

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL POWER: EVOLUTION IN LATIN AMERICA

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Abstract Social movements came to life again in Latin America towards 1964. Working mainly at the local level, they have been undergoing intense evolution by adopting political functions. This has been due to the concatenation of the problems faced by them in existing vacuums of power. Movements have sustained themselves in time and have expanded regionally, to the point of now adopting national stances. This is expressed in autonomous action exemplified in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Chile and other nations. Prospects are difficult because of repression and co-optation, but unexpected resistance of the movements expresses an intense desire to achieve alternative developments and ways of life in these countries.

More than two decades have gone by since a new surge of social and popular movements began to arise in the Third World. These movements are no longer 'new' and have been taking on other modalities.

In Latin America they have involved an extraordinary cycle of action and discussion, which was particularly intensive around 1964 when João Goulart, the president of Brazil, was overthrown. Some of the first signs, though, had appeared even earlier (cf. Germani 1962). The European phenomenon, however, which also had its antecedents, came to the fore some four years later and then for different motives and reasons relating to *Angst* and culture. The Latin American response, which continues, was to military authoritarianism, to foreign intervention, to the indigence of our masses, and to the ill-conceived approach of so-called 'economic and social development' policies imposed by the rich countries and abetted by local oligarchies.

These technocratic policies, which more than anything produced under-development and made the rich even richer – since the rich did not let much of the funds 'trickle' down to the lower productive classes – intensified the exploitation and dependence that had long gone hand in hand with hunger, destitution and ignorance. The cycle of action and discussion referred to above is still in progress and evolving, for the basic problems of the people have not been solved in their favour. In response, millions of subordinated people neglected by those in power have managed to articulate their own expectations and fight on their own to find democratic solutions. This has shown once again the force of the creative impulse in ordinary men and women and their capacity to resist injustices.

Most observers of these movements have regarded them with favour and wished them luck. They see them as having undertaken the necessary historical function of articulating protest. The movements still cherish the hope of real progress being achieved by the communities, and see a chance of building a new social order that will be more equitable and prosperous and offer peace and justice, a social order in which they can help to resolve the

contradictions of capitalism and correct the ethical inconsistencies of bourgeois democracy.

It is not therefore surprising to find discussion of all these aspects in the abundant literature on the subject. But this is not the place for a complete review of the relevant publications, so I will only mention those that have given me greater guidance: from the first dramatic descriptions of Bhoomi Sena of India in 1979, to the useful delving by Tilman Evers into the 'hidden identity' of the movements (1986), the dynamic analyses by D.L. Sheth (1987), Rajni Kothari (1984) and Luis Alberto Restrepo (1987, 1988), the tactical possibilities offered by the movements, according to André Gunder Frank and María Fuentes (1987), their relationships to socialism and democracy, according to David Slater (1989) and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1987), and their 'global promise', postulated by Richard Falk (1987). European analysts have, on the whole, as is their wont, ignored the different nature of Third World phenomena and tended to globalise or universalise things on the basis of their own limited experience (cf. Hegedus 1989). But a reasonably positive, duly critical, balance has been drawn up, with some suitable doses of scepticism, romanticism and utopianism (cf. Cardoso 1987).

To interpret what has been going on in Latin America with social movements and to place these in a broader perspective, I have tried to present two aspects of them in this article: first, an analytical aspect derived from my own observations and direct experience in the last twenty years; and then, on the basis of this, a projective or interpretive aspect in which I express my personal concern as a feeling social scientist unable to stand by silently watching the development of events.

Analysis

Redefining political action: from the micro to the macro level and vice versa. Two practical aspects of Latin American social and popular movements that have aroused greater curiosity – and expectations – among scholars are: (1) their duration in time; and (2) their expansion in territorial or socio-geographical space. Both aspects are important because they are an indication of the strength or weakness of the movements, because they have repercussions on the political component, and because they create 'political culture'. This is a very significant point, for politics has been an activity that the movements never felt ready to undertake, especially in their earlier years. And in fact they, or those leading and guiding them, have always been distrustful – and justifiably so – of anything smelling of traditional politicking.

Sufficient explanations have already been given, at least in Latin America, of this initial negative reaction. As will be recalled, these movements arose almost spontaneously from the base and periphery of society, in specific places and for concrete needs. Their leaders were people concerned about economic stagnation and militarism, and frustrated by the verticality and sectarianism of revolutionary vanguard groups. There were academics and schoolmasters who abandoned the universities and schools because of their inability to meet the challenges of the times. There were also men of vision, critical of

religiosity, who wanted to build a New Jerusalem. They dwelt in those days in the realm of the micro sphere, the quotidian, of short careful steps. It was in the context of the situations in this realm that acts of protest and rebellion as well as the search for cultural, eco-regional, social, ethnic, gender, artistic and other identity, were to occur – and still do occur – as natural means of self-defence. Virtually all these activities were carried on outside party structures or established organisms.

On the basis of historical experience, especially that of the previous, nineteenth-century, cycle of movements, it was expected that the movements of this time would last no longer than the circumstances that produced them, or that their leaders would yield as easily to co-optation by politicians or fall victim to official repression, as had occurred in a great number of painful cases from Tlatelolco to the Mapuche. In this case, however, a concatenation of conflicts began to be created, and these conflicts made it necessary to link one protest or struggle for rights or services to another, to look for steadfast allies of different social backgrounds, and to form networks of mutual support and coordination at several levels. Forums, gatherings or festivals on specific topics proved to be flexible and effective tools. Such tendencies towards self-examination and internal and external affirmation gradually expanded the space of confrontation and raised the level of self-recognition, thereby prolonging the life of a good number of the movements and making them more effective. This led to their becoming articulated for political, social and cultural action in larger arenas, especially 'regions', as defined socio-geographically. In this way the foundations were laid for a different civic political culture.

In many places, this first schematic functional coordination broke down any initial resistance there was against formalisation and, paradoxically enough, led to the institutionalisation of those same movements. This did not involve establishing any hierarchies or central commands, nor was there any predominance of bureaucracies, although in the course of time qualified professional services came to be set up. The governing principles were internal democracy, participation by the grassroots, open meetings, collectivisation and rotation of leadership, and absolute administrative transparency. In other words, self-medication and auto-control were applied. In this way, a hitherto unthought-of continuity of action was achieved and the boundaries of work were extended beyond the local community.

It seemed as though the original *raison d'être* of the movements was being contradicted. But, either because of the depth and seriousness of the socio-economic crises, or because of the very dynamics of the actual problems tackled, the movements saw new courses of practical action – other than specific protest – opening up before them. One possibility that stood out amongst the rest was that of acting against the coercive superior power whose limiting weight in the struggles waged could not be ignored. Then it was found that both the movements' striving for local progress, and the justification of their continuation as democratic factors of change were, in the final analysis, political and macro-structural in nature. Their focal point lay in the monopolistic, authoritarian, technocratic, developmentalist State as well as in

the social contracts that gave it life and legitimacy. Consequently, it was in this direction that efforts at change had to be aimed, with as much – or even greater – intensity as in the earlier struggles, by articulating a new ‘countervailing power’. This new political culture obliged many local movements and their leaders to broaden their originally quotidian outlook, discard the remains of their restricting sectarianism, branch out in various directions, and join forces in united action fronts. Thus the movements went from the micro to the macro level, and from protest to proposal. In so doing, they shed the two original characteristics described above: that of arising from a conjuncture limited in time, and that of being localised in space. And they established two-way channels, from the grassroots upwards, and from above down to the grassroots, in new and more symmetrical forms of interchange. This new stage of expansion and equilibrium has been in progress in several countries for about five years. That is not a long time, but the fact that this stage has been reached at all may be of far-reaching significance to the peoples concerned.

On the whole, the survival of the social and popular movements against all odds during these twenty years of serious conflicts and multiple violence is nothing short of extraordinary. They live on; while a number of political parties and groups founded during this same period, according to time-honoured rules of organisation, disappeared very soon after. Despite inevitable internal fissures, strains and inconsistencies, and despite assassination, imprisonment and torture, the movements have carried on, and have expanded to embrace socio-geographical regions by means of the networks and coordination mechanisms referred to above (associations of community boards and of voluntary communal labour groups, cooperatives of low-cost housing and of ‘shanty towns’, people’s education campaigns, etc.). Thus, united, they continue to resist the temptations of radical leftist instrumentation, as well as the assaults of co-optation and repression against them and their leaders by existing parties and governments. It is true that there have been desertions from the movements and that some political tricks have filtered into them. Yet, given the enormous discredit of many establishment bodies, it is no longer considered a step forward for anyone decidedly involved with the movements to enter them, imitate their reactionary or immoral practices, or reinforce them in any way. Many dominant institutions, such as the traditional parties, have lost their legitimacy in the eyes of the people, partly because they are no longer able to mediate for or uphold the interests of defenceless or persecuted groups, and partly because they have allowed decay to infect the social fabric, as has occurred in the situation of violence in Colombia.

In many parts, the loss of legitimacy by parties and governments has created a power gap, which the movements, in their expansive evolution, have been filling locally and regionally in their own way, as mentioned earlier, by showing the possibility of alternative forms of society and social contract to which they can all converge from their different spheres of activity and initial points of departure. Today, through their networks and other mechanisms of regional and national coordination, many of them are beginning to propose or demand programmatic or structural changes for society at large. These

particular movements have formed a vanguard of action and commitment, while the others are increasingly being left to do the job of asserting claims, the characteristic activity of the early years.

By making the leap from the micro to the macro and also contemplating the reverse course in these structural forms, and by entering on the plane of general ideas and objectives without losing their identity, integrity, leadership and autonomy as movements, the most advanced of the movements are becoming, or have already become in several places, major political alternatives. They are alternatives that tend to take hold because of the political vacuum referred to above, and because of crisis both in developmentalism and in the existing bodies or institutions. Consequently, unlike movements of former times, many of the important ones of today have neither lent strength nor given birth to parties (of the right or the left) as we conceive them, for these are regarded as obsolete formulae of political organisation, or worse still, as instigators of violence, corruption and abuse of power. Many of the advanced movements have begun to assume the role of the traditional parties more directly and efficiently, marking out a greater area of democratic participation.

The critical attitude to parties is serving the important purpose of demystifying them. Many activists are discovering, as Marx did in his time, that parties are not the only possible forms of organisation for political action; that they came into being in Europe in a specific historical and cultural context in the eighteenth century; that they have not been indispensable for acceding to power (witness the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua); and that they become a dead weight impeding change when they take hierarchisation and verticality to extremes, are reduced to defending the vested interests of certain groups or social classes, make an ideal of and practise violence (as they often do), or allow manipulation and debasement to fester (which they often do too). In the movements, a creative search is being made for alternative forms of political organisation and action. They have not yet crystallised. But the traditional parties are being more and more vigorously challenged about their organisation, inspiration and morality.¹

It is not only a question of being called a party or a movement, although this may have practical consequences. The fact that the existence of 'parties' is still required by law (as it is in Chile and Mexico) does not obscure the far-reaching challenge presented to them by the advanced movements as regards their conceptions, structures and procedures: the parties will have to change if they want to survive. Moreover, the movements as such can go on being political alternatives, for there is room enough here for imagination and creativity adapted to our particular history, culture and environment. The movements will have to continue to show us what the new necessary ways of doing politics are like. Since experience continues to be a good teacher, let us analyse some actual cases that I think are relevant.

There is the Workers' Party of Brazil (*'Partido de los Trabajadores'* - PT) which, despite its name is not, for any practical purposes, a party as its founders and directors admit (Weffort 1989); at least it is not a party like the others. It is the outcome of an all-embracing process of organisation involving sectors of workers, community and religious leaders, and organic intellectuals

(including Paulo Freire, the educator), who drew up a common programme of political, economic, social and cultural action that went beyond the limits of associational or local concerns and now covers the whole of Brazilian society.² Its extraordinary national appeal, demonstrated in the last presidential elections (December 1989) where the PT candidate almost won, is another proof of the rise of social movements and the irrelevance of many old parties.

The persistence and extensive impact (both open and underground) of social, educational and trade-union movements in Chile were decisive factors in voting 'No' to Pinochet. In the reconstruction of Mexico City after the earthquake of 1985, local social and civic movements revealed how solid their invisible infrastructure was by being able to fill in for the State; this set the basis for the eventual creation of the 'Cardenist' alliance that made the hitherto unbeatable Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) totter. New political forces in Peru (*Izquierda Unida*), Bolivia, Venezuela and other countries would not have made any headway without the support of coordinated social movements or without the help of grassroots organisations. The Nicaragua of the Sandinistas has a lot to teach us in this respect.

In Colombia, the *'Movimiento Inconformes'* (non-conformists' movement), which was started in 1980 by lecturers, teachers, trade unionists and workers of the cultural sector, is now the second largest political force in the Department of Nariño, with mayors, town councillors, departmental deputies and a participatory-action philosophy. It is the most important movement among a dozen similar forces that have emerged in several parts of the country (Tolima, Sucre, Santander, Cauca, Llanos, Cesar, Boyacá, Putumayo and Antioquia), and has shown in practice how to go from the micro to the macro, from the grassroots upwards, from the periphery to the centre, and back again, so as to build up networks, coordination mechanisms and other organs or people's countervailing power. An interesting local case is that of the *Movimiento Peñolita*, which was established as a civic force in 1980 in a very small town called El Peñol, in Antioquia, and set out to organise community, low-cost housing and cultural fronts; by 1986 it had reached the town council, and today it can claim the mayor as a member, has ousted the traditional party bosses (both liberals and conservatives), and begun to become coordinated with ten other towns of the region.

Following these examples, in the intervals between conflicts in Colombia, meetings, forums and workshops have been set up, long-distance marches organised, strikes held, ideas stirred up and resources mobilised to call for a new social pact between Colombians.

Despite the situation of violence, the growth of independent local and regional power in Colombia was plainly revealed through the half-open door of popular mayoral elections held for the first time in March 1988, when to everyone's surprise a respectable number of the elected mayors, town councillors and departmental deputies turned out not to belong to the traditional parties. There has been a fuller development of tendencies since these independent forces made a first attempt at convergence in Funza in June 1984, and a later one in Chachagüí, Nariño, in January 1987 (Chaparro 1989). Another step forward was taken in June of 1989 with the establishment

of an initial coalition between 150 smaller movements and groups, under a large democratic, pluralistic and non-violent umbrella, christened '*Movimiento Democrático Colombia Unida*', to oppose the prevailing two-party monopoly.

Thus, even in Colombia, despite – or perhaps because of – its violent terrorism, many movements during these years have been redefining politics, creating a new political culture in their own terms, and casting doubt on the legitimacy of the present authoritarian, developmentalist State (cf. Lechner 1982). They have done so with a certain spontaneity, and maybe even unwittingly, by offering constructive solutions to the situation of violence and the structural problems afflicting many regions. But today the more advanced movements, with their accumulated experiences in this hazardous course and with the sum of their adherents and coordinated networks, find themselves on the threshold of another change, one involving a serious dilemma that was referred to above: whether to carry on with the broad and creative political action they are already engaged in, that is to say, without giving up their status as movements or feeling apprehensive or reluctant about putting forward shared political views; or to become new parties or join forces with any of the existing ones after inducing their necessary regeneration.

Civilianism–autonomy–pluralism. The most prominent characteristics that could allow the more advanced, democratic, socio-political movements to continue to exist and grow in strength are: their civic and pacific nature, their commitment to decentralisation and autonomy, and their pluralistic tolerance founded on cultural and human diversity. These characteristics have become fundamental concerns for building up their structure, shaping their ideology and giving them a coherent and dynamic outlook to bring them closer to a new type of democracy that is participatory and direct in character (Fals-Borda 1989).

In the first place, the civilianism of these advanced movements is expressed as a reaction against the miscarriage of violent means of acceding to State power, whether by the revolutionary socialist methods of the twenties, or by the guerrilla methods of the sixties, which still persist in several countries. In this respect they have learnt an important lesson: that the seizure of power in itself is not the whole answer; that if this act is not fully prepared, it runs the risk of continuing the violence that preceded it or reproducing indefinitely the warlike tendencies rife during the process of struggle. The Jacobinic mirage of the seizure of the Winter Palace of Petrograde as a requisite for a successful revolution has been largely dispelled.

Hence the insistence on putting into practice right away democratic forms of authentic participation, with the experiential philosophy of otherness, among people of different standing, in the daily round and in the relations between the sexes. It is another way of seeing, understanding and coping with life. What is involved basically is an ethical approach having profound implications: the Machiavellianism of force and manoeuvring, the Hegelian excuse for abuses by great men, the thesis of the means justifying the ends, including power in itself, are called into question.

Likewise, the strong delegitimising reaction against technocratic, developmentalist institutions and governments is directed especially against the most centralist and authoritarian of them, i.e. those that monopolise decision-making. This seems natural given the local origins of the movements, which continue to be very jealous of their identity and autonomy as forms of physical survival. One interesting aspect of the present moment of redefining politics is the insistence on fragmenting existing power and amending the prevailing rules to leave the field open to various novel approaches: (1) promoting ways in which the ordinary citizen may have a say in and control of the acts of those governing him or her ('people's power', open council meetings, referenda); (2) favouring different forms of territorial government or regime (such as the region-State); and (3) creating more efficient and decentralised forms of administrative organisation (such as autonomous provinces and districts) to establish an ecologico-cultural regionalisation that reflects the actual dynamics of community life. These tendencies towards splitting up the present territorial arrangement have shown up the inadequacy of existing power-unit structures, such as the electoral constituencies of local strong men and party bosses, which are now seen to be obsolete or unsuitable, because the less developed and remoter territories are the site of conflict and appropriation where the State is made or unmade.

Lastly, the emphasis on pluralism and on tolerance is one of the biggest lessons learnt by social and popular movements during the last twenty years. In fact the movements owe their survival to the ethical rules of opening up to 'the Other', respecting his or her right of being different, valuing ideological, artistic, cultural and social diversity, and recognising the relativity of history. These are the moral secrets of their resistance. A large part has been played in this by two oppressed, marginal groups that in one way or another defend and proclaim their particular cultural roots: young people and women. Both groups have given full play to their creative intuition for bringing about a new ethos, a better kind of society and social relations in which unity may co-exist with diversity. In so doing, they have given valuable lessons to the male-dominated, patriarchal, ethnocentric tradition characterising our underdevelopment; and have also shown how mistaken were those dogmatic parties and groupings of the old left that prided themselves on being the vanguards or custodians of revolutionary truth, a belief that only destroyed the vigour of their ideals.

Generally speaking, the more advanced social and popular movements favour negotiation, dialogue and reasonable ways out of existing conflicts, whether armed or unarmed, reject unbridled or ritual violence, and rely on elections. Some have revived Gandhi and Martin Luther King as exponents of suitable forms of civil resistance. Others recall Camilo Torres and the insistence of his '*Frente Unido*' on pluralism as a political ideology, and on the Church's transforming itself through participation to play a liberating role. The recent upsurge of interest in salvaging oral regional history and popular culture and art, and of respect for Indian and Black legacies is yet another outcome of this positive political attitude.

Projections

Reinventing power and the State. These emphases on civilianism out of respect for human life, on decentralised autonomy with regional fragmentation of State power through new pacts, and on an opening-up to pluralism and ethical values, together with other elements of participatory democracy also deserving mention, may serve to reorganise society on democratic models that will put a stop to the disastrous onrush of violence and exploitative underdevelopment. They have, moreover, led some observers to think that certain of today's socio-political movements, including the most advanced ones, may be coming close to a particular kind of anarchism. This has been suggested by Frank, Falk and the present author (Fals-Borda 1986), among others.

We are not, of course, referring to the red brand of anarchism of Mikhael Bakunin's disciples, or the unconvincing, radically anti-State position of 'doing away with all government'. Neither do we proclaim unconditional adherence to the convergent Marxist doctrine of the withering away of the State. Our version draws inspiration from the 'law of mutual aid' and from Kropotkin's Siberian experience in autonomy. More than anything, it involves a different way of conceiving and understanding power, as suggested by some movements, albeit rather timidly still. It is a humanist neo-anarchism that is in the process of articulating its thought more precisely. It may derive further inspiration from the reading of some hermeneutic texts, such as those of Michel Foucault, Pierre Clastres and other contemporary critics, who tend to rescue from oblivion the function that civil society has performed and continues to perform as ideological cement in the structuring of contemporary nation-states.

It has been diversely stated that an analytical distinction needs to be made between the State as an apparatus of coercion, and power as a cultural category made up of nodes of social relations. Foucault explained it in a way approaching what many movements have sensed in their practical experience. The latter maintain that all power 'emanates' from the people, while the former wrote that 'power should be analysed as something that circulates or operates like a chain . . . it is used and exercised through a network-like organisation' (Foucault 1980 : 98). Obviously power does not rest only in the State and one must look beyond this for its sources, because the State, 'with all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is unable to occupy all the actual field of power relationships, and because the State can only function on the basis of other, previously existing relationships . . . [The resultant metapower], with its prohibitions, can only take hold where there is a whole series of multiple, indefinite power relationships to provide it with the necessary force for exercising negative forms of power' (Foucault 1980 : 122).

Clastres reinforces this thesis with that of power existing not only as a social dimension but also as a separate quality of violence and of hierarchies. He likewise distinguishes between coercion and power, and maintains that 'the coercive power [of the State] is not the only form of power' but one among many, the one adopted by the West and regarded today as the dominant standard or model. It is a formula for historical societies; other societies, such

as the archaic ones (e.g. that of the Maya), developed quite different, collective forms of power, many of which still prevail among huge segments of the Earth's population, for example, the tribal groups of India, or the American Indians with their councils of elders. Modern political links, in contrast, are created by hierarchy or formal authority. Consequently, the ultimate and most complete form of violence is to be found in the domineering, homogenising, monopolistic central State (Clastres 1987).

These ideas not only explain paradoxical situations faced by many socio-political movements in their efforts to promote 'people's power' and combat violence and injustice; they also shed light on the concrete effects States have on society by worsening situations or intensifying conflicts. A case in point is that of the Eastern Plains of Colombia, where the State was at one time the main generator of violence, spreading it wherever it cropped up for the first time; understandably, there emerged immediately in the region on the one part guerrilla groups, and on the other an autonomous body of law or code of conduct in mobilised bases and a regional movement for social reconstruction (Barbosa 1989; Molano 1989). The same thing can be seen in ethnic regions that have been arbitrarily divided by political frontiers, such as those of the Guaraní of Paraguay and Argentina, the Guajiro of Colombia and Venezuela, or the Maya of Yucatan, Guatemala and El Salvador.

It is not surprising therefore that in many present-day movements, whether described as neo-anarchist, post-modernistic or ethno-cultural, talk is beginning to be heard about hitherto taboo subjects, such as 'reinventing power' and 'demolishing existing myths'. They have discovered, for example, that the Leninist model of revolution has in fact only exceptionally been repeated, and that the so far unquestioned myth of parties is now considered doubtful. They also see that, as mentioned earlier, the seizure of power by frontal attack does not imply radical changes in political affairs.

That is not to rule out, of course, the struggle for exercising control over the State as it is today, delegitimised though it may be; and use can continue to be made of some mechanisms of liberal or representative democracy, as well as of formally established civic rights. Thus it is that many of the advanced movements, driven to despair by the State's inefficiency, have taken the convergent step from the micro to the macro level and are being articulated today as alternative political forces.

It would be foolish to ignore the moral challenge presented to all by the sight of the resources of the State remaining in hands often so inept, so corrupt, so cruel. The essential question, however, lies in the philosophical conception of the new popular power that would feed this other State in the stages of reconstruction of society. The ideas of Foucault and Clastres and other foreign, as well as national, authors can be of service here. They are discussed and studied, for the need is felt of sowing from this very moment throughout civil society the ideological seed of respect for life, the environment and cultural diversity, to obtain its fruits, in the form of better social bases and more consistent leaders of movements, without waiting for the movements 'to seize power'.

It goes without saying that it is equally important for all the political forces of this unequal civil society – from the progressives and leftists to the rightists and paramilitary – that power and the State be reconceptualised, demystified and considered under a less authoritarian and menacing and more ethical light than the Hobbesian idea bequeathed to us by the creators of our nationalities. This will be particularly helpful in limiting the deleterious or violent effects of social Darwinism and fascism which are raising their heads again amongst us.

An intellectual and professional challenge. Will it be possible to articulate these nodes of collective power in new social pacts to prevent force from being hierarchically concentrated and decision-making monopolised by a few? Can formal power be exercised openly, without the principles of secrets or reasons of state, with full *glasnost*? Will it be possible to form borderless States that will be democratic expressions of real participation and direct civic interchange – the two forms of authentic popular power? Would it not be better to move away from Marx and Lenin with their theses of social-class monopolies over States, and closer to Gramsci to define the pluriclass sense of new, more generous, political hegemonies? How applicable are amongst us the philosophical recommendations formulated on the subject of State violence by scholars such as Paul Ricoeur (effects of reconciliation among men, 1957), or Walter Benjamin (creation of a new body of laws for the new forces, 1965)?

These are some of the 'scientific' questions being asked today in collectives of the more advanced movements which seek peace together with social justice, and want to make democracy more participatory and direct, and to build alternative forms of State, such as region-States, by revealing, reconstructing and reinforcing the diffuse power of the citizenry. Efficient organisation of these nodes of power to lead them towards autonomous forms of non-violent conception and action, different from nation-states and parties as we have conceived them, is the order of the day.

Hence the importance of the analytical and cognitive function of intellectuals and professionals committed to these political possibilities, the so-called 'agents of change'. To develop new pacts it is necessary to balance the present arrogant, reductionist tendencies of Cartesian science and technology, which lead to the deformation of essential values, the enthroning of violence as the principal historical explanation, the debasement of the human being to the condition of an object, and the destruction of the environment, as I have explained in detail elsewhere (Fals-Borda 1988). This balancing can be effected by the recognised use of alternative ways of producing knowledge, a knowledge formerly rejected as unscientific, such as popular knowledge and daily, common-sense knowledge, which tend to be culturally richer, more respectful of life and nature, more civilised. Intellectuals and agents of change could synthesise these different types of knowledge experientially, as proposed by participatory action-research (PAR), and apply the resulting enriched body of knowledge towards demolishing existing structures of unsanctioned force and inadmissible domination and exploitation, as well as towards furthering social and economic reconstruction. They would become teachers of peaceful change by

helping the subordinated and oppressed classes to gain a better understanding of what they already know from experience, as well as to broaden their knowledge and take part in the creative task of producing a new society (Fals-Borda 1987).

With this participatory opening to collective aspirations, and with this unalienating approach by the social sciences to our peoples and their cultures, the continued existence of the movements becomes justified and the possibility is provided of framing the intrinsic question of a new democratic power to be built by the movements for the achievement of collective peace and progress and the satisfaction of basic needs. It is not advisable, or necessary, for this purpose to translate French, English or German constitutions or political-science treatises that correspond to other cultural traditions and are only Republican in letter. There have already been among us remote as well as recent flashes of this endeavour to establish a creative, participatory autonomy by means of endogenous pacts, which would be a fitting basis for continuing to reinvent power in our own terms, in more human, less cruel and violent, forms that are more controllable by the people in general.

This is a theoretical and practical challenge that has to be taken up if the independent social and political movements of today are not to waste away or be left to become absorbed by parties, as has been happening, but are to continue their vigorous, fruitful existence as leading actors in historical developments for much longer. For they are the healthy part of our otherwise tattered social fabric. Our future as nations and peoples depends in good measure on them.

Notes

1. The same thing happened in previous cycles of upsurge of movements, when politics was redefined by their action. Let us recall, for example, the case of Chartism in England (1838–1848), which became the springboard for the Labour Party, or the case of peasant, Indian, labour union, and student movements in Colombia, Peru and other countries during the twenties, which gave new strength and orientation to liberalism. Older movements such as the feminist, universal suffrage, Indian Gandhian, and even workers' movements, had the same challenging and renovating effect on the parties of their time.

2. A similar course was run by Poland's Solidarity Movement, which today begins to take part in governing the country, and the People's Power Movements of the Philippines and Haiti in their early post-dictatorship period. Other movements, such as those for the defence of human rights and the environment (the Greens) and the anti-nuclear ones, have spread from Europe and acquired international dimensions. Symptoms of this non-partyism are to be observed also in India, as well as in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

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