers' parties along with ours, lost that worker characteristic; first because there were few struggles and then because there were student struggles and they grew thanks to that. But even though it was Trotskyists, the SWP had very serious elements of revisionism. For example, they refused to support the MPLA of Angola⁶ against South Africa, saying it was a fratricidal war and other atrocities. In Portugal, they refused to raise the slogan of "agrarian revolution", so that the landowners would be expropriated and that was one of the reasons for breaking with us: how to make a document on

5 **Jack Barnes** (b. 1940) and **Peter Camejo** (1939–2008). They were part of the new youth leadership of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the United States that, together with Joseph Hansen, of the old guard, were leading the party to transform itself into a propaganda agency for Castroism. Peter Camejo joined the Green Party and in 2004 was a candidate for the US vice presidency.

6 **Angola**. An African country, which was a Portuguese colony. It became independent in 1975. The rebellion for the independence of Angola was the fact that precipitated the revolution in Portugal that overthrew the dictatorial imperialist regime of Oliveira Salazar and his successor Caetano in 1974. Angola, recently independent, suffered a civil war. One sector, UNITA, was armed and financed by the racist South African regime that invaded sectors of the country, with Yankee support. The other sector, the MPLA, supported by the Cubans, who even sent fighters, faced the invaders. Moreno called for unconditional defence of independent Angola against South Africa and UNITA. But the American SWP had a "neutral" attitude. This was one of the main reasons for Moreno's political break with Hansen and the SWP. Moreno wrote about this controversy in the book *Angola: The Black Revolution Underway* (available to download at www.nahuelmoreno.org).

the Portuguese revolution of 1974–1975 without raising the agrarian revolution in a country that is full of peasants? So, the current problem was already in embryonic form for many years; it is a class problem because it is a totally petty-bourgeois leadership. Instead of becoming increasingly linked to the working class, they do the reverse, thus they float in a vacuum.

Yes, but, for example, the influence of the Central American revolution, can't it act as a counterweight to these trends?

No, it's very difficult. If the leadership of the Central American revolution had been revolutionary Marxist, yes, but otherwise it produces the opposite effect. A great victory in the hands of an opportunist leadership strengthens with its influence the deviations in Trotskyism. The Nicaraguan revolution triumphed in 1979, how do you get it into someone's head that this leadership is a disaster and is capitulating? Mao seized power in China, how do you explain to someone that Mao got the power by chance? No, no one understands it. Look: in this country, for example, Arturo Frondizi⁷ has a reputation for being intelligent and I, on the other hand, have a deplorable opinion of him, I find him quite foolish. But Frondizi has a reputation for being smart because he was president. After all, he succeeded. Rogelio Frigerio,⁸ on the other hand, is a very capable, very intelligent man, but he was never president, so Frondizi is much more prominent than he is and of Frondizi they say "what a talent!". Put another way, they are the rights of every person who succeeds. So, coming back to the first, it is the reverse of what you suggest: a revolution led by a horrible leadership causes chain reactions. That is the misfortune of Trotskyism. Previously, we believed that a revolution was coming and Trotskyism was fortifying itself but this period showed that it is not. On the other hand, there was never a Trotskyist party with a mass character linked to the proletariat, except for the Bolivian party in 1952. And it is proven that, sooner or later, class phenomena express themselves, as they are expressed in our party today.

This was seen in the case of Ceylon, where the Trotskyist movement ended up sharing power with Bandaranaike.⁹

Yes, it was a similar phenomenon and the party's class structure was also expressed there. They were all leaders educated in England, with a level far superior to the Sinhalese proletariat, they were great lawyers, so it is not by chance that the great stronghold of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party was Colombo, the capital of Ceylon; it was a petty-bourgeois group. For example, do you know where the word Marxism as we know it today comes from?

No.

Well, because it has to do with this that we are talking about class expressions in the parties. Modern studies of Marxism show that the word comes out strong thanks to Kautsky.¹⁰ In the German Social Democratic Party, there was a strong working-class current, but many students and intellectuals began to join the militancy; then Kautsky fortifies Marxism almost like a church because

7 **Arturo Frondizi** (1908–1995) was an Argentinian lawyer and politician elected President of Argentina between 1 May 1958, and 29 March 1962. He was overthrown by a military coup d'état. Under his program of "Developmentalism", he encouraged increased foreign investment.

8 **Rogelio Frigerio** (1914–2006) was an Argentine economist and politician. An adherent of developmentalism, in 1958 he was Secretary of Socio-Economic Affairs in the critical Economics Ministry.

9 In **Ceylon** (now Sri Lanka), the Trotskyist party, which was called the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), came to have mass influence in Colombo, the capital and even to win elections in that district, although they had no influence in the countryside where the economic social axis of the country was. They were part of the world Trotskyist movement and integrated the reunified Fourth International of 1963. But their course was increasingly opportunistic and in 1964 they decided to enter the bourgeois government headed by Prime Minister **Sirimavo Bandaranaike**. They were immediately expelled from the Fourth International. A small minority broke with the party and remained linked to the International.

10 **Karl Kautsky** (1854-1938). German socialist. In his youth, he frequented Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, of whom he was secretary. After Engels died in 1895, he became one of the most important theorists and leaders of the influential German Social Democracy. He opposed the Russian Bolsheviks because, he said, "Russia was not ripe" for a socialist revolution. But he did not accompany the betrayal of the German Social Democracy when it supported "their" imperialism in the First World War. Kautsky objected and was removed from the party leadership. He continued to write about history and Marxism. With the rise of Nazism, he had to go into exile in Holland, the country where he died.

it is a way of opposing the petty-bourgeois and dissolving tendency that threatened to change the class character of the party. It is a great role that Kautsky played and that hardly anyone knows about.

Now the Trotskyists remain marginal. Do you think the IWL and Trotskyism are in advance or retreat?

The IWL is consolidating, in a process similar to the Argentine MAS, and, historically, it has taken a great leap. I don't remember well, but when we formed the Bolshevik tendency in 1977, we had only about 50 militants in Brazil, 20 or 30 in Uruguay, and a few in Peru: we would be 150 or 200 in those countries. We grew a thousand per cent in eight years. Seen dialectically, dynamically, we are very well. On the other hand, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International or Lambertism have stagnated and even lost members. Our growth is the future. The process will be similar to the Argentine party that progressed slowly and is, therefore, a guarantee of advance, not of regression. And I see the same in the IWL, consolidating itself, new national leaderships emerging.

What are the main weaknesses of the IWL?

First the leaderships; the lack of cadres is a very big problem. Because there is a dialectic: being marginal to the mass movement, cadres are not formed because cadres are only formed and made in the mass movement. It is a very contradictory and dramatic process. Because then, many join the movement, they do badly and get demoralised; they stop their militancy and are absorbed by bourgeois society. If we were surrounded by the mass movement, it would be different, it would consolidate those cadres more, and it would also be different because insertion in the mass movement would provide us with more capable cadres. Hence, it's a hellish dialectic. As we are not in the mass movement, we do not have great leaders and because we do not have great leaders, we are not in the mass movement.

And isn't it quite contradictory that in a country like Argentina, where the proletariat is politically backward, a relatively strong Trotskyist party like the MAS has emerged?

No, it is not contradictory. First, because Argentina has great objective contradictions; it is a country that lives immersed in coups, the fall of military governments because of the struggle of the masses, the fall of civilian governments; and not all countries have that experience. In a country where there is a military government, for example, and it lasts for 25 or 30 years, there is no political experience, it is always the same. In such a country, when a political document on the national situation is drawn up, you don't have to touch a single comma for years. This is not the case in Argentina. Here, since 1930, we live in a permanent crisis. One government rises, another falls, no one ends their mandate, there are waves of general strikes, there is an infernal class struggle. Bolivia and Peru are also similar in this to Argentina.

And another thing, Argentina has a strong proletariat. But most importantly, because Argentina is the richest semi-colony of imperialism, a very strong and extended middle class is created here, and this middle class has an intellectual and enlightened layer numerically superior to what a semi-colony in crisis can absorb and satisfy their cultural and economic needs. By not being able to absorb the middle class and the intelligentsia, two phenomena take place: the exodus of a sector to continue studying or working professionally in the advanced capitalist countries, and another sector that stays here and dedicates itself to theatre, literature and politics. Because of this, Argentina is a great exporter of revolutionaries. Che Guevara, for example, is not a casual phenomenon. One of the times I was imprisoned, they put me in a cell with a leader of the Brazilian guerrilla and he was an Argentine who was also an artist; the one who led the guerrilla preparations in Chile was an Argentine; in Bolivia and Peru there were Argentine revolutionaries and now it is said the FSLN in Nicaragua was helped a lot by an Argentine named Baxter.¹¹ Che is the synthesis of what I'm telling you, he is the

11 **Joe Baxter** (1940-1973). An adventurer who initiated his political action in the anti-Semitic Catholic nationalist group Tacuara Nationalist Movement. In 1963 he led the assault on the Banking Polyclinic, considered the first urban guerrilla action. But he breaks with Tacuara and goes to left-wing Peronism, travels to China where he receives military training and then went to Vietnam, where he collaborated with the Vietcong guerrillas. In 1970, after being in France, Cuba and other countries, he met Mario Roberto Santucho and joined the PRT (Combatiente). He militates in the PRT-ERP until he breaks up and is part of the Red Faction, which was the group that remained in the Fourth International. In 1973 he died in a plane crash in Paris.

symbol of that sector that did not find answers here. He left the country because he could not bear the totalitarianism of Peronism; he emigrated as a doctor and later became a politician, but like him, there are thousands and thousands. He is an Argentine phenomenon.

Another example: at the time of Onganía,¹² a political scientist from the University of Florida came to see me on behalf of Cannon,¹³ in full clandestinity of our group, who at first, I thought was a CIA man and later I asked Novack¹⁴ and he said he wasn't. He was a great university authority on political science. This man came and asked me to access the archives of our party because according to him Argentina was the centre of the Marxist theoretical and political elaboration of this post-war period and the guy came desperate to read our works on dual power in Bolivia;¹⁵ to give us whatever we asked to get that material out of our archive. And I think he has to do with that phenomenon that we talked about.

Something similar happens in Chile, which was another elaboration centre. Argentine intelligentsia, which is very numerous, has no place in the country, either for political reasons, because they persecute it, or as now for economic reasons. This contradiction that in the country this sector does not find a way out of its concerns is perceived by the intelligentsia before the working class.

Trotsky's mistakes

Continuing with the development of Argentine Trotskyism, in 1948 you participated in the Second Congress of the Fourth International in Europe. What was the purpose of that meeting?

The purpose was to begin to agglutinate Trotskyism. In 1938, two years before Trotsky's assassination, the founding congress of the Fourth was held; then in 1940 the emergency congress was held for the imperialist war and eight years later this Second Congress of the Fourth International was held. But our first international participation, as I said before, is in that conference held in 1947 in Buenos Aires.

This one of 1948 is the second official congress and it is held in Paris; there they finished destroying the anti-defencists. As you know, there were two tendencies: those who said that the USSR had to be unconditionally defended from any imperialist attack, which on the other hand was Trotsky's stance, and those who were against that position. At that congress, I meet Ernest Mandel and I become a great admirer of him. It is a very rich congress politically; the anti-defencists, mainly Shachtman and Grandizo Munis¹⁶ were brilliant but very, very sectarian and with great problems

12 **Juan Carlos Onganía** (1914–1995) was de facto President of Argentina from 29 June 1966 to 8 June 1970. He rose to power as military dictator after toppling the president Arturo Illia in a coup *d'état* self-named Argentine Revolution.

13 **James Cannon** (1890-1974). An American Trotskyist, he was the founder of the CP of the USA and a delegate to the Sixth Congress of the Communist International. He was expelled from the CP as a Trotskyist. He was a founder and leader of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Fourth International.

14 **George Novack** (1905-1992). An American Marxist theorist, he entered Trotskyism in 1933 as a member of the SWP. Some of his books are *Introduction to the Logic Of Marxism*, *Understanding History: Marxist Essays*, *The Origins of Materialism*, *Genocide Against the Indians*.

15 **Dual power in Bolivia**. A Marxist concept that refers to the power of the masses and their organisations against bourgeois power. In Bolivia, during the 1952 revolution, the power of the COB, Bolivian Workers' Centre, existed, especially supported by the miners' unions that armed themselves and defeated the bourgeois army. The MNR government of Paz Estenssoro emerged, supported by Juan Lechin of the COB and also by the Bolivian Trotskyist POR. Moreno defended the slogan. "All power to the COB". Mandel and his followers in Bolivia supported the bourgeois government of the MNR. The main texts of this polemic are "Two lines, the opportunist and the revolutionary in the face of the Bolivian masses" (1953); "Letter to the Latin American Committee on Bolivia" (1955) and "Let us further refine our aim in the Bolivian revolution" (1955).

16 **Max Shachtman** (1903-1972). He was a leader of the CP of the United States and then he broke up and became a Trotskyist and was a member of the SWP until 1940. He broke with the SWP because he was against the defence of the Soviet Union. He became a Social Democrat.

Grandizo Munis (1912-1989). Spanish Trotskyist. During the civil war, the republican government of Negrin imprisoned him in Barcelona. He was released only shortly before the Francoists took Barcelona. He later went into exile in Mexico. He wrote a book on the Spanish revolution, *Milestones of Defeat: Promises of Victory*.

between them. Note how they had problems among them that they were divided into four tendencies and presented for discussion five political documents. How ridiculous, right? Four tendencies and five documents, something incredible. The anti-defencists, in a fierce discussion they had with Mandel, accused him of totalitarianism, saying that the authoritarianism of his methods of directing the congressional discussion ultimately explained his defence of the USSR that had a totalitarian regime.

Apart from the defence or not of the USSR, that world congress was very important because it made the statutes of the Fourth; an ultra-centralist statute, very much at the service of the “apparatus” that led the international and mainly Pablo.¹⁷ This statute would later cause some serious problems after 1951. I had to play a fairly important role together with Pablo and others in the making of the statutes, unconsciously I served Pablo’s plans a little. I say this because years later, when the great political differences in the Fourth and strong internal discussions began, Cannon, who had never read the statute correctly, read it and said: “who were the morons who made this statute?” and I had to clarify I had been one of those morons. Cannon was right: it was a terrible statute, full of details, very bureaucratic and totally in the service of the leadership. But as I told you, as of 1948 there are no longer any anti-defencists within the Fourth International.

From the assassination of Trotsky until that meeting, only the emergency congress was held. Meanwhile, where did the leadership of the Fourth fall?

First in the American SWP, but it does not do a real leadership but an administrative leadership. From 1944 or 1945 the European secretariat is restructured and in 1946 there is a kind of conference. The leadership, then, remains in the hands of the great Trotskyist figures of Europe, such as Mandel, Pablo and Pierre Frank,¹⁸ and of the Yankees. But Trotskyism was very poor. The strongest section had been the French but when I arrived in 1948 there was a total crisis; all the Trotskyist youth had been taken away by Jean-Paul Sartre¹⁹ for a little party he had formed.

In addition to the issue of the statutes, I understand that great mistakes were made in the Congress of 1948.

Yes. The documents that are approved were quite sectarian; it continues with the analyses that Trotsky had made in 1940 without seeing the new phenomena. It is not seen, for example, the process of the Eastern European countries that, in a bureaucratic way or whatever, were eliminating capitalism. It does not measure the Yugoslav revolution and the Chinese revolution that was about to win. We didn’t see anything. In the middle of the conference, there is the Prague coup and there is no discussion... a disaster. We need to see what degree of fault Trotsky has had in this ...

Why?

Because nowhere in the *Transitional Program* does Trotsky foresee anything of what happened in the post-war period. He does not see the phenomenon of the guerrilla. I mean, Trotsky has brilliant predictions about several things, for example, how the Second World War would be; there he hits to the millimetre, Germany is going to attack France, the war is going to be like this and thus, he anticipates almost everything. But he does not see a series of questions, such as the importance of guerrilla warfare and a series of things that have haunted me all my life. In this, I get the impression

17 **Pablo**: pseudonym of Michel Raptis (1911-1996), a Greek resident in France who led the Fourth International in the post-war period, together with Ernest Mandel. He joined the Algerian FLN in the anti-colonial revolution. When Algeria achieved its independence from France, he was a personal advisor to the Ben Bella government. In 1965 he broke with Trotskyism. He raised the priority of the colonial revolution over the workers’ revolution.

18 **Pierre Frank** (1906-1984). French Trotskyist leader. He was Trotsky’s secretary between 1932 and 1933, always aligned himself with Mandel’s positions and until his death, he was part of the leadership of the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International.

19 **Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905-1980). French novelist, playwright and philosopher who had a lot of influence on leftist ideas and currents in the post-war period and until the 1970s. His philosophical current is called “existentialism”. He was a militant intellectual and sympathised with the CP until the invasion of Hungary in 1956. He was a reference in the French May. He formed a famous couple with Simone de Beauvoir. Among his books are: *Nausea*, *The Age of Reason*, *Being and Nothingness*, *Existentialism and Marxism*, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

that, even though I was a fan of Trotsky, I was an independent thinker, for years I have questioned many things.

Such as which?

For example, about his prognosis that we Trotskyists would be millions... This worries me little if it comes true, instead of at 10 years as he said, at 15 or 20. But 50 years have passed since the founding of the Fourth and we are still units. A Marxist uses his method of analysis for the party itself. I cannot make an accurate critique of Stalinism and be unable to critique my organisation; otherwise, I will stop being a Leninist and a Trotskyist. The same regarding how to define a “revolutionary situation”. For me, without the existence of mass Marxist parties, there are revolutionary situations. All my life I have reasoned like this and even more since the 1960s when the triumph in Cuba took place. The role of the guerrilla must be analysed. I am against those who say that only through guerrilla action can power be seized but also against those who say that there will only be classical urban revolutions, in the style of the Soviet revolution of 1917. In the 1969 Congress of the Fourth, we discussed this topic. Mandel said that guerrillas had to be carried out and the SWP only “urban insurrection”. We say: it will neither take place in a classical way nor the form of guerrillas only; it will be a synthesis, a combination of both. I think we are only now reaching conclusions. This is why I think that the model of triumphant revolutions that occurred in the post-war period, Trotsky neither glimpsed, nor sniffed it, nor did he come a millimetre closer.

And the famous phrase of Trotsky, in case of a financial crash, war, etc.?

Yes, but he doesn't even talk about the guerrillas. If he had said that based on all those elements, instead of classical revolutionary processes, guerrillas could be organised, it would have been something else.

Then, that paragraph of the *Transitional Program* points more to the role of Stalinism?

Of course, and the role of the European socialist parties. But Trotsky, for me, makes the very serious historical mistake of believing the Second World War would be the same as the First and that everything was going to be repeated mechanically. It is analogical reasoning, not dialectical. The same situation does not occur twice. The imperialist war is not the same as the German-French war; the Russian revolution is not the same as the Paris Commune. So, I think he makes the very serious methodological error of moving by analogy.

Do you observe the phenomenon of the guerrillas from the Cuban revolution of 1959 and not from the Chinese revolution of 1949?

Well, Cuba led me to reflect also on the process of China and the countries of Eastern Europe. I am one of the first in the Fourth who sees that in Yugoslavia there had been a revolutionary process different from the classic one, that is why Hansen of the SWP, Pablo and I were the first to define the new regime as a workers' state.

But regarding Cuba, during the first six months, we were against the revolution because we thought it was like the “Liberating Revolution”²⁰ of 1955 here.

Well, Admiral Isaac Rojas²¹ celebrated Fidel's victory at the time.

Of course, those facts and also something linked to my family led me, at first, to be against the revolution. My family has confused me a lot politically. Why? Because of my uncle, the fascist, I don't see the phenomenon of the Labour Party, for example. He was very reactionary and at the same time one of the founders of Labour, so I could not believe that the rise of the Labour Party with a fanatic Nazi-like my uncle among the founders was progressive.

Something similar happens with the Cuban revolution. The chairman of the Commission for Solidarity with Cuba in Buenos Aires was my brother; eight years ago, I saw a photo of Fidel Castro

20 **Liberating Revolution** is the name by which is known the civic-military dictatorship that ruled Argentina after having overthrown Juan Domingo Peron in September 1955.

21 **Isaac Rojas** (1906–1993) was an Argentine Admiral of the Navy and de facto Vice President of Argentina from 1955 to 1958. Together with Eduardo Lonardi, he headed the self-titled “Liberating Revolution” *coup d'état* against Peron in September 1955.

with my brother. My brother was a fan of Fidel and he used said: “I support Fidel because I support whites against blacks like Batista; finally, the ‘good’ people will win; we will kick out the Cuban ‘Peronists’ and create a government of whites.”

Those were the comments I could hear at home. Well, my brother ends up supporting the counter-revolutionary *gusanos*²² with everything. Along with these comments, others like the one you mention about Admiral Rojas. When Fidel came here, he was the idol of the oligarchy, among wealthy people it was fashionable to wear a beard. Those facts confused me. But the confusion lasted six months, then we realised it was a serious revolution. Because first it is supported by imperialism but later it distances itself more and confronts it; every measure that Fidel adopted was confronted by imperialism. At first, Castro was a friend of America, he was closely linked to the Jesuits and Freemasonry. I think, therefore, that Che is great when in a letter he tells the Argentine writer Ernesto Sabato²³ that their movement was similar to Argentine Radicalism.

In your opinion, when did the Cuban revolution become bureaucratic?

Well, first of all, the revolution has a petty-bourgeois leadership. For example, I believe that in 1961 or 1962 a leader named Salvador was as secretary-general of the Central of Cuban Workers, who was swept between the Cuban CP and the USSR to turn the workers’ central into Stalinist. The Cuban leadership in its origin, being petty-bourgeois and guerrilla, already tends towards Bonapartism. It is already Bonapartist or collegiate of the Bonapartist type. Mao, Fidel, Ho Chi Min, all of them and their movements have this characteristic. Being a party-army, it is already a Bonapartist leadership because it is not through workers’ democracy or any type of internal democracy that a political line is adopted but there is always a boss; a commander who is indispensable in war but who is pernicious when he translates his military centralism into politics. In this way, the party disappears and the army becomes a party. The generals give their political orders and everyone has to obey them: he who does not obey them becomes an enemy. These leaderships extrapolate military discipline, which is a necessity of war, to the political task.

In the Cuban process, did Che represent the most revolutionary wing?

Yes, the one that was most opposed to the USSR, but also the most pro-Chinese, let’s not kid ourselves. Che told me he didn’t know why they pondered him so much and took him as a great theorist if he was nothing more than a vulgariser of Mao.

Where did you meet Che?

In Punta del Este, when the meeting of the Alliance for Progress of the OAS. At that time the meeting was a worldwide event. Che opposed the alliance promoted by Kennedy, he called it “the clan of the latrines” in a famous speech where they applauded him wildly.

Did he know you from before?

It may be that in name, quite a bit. A cousin of his belonged to our group.

Did Che have any contact with Trotskyism?

Yes, quite a lot, for that cousin and for a friend of the cousin who was our militant and did the guerrilla in Peru in 1962²⁴ and who was arrested for his participation in the bank robbery. He went to see him in Cuba; Che received him very well and told him the Soviet secret agents watched him a lot, so he could not have much contact with us. He sent us his regards.

And did the rest of the Cuban leadership keep contacts with Trotskyism?

22 *Gusanos* (worms) is the term used by Fidel Castro to describe the first waves of bourgeois exiles and landowners who had their properties expropriated and opposition sectors of the upper middle-class who fled Cuba after the overthrow of dictator Fulgencio Batista. It has since become a derogatory term for anti-Castro counterrevolutionaries in exile.

23 **Letter from Che to Ernesto Sabato**, dated 13 April 1960. It is reproduced in fascicle No 5 of “El Che”, published by the morning daily *Pagina 12*, in 1997.

24 **Guerrilla in Peru**: it refers to the revolutionary mobilisation of the peasants of La Convencion and Lares in 1962, led by Hugo Blanco, and the bank expropriations in Lima in December 1961 and April 1962.

No, Fidel Castro had a right-wing origin. The one who always had relations, but with Stalinism was Castro's brother, Raul, and his wife.

But did Fidel and Posadas have no connection?

No, what happened is that there was a Posadist group in Cuba, but they arrested them all when they planned the madness of taking Guantánamo, the Yankee base on the island.

Chapter III

Psychoanalysis

The decadence of Argentina

The role of personality

“Keep filling this minute with reasons to breathe” (Pablo Milanés)

Moreno, we live in the third world country with the highest proportion of psychoanalysts and psychoanalysed. Let's leave the strictly political issue for a moment and enter the lands of the subconscious ... What do you think of Freud and psychoanalysis?

Of Freud, I think one thing and of psychoanalysis another. Freud was one of the greats, the initiator of psychology without question. He said that psychology was science and tried to formulate laws. He took on a very important problem, which is the sentimental, the emotional, but there is another conceptual one which he hardly touched upon and that Jean Piaget and others will take on. I believe in Piaget's division between psychology and psychiatry. For me, psychoanalysis as a social phenomenon, especially in highly developed countries such as the United States, to a certain extent England and also Argentina, which is a great psychoanalytic centre, plays a role of the first magnitude and, specifically, replaces religion. As for psychiatry, it is not a science, there are different methods and they all have an essential base, a “religious” base which is faith. I have discussed a lot about this, especially with a psychiatrist friend of ours named Tandi; I beat him in a bet, he left psychiatry and went to work in a factory. It so happens that I always liked to corroborate my ideas, not fall in love with them. So, I tried to corroborate this theory of faith and that it is not a science.

My idea is the following: in the last century, there was a patriarchal and neighbourhood-type bourgeois structure. People lived in their homes for decades, then solid neighbourhood structures were formed, in addition to family structures. At first, when feudal cultural patterns still existed, the priest played a role that, with bourgeois development, the neighbourhood doctor also began to play. In my time, for example, the doctor would see a very hysterical girl and then he would talk to her parents and tell them: “Send her to Mar del Plata for 15 days.” And in Mar del Plata she was sure to relax, get a boyfriend and get better. Mar del Plata fulfilled a similar role to the Brazilian carnival; that is, almost sexological. And that the parents and the girl were convinced the solution was a few

days in Mar del Plata had to do with the faith they had, in this case, in the doctor. After the girl had solved her hysteria by sinning, the priest would come and solve her feeling of guilt with faith in God. Because the point is that without faith, you cannot live. It is one of the essential parameters of existence; he who completely loses faith is suicidal, a living dead. Faith is believing in something that justifies living. Religion has fulfilled this role but, with the arrival of bourgeois society, it can fulfil it less and less. Today, with capitalist decadence and the lack of hope of millions of people, religion is gaining influence again because, as I say, we all need to believe in something.

This element of faith, this role of healing by faith, is now fulfilled by psychoanalysis. It has been shown that all psychoanalytic schools and methods heal in the same percentage and as soon as a patient goes from one psychiatrist or one psychologist to another, the percentage of getting well decreases because if the patient no longer has faith in the first, he will have less faith in the second and he will become a difficult case to get well. Getting well in psychoanalysis, then, is essentially by faith, hence the therapy consists of a talk, an ingenious method of giving confidence. I knew a psychiatrist, for example, who had the method of reading a book to his patients. The sister of one of our comrades was in treatment for five years and the only thing the psychiatrist did was read her a book. She was getting better, she was healing. I believe, then, that it is a method by trust, by faith; He who has faith gets healed and he who doesn't won't get well and the healing is always relative because society destroys him again. The latest American statistics indicate that madness can no longer be healed and on the other hand, in the 1960s, in the time of the hippies, almost all crazy people were healed. This has to do with the overall social problem, today the crisis is very deep.¹

Something happened to this militant psychiatrist and friend that was similar to what happened another comrade who was a bone specialist and who cared for workers injured in their jobs in a health clinic. When someone came with fingers shattered by a machine, he would amputate them. That was the method he had been taught in the health clinic. Then one day he was on duty at Fiorito Hospital, which was the trauma centre, and he gets as a patient — in the same way as several workers do every day — none other than the head of Fiorito's trauma. He had been in an accident and his hands were shattered. Then he makes all the preparations to amputate, as he did with the workers, and the boss shouts: "No, what are you doing if our art is to save the fingers, not cut them!" He ran out of the Fiorito and left the profession.

Returning to psychoanalysis, what is your opinion about the different existing schools?

I think that none is scientific, none practices a science. For me, the good thing is that the person who practices psychology is aware that it is not a science, that he does not try to create religious mechanisms. If he does this, his role can be very positive. I accept the psychoanalyst that does not try to fulfil the role of priest, confessor of the patient. The one who transmits to the patient that he is going to help him but saying "we still don't have an organic science, there are many scientific elements, methodologically correct but we still don't have a science; we will start chatting, we will walk this path and the good thing is that you start to have faith in yourself." Because it is true there are many correct and verifiable elements in what Freud wrote. For example, cleaning mania is typical of women and men with frigidity. I believe there are a series of methodological guidelines based on certain and scientific facts, the problem is the mechanisms psychoanalysts use. They talk about strange things like "non-transference", not establishing equal links but hierarchical links and that is pure ideology for me. I do believe in a frank dialogue between the psychoanalyst and the patient, where the former approaches the problem from the social point of view and the personality point of view.

1 An exhaustive study sponsored by the US government affirms that 46 per cent of Americans — 135 million — will suffer a serious mental disorder in 2005, notes the *Washington Post* in its edition of 8 June 2005. It then says that 70 million (a quarter of the population) were clinically insane during 2004 and that some 12 million suffered from mental illness that prevented them from leading a normal life. The *Washington Post's* source was Thomas Insel, head of the National Institute of Mental Health, the nation's highest authority on this topic, who reported that US\$ 20 million were invested to fund the study, conducted by the University of Michigan. "Although no parallel studies have been completed in 27 other countries, these figures suggest the US should rank first in the world for its abundance of mentally ill patients", he reports. "We are first in many things but we are also first in this regard, and we would rather not be", said Ronald Kessler, a Harvard professor of public health and director of the study, called *National Comorbidity Survey Replication*.

The decadence of Argentina

Another issue, which I would like to address from a personal and political perspective, is the decadence of Argentina. To begin, how did you find your country after several years of exile in Colombia and France?

I agree with the soccer player Diego Armando Maradona. He left for about six months and when he returned to Argentina, he said he found it increasingly sad. This is impressive, especially in Buenos Aires, which has always been a happy, cordial city, with a fairly good standard of living. On a global scale, Buenos Aires is almost unique for its nightlife and crowded nights. And in this sense, the city lost part of those characteristics because of the economic crisis, the military dictatorship and other factors, such as being immersed in a country in decline. Similar to Montevideo, for example, which used to be a dynamic city, very beautiful, with a high economic and cultural level and which in recent years has been transformed into a city-museum, very sad. One notices that decadence in all customs. Here, in Buenos Aires, everything seems frozen in time. That is very noticeable in the automotive fleet, it must be one of the few places where a car like the Ford Falcon lasts 15 years. Everything is like this. I remember that 10 years ago, this about the cars attracted the attention of American and European tourists. Once some Yankee senators came to visit and the wife of one of them, responding to journalists who asked her what she thought of Buenos Aires, said: "Oh, it's an exciting city, I get the impression of walking through an automobile museum!". And the funniest thing about it is she didn't say it to make a joke.

I have seen the decline in people's dress, in the loss of kindness, in increased selfishness. I have seen the restaurants and pizzerias of Corrientes Ave very empty; the subways closed early and the nightlife in total decline. The first time I came back from Europe, I think in 1948, I was impressed by the view of Buenos Aires from the plane. It is practically the only modern city in an underdeveloped country.

Let's move on to the political vision of the subject. Could 1930 be the start of Argentina's decline?

Yes, but in historical terms, because until a few years ago there was a lot of "fat". Under Peronism, for example, there was a lot of money; people ate very well, they went out a lot. The country was already decadent but from a historical point of view, because the wealth it had was being consumed. But in another sense, in the 1940s, when the domination of English imperialism was eliminated, the country and the workers did not live a decline; in this, you have to be dialectical. That is why I have spoken of two economies: there is the economy of the workers and the economy of capitalism, almost everyone ignores this concept, there is a work of mine where I address this issue.

When everyone talks about economics, they fall into the fetish of thinking there is only the capitalist economy and nobody talks about another one, which is the economy of the working class. In other words, the capitalists could do very badly and the working class could do well. There is an economic issue of the working class that we often ignore and that should be our main focus. For example, the argument of the conservatives, that they left immense wealth and they made Argentina a powerful country, is correct, evident, but they only speak of the bourgeois economy. I'd rather the country decline from third place, which was the position Argentina occupied as a financial and commercial power at the end of the World War (after the United States and Canada), to number 10 or 15 if the situation of the working class is very good. Because this thing about the economy is similar to when we talk about war: yes, war is the locomotive of history, but I don't want war. So, there are two economies. When we talk about decay, it is not a mechanical phenomenon that each day it decays a little. Because if you say the decadence began in the 1930s, I will tell you that from 1940 to 1960 there was a political and cultural peak of all kinds in Argentina. In the Frondizi era, for example, there is an improvement in democratic rights, much more than during Peronism, which had reactionary and totalitarian elements. Under Frondizi, the university progresses, the country advances as a whole. In other words, it is a contradictory phenomenon, not a mechanical one.

But now, in the last stage, for 10 or 15 years, the decline is more evident; the country is losing its vast intellectual middle class. Argentina was, in several areas, of the first level. Like Canada,

Australia, Uruguay and also a little like Cuba, that is to say, that in many respects they were on a par with Europe. Buenos Aires was the undisputed cultural centre of Spanish and Portuguese. And Uruguay too; what happens is that Uruguay, for its small population, did not weigh; it's a country similar to New Zealand, which also weighs little. They are very parallel countries, Australia and Argentina, Uruguay and New Zealand. You can also see the decline in this because in 1918 they produced the same number of sheep, for example, and now New Zealand has 70 million heads and Uruguay 18 million. The differences between Australia and Argentina are also notable.² In other words, it is about a general decline that for me, accompanies that of Europe, that is why I insist so much on the "Latin Americanisation" of Europe. Europe has to look at itself in the mirror of the southern cone, especially in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, because that is its future. They still have more "fat", there is more middle class, but day by day they are skinnier. It is the same thing that happens to a fat person who is on the way to emaciation, there is a moment when they say: "how good you look, you have the ideal weight", but from a dialectical and dynamic point of view, that person goes towards emaciation. Then Argentina, which was very fat in the first decades of the century, on its way to emaciation went through that period of "being well" that went from 1946 to 1955 with Peronism.

- 2 Comparative economic data of the "parallel countries" mentioned by Moreno, according to World Bank figures for 1984 (*Mercado* magazine, December 1986).

Country	In million dollars				
	GDP per capita	GDP	Exports	Imports	Infant Mortality (*)
Australia	11,890	184,980	22,720	22,659	10
Argentina	2,230	67,150	8,017	4,585	36
New Zealand	7,240	23,530	5,508	6,181	13
Uruguay	1,970	5,900	925	776	38

(*) Number of children who die before their first birthday for every thousand live births.

Country	Wheat production (thousands of tons)	
	Average for 1961–1965	1983
Australia	8,222	21,780
Argentina	7,541	11,700

Country	Livestock (thousands of heads)
	Cattle and sheep
Australia	155,950
Argentina	96,272

Country	Wool production (thousands of tons)	
	1970	1983
Australia	947	703
Argentina	175	155
New Zealand	332	371
Uruguay	65	82

Octavio Paz³ said that Argentina was the “great tragedy of Latin America” and the economist Nick Eberstadt⁴ described this decline as “the most dramatic case of a country that goes from the first to the third world.” And I brought a quote that I want to read to you from a Spanish journalist who was for some years a correspondent for *El País* of Madrid, in Buenos Aires. He says: “I believe the Argentine economic oligarchy truly has no homeland; they do not care at all for Argentina as a nation. They can play the *coup d'état* perfectly, even knowing that with a coup Argentina literally ceases to belong to the world of civilized nations and becomes a ‘coup-land’. They do not care at all, I think the selfishness of the Argentine economic oligarchy is truly incredible and would not find a comparison in nations of the same social, cultural and economic status.” He then refers to the old phrase: “The failure of Argentina as a nation is one of the great enigmas of the 20th century.”⁵ Based on all this, I ask: what is the main cause of Argentina’s decline? Politicians of the bourgeoisie often attribute the decline to deep political instability.

But that is a formal impression. Let’s see it by part. First, all Latin American countries are in crisis, not just Argentina. As for instability, Brazil also suffered a great military dictatorship and did not decline so much. Argentina’s decline is indeed very great but that of Bolivia, for example, is much worse. Bolivia also had its period of splendour with mining because it dominated the world production of tin. Argentina’s problem is very simple: it accompanies the English decline. It was the main colony of the United Kingdom. The others, like Canada or Australia now, are either more independent from the British crown than Argentina was, or they depend more on Yankee imperialism. That is, in the last post-war period, everything that was pro-Yankee progressed to the bitter end and everything that was pro-English collapsed. Now there is a formidable book by Carlos Escude,⁶ with the same thesis that we held all our lives: in this century there was a profound process of Yankee colonisation throughout the world, which was accentuated after the Second War. Argentina, for various reasons, resisted this colonisation and then the Yankees understood that only by destroying it could they colonise it. They followed the reverse policy with countries where labour was extremely cheap, for example. That is why they greatly developed Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong; The whole “miracle” of Southeast Asia has no secrets. Everyone talks about Japanese talent and I think that if that’s why, the Chinese must also have it because Formosa, which is part of China, also had a colossal development in the last 10 or 20 years. There is no secret there. Before, the Argentine bourgeoisie was also considered very talented, intelligent and sophisticated; it was a racist bourgeoisie that despised the Brazilians, the Mexicans, the whole world. A bourgeoisie that believed itself superior. And today it is very nice to see how imperialism itself takes charge of bursting, of “settling accounts” with this smug and racist bourgeoisie. Now it is the Brazilians, where there is a good portion of black blood, and the Mexicans, where there is a good portion of Indian blood, the most dynamic in Latin America.

3 **Octavio Paz Lozano** (1914–1998) was a Mexican poet and diplomat. For his body of work, he was awarded the 1981 Miguel de Cervantes Prize, the 1982 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and the 1990 Nobel Prize in Literature. He is considered one of the most influential writers of the 20th century and one of the great poets of all time.

4 **Nicholas Eberstadt** (born 1955) is an American political economist. He holds the Henry Wendt Chair in Political Economy at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a political think tank. He is also a Senior Adviser to the National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), a member of the visiting committee at the Harvard School of Public Health, and a member of the Global Leadership Council at the World Economic Forum. He is the author of numerous books.

5 In 1942, a famous economist, Colin Clark, made what seemed like a reasonable prediction at the time: ‘in 1960’, he said, ‘Argentina would have a fourth-highest gross product per capita in the world.’ The year 1960, however, found Argentina firmly on the path to becoming a member of the Third World.” (Carlos Escude: *La declinación argentina* [The Argentina Decline], Fundación Editorial Belgrano, 1983)

6 It refers to Carlos Escude’s *La declinación argentina* [The Argentina Decline], Fundación Editorial Belgrano, 1983. already quoted. Escudé’s thesis is summarised in the following quote on page 13: “Argentina’s prosperity had been based on an almost symbiotic relationship with Great Britain. The partnership had been feasible and lucrative because of the complementary nature of the two economies and because of the global capacity of the British Empire. Instead, Argentina had maintained unsatisfactory commercial relations with the United States for the competitive nature of both economies and a conflictive diplomatic history.” And on page 15 he adds: “The opening of British and American archives relating to the 1940s shows (...) that Argentina was subjected to a constant and severe economic boycott and political destabilisation by the United States. She was punished for her neutralism, to a much greater degree than other neutral countries, and after the war, to a much greater degree than the former enemies of the United States.”

Now, the quote that you read to me from the Spanish journalist is interesting. Argentina is not an independent country but a semi-colony since 1930 because of the oligarchy. It is a terrible evil, a structural evil of Argentina. The landowners and *estancieros* who prevented the millions and millions of Europeans who came from settling down and colonising the countryside, and especially Patagonia. Here was not done what the United States did with very wealthy smallholders who colonised the countryside. Here there were extraordinary natural conditions to do so, better than those in Australia and perhaps even Canada. Regarding Australia, for example, there were comparative advantages for the type of land and for the distance: Argentina was closer to Europe. That is, there were immense natural and geographical privileges in favour of the Argentine bourgeoisie and the capitalist development of the country but the oligarchy monopolised the privileges and ruined the country; their union with imperialism is terrifying. I have a written criticism of Aldo Ferrer⁷ showing that his book *Vivir con lo Nuestro* [Living with what is ours] conceals a decisive fact: that imperialism always took between 30 and 40 per cent of the value of Argentine exports. They are billions of dollars over many years. Ferrer does a whole analysis of the country's ills and does not say the main thing: that the evil is that, of what we exported, they took away in interest on debts, in this and that, 30 to 40 per cent. By this, I mean that while imperialism put its hands in one pocket, the oligarchy put their hand in the other pocket and that combination was lethal for the country.⁸

But specifically, the Argentine decline has to do with what I tell you: it accompanies the British decline. England declined a lot. It was the great European and world industrial centre and today it is the fifth or sixth capitalist power, they say that it is already below Italy. Just a century ago it was the second-largest power in the world, then it was displaced by Germany, then by France and Japan, now by Italy and already all its economic indicators are now very far from the United States, Germany and Japan. We have the same process, we have accompanied the English decline and as we had a large internal market and industrial development, a closed and protectionist economy was formed. About 30 years ago the world market was opened and as a consequence of the division of labour imposed by American imperialism, the Argentine workforce is expensive, it is not competitive. But besides, Yankee imperialism wants to destroy Argentina. That is why you cannot put all the blame on the oligarchy because it would be like blaming Al Capone's henchmen and not Al Capone. The Spanish journalist you mention seems to me he blames only the oligarchy; it is a partial vision. In the oligarchy, some sectors offered some resistance to Yankee penetration. So, for me, the great culprit of the decline is Yankee imperialism and historically British imperialism. After the Second War, in a capitalist world totally dominated by the United States, there is no longer room for capitalist development in Argentina. The Yankees resolved a few years ago they will develop the countries with the cheapest labour, such as those in Southeast Asia, and in 10 years perhaps the example of capitalist development will be Haiti. They are already investing because no proletariat earns less than the Haitian and the Yankees are saying: "How did we not realise it, we have it so close!" They are going to build factories, airports, everything, and the statistics are going to start talking about how Haiti's GDP increases.

To summarise the issue of decadence, the Argentine problem is that, for thousands of reasons, it does not fit into the Yankees' plans: it is a very advanced country, historically opposed to Yankee imperialism, imperialism considers it potentially an enemy or at least little reliable, it does not have a complementary economy with the United States, it does not need it for its plans, they are producers on a world scale of similar raw materials, such as wheat, soybeans, cattle, that is, a competitive country, not complementary. The Yankees are not interested in investing here because they cannot do scale production, labour is very expensive and for many other factors. In 20 years, they may be interested in investing, when the country is poor and its proletariat one of the lowest earners in the world; here they could bring more sophisticated productions because it is a high-level proletariat,

7 **Aldo Ferrer** (1927–2016) was an Argentine public accountant, economist and politician linked to the Radical Civic Union (UCR). He held the Ministry of Economy, the Argentine embassy in France and was editor of the Buenos Aires *Economico* newspaper.

8 More data on Argentina's economic evolution, its foreign trade and its dependence on England first and the United States later, appear in Moreno's book, *Method of Interpretation of Argentine History* (available for downloading at www.nahuelmoreno.org) and specifically in Chapter IV, "Argentina: a country dependent on British imperialism".

although world production is now in need of gross, unskilled labour. And this trend can be seen very well in Silicon Valley in the United States, which is one of my obsessions because there the technicians are very well off and earn good money but the workers work a lot and earn a pittance. It is the symbol of today's capitalism. You go there and see the engineers living in luxurious houses, with a swimming pool, a tennis court, but underneath that there is a monstrous super-exploitation; the workers are not unionised, they contract serious acid illnesses, it is terrible. South Korea is similar.

Your diagnosis of decline is clear. But there is also a role that the workers' movement played: the workers' struggle throughout the century was objectively aimed at halting the decline.

The workers' movement fought a lot at the union level but it is very reformist. And it is a very reformist proletariat precisely because it belongs to a very rich semi-colony. Yes, there were great battles but they began after the fall of Peron in 1955 and were battles that resisted the Yankee colonisation. You are right that, in fact, it is the only class that resisted the decline, even if it was not aware of it because of the bureaucratic leadership, the union statisation, the populism. Ultimately, all those reformist struggles for the defence of wages or the union resisted the decline of the country.

The role of personality

To finish with today's interview, I thought about dealing with some aspects related to what is known as the "role of personality" in revolutionary processes. The initial question is whether Lenin would have avoided the bureaucratisation of the USSR if he was still alive after 1924. I think that Trotsky, in his article "On the Suppressed Testament of Lenin" posed something similar, although in "Why didn't I give the coup?",⁹ referring to himself, he says that he could not have prevented the consolidation of the bureaucracy and his expulsion from the USSR.

No, in "Why didn't I give the coup?" he quotes Lenin's wife who says: "If Lenin lived, he would be in prison."

Do you agree with that observation?

No, I don't agree. Because I believe that at every unstable moment, the role of the personality is decisive. In the passage from one stage of the class struggle to another, this role is fundamental. In a scale that has a perfect balance, a feather, just one feather tilts the plate to one of the two sides. On the other hand, I am against mechanical analyses, which are done by repetition. For example, Trotsky's analysis in "Why didn't I give the coup?" is possibly correct but in the historical process nothing can be given as inevitable or certain because the historical process is always new, it is a new stage. When the new stage is already consolidated, there are sure things. In America, I can bet, and I won't be wrong, that there will be elections and not a coup; that the next president will be Reagan and not Mondale and that if one of the two dies, the candidate will be the vice president; in other words, everything is planned here, there is no personal factor that modifies the situation. But that personal factor does exist when the situation is convulsive. It is the same as when a new species or a new geological age arises. When everything is explosive and something new is taking shape, the personal factor plays a role.

This has to do — and I think it is a discovery of mine — with the fact the true law of the new is not the leap from quantity to quality but the combination of different elements. But it is new because it is unknown how these elements will combine and it is unknown how the personal factor will combine, which also acts. So, I don't agree with fatalism. I disagree with Trotsky's fatalism that he thought the Second World War was going to be the same as the First. And it was not the same, among other things, because the USSR existed. This analysis that Trotsky makes is mechanistic, with the method of formal logic; a method that leads to interpreting human history by identities, by

⁹ Trotsky wrote the article "On the Suppressed Testament of Lenin" when he was in Prinkipo in 1932 and it accompanied the dissemination of Lenin's text, which was hidden by Stalin, by left oppositionists. The article "Why didn't I give the coup?" was published under the title "How did Stalin defeat the opposition?" in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935–36)*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1977, p. 171–179.

comparisons. Comparison is very useful, it is part of formal logic, but it is of very little use because in history no two processes are ever the same. Everything that has already happened is the “same” but not the new stage.

It is quite possible — and I warn that we are discussing a hypothesis or perhaps a theory — that Lenin would have been a significant personal factor after 1924 and Trotsky would have been a factor if he had carried out the *coup d'état*. Beware, I am not arguing with Trotsky because it is very likely his analysis was correct. But he bet everything on recovering the Bolshevik party and I wonder: was it possible to recover the Bolshevik party for the revolutionary positions? Was it a good strategy? I have my doubts. But, put in Trotsky's place, I too would have had the same queries as him and I would have bet on getting the party back. Now we can see it more clearly because it is over: the Bolshevik party was irretrievable. Today, from a distance, we can also ask ourselves to what extent the Red Army bureaucracy, erected to develop the world revolution, wasn't better, more permeable to Trotsky's positions, than the party bureaucracy.

I wonder to what extent we can emphatically deny that if he carried out the coup, took the leadership of the Red Army and encouraged the world revolutionary process, with the possibility of taking power in another country, the situation would not have changed course. Because I see a contradiction between the analysis of “Why didn't I give the coup?” and a very little-known work by Trotsky that is from 1919 or 1920. It is a letter with a militaristic tone. This is seen in the movie *Reds*, where a congress appears in Baku. There Trotsky sees the possibility that the Red Army will turn to Asia and perhaps it will go to war and occupy nations to develop the revolution. This line of reasoning was not developed later. But, for example, when the bureaucratisation began, if he gave the coup, he took power and declared war on capitalist Germany, I don't know what would happen. What I say perhaps is delusional but I don't know what would have happened if it avoided fascism or not. Could history change? How would the personal factor have taken place?

I presume the same regarding Stalin. Stalin was absolutism “not enlightened” or enlightened, without lights, he was not like Napoleon: he was a savage, a beast, a pimp, surrounded by characters like Malenkov¹⁰ who became the secretary-general of the party, a great kingpin of the USSR and was a typist, a complete animal. So, I wonder if Trotsky, through more enlightened people, could not have done something to stop the bureaucracy. The biggest problem I see in this whole process is that the Third International, the communist parties of the whole world, might have opposed a coup. But perhaps it was not a coup in the strict sense but a movement to restore workers' democracy and gained the support of the Third. But I do not know. I insist once again that almost certainly I would have done the same, what I refuse to say is that the processes where the class struggle is involved and where something is at stake are ineluctable. In those moments of struggle, the personal factor has a lot to do with it.

This is one aspect of the problem; that is, whether or not to give the coup. But let's look at another aspect: was it appropriate or not to make a pact with Stalin? If they agreed, they reached an agreement and left Stalin in the party apparatus, would it have gone well? Because sometimes it's about strategies. Today a whole new subject has emerged in sociology and mathematics and it is the subject of strategies. But in the case we are talking about, the other option that Trotsky had was not to make a pact with the military bureaucracy and to make a pact with the party bureaucracy because relying on the workers' movement was impossible; the old working-class had disappeared and the new one was of peasant origin, without education, without political level and any internationalist consciousness. What did Trotsky do? He opted for the “historical variant”, he said, “this has no solution so let's work for the future”. And I keep wondering what would have happened if he took power and prevented Stalin from destroying and bureaucratising all the communist parties. Because at least while Trotsky was in power, the CPs would be independent.

I want to make it clear to you that everything I reason is pure metaphysics; I may be wrong but I do vindicate the methodology of reasoning which is the opposite of fatalism. I would not claim, as

¹⁰ **Georgy Malenkov** (1901-1988): Deputy Prime Minister of the USSR in 1946, succeeded Stalin as head of government between 1953 and 1955. Opposed to the so-called “de-Stalinisation”, he was excluded from the Russian Communist Party in 1957 by Khrushchev.

his wife did, that if Lenin had lived, he would have been inexorably imprisoned. I can say that the personal factor, combined with other factors, in a moment of change, at a boiling point, is important. The only thing that can be absolutely stated is what has already happened and what happened is that, within the combination of elements that brought Stalin to power, the “Lenin factor” did not exist because Lenin had died. And I can also say that if he had been alive, in some way, at least in a small proportion, the events would have been different. Because maybe they didn’t put him in prison but shot him because he fought Stalin more than Trotsky himself; we don’t know. What is known is that the personal factor is very decisive in a moment of change and that is precisely Trotsky’s theory when he states that without Lenin there would have been no revolution in 1917. I invert that statement and say: with Lenin, would Stalin have existed? We cannot state it diametrically because that is pure idealism, the only thing I am saying is that with Lenin things would not have been exactly the same because Lenin was very astute and, perhaps, he made the party bureaucracy collide with the military bureaucracy or resorted to the parties of the Third International that were still whole and full.

Perhaps, if Lenin lived a few more years, the bureaucratisation process was slower and that gave time for the revolution to be made in another country, strengthening workers’ democracy. And maybe the opposite happened, Stalin would strengthen himself and commanded to poison him, as some suggest that he really did.

With Lenin, then the historical process would have been different.

This can’t be stated categorically either, perhaps it would have been the same. What I am pointing to here is a methodological problem to analyse the role of personality. And I say: if to seize power in October 1917, according to Trotsky, the Lenin factor was decisive, it is not possible that for Stalin to seize power, the Lenin factor had no importance. This is a methodological problem. Because if so, we would have to conclude that the personal and subjective factor had nothing to do with Hitler’s seizure of power; to say that without Hitler Nazism would have been exactly the same is a statement that falls within what I call “historical fatalism”. Instead, I think the personal factor is one more factor and its weight depends on the situation. Trotsky himself played his role to see if with the weight of his figure he could get some great leader of the CP or socialist party to say: “I’d better join him because otherwise, they cut off all our heads.” And we do that too. We also play the personal factor to see if any leader of the Fourth International changes and fights for Trotskyism unity. That leaders like Mandel, for example, fought for the principled unity of the Fourth would mean a weighty factor.

Chapter IV

The atomic war

Petty-bourgeois leaderships

A “success-worshipping” party?

The coup of 1976

The Malvinas war

“A sceptic cannot be a revolutionary. The revolutionary can be an optimist, someone who believes in man, who believes in the human species.” (Fidel Castro, 1987)

In your book *The Chinese and Indochinese Revolutions*,¹ which is from 1967, and in later documents, you speak of the true possibility of nuclear war. You summarise your analysis in a more modern formula than “socialism or barbarism”, which is “nuclear holocaust or Trotskyism”. Do you see real possibilities for an atomic war today?

I think it is a present, permanent possibility. Humanity has already given a Hitler and a Mussolini, or rather, not humanity but capitalism in its final curve. So, it is not ruled out that it give a new Hitler, perhaps not from the social but from the hysteria point of view. Reagan, for example, is a totally hysterical government. A previous US administration even considered the possibility of using atomic bombs during the Vietnam War, and thus chemical bombs were used; the same possibility was present when the Cuban missile crisis.² But alongside this reality, I see counteracting laws. That the possibility of nuclear war is permanent does not mean it is the most probable. I’ve always been one of those who was against the thesis on the possibility of a third world war, first because I do

1 Available for downloading from www.nahuelmoreno.org.

2 The “missile crisis” took place in Cuba in October 1962, when the United States prevented the deployment of Soviet missiles on the island. In the unanimous opinion of the analysts, the seriousness of the situation led for the first time to a certain possibility of nuclear war between the United States and the USSR. The Soviet Union, led by Khrushchev, ended up capitulating to American pressure. In the book *Fidel Speaks* by Italian journalist Gianni Mina, Castro criticises Khrushchev’s position for having decided without consulting Cuba and acknowledges that the Cuban leadership thought the nuclear confrontation was inevitable.

not see the proletariat defeated and second because I do see a very fundamental unity, of a counter-revolutionary type, between the United States and the USSR. I see that the counter-revolutionary political agreement prevails; I think there is a fairly deep agreement on the Middle East, the US State Secretary has recognised it. And against appearances, I also believe there is an agreement on Central America. Thus, I don't see the possibility of a third world war that today could only be between the USSR and the United States; I do believe that since the post-war period there has been a world war that is a class war. But in this war, for now, imperialism has not come to use nuclear weapons and at any moment it can use them even if they are not conventional wars but class wars.

Do you believe in what some American sectors call "limited nuclear war"?

I don't know... I believe in hypotheses. That makes to the true Marxist method, which is scientific with experimental elements. But in the human phenomenon, you cannot experiment although reality fulfils the role of the experiment. We are talking about phenomena that have not happened, that are new and that, because they are new, are the product of a combination of unknown circumstances. That is why I cannot say yes or no because they are hypotheses: there may be a partial nuclear war, there may be a general nuclear war with the USSR itself, but everything depends on the process of the class struggle. Today, I see this war as difficult. One issue is the trend; the trend to nuclear war exists. Even if a revolutionary process develops and a revolutionary government takes power in the USSR, what will America do? What type of government will it have at that time? I don't know, because it makes for the uneven development of the revolutionary process; if there is a very strong bourgeois government in the US, perhaps it decides to go all or nothing. I do not doubt that Hitler would have "pushed the button" and if he had had the atomic bomb, he would have dropped it. I have no doubt this situation can be repeated. If you ask me today, at this juncture, I don't see any possibility, but I do see a permanent possibility. Today I don't see the possibility that, for example, they will carry out a nuclear attack against Nicaragua or Cuba, but I do see the trend. I do not think they make atomic bombs not to use them, I do not think they are to make fireworks, I firmly believe that nuclear devices are made to be used against the world revolution.

Right, but what now prevails is the agreement of the United States with the USSR...

Yes, after the cold war this agreement prevailed. And the cold war was a miscalculation of imperialism to try to recover the markets at full speed. History proves it was caused by imperialism; Stalin was in favour of continuing to make deals. Imperialism, by recovering Western Europe, also wants to recover Eastern Europe, the USSR, China, everything, so that causes a tremendous clash with the Stalinist bureaucracy that wants to defend itself. Imperialism had several miscalculations. Another was in Germany when it planned to transform it into an agricultural country and yet the laws of the economy led to it being transformed again into a great capitalist-imperialist country. Another mistake was that they had the atomic bomb and were much stronger militarily, they believed they could take back China. In the film *Patton*, you see this in imperialism's dealings with the bureaucracy; they are in Berlin and General Patton insults the Russian generals taking advantage that they do not have a translator.

Yes, he says, "I will never toast with a Russian pig."

That's it. I mean, it was a tremendous thing, they were about to go to war, a military wing of imperialism wanted to continue the fight against the USSR but the plan fell apart because all the Yankee soldiers had been told the war against Germany was the last one and then they would go home. Some soldiers began to desert. It is the class struggle that prevents them from advancing with their army to occupy the USSR. This causes the cold war.

Just in passing you referred to China and I remember that in the book that I mentioned to you, *The Chinese and Indochinese Revolutions*, you characterise the Maoist leadership as "revolutionary Bonapartist". I suppose it is now clear the Chinese leadership is counter-revolutionary Bonapartist. When did the situation change?

Well, this is a very serious theoretical problem. I am a strange person within Trotskyism, I am considered rather an orthodox, a dogmatic. This is how Mandel, the SWP, and Livio Maitan

considered me — I was rather the “sectarian”. They considered me a strange man, with a mania for theorising. And I get the impression that Hansen — when he was a good friend of mine and because of things that have been said to me — considered me capable of mastering new situations, perhaps the best there was in our international. But in that praise, perhaps inordinate and perhaps not, there was implicitly a very deep, very elegant criticism that I was a theoretical charlatan...

Did he think you were weak in theory?

No, more than weak, worse... He thought I was a charlatan. Peter Camejo and Barnes were very happy with a controversy I had with the SWP and instead I never saw Hansen ponder me. He always kept a kind of silence when they referred to me in the theoretical aspect. I have commented to him about Sartre’s books, I gave him a *Critique of Dialectical Reason* but in all theoretical aspects, I saw a very strange silence. Why am I telling you this about theory? Because quite possibly he considered me a charlatan because I have given very heterodox opinions, that is, I have had a critical attitude on a series of topics since forever. I was like this all my life. I was a big fan of Mandel in 1947 and yet I argued to death with him that there was not going to be stagnation and paralysis in the economy and other issues. We foresaw the post-war economic boom and Mandel believed otherwise. So: I always questioned many things. It always struck me a lot, for example, that there were so few of us since Trotsky had said we would be “millions”. I always tried to think with my head, hence the anthological gaffes I have. Let none of this give you the impression I am defending my past but I vindicate to have thought on my own, which also allowed some successes.

Starting with the Cuban revolution, I begin a reflection that has not yet finished and has been going on for 25 years. And I think I drew some conclusions. I am doing this whole introduction to your question because you mentioned the word “revolutionary” and I told you that it was a serious theoretical problem. Because it is not only the case with China. For example, the Sandinistas, the Sandinista National Liberation Front, while it is fighting against Somoza, what is it? Is it counter-revolutionary or revolutionary?

According to Trotsky’s definition in *The Transitional Program*, it is counter-revolutionary. But let’s see. Mao, when he fights against the Japanese who invaded China, is he a counter-revolutionary or a revolutionary? We even have the case of Bismarck.⁴ Marx and Engels say he made a great revolution, against my opinion that he only made a reform, but they go further, they say he made a revolution; That quote is from Marx and Engels and it’s good for those who come here, to Argentina, and say that nothing happened. And I say there was a revolution. Many, including Mandel, laugh when I say that here, in Argentina, there was a February revolution.⁵ And I have two quotes reserved to answer. I have a little-known quote from Trotsky that says: with the French general strike, the February revolution in France took place. Then, when I present them to them, at most they will say that there are two crazy people: Trotsky and me.

The other quote I mention to you is about Bismarck. It says that when the war with Austria, Bismarck was forced, as a consequence of the war itself, to make a great bourgeois-democratic revolution ... It says the war itself was already a revolution, as if it were the case of the Malvinas and Galtieri⁶ would have gone on and made a series of changes forced by circumstances. What would Marx and Engels have said in this case? That it was Galtieri who made the revolution. I am in that

3 **Livio Maitan** (1923-2004). He was the best-known Italian Trotskyist. Leader of the Pabloite-Mandelist sector of the Fourth International since 1951. Together with Mandel, he led the guerrilla deviation in the 1960s.

4 **Otto Leopold Bismarck** (1815-1898): considered the founder of modern Germany (Second Reich), he carried out several military campaigns, including the war against Austria in 1866. From 1871 he held the position of chancellor for 19 years.

5 **February Revolution**. Took place in February 1917 in Russia, it abolished the monarchy of Tsar Nicholas II bringing to power a weak bourgeois government led by Alexander Kerensky, a member of the reformist Social-Revolutionary Party. The February Revolution changed the political regime but did not expropriate the bourgeoisie. It opened the doors to the victory of the Bolsheviks in October. Moreno speaks of “February revolution” when the masses have achieved a revolutionary triumph (for example, in Argentina, the fall of Galtieri and the military junta), an “unconscious socialist revolution”, that is, without a revolutionary workers’ party at the head.

6 **Leopoldo Galtieri** (1926–2003) Argentine military ruler who initiated the disastrous 1982 war with Great Britain over the Malvinas Islands during his brief period as the head of the military junta that ruled Argentina in 1976–83.

line of thought, to see the evolution of events. So, a Mao, who fights for years through the guerrilla against Chiang-Kai-Shek, and the Japanese invasion, even if he is an opportunist and whatever you want, what is he? This problem always tortured me. A son of the bourgeois, who takes arms and goes to fight the guerrillas, as was the case with Fidel Castro, is he a rotten counter-revolutionary, an opportunist who is sitting in an armchair giving everything to the dictatorship? Such an opinion seems monstrous to me. That is why, in my work on Nicaragua, I say the Sandinistas are revolutionary heroes. All the same, we fight their erroneous policy because each time they will go further to the right, they will turn from revolutionaries to counter-revolutionaries because I think there is a dialectic. But this approach of only saying that they are counter-revolutionaries is sectarian. At the very least, if they are counter-revolutionaries on a world scale because of their politics, they are revolutionaries on a national scale. They are centrists. That is, they are not the same as us at all: they have a nationalist policy, they make a pact with the bourgeoisie, etc. But they are not equal to those who collaborated with the Somoza dictatorship, nor equal to the bureaucracy. They are people who risk their lives and it is not that they are platonically against the dictatorship but that they are materially, with weapons. So, at least I, I have great respect for those people. Mao Tse Tung can be the leadership of a revolutionary party, even though he is the leadership tending towards counter-revolution. The party itself is revolutionary, or sui generis revolutionary or sui generis opportunist, what do I know... That is, they are different phenomena; they are not the same as us because they are not proletarian revolutionaries but they can be petty-bourgeois or bourgeois revolutionaries; The qualifier of revolutionary is not automatic when we refer to the petty-bourgeoisie because the petty-bourgeoisie is capable of being revolutionary and also counter-revolutionary, it corresponds to its character of petty-bourgeoisie.

So, all this is a serious theoretical problem. I defined Castroism and Guevarism in the same way, as revolutionaries, but I gave them the character of class, I said that they were petty-bourgeois and lumpens and with tendencies towards nationalism. But I always thought it was a sectarian definition to call them counter-revolutionaries. One, then, has to distinguish: those who are fighting with the revolutionary method of armed struggle, relying on the mass movement or tending towards this, are revolutionaries and from this definition, we will make our criticisms. It is wrong to define them as counter-revolutionaries and then to criticise. And this is not a demagogic problem but a scientific problem. This is why I tell you that it is a meditation of mine that has been going on for 25 years now because I have not achieved a synthesis between orthodoxy and this new phenomenon. However, it seems to me the matter now is easier than we thought. For example, at present, regarding ETA and Basque nationalism, we believe we are reaching a synthesis, a balance. In other words, for me, the movements or political parties that can be allies of the proletariat for the taking of power, and be part of a workers' and peasants' government, are revolutionary, in the event when there is a revolutionary workers' party. When this does not exist, everything is distorted but not because everything is distorted, do we have to change the characterisation. They are allies of the proletariat, whom we cannot criticise harshly for not having class positions. Being petty-bourgeois or peasant revolutionary movements, they cannot have it. The Spanish comrades understood it very well. I told them: How are we going to demand that ETA have a class policy? If we do that, the dialogue is over because ETA would tell us: we don't want to have class positions because we want to have Basque positions since ETA was created to liberate the Basque Country and we believe in the union of the classes. We, then, cannot ask them to accept the leadership of the working class, because they would answer us: ETA was made so that there is no workers' leadership. Instead, if we tell them: you have your policy, we have ours; We respect yours but we criticise it and on one point we agree; we go together to fight the monarchy. And we ask them: do you want to make a government with us if we take power in all of Spain? We will give you the right to national self-determination; As long as we can hit together better and when not, we will see. That is, we must use language towards an ally. And to use that language, we need a definition. For me, then, defining ETA as revolutionary is correct but temporary because it is not a workers' movement and cannot consequently be revolutionary. Every revolutionary movement that is not workers tends to turn counter-revolutionary and there

Argentina's ignominious surrender of the genocidal military men led to the almost immediate downfall of Galtieri in June 1982 and the opening of a new stage of freedoms and the call to elections.

is a qualitative point where the transformation takes place. Also, sometimes, a movement is not revolutionary but it is progressive. For me, it is progressive when it does not use the armed methods of the revolutionaries but it plays a progressive role in mobilising the masses.

And what would those progressive movements be, Gamal Nasser's,⁷ for example?

Yes, it could be, or also that of Peronism at some point; the Bonapartist governments of the left such, as Cardenas in Mexico; are progressive or have progressive elements over time. By this, I mean that everything is not black or white. There are not just plain revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. For me, this dichotomy, which is very sectarian and very dangerous and into which we have sometimes fallen, served to isolate us from important processes. It is a dichotomy that threatens the revolution, including one that we lead. Some comrades believe that the revolution is going to be linear, led only by our party, without alliances with anyone and I tell them that without alliances there is no revolution and more in our case, that more than alliances — at this stage — we will have to go at someone's tail.

It is clear. Nevertheless, you held for a long time the characterisation of "Bonapartist revolutionary" for the Chinese leadership, I think until the Cultural Revolution. When does the qualitative leap you mention take place and is the counter-revolutionary tendency consolidated, in the Chinese case?

I think that even before the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese leadership was already bureaucratic ...

Yes, but in your book, you give key elements like this: that China had declared that any attack against the USSR would be considered an attack against China. Now it is the reverse, any attack against the USSR is welcome in China. I wonder this turn is the result of what? Why is the Cultural Revolution defeated? And, is the bureaucracy consolidated because of this?

My opinion now is that the Chinese leadership quickly turned counter-revolutionary; as soon as they took the power of the state. All these kinds of leaderships turn counter-revolutionary very quickly. All the same, we need to study if it was not a Bonapartism, in the book I point out the Bonapartism and I hold to it. I believe the USSR fulfilled its role to achieve a kind of Bonapartist government in China. We need to study whether or not, in the early years, it is a very anti-imperialist Bonapartism, which did not follow the Soviet bureaucracy and which broke with the USSR over the problem of the atomic bomb. All this would have to be studied. But, in any case, the characteristics of the Chinese leadership were ultra-bureaucratic long before taking power in 1949. Mao was very bureaucratic and after taking power, even more so. As for the Cultural Revolution, it seems to me that with it there is a rebirth or beginning of the political revolution, a revolution that, unlike the cultural revolution, is very progressive. What Mao did was ride the wave of the Cultural Revolution to bureaucratise and destroy it. The Cultural Revolution was not created by Mao; it was the beginning of the political revolution, which Mao managed to deflect.

In any case, other phenomena must have an impact for China to have made such profound changes in its international policy, moving closer to the United States.

Yes, another element is that imperialism has surrounded it, we always said it.

Sometimes these doubts lead us to have somewhat eclectic positions but later, over the years, we join the elements. Which is why I insisted it is a reflection that has been going for 25 years.

The same happens with the definition of a revolutionary situation since the Cuban revolution took place, we have been reflecting on that. Now we are better placed in this theoretical aspect.

But the case of China has always been very similar to that of Yugoslavia: the only two countries where, independently of the USSR, power is taken; that's why they are both revolutionary. But along with this, the two leaderships are more bureaucratic and potentially pro-imperialist. Note the contradiction: Yugoslavia was protected by imperialism. When China happened, we said it was potentially another Yugoslavia: as soon as imperialism negotiated with it, it would be ultra-servile, it would make all kinds of concessions. And as long as imperialism blocked them, it would have

⁷ **Gamal Abdel Nasser** (1918–1970). He led the vigorous nationalist movement in the Arab countries in the 1950s. As president of Egypt, in 1956 he nationalised the Suez Canal.

them as terrible enemies. That is why we insist on the definition of Bonapartist because we saw very similar elements with Peronism, with Nasser. That is, they are regimes that while imperialism persecutes them, they remain tough but there comes a point where if imperialism negotiates and tends to reach an agreement, they begin to release the ballast and go to an agreement. As a historical process, structurally, Yugoslavia and China are similar. Neither of them takes notice of Stalin. Tito had a Stalinist background anyway, and Mao says he only read Stalin when he grew up, I think by late 1930.

Do you believe that the possibility of petty-bourgeois or Stalinist leaderships seizing power and expropriating the bourgeoisie is getting further and further away? I ask you this because Vietnam was the last consolidation of a workers' state and subsequent revolutions, like Angola or Mozambique, did not transform into workers' states but into what you defined as Stalinist-bourgeois states. Apparently, there is a larger counter-revolutionary world alliance and the possibility of the creation of workers' states like those of the post-war period is now more difficult. Is this analysis correct?

Yes, for now, it is as you say. Let's see what happens next. I believe the greatest revolutionary victory that humanity has known, the most colossal, and the subsequent processes are the product of that, was the battle of Stalingrad with the defeat of the Nazis. It is the first global revolutionary victory as a whole because it meant the defeat of the counter-revolution in the world. This is the greatest thing there was and only the existence of the bureaucratized communist parties and the reformist socialist parties prevented this victory from developing. In this sense, it is correct to say that both Tito and Mao were counter-revolutionaries and this is the contradiction. On the one hand, because of Tito's struggle, we have to say that he is a revolutionary but, on the other, because of his national conception, he is a counter-revolutionary. Now we see it in the Sandinista National Liberation Front of Nicaragua: they are in fact counter-revolutionary because they allow imperialism to remake itself and achieve victories. They do not spread the revolution but rather stop it at the national borders. In other words, the definition of counter-revolutionary is also present in the FSLN: this is the most serious contradiction and we do not know what precise definition to give it. This is the case of Fidel Castro now: he is giving everything to imperialism. And the contradiction is that he is now selling out the Central American revolution but before he fought in the guerrilla against Batista. Nevertheless, at that time, Castro already had counter-revolutionary conceptions, he was a Freemason and belonged to the Caribbean League.

Our problem, then, is how we manage to reconcile the phenomena in the definition. Should we give priority to the international aspect? Then, they are counter-revolutionary, with certain positive aspects forced by circumstances. Do we give priority to the national aspect? Then, we can define them as revolutionary.

Returning to what I was saying, I think that between 1943 and 1947, the greatest revolutionary victories that humanity has ever known were achieved, victories superior to the Soviet revolution of 1917 because the crisis was also greater. From then on, there were upturns and downswings but a critical point was never reached, not even close, similar to the moments before 1943-1947 because there German, Japanese and French imperialism disappeared, English almost disappeared; Spain was reduced to nothing and the same happened with Belgium, Holland and others. Yankee imperialism ended the war as a power but with the whole world in an incredible revolutionary process. We could say there was a great February revolution on a world scale. This situation has not been repeated. In this sense, we have come down. But let's not confuse the stage: today it is still revolutionary on a world scale and, in many ways, it has expanded but it did not reach the previous point. This is the ultimate reason that revolutions have become more mediated, more complex because imperialism, in general, is stronger.

Yes, but also, doesn't it now have a much stronger alliance with the USSR?

No, between 1943 and 1947 it is more solid. At that time, they were the same, especially with Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin.⁸ It was only with the "cold war" that the front cracked. If we compare

⁸ Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin Pacts. In February 1945, the imperialist leaders of the United States (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) and Great Britain (Winston Churchill) met with Joseph Stalin in Yalta (Crimea, Soviet Union). The war was

the current period with the cold war, we must say that now the unity is greater. In this sense, the cold war helped the revolution because the USSR was forced to transform several eastern European countries into workers' states. Regarding this period, you are right. Now the crisis of imperialism is much weaker than between 1943 and 1947 or 1949, and the mass movement on a world scale is also weaker because the leading role of the French, English, Italian, and Yankee proletariat is missing, which was a decisive factor in the crisis of 1943–1949. This explains why there were almost no new workers' states.

Nevertheless, there were Cuba and Vietnam.

Well, Cuba and Vietnam for me, are an indirect reflection of what I am saying, they are the last threads and perhaps the same will happen with Nicaragua. Not for nothing does Somoza come from the dictatorships of the 1930s, the same as Franco and Salazar. Because of the betrayal of the leadership of the mass movement, their overthrow was postponed, which objectively could have happened much earlier.

Today, there is another stage in which imperialism is in crisis again and then uprisings take place again. If we make the comparison with a mountain range, we are in the same mountain range as in 1943–1949: in a revolutionary stage that began with the defeat of fascism. But the highest point of that situation, the highest peak of that mountain range, was between 1943 and 1949 and now we are lower, on the slope, but in the same revolutionary stage. Why are we lower? Because imperialism managed to rearm thanks to the betrayal of the counter-revolutionary leaderships; it rebuilt capitalist Europe, it extracted a great mass of surplus-value. For this reason, there was no brutal crisis forcing the petty-bourgeois leaders to take power everywhere and, besides, the bourgeoisie is also much stronger regarding 1943–1949, which is why it is more difficult for them to allow petty-bourgeois leadership to seize power.

Yes, but in the case of Nicaragua, they practically destroyed the bourgeoisie, the same happened with the state, and yet a workers' state was not formed. It seems to me that, more than the strength of the bourgeoisie, in this case, the alliance of imperialism and Stalinism weighed against the formation of a workers' state.

Yes, but suppose there were a world war in which all the Latin American countries were involved, with consequences of hunger and desolation, with the destruction of the states, with armies broken. If that happened, the situation in Nicaragua would change because it would be a very big conflict and imperialism would not know whether to cover Brazil, Argentina or Mexico first; it would not know what to do, then maybe it would agree with Stalinism saying "I will give you Venezuela and Colombia, but help me with Brazil because if I do not fix Brazil, everything will sink." When a similar situation takes place, there is also a pact with imperialism and Stalinism but the situation is catastrophic, as it was on a world scale in 1944–1945. At that time, imperialism disappeared, that is why imperialism yielded the east of Europe. This is not the current situation in Central America. The bourgeoisie is stronger. The conflict is limited to Nicaragua and El Salvador, it is not a crisis where everything is collapsing right now. At that time, imperialism was on the floor, destroyed and had to be rebuilt. Today imperialism intervenes, negotiates, the social democracy and the Catholic Church helps it and, in this sense, the situation is more stable than in 1943–1947.

A "success-worshipping" party?

I am of the idea that there is a certain exaggerated optimism in your party, which I would call "success-worshipping" and which is even reflected in some of your works, such as the one referring to the socialist win in France in 1981. There you point out that the new French popular front it opens a

about to end. Only three months later Germany surrendered and in September Japan capitulated. In this agreement and the subsequent in Potsdam, after the defeat of Germany, the powers divided the world, divided Germany into four parts and established the areas of "influence" of the USSR. In exchange for this, the USSR agrees to maintain capitalism in Western Europe and orders the CPs to disarm the militias who rebelled against the Nazis, in the resistance of France and Italy and it allowed the massacre of the guerrilla in Greece.

stage that can lead to a “Russian style” outcome, in other words, revolutionary, “Chilean style” if there is a military coup, or “English style” if the electoral change takes place normally. You state that the most probable hypothesis is that there will be a “Russian or Chilean” outcome, ruling out the possibility of an electoral change. And I believe that the “English style” outcome is the most realistic possibility currently in France.

I believed it too and I believe it, but my work was corrected by Lambert. I had written a chapter where I said it was going to be “English style”, that bipartisanship would continue. Then I accepted Lambert’s correction to avoid a false controversy about whether I saw a reformist outcome. I realised that if I kept this position, we were not going to argue with Lambert about whether or not Mitterrand would starve the people but about whether or not I was a reformist. So, I resolved to put myself in an “ultra” position and change the draft so he cannot tell me “you do not believe in the revolution, you are a pessimist”. But my analysis is that bipartisanship will continue in France, there is no possibility that it will be the Russian style and that the next elections will be won by the conservatives.

Regarding the other part of your question, I would not call it “success-worshipping” but I would say that sometimes we sin from an exaggerated optimism. But, on the other hand, this is not very serious. What is serious is self-proclamation, which is very common among Trotskyists; in all of them, in Mandel and it is possible that in me. I think, however, that compared to Mandel I have been a little more objective. For five or ten years I have not been optimistic or self-proclaiming.

And what do you understand by self-proclamation?

Self-proclamation is to say: “We are the leadership of the masses, we will be the future, our party or nothing”, and in this aspect, I think I was careful. But of course, there must be many formulas of this type because it makes to the human condition, every activity that one does reinforces it with an ideological structure that gives it a foundation. Nobody can go boxing saying that the opponent will kill him. In all action, there must be a subjective charge and that is highly positive, not negative. If the action is positive, what recharges that action is correct. Within this general framework, I believe that among the Trotskyist leaders I have been one of the most objective and I believe Hansen too. I foresaw, for example, that the post-war economic boom was coming and this boom would bring bourgeois stability for many years and at that time there was no one on the left to say so. I was against the “Pabloist” theory according to which the Third World War was coming and, in a few years, Stalinism would be forced to take power everywhere. Well, of course, there must be thousands of overly optimistic expressions regarding the future of the revolution. Nor have I been self-proclaiming. As a young man, in 1958, I did a thesis where I said that never, not by chance, a Trotskyist party, much less ours, were going to lead a revolution on their own; It was the thesis on the Revolutionary United Front.⁹

In the last 10 years, I’ve had a share of pessimism. We coined the phrase “barbaric Trotskyism” because for 20 years I usually say in international meetings that we are a barbaric and ignorant Trotskyist organisation and that we have a world record for mistakes. Ours is the first organisation I know of that made its history based on mistakes. From a young age, I tried to instil that we make a lot of mistakes. Posadas laughed a lot about this and always cited our report on activities at the meetings of the Fourth International because we always began by saying: “taking into account the inability of our leadership, the deficient character of our Marxist training, the fact we have come from a backward country where we do not live Western culture, etc.” That was our attitude, that’s why Posadas used to say to the Fourth: how can an organisation be recognised as a member of the International whose leadership says all that about itself.

Now, in our party, many comrades exaggerate, but this has to do with a subjective issue. Self-proclamation is believing you are the centre. I think we were always a small group, with a lot of union strength but small. However, I have heard Mandel and other leaders of the Fourth say, every two years, “everything is in crisis”, “capitalism is collapsing”, “we will become a powerful party and we will take over everything”. Quite possibly, we may have lots of similar statements, also self-proclaiming, but I get the impression that if we have had some of that, we also had objectivity. On

⁹ Available for downloading from www.nauelmoreno.org with the title *Theses of Leeds*.

the contrary, the history of the Fourth, written by Pablo and by all, is always a series of successes. I was the first to say that Trotsky was wrong. It seems to me, then, that our trend was not toward self-proclamation. And this is also repeated in the theses that I mention: we say the revolutionary party is going to make unions and not just splits. It is a great discussion: is the party made with an increasingly pure group, that splits with one and the other, splits and joins, splits and joins? The latter is our thesis of the Revolutionary United Front. In other words, do we join with sectors that are much better than us, which, although full of mistakes are the fruit of the reality of the class struggle, of objective reality? We believe that yes, without these unions there is no future.

Okay, but what you do admit is that in your party, even if there is no “success-worshipping” there is a great deal of optimism.

Ah yes! But if there is no optimism there can be no action, that is very positive, the opposite is delusional. How are you going to go on a general strike, make a picket, risk the police, lose a leg like a comrade who lost it to a bomb, if you don't have a tremendous load of optimism? One thing is objectivity, another is optimism, but you are talking about “success-worshipping”. “Success-worshipping” also exists, that is why we are fighting against the subjectivity of the leaderships. What has to be cold, calculated, is the analysis, not the action; the action has to be full of optimism. If Hitler comes and we all go into hiding because the militant whom he catches he tears to pieces... I don't know if you know that he tortured himself by cutting off limbs, then if they catch you, they torture you, you lose an eye or a leg, you are not going to tell me that you put up with all this with pessimism, it's ridiculous! This person has to have a tremendous optimism to continue fighting after that and be conscious that if everyone fights, they will overthrow Hitler.

Even so, at the time of the Videla¹⁰ dictatorship, I saw too much optimism on the part of your party. I received oral reports in which they told me that when the dictatorship fell, the bourgeoisie no longer would have a way out because Peronism was discredited and because Radicalism had always been a “gorilla”¹¹ party.

Yes, but I was not in Argentina at that time and I have to be guided only by written analysis and characterisations. Anyway, I think reality showed that, to some extent, we were right. I thought you were going to refer to another event where I do have a responsibility there because I said we would be a party of 20,000 militants and I argued the Videla dictatorship would last a short time, that it was atypical just like the Bolivian dictatorship that succeeded Hugo Banzer.¹² So yes, there were incorrect expressions like that of the 20,000 militants, but for me, the overall political line was correct and it was correct to say that the dictatorship would not last long because the proletariat was not historically defeated and the coup had not been like that of Pinochet in Chile in 1973.

You have to start from the premise that everything written in politics, even if it was written by Marx or Lenin, is inevitably 10 to 30 per cent wrong. What you say is similar to the criticisms the Sovietologists make of Lenin. They claim that Lenin was a charlatan and to prove it they take his quotes and point out: in July 1917, Lenin said that Kerensky¹³ headed an acute Bonapartist regime; 15 days later, that he is semi-Bonapartist; a week later he says Kerenskyism is a regime that reflects the democratic revolution and later makes another characterisation: Kerensky is very weak and the Soviets must take power. Then the Sovietologists come and say “Lenin was a charlatan, he made three, four diametrically opposed characterisations in a few months.” But if you take the objective situation, it says: he was a Bonapartist, it is true, when the militants of the Bolshevik party were killed

10 **Jorge Rafael Videla** (1925–2013) was the general who led the genocidal coup of March 1976 together with Admiral Massera and Brigadier Agosti. Between 1976 and 1978 he served as the de facto presidency of Argentina, of that first Military Junta.

11 **Gorilla** is a term from Argentina's domestic politics, historically used to refer in a derogatory or pejorative way to those who gave a coup against Peron. Over the years, the term has been extended to a greater or lesser extent to other countries in Latin America as synonymous with “reactionary right”.

12 **Hugo Banzer Suarez** (1926-2002) was a military man, dictator, and president of Bolivia in two periods. In 1971, he led a bloody triumphant military coup and ruled until 1978. In 1997-2001, he was president through elections.

13 **Alexandr Kerensky** (1881–1970) headed the provisional government in Russia after the February revolution. He was overthrown by the Bolsheviks and Soviets in October 1917. He died in the United States in 1970.

in the streets but after 15 days the situation changed and a month later it changed again. That is not scientific, it is political. My announcement about the 20,000 militants is an ideological burden that I put unconsciously. But beware, sometimes it is done consciously: Trotsky did it a lot and Lenin was a specialist in it. He sometimes took things to the extreme, to black or white, so that the discussion could be clarified, the differences in controversy could be seen and it was resolved by voting: either black or white. In the case of the 20,000 militants, then, it is the ideological burden I put in front of the leadership sector that said that in Argentina we should bury ourselves because there was fascism for 10 or 15 years, as Jorge Brunello¹⁴ and others argued.

You criticise optimism and I will tell you something about that time because there was a terrible discussion between the leadership that was in Colombia and the leadership sector that was in Argentina. At the time of the Minister of Economy Alfredo Martínez de Hoz,¹⁵ we believed that there was “sweet money” here and the leadership of the Argentine party said there wasn’t. We also believed the middle class was a fan of Videla and the comrades said they weren’t. All of this was highly discussed and settled in the 1980 Congress in Colombia when there was an immense debate and the political documents presented by the Argentine leadership were modified, but it was a discussion of years. Because the picture of reality the Argentine party made was that, under Videla and Martínez de Hoz, everyone — the proletariat, the middle class, everyone — was under a regime of hunger and total misery and thence they were all opponents, the government didn’t have a social base of any kind. But our characterisation, of the leadership that was in Colombia, was the opposite, very pessimistic: we said that the regime had the support of the middle class, that the working class was alone and that there were also sectors of the workers who were earning very well and that for the bourgeoisie there was a very flourishing economic situation because it had taken an extraordinary share of surplus value from the proletariat. Now, that in the party there are optimistic people, yes, there is everything, also pessimists, but the tendency is towards optimism and even “success-worshipping” in some cases and towards subjectivity. It is difficult to achieve, for example, that the party be very objective because in this sense the clandestine militancy harmed it a lot.

Why did clandestine activity prevent objectivity?

Because it turned the party into a body separate from society as a result of the need to be clandestine. In Cordoba and Rosario, for example, the reaction hit us very hard and this to some extent forced the party to seclude itself in Buenos Aires. This led to the abandonment of many workers’ centres and the party, losing its proletarian character, committed a series of mistakes. The Argentine leadership itself invents fables to justify the situation of the party, like what I tell you that there was total misery and that no one supported Videla and instead for us there were sectors that supported him, in the same way, that at the time Pinochet had broad support in Chile. I am one of those who believe that Pinochet really won the 1980 plebiscite.

Since we are talking about the time of General Videla and the situation of the party at that stage, did your organisation foresee that the coup of 24 March 1976 would take place? I know there was a lot of internal discussion about it.

It is very complex and there is a work written by me on this for those who wish to deepen in the subject. There was indeed a very big discussion with Jorge Brunello, who was part of the Argentine leadership. But I will answer you.

We did not get the date right, 24 March, but we did get it right in the analysis. We showed Brunello in Bogota, with the quotes of documents, what I’m telling you. But in March 1976 there was an important wing of the leaders who believed there would-be elections at the end of the year, as scheduled, and not a coup. But this wing was defeated during a discussion. An internal

¹⁴ **Jorge Guidobono**, alias **Jorge Brunello** (1944–2007) was Uruguayan, and since he went into exile in Buenos Aires in the early 1970s, he was a member of the PRT-*La Verdad* and later the PST and MAS. He was part of the editorial staff of *Revista de America* and *Avanzada Socialista*. In 1992 he separated from the MAS and founded the Revolutionary Socialist League and was editor of its newspaper *Bandera Roja*.

¹⁵ **Jose Alfredo Martínez de Hoz** (1925–2013) was an Argentine executive and policymaker. He served as Minister of the Economy under the military dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla, between 1976 and 1981. He is considered a representative of economic liberalism at any cost and intimately linked to international financial agencies and centres.

bulletin was produced considering hypotheses to achieve the unity of the party that was divided into three opinions. It was this internal bulletin which we read to Brunello. We knew for sure the coup was coming because more than a year before, exactly in November 1974, we went completely underground.

I believe that the going underground was because of the state of siege that was anticipated to the millimetre. A week before the state of siege, or 15 days, your party said: “The state of siege is coming, let’s go underground”. In October 1975, during General Numa Laplane’s military crisis, the party sniffed the possibility of a coup, but finally, in March 1976 the precise moment in which it would take place was not foreseen.

The specific moment more or less, what we did not foresee in such a case is the date. I’m not telling you that we foresaw only the state of siege but specifically the possibility of a coup. We bought a printing press, not because of the state of siege but because the coup was almost certain, either one year or the next. Because our social analysis was as follows: if the general strike against Minister of Economy Mondelli¹⁶ fails, the coup is inevitable, what we missed is the week. At that time, in the headquarters of 24 de Noviembre Street, a meeting of the Central Committee was held where I spoke to say that the Marxist analysis and the political line always take place regarding something. Years later, in Bogota, Brunello discussed with me and reminded me that at that Central Committee meeting I said: “Let’s end the obsession with the coup because it is something of the fifth order.” It happens that before this CC meeting, I had been abroad and when I return, I find the whole party saying that the coup is coming. So, I say: “After the workers’ movement triumphed against the ministers Rodrigo and Lopez Rega,¹⁷ there is no other way to fight against the coup than to continue the mobilisation against Isabel Peron; instead, raising the ghost of the coup means stopping the fight against Isabel.” There the CC modified the line. Later Brunello takes this line and says it was wrong because the coup was coming and that, ultimately, the general strike line against Mondelli was also wrong. As I was telling you, in that CC meeting I asked: what is the main enemy, the possible coup or the current government of Isabel Peron? And who is the main friend, Isabel Peron, the union bureaucracy, and the masses because they all go against the coup, or are the main friend the masses who have begun their mobilisation to overthrow Isabel? At that meeting, I spoke out against the majority who argued we had to be on the side of Isabel, with anyone, against the possibility of a coup. Whereas I say that there would be no coup if the general strike triumphed and Isabel fell because of the action of the masses. After the controversy, the CC changed the line and we launched the slogan that a representative of the CGT be appointed in the Senate and that for this to happen, there should be a general strike that overthrows Isabel Peron. The substantive discussion, then, was whether we had an offensive or defensive line and I spoke out for the offensive one because I believe that the worker’s movement had begun its offensive against Isabel and that if it succeeds there is no possible coup and if it fails there is a coup one way or other.

Honestly, today I think this analysis was correct, what happens is that the party is sometimes spoiled and wants characterisations to the millimetre, like the ones we had in 1955. In 1955, we said Peron falls from June and so it was. In this case, we didn’t say Isabel falls in March, or we foresaw the exact date, or we said she falls between March or April, perfect, I accept it, but the

16 **Emilio Mondelli** (1914–1993) was an Argentine banker, the last Minister of Economy in the government of Isabel Peron.

17 **Celestino Rodrigo** (1915-1987) was an Argentine engineer and politician, who served as Minister of Economy of Argentina during the government of Maria Estela (Isabel) Martinez de Peron. He is remembered for having applied a policy of strong adjustment: a devaluation of 60 per cent of the value of the currency and a sharp price increase of fuels and energy. He was forced to resign, together with the Minister of Social Welfare Jose Lopez Rega, by the workers’ mobilisation and general strike.

Jose Lopez Rega (1916-1989) was a politician and Argentine minister, known for his influence on Juan Domingo Peron and Maria Estela (Isabel) Martinez de Peron and for organising, from the position of Minister of Social Welfare, the Triple-A, a paramilitary right-wing terrorist group that practised bombings and assassinations to combat the influence of the left and organisations opponents of the government. His influence increased rapidly since 1973, especially after Peron’s death in mid-1974, becoming the virtual prime minister because of his influence on Isabel Peron, to the point that almost all the cabinet was made up of men of his trust, promoted by him. He fell because of the mobilisation against the “Rodrigazo”.

analysis was correct. In other words, there was a coup because the strike against Mondelli did not win and it did not win because Isabel, Lorenzo Miguel and Calabro¹⁸ made a deal to lift the strike. That is what I believe because I believe in class analyses and I still believe Videla would not give a coup against Isabel Peron because he was afraid of a reaction from the workers' movement but the reaction depended on the strike and the strike was lifted. It seems that Admiral Massera¹⁹ was the most coup-plotter of them all and when they saw that the workers' movement demobilised, they took advantage. But for me, in the previous months, what had opened up was the stage of removing Isabel Peron, that was the battle that had to be fought until the moment of the coup because if it succeeded, the military would have to stay put. In the written work that I have on the subject, I place a quote from Lenin. Because Lenin, until 24 hours before the Kornilov²⁰ coup attempt, was pushing to overthrow Kerensky and only changed tactics with the Kornilov uprising, because he knew the only way to guarantee there would be no right-wing coup in Russia was to overthrow Kerensky. with the mobilisation of the masses.

Admitting that the line was correct, what is certain is that the coup took the party by surprise. I saw you myself at the funeral of Arturo Gómez²¹ a month after the *coup d'état* and the funeral was not held clandestinely. The entire leadership was present and even Silvia Díaz spoke on behalf of the Executive Committee. That is why I say that the party was taken by surprise.

Yes, but we go back to the same thing: one thing is how the militants think and another thing is the documents. As the whole party was engaged in the workers' offensive against Isabel Peron, its militants believed there was no possibility of a coup. This is what I show to Brunello in the Bogota controversy because I tell him: Brunello, you are fighting against the public opinion of the party, not against the documents. Yes, it is true, the first fortnight after the coup there was confusion. For example, we did not believe they were going to hit us very hard,²² but you can read the letter we sent to Mandel where we give him the official party resolution on the subject of the coup. What you are right about is that we saw certain legal margins, that was my mistake that was repeated two years later by the Argentine leadership when I was no longer in the country. The mistake is that we believed that military repression was going to be selective and within their selectivity, that they would hit especially the Montoneros.²³ That is the definition we gave: a counter-revolutionary government

18 **Lorenzo Miguel** (1927-2002) was one of the historic chiefs of the Peronist trade union bureaucracy. Head of the powerful metalworker's union (UOM) since 1970. During the government of Isabel Peron, he linked with Jose Lopez Rega to give birth to the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance or Triple-A a death squad that appeared on the scene in 1973. After the coup against Isabel Peron, he was sent to prison, but his close relationship with Junta member Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera protected him.

Victorio Calabro (b. 1929) is an Argentine politician and trade unionist. He was a leader of the Metal Workers Union. In 1973, he was elected lieutenant governor of the province of Buenos Aires and then assumed as governor on 24 January 1974 after the resignation of Oscar Bidegain. He was demitted on 26 March 1976 by the coup d'état by Jorge Videla and the Junta of Commanders.

19 **Emilio Eduardo Massera** (1925–2010) was an Argentine Naval military officer, and a leading participant, together with Jorge Rafael Videla and Orlando Ramon Agosti, in the Argentine coup d'état of 1976, self-titled National Reorganisation Process, that overthrew María Estela Martínez de Peron. Many consider Massera to have masterminded the junta's Dirty War against political opponents, which resulted in nearly 13,000 deaths and disappearances, according to official records. Human rights groups put the toll closer to 30,000.

20 **Lavr Georgiyevich Kornilov** (1870–1918). Appointed supreme head of the Russian army by Kerensky in 1917, he attacked Petrograd attempting a pro-monarchical coup in late July, early August, against the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks called to confront Kornilov's "white" coup, even if Kerensky's was not a workers' and peasants' government like the one that was established in October. Imprisoned, Kornilov managed to flee and died at the head of the White Army of Ukraine in 1918 fighting the power of the Soviets.

21 **Arturo Gomez** was one of the main leaders of the PST. He had joined Palabra Obrera [Workers' Word] in the late 1950s, in La Plata. He was a delegate to the Tenth World Congress in 1974 and later was the director of *Avanzada Socialista*. After the coup, he directed the publication of *La Yesca* and *Cambio*. He passed away suddenly in May 1976.

22 The Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers Party, PST) had around 100 assassinated ("disappeared") during the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1982). However, it kept a militant activity, distributing thousands of newspapers and supporting strikes and democratic movements, based on a strictly clandestine organisation. Before the coup, between 1974 and 1976 it had over a dozen militants assassinated.

23 **Montoneros** was the main Peronist guerrilla organisation in Argentina. It was born encouraged by Peron himself. In 1973 it supported the brief government of Hector Jose Campora, who was quickly overthrown by Peron. On 1 May

that would only strike at the guerrilla vanguard. This is a tactical error, but a tactical error within an overall analysis that was correct, as it was also a tactical error to put out two legal publications, such as *La Yesca* and *Cambio*, which lasted two issues. At the end of 1976, we did change the entire line. But as soon as the coup takes place, our analysis in the letter to Mandel is correct. Yes, I admit that there were conjunctural and tactical errors but within the framework of a correct analysis. At the end of 1977, after the railway strike, the Argentine leadership made a mistake again because it believed that it could change the stage. We, in Bogota, did not subscribe to this characterisation and we discussed a lot with the Argentine leadership. We believed that there was no change of stage.

The Malvinas post-war period

I would now like to touch on the issue of the Malvinas (Falklands) war since it led to the fall of the dictatorship we are talking about. The analysis of your current, during the war, was more or less this: if Galtieri wins it is magnificent because he defeats imperialist England supported by the United States. If he loses, it is also good because the dictatorship falls, as it actually did.²⁴ And I believe that from a military defeat with imperialism, there are some bad consequences for the masses. One of those consequences, perhaps, is the great pacifism and “democratism” that abounds today. It is not by chance that pacifist-religious sects such as Silo, the Humanist Party and others are emerging with strength.

I don't know whether there are bad consequences or not. You have to be dialectical and for me, everything was very positive because the dictatorship fell. This thing of Silo also has some positive elements. The masses believe you cannot go to war with such leadership as Galtieri and company; this is the essence of the feeling that is expressed as pacifism. A distinction must be made between the pacifism of the masses and the pacifism of priests and religion. The pacifism of the masses, that in this case, you see as negative, I see it as positive. Because thanks to it, for example, today there is no possibility of a war with Chile as there was in 1978, which would be horrible, similar to the of Iraq-Iran war. It has a “negative” side because there is also no possibility of a new war for the Malvinas but that — hence why I say that you have to be dialectical — is also positive, since today Argentina would receive a beating 10 times worse than in 1982.

It is feasible that this beating would accelerate the revolution but we do not want it at the cost of tens of thousands of deaths. The British plan, the next time Argentina tries to recover the Malvinas, is to bomb our cities, which is why they are building the airport. So, it is a contradictory phenomenon because the masses become pacifists, but this is positive insofar as it reflects distrust in the military and the government; distrust badly expressed politically because there is no revolutionary party that can organise such discontent.

In any case, there is a negative aspect, which is that the dictatorship fell through defeat in the war and this defeat took place too quickly, preventing the mobilisation of the masses from maturing. So, Galtieri did not fall because of a mobilisation that had the working class as the main protagonist but rather because of a popular mobilisation, which also aborted because of the end of the war.

All this, the non-deepening of the mobilisation, has allowed the union bureaucracy and the 1853 constitution to survive, for example. All because it was not a massive mobilisation with direct confrontations, which would have left the armed forces in poor condition. The role of beating the armed forces, superstructurally, was fulfilled by the war but the masses did not follow the confrontation. That is a negative phenomenon in a highly positive context.

1974, Peron drove them out from the massive rally of the day. It pursued guerrilla warfare between 1970 and 1979. It was primarily composed of young men and women of the middle class.

24 When the Malvinas war broke out, the PST began a great campaign, together with the parties of the International Workers League (Fourth International), to support the occupation of the Malvinas and Argentina against Great Britain. Polemizing with pacifist sectors and other sectors of the left, the PST indicated that it was necessary to support the military camp of the oppressed country, in this case, Argentina, against imperialism. This regardless of whether Argentina was ruled by a fierce military dictatorship and without giving any political support to the government. Criticism of the military government focused on the fact that it did not take economic and military measures to defeat imperialism, nor did it accept help from other Latin American countries.

The general analysis of the Malvinas war is that it was the product of the desperation of Galtieri and the military Junta to stay in power. To what extent was it not also a war of the national bourgeoisie against imperialism?

It was also a war of sectors of the national bourgeoisie linked to the Yankees against British imperialism. There was a miscalculation and the statements of the protagonists confirm it. For me, the real plan was semi-arranged with the Yankees and was to occupy and retreat and negotiate from a better position. But the mobilisation transforms everything. I believe it was a plan of the national bourgeoisie conceived with the Yankees, hitting British imperialism, which is the weakest. The problem is that although the Argentine military occupation is easy, they make a wrong military and diplomatic analysis and think that if war breaks out, the Yankees will continue to support Argentina. In other words, it is a war against the weaker imperialism that is England, but we cannot say it is so “anti-imperialist” because here the dominant country is not England but the United States. Argentina wanted to do something similar to what India did when it took from Portugal a colonial position,²⁵ but England is not Portugal, it is satellite imperialism of the United States but it is not as weak as Portugal and it also has the third-largest navy in the world. So, it is not an anti-imperialist war but a manoeuvre against the English to fortify the military regime here. The plan was that Argentina would take the islands and withdraw, then it would negotiate in the United Nations and through the UN, the United States could have more control over the Malvinas, although formally the sovereignty was Argentine or a tripartite domain was formed. English, Argentine and American. But here the mobilisation forced the military not to back down, they did not withdraw and war broke out. Galtieri acknowledges all this in an interview that appeared in *Clarín*: Argentina was looking for a diplomatic victory and that victory was agreed with the Yankees.

25 It refers to Goa, a small territory located in the southwest of India that was conquered by the Portuguese in 1510 and recaptured by India in 1961. The Portuguese garrison surrendered without fighting the Indian army.