

Volodia Teitelboim, Reflections on the 1,000 Days of Popular Unity Rule, 1977

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Reflections on the 1,000 Days of Popular Unity Rule

Lenin took careful account of the lessons of the Paris Commune and the 1905-07 revolution in Russia to evolve on their basis the strategy and tactics which in 1917 led to the victorious October Revolution. Similarly, it is essential for Chileans to make a deep study of the 1,000 days of Popular Unity rule, in all the diversity of its typical and atypical factors and features, and draw proper theoretical and practical conclusions. By analysing the highly valuable data at our disposal, we can - in a definite social micro-world, within the bounds of a small country of 10 million - ascertain the characteristics of a political drama of universal significance. We can make a sober assessment of the achievements and miscalculations of the popular movement, of its correct moves and its mistakes. The evidence we have also makes it possible and necessary to study the enemy's methods and devices, to compile a veritable manual showing how present-day counter-revolution can strangle revolution.

To be sure, the only political value of such manuals is that they point to a specific example governed by general laws, with all the peculiarities of place and time that characterise every revolution and every counter-revolution.

We will endeavour to examine the past impartially and self-critically, suggest correctives to our activity and reveal the overt and covert lines of enemy action, all of which is bound to make for greater clarity regarding our strategy and tactics, as well as those of the enemy. This will be the prologue to introducing corrections into our activity to transform the people's defeat into victory.

The Role of Elections and the 'Peaceful Path'

We think the events in Chile indicate, in the final analysis, that, given definite circumstances resulting from a complex course of historical evolution and from a painstaking building up of forces and uniting all the strata striving for social change, it is possible to achieve through elections much more than an ordinary or even a

considerable electoral victory and, on the other hand, much less than real power. Those events also show that no electoral victory holds a guarantee of its solidity. Such a victory can be a notable advance on a long and generally thorny path abounding in dangerous curves and crossings and often skirting a precipice. But unless victory in elections is followed up by a vast offensive of a popular majority to turn it into real power which the masses would be willing and able to hold and defend against all obstacles, against all attempts by enemies at home and abroad to ignore and do away with this power, the result may be, or is even bound to be, defeat.

Indeed, victory in elections brings power only in part. Being the beginning of a new stage in the revolutionary process and the completion of previous stages, it does not come overnight but is a result of the revolutionary process as a whole, of a growing structural crisis in the country stemming from the deterioration of the general crisis of capitalism. It is the ultimate result of the accumulation of preliminary factors reflecting the maturing of diverse forms of class struggle.

That was how a pre-revolutionary situation shaped up in Chile. The Communist Party regarded elections as a form of action in the struggle to transform society, and for this it required winning majority support.

'Political majority' means something more solid and complete than a relative or absolute majority of votes. *To a greater extent than an arithmetical (or mechanical) majority, it must be expressive of the existence of a representative social bloc of the greater part of the population.* Besides, it must be an *active majority*, one not only operating continuously (which is typical of any steadily developing movement) but realising the need to uphold by every possible means the gains made.

Yet during the growing revolutionary process in Chile, the forms of struggle were considered as important as its goals. Form was exalted to the rank of substance, as it were, and an absolute was made of one path. This was undoubtedly a mistake, for when the concrete situation changed, the masses found their hands tied. While the peaceful development of the revolution was in keeping with prevailing conditions and expressed the will of the popular movement, it was far from being in harmony with the mood of an enemy ready to stop the revolution at all costs and by every means, including means that were anything but peaceful. This must be borne in mind. The enemy's bellicosity and aggressiveness should never come as a surprise to revolutionaries. The enemy will always do his utmost to put up resistance. He will grasp every chance to take up arms against the people.

Every phenomenon or development is dialectically influenced by diverse factors and every concrete truth has fundamental and secondary aspects. In the light of past events, we consider that in the case of Chile the political factor certainly played the main role in the interconnection of the political and the military factor. The latter factor is a part of the former, but an essential one. Hence the immense significance of the military policy of the popular movement. It implies more than merely adopting a definite position towards the army and establishing a solid alliance with its potentially democratic part. It implies forming a force that could make common cause, as far as possible, with the section of the army loyal to the revolution.

Experience has shown that our advance must be safeguarded not only by popular, but also by adequate military support. And the precondition for that is a constructive policy on this issue (with the Communists assuming special responsibility, of course).

Possibilities of Changing the Path

It is vitally important, therefore, to restore to the revolution (in our conceptions of it) its highly dialectical nature, always bearing in mind that this is a process that can change depending on the course of the struggle, and that at times its revolution can accelerate to the point of dictating other forms of struggle, as was the case in Russia in 1917. In other words, we must take no absolute of this or that path of the revolution, must not consider that the choice of path is final and may not be revised, or that one and the same principle should be used invariably throughout a long period of history. Switching from one form of struggle to another in other countries may not take place as rapidly as it did in Russia in the few months preceding the October Revolution. But our negative experience suggests that it is wrong in general to attribute an *unchanging* character to any particular form of struggle, to treat it as a *constant* making it possible to disregard changes in the situation, often abrupt ones, caused especially by political crises and growing contradictions.

'Peaceful path' is a correct term only in so far as it rules out civil war. But because of the many vicissitudes, it cannot bypass the law which says that violence is the 'midwife' of history. We should have always borne this in mind, should have remembered that the very act of changing path presupposes 'changing horses' and continuing our advance. It is hard to change horses in mid-stream. But then it is harder still when no preparations have been made beforehand. Irrespective of how clearly the necessity for the change is realised, the very possibility of such a change and the ability to carry it out must certainly be guaranteed. This is not a matter that can be settled at the moment of change; it requires advance preparations, which may even take years, and this is what Chile's popular movement failed to do. The

revolutionary vanguard marching at the head of the masses must be really prepared to adopt if necessary the most vigorous measures against a reactionary onslaught.

What happened in Chile under Popular Unity rule was that many regarded preparations for an eventual change of path and forms of struggle as absolutely unacceptable. Another lesson taught to Popular Unity is that an atmosphere of legality admittedly makes for stricter enforcement of laws and hence gives revolutionaries more strength and can, in the end, help them to make rapid progress but that in definite cases it can contribute to enemy plans for a rebellion or coup. Unless this is properly understood, legality itself may be used for tying the people's hands and making it even harder for them to exercise their right to legitimate defence. The people have no reason to feel bound hand and foot by legality like a Gulliver. They should regard it as a useful weapon in upholding their just cause, but never as a trap or gag.

In setting up the machinery of their conspiracy, reaction and fascism in Chile harped on absurd accusations against the Popular Unity government, saying that it had trespassed the bounds of legality. What they were after was to trample all legality underfoot (as if developing in their own way Odilon Barrot's statement, 'Legality is killing us', they set out to implement the slogan, 'Let us kill legality'). Developments showed, in particular, that they turned the arms control law into a trap for the people by using it to disarm and crush them.

All this confirms the need to respect a fundamental demand: reliance on the masses. We have said that the peaceful path is practicable only if the idea of the revolution wins the minds of the majority of the people and prompts it to act. When the forces favouring change have achieved overwhelming superiority no opportunities are left for a reactionary rising, let alone for its success. The idea of majority, which Lenin considered so important (the majority of the people are *for us*" he said in September 1917), retains its validity as a requisite of victory whatever the form of struggle.

Consequently, the alignment of forces is of decisive importance. We must always, I think, see to it that the front of advocates of change is stronger than that of their opponents and that this superiority is considerable numerically and organisationally, as well as in terms of political, ideological, cultural, propaganda and all other activities. In other words, this broad front would be stronger in regard to the quality and solidarity of the alliance, to the dynamism and effectiveness of its united action. Also its programme must be the common denominator of all factors and the elements and forces making it up. On this basis, they must operate in co-ordinated fashion, on the principles of tactical and strategic unity, as they strike joint blows in one and the same direction. It is only in this way - by operating as a genuine coalition,

avoiding the rise of opposed poles or disunited action inside the movement and by developing a common programme line - that the enemy can be defeated. The preservation and extension of the scope and strength of the front and the consolidation of the majority are a vitally important factor, as experience has shown, for the advance of the revolutionary process.

I repeat, the enemy will use force for as long as he can. The revolution can do without bloodshed, but only if the majority can impose this and the minority cannot prevent it. This could have been true of the period our country went through in the closing months of 1970 and partly in 1971. However, the enemy will always do his utmost to regain his strength. Hence it is not a question of only one moment of danger, for there is danger as long as there exist reactionary forces and it increases when reaction succeeds in reversing the situation in its favour.

Consequently, the problem of the balance of forces makes it necessary to take account of its inconstancy and likely changes. It is not established once and for all except when the revolution, having consolidated its positions, overcomes this internal contradiction and eliminates antagonistic classes to build a classless society.

Throughout the period of Popular Unity rule, Chile was under a kind of dual power, which cannot, of course, be compared to the situation in Russia in 1917. In Chile there was a lawful popular government and, on the other hand, an unlawful reactionary power backed by all who earlier had dominated society. In addition to certain key economic and financial levers and the mass media, that reactionary power controlled a considerable part of the state apparatus. It skilfully exploited the miscalculations and incompetence of Popular Unity and the existence of different trends in it to bring the petty bourgeoisie into the effort to carry out reaction's plans. This large social stratum is often undecided, being attached to its own values and frightened by the stories which the enemy's machinery of psychological tenor continuously spreads. The enemy knew full well that he would get nowhere unless he won the support of the intermediate strata and influenced the heterogeneous group of people differing in political consciousness, ideology and behaviour in the climate of hysteria cunningly created through the efforts of the CIA. If the oligarchy made certain gains through its strategy of winning over the masses it was only because it had the support of other strata not belonging to its class. It succeeded in this because there was no adequate counteraction from the other side, that is, because the popular movement had no policy bickering up with the programme of the movement and inspiring the intermediate social strata with confidence that they, too, would have a place in the new society.

Responsibility of the Vanguard

The decisive factor for the outcome of the struggle in favour of the people is, undoubtedly, correct leadership of the popular movement, a leadership capable of giving the masses proper guidance, keeping them informed, mobilising them for this or that necessary action and making this political majority fully aware of its responsibility and turning it into a totality of politically conscious and united forces. Needless to say, the Communist Party plays an essential role in this, as do the other popular front parties.

The Chilean popular movement doubtlessly has historic achievements to its credit and showed creative initiative throughout the period of Popular Unity rule. There developed rudimentary forms of democratic government that sprang from a people determined to change the class nature of the state, and that should be taken into account in the future as useful precedents of genuine democratic rule capable of keeping chaos under control.

However, Salvador Allende's assumption of the Presidency could not in itself alter the class nature of the state, the character of the armed forces, the police or the administrative machinery. This is why we stress that in any process following a peaceful course, it is most important to bring about an alignment of military forces in favour of revolutionary development. This is a key issue.

Popular Unity was faced with the pressing need to effect changes that would put the state apparatus under the people's organised pressure to the point of gradually placing it in the people's service. Furthermore, it was indispensable to promote active democracy involving the participation of the masses in the broadest sense of the term, strip the reactionaries of their spheres of domination and transfer all real power to the working people, to the progressive social strata.

There is no denying that in the three years it was in power, the Popular Unity government won the active support of the masses. However; confusion over the objectives - democratic or socialist ones - and the introduction of ideas alien to its programme, or based on sheer utopia made it impossible at any moment to give the initiative of the masses the right direction and secure majority support in solving every problem, as was the case with so patriotic a measure understandable to all as the nationalisation of the copper mines.

Let it be stressed that the sad conclusion of this chapter of history should not minimise the significance of so evident a reality of the past as the fact that, in less than three years, the popular government made tremendous progress by scoring

valuable gains which live on in the people's memory and are part of a lasting political patrimony (even though they were subsequently destroyed by the fascist regime). They became a legacy that will again play an important mobilising role when the country has overcome its present state. It would be wrong to underestimate this experience. We must give serious consideration to the vastly positive significance and great constructive contribution of a popular movement that was broken off so tragically.

However, we maintain that unless the masses are constantly schooled in political action and in assessing the political situation, they cannot by merely following their instinct rise to the level of social awareness needed to defeat the enemy and participate consciously in making history. Hence *it is a duty of the Marxist-Leninist political vanguard*, of the Communists operating at home or abroad, *to provide the working class and the popular movement with scientific leadership at any moment*, even in the dire conditions of fascist rule. In fulfilling its fundamental mission, the Communist Party, the leading party responsible along with other parties, its allies, for the development of the revolutionary process, must solve a dialectical equation consisting of two elements: the *quality of its unity* with other forces of a popular movement not free of contradictions that can at times grow to dangerous proportions; and *its independent role* in this movement as a party which can under no circumstances, even amid discord, renounce its duty to present its policy to the people and country with a view to strengthening and not weakening unity.

How Present-day Counter-Revolution Can Strangle Revolution

The positions of the representatives of the popular camp were undermined step by step, and eventually this became perfectly obvious and made for the success of the reactionary coup. Besides, there were shortcomings in the implementation of the working-class policy of alliances and the balance of forces in both the political and the military spheres deteriorated noticeably in the closing months. For all this, however, the negative epilogue of this period of the Chilean revolution was not due, as has been said, to the people's will, but to the crippling forcible interference and violent change brought on by the fascist coup.

It is necessary that the revolutionary process be supported by a popular majority. On the other hand, while this factor is indispensable, it does not guarantee the success of the revolution, whose progress may be upset and its gains nullified if the popular movement is unable to support the resolve of the majority through effective defence measures.

We do not mean arms alone. To achieve political results, imperialism and home reaction launched their offensive first of all in the economic sphere, that is, a sphere in which they were particularly strong and in which they could do it all the more easily. The economic offensive was combined with individual terror, which by now has become a widespread daily practice of Latin America's political reactionaries. The resulting situation was one of utter chaos, described by some as very well organised. It was organised by the CIA, which did not hesitate to use for the purpose an all-out propaganda offensive. Perhaps it was the first time that counter-revolution had used the mass media so thoroughly, on so large a scale and with such force. This is another page of history worthy of most careful study. Reaction's plans were furthered by the government's failure to take co-ordinated and organised counter-measures. The existence of two parallel policy lines within Popular Unity contributed to the success of reaction's conspiracy'. Besides, the conspirators continuously took advantage of the ultra-revolutionaries' talk about armed forces, which they did not have.

What we are trying to say is that a war in which no guns are fired requires a common, clear-cut policy that must constantly be spelled out to the masses. It is not merely a question of properly organising intelligence and counter intelligence. The task is to carry on a total political struggle aimed at disuniting the central forces of the conspiracy from top to bottom and in every respect - economically and psychologically, publicly and otherwise, but above all militarily.

Needed: A Reappraisal of the Issue of the Army

These bloody events cast a stark light on the role of the armed forces. Under-estimation of this issue translated itself into a new tragedy for the people. What we witnessed was not a mere repetition of the past or a confirmation of the lessons of a long period of history. More than before, imperialism and its domestic allies are anxious to bring the army out of the barracks. This is due to the tacit admission that the development and growing strength of the popular movement more than ever endanger imperialist and capitalist control of society and the state. Revealingly, it is no longer a question of military actions, which have been numerous in the 150-year-long history of Latin America's republics, that is, of a conspiracy against a high-ranking adventurer, of a simple replacement of a power-thirsty individual in the government palace. As a rule, now it is a matter of outright action against the popular movement, taken above all when reaction has no other means of preventing a victory of progressive forces or abolishing their gains.

This prompts us to reappraise the military question from today's point of view. No new approach to it is conceivable if we overlook the important fact that imperialism

persistently seeks support among Latin American armies, which it tries to influence as an inseparable part of the forces implementing the Pentagon's global strategy. According to an imported doctrine accepted by certain domestic military leaders, the chief enemy today is not outside but inside the country and is called 'internal subversion'. At a certain juncture, the US military-industrial complex evolved the tactical principle of *Vietnamising the war*, which expected 'Asians to kill Asians'. Its present motto in our country virtually expects '*Chileans to kill Chileans*', which means that the armed forces must wage war against their own people. This would make it easier for the imperialists to assure their domination and plunder of Chile. In this context, Pinochet's statement in Uruguay that he had acted in the interests of imperialism was brazen tragicomedy. 'The United States,' he said, 'did not fire a single shot to remove communism from Chile. It was no Vietnam. No one was killed.' Indeed, no US soldier was killed, but then many thousands of Chileans were. Pinochet disregards these deaths.

Certain Pentagon political and military strategists have said that their best investment is training Latin American officers in US military academies and important Pentagon thinking. Indeed, this is what they have done. Senator William Proxmire announced in 1971 that between 1945 and 1971 the US had spent \$175,000m on the training of 320,000 servicemen from 70 independent countries. In 1965, Robert Wood, then in charge of military aid, proudly said that almost all Latin American officers had received training in the United States or in the Panama Canal Zone.

The imperialists are now reaping the fruits. In several Latin American countries, they have imposed reactionary military dictatorships in their service. And they are plotting to do the same elsewhere.

In learning the lessons of our own mistakes, we must therefore draw the following conclusion: to ensure that the revolution follows a peaceful course, we must prevent reactionaries in the armed forces from turning them into executioners and stranglers of the popular movement. In other words, we must see to it that the army stops playing the role of a super-police, that it does not operate as a domestic colonial force taking orders from the Pentagon, an insurance company or a praetorian guard protecting the interests of monopolies and latifundian holders.

One of the greatest weaknesses of the Chilean popular movement was that this question was posed inadequately, narrowly and shyly as it were, preferably at the level of individuals, to the exclusion of parties having deep roots among the people, to the exclusion of the masses. For a long time, men shirking their duties remained in charge of the army and the police. The sentiments of many high-ranking officers were little known (the case of Pinochet is the most striking, but not the only one). The

information services, honeycombed with subversives, were disastrously incompetent. Besides, everything was affected by lack of unity in the government over the support for General Prats when he headed the cabinet and after his removal as commander-in-chief. It is our sincere opinion that we Communists, too, are to blame for that historical miscalculation, which was a result of the weakness and untenability of our military policy and our attitude to the armed forces.

How can a favourable change in the army be brought about? It is a very difficult task but undoubtedly a feasible one. To answer this question as correctly as possible, we must analyse the social nature of the army, its class composition and the mechanism of its activity, its changing functions in the course of history and its present role in society - in other words, the dialectics of its behaviour.

The armed forces of Latin American countries are not abstract institutions or sinister organisations destined inevitably and forever to brutally suppress their peoples. There is no need to stress here the special character of the revolutionary armed forces of Cuba, brought into being by a victorious socialist revolution. But even in the armies of those countries of the continent where there has been no revolution, we are witnessing developments that do not entitle us to a fatalistic interpretation of their role or to extreme pessimism. Karl Marx distinguished two currents in the Spanish army (historically speaking, it bore a certain similarity to the armies of the countries of one-time Spanish America in atmosphere and as a school for the training and indoctrination of troops). He saw two incipient alternatives of social and political activity for it that manifest themselves to this day: an obtuse reactionary attitude and, at the same time, a potential for revolutionary initiative, as the rising led by Rafael Riego showed. This initiative can only manifest itself in periods of political crisis. Lenin pointed to the living connection between a developing revolutionary movement and its reflection in the armed forces, growing restlessness in the army. It must be admitted, however, that it was not this characteristic of the army that was the historic dominant, but the army's being the armed guarantee of a system based on oppression.

Chile had quite a few advocates of the theory of 'particularism' of the army, who claimed that at a definite moment it adheres to 'political neutrality'. It is only right to point out that the army always acts under the decisive influence of this or that class or movement. It would be utopian to think of the army as being politically 'neutral'. *Not so when, in a definite situation, a period of neutralisation is brought about* as a result of struggle outside and within the armed forces to foil fascist plans aimed at involving the army in a reactionary coup. In this instance, the people can lean on those elements in the army that remain loyal to the constitution. Within the

framework of the concept of peaceful development of the revolution, this *neutralisation* can have a certain effect for a time.

A very important factor to be borne in mind is, of course, the class origin of the military. However, the fact that most members of the armed services come ultimately from the working class and poor peasantry manifests itself on a mass scale only under the impact of a revolutionary situation and provided there exists an organisation in the barracks that is carrying on definite ideological work.

The point is that a false social consciousness and a false conception of public duty are imposed on the military, or at least on many of them, and that this makes effective ideological and political work on our part all the more necessary.

According to a view commonly held by students of this problem, there was evidence of three currents in the Chilean army prior to the coup. They are classified - without sufficient scientific accuracy - as follows:

(1) patriotic servicemen, or 'constitutionalists'; (2) servicemen loyal to their professional duty, and (3) servicemen favouring fascism. This classification is more or less close to the truth and retains its validity. However, it would be mechanistic to overlook the changes subsequently brought about by the operation of internal and external factors. The struggle, including the ideological struggle, which, of course, is going on in Chilean society in spite of the monopoly of the mass media held by a totalitarian state, has its effect on the armed forces as well. The country's anti-fascist forces, its popular and democratic movement, can and should contribute actively to this struggle.

There are objective prerequisites for this: a deep-rooted, disastrous economic crisis; a political vacuum around the junta, the international isolation of the regime, and the hatred which the vast majority of the population feel for it. Today, three years after the imposition of the dictatorship, various subjective factors are maturing too. The role of the working class has increased over the past year. The Communist Party perseveres in its guiding role, braving savage repression. Its organisations are active throughout the country. The major popular opposition parties are reorganising at the national level. Discord within the ruling group is mounting. There is more and more evidence of vacillation in army circles, which daily witness growing condemnation of the junta by a population convinced that the military clique, far from solving any of the country's problems, has aggravated them. More and more people in the army condemn the unbridled terrorism and unprecedented brutality of the junta and the countless abuses of DINA. The activities of this agency, which depends directly on Pinochet, are marked by a sinister man-hunt and increasingly numerous lists of

'missing persons' containing the names of prisoners of Chile's gestapo whose arrest the regime refuses to admit.

We know that hastening the end of today's nightmare, of the people's suffering, depends largely on ourselves, on the activity of Popular Unity and the anti-fascist forces generally. In drawing numerous lessons from the Chilean experience, many of which are bitter while others are instructive, and all of which are equally useful, we consider that by carrying on a selfless, extremely dangerous but increasingly widespread and organised struggle, the people will pave the way for changing the situation. This will make it possible not only to return Chile to its people when the time comes but to contribute to the elaboration of certain pressing theoretical and political problems.

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