

## "Representative" Democracy in a State of Advanced Decomposition

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**I**t is increasingly evident that the myth of "representative" or "delegating democracy" as some call it, is in a state of advanced decomposition. Said democracy, where that citizens are periodically called upon to choose between different names that appear on the ballots and choose who they believe—after having suffered brainwashing during the election campaign—who will be the people who will best represent their interests and opinions, delegating in them—without limitation or some subsequent control—the power to decide on everything that may affect in one way or another their own existence.

### The Democratic Travesty

The citizen vote suffers from the conditioning of electoral propaganda carried out by government media oligopolies or at the service of sectors of the bourgeoisie opposed to the government in power, where the alternative proposals of some left-wing movements practically do not appear. And the electoral result is also frequently tainted by vote buying. Not quite a few poor citizens feel unmotivated to vote at all and tend to abstain; until a motivation appears when they are

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proposed to vote for a certain candidate in exchange for money or a voucher to make purchases in a supermarket. By voting, they know that they will not influence the policies of the future government at all, but at least by monetising their vote they will be able to fill the supermarket trolley once, even partially. As a general rule, those elected will do the opposite of what they promised. Because—as professional politicians think and some say it out loud—one thing is to campaign, and quite another to govern.

It has been a few years already, since many citizens have ceased to believe in this system and expressed their disdain by abstaining from voting (the numbers of abstentions are increasing worldwide) or by declaring very widely in different surveys their total distrust of politicians and political parties in general. Another element that shows the progressive degradation of representative democracy is the assessment of the social composition of parliaments—the supposed "popular representation"—where the popular classes, and in particular the workers, were never represented, in proportion to their demographic weight. And in recent decades the curve of this representation has been descending until it is currently, in regards to workers, almost nil. The highest rates corresponded, in some countries, to the periods when the Communist Parties had a large parliamentary caucus that included many workers and when the Social

Democratic parties had in their ranks a relatively high proportion of workers, which was partially reflected in their parliamentary representation.

Now the Communist Parties are reduced to a minimum and have culminated the divorce between the social democratic parties and the working classes. For example, in France at the first post-war National Assembly, where the Communist party had 150 deputies out of 522, workers and employees represented 18.8% of deputies, the highest rate since the creation of the National Assembly in 1871. Already in 1958 that rate had decreased to 4%, in 1967 it rose to 9% and in 2012 it was 2%. While in French society, workers and employees constitute almost 50% of the active population;<sup>1</sup> about 80% of the French deputies who entered Parliament in 2007 and 2012 came from the highest categories of the population (industrialists, company managers, liberal professions, elite cadres, etc.), categories that make up between 13 and 14 % of the population.<sup>2</sup>

In the European Parliament, out of 766 deputies, 0,4% are workers and 1,4% are employees.<sup>3</sup> In Argentina, the highest peak of workers' presence in the Chamber of Deputies was reached in 1973 with 6,7%, and in 2010 it was 1 percent.<sup>4</sup> A

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statistical table, taken from surveys carried out by the Research Institute of Parliamentary Elites of the University of Salamanca, provides the following data on the percentage of deputies of worker or artisan origin in some Iberian American countries: Argentina 2,2%;

Bolivia 11,2; Chile 4,6; Uruguay 8,3 and Brazil 0,8%.<sup>5</sup>

It can be said, then, that the representation rate of the socio-economic layers in parliaments is inverted in relation to the social reality. In other words, the richest and least numerous social strata are overrepresented and the most modest and numerous are underrepresented.

There is, therefore, for the exercise of the parliamentary function, a selective and class recruitment process that passes through the political instances (both right and left) and the economically stronger corporate groups. It is becoming increasingly clear that in the conditions of contemporary monopolist and imperialist capitalism—in a state of permanent crisis—there has been no room for popular participation in decisions, since state and interstate institutions are fully functional to the reproduction and preservation of the system.

The capitulation of the Tsipras government, which violated the popular mandate received in the elections, a mandate confirmed in the referendum by a large majority, is the most blatant proof that the so-called "representative or delegating democracy" and even a supposed form of direct democracy such as is the referendum, are in an advanced state of decay.<sup>6</sup> As for referendums, it really is an "apparent form of direct democracy", for people vote but do not decide. Something similar to what happened in Greece took place in France in 2005: the majority rejected by referendum the accession to the Treaty establishing a European Constitution, yet the Government approved the Lisbon Treaty through parliament in 2008.

<sup>1</sup> ↪ De quel milieu social viennent les députés ? Observatoire des inégalités, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> ↪ Daniel Gaxie, Questionner la représentation politique. Université de Paris I, Centre Européen de Sociologie et Science, en Savoir/Agir. N° 31, mars 2015. Démocratie

<sup>3</sup> ↪ <http://geopolis.francetvinfo.fr/qui-sont-les-766-deputes-europeens-26227>

<sup>4</sup> ↪ <http://www.icsa.cl/images/Papers/decimo.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> ↪ Constanza Moreira, Entre la protesta y el compromiso. La izquierda en el gobierno. Editorial Trilce, Uruguay. 2009. pág.117.

<sup>6</sup> ↪ Tsipras misinterpreted that the majority of the Greek people had spoken in favour of remaining in the Eurozone.

The Greek government capitulated before a blackmail in the purest mafia style<sup>7</sup> exerted by the Eurozone in the exclusive interest of international financial capital. The Greek government and the European institutions with decision-making power totally ignored the will expressed by the majority of the Greek people in the elections and in the referendum and are well on the way to making Greece a colony of financial capital and the great powers. It became clear who has real power in decision-making: big capital and the political institutions at its service and not citizens.

This brutal way of burying the myth of representative democracy sparked multiple adverse reactions and different interpretations. One of these interpretations is that this episode crudely revealed that the European Union, the governments that compose it and the institutions that have decision-making power within it do not represent the peoples of Europe but rather big capital: What some modestly call the "democratic deficit" of the European Union.<sup>8</sup>

But some critical comments have made another interpretation. We are interested in highlighting those of three references of the "progressive" currents: Jürgen Habermas, Immanuel Wallerstein and Slavoj Žižek.

Habermas, in an interview with The Guardian on July 16, 2015, on the question of Greece, stated:

*The Greek debt deal is detrimental both in its outcome and in the way it was achieved. Firstly, the outcome of the negotiations is regrettable. Even if one were to consider that strangling was the correct way of doing things, we cannot expect that these reforms will be implemented by a government that, as it admits, does not agree with its terms. Secondly, the result makes no sense in economic terms due to the toxic mix between the necessary structural reforms of the state and the economy and the imposition of new neoliberal measures that discourage the completely exhausted Greek population and kill all impulse to grow.*

*Thirdly, the result means that an impotent European Council has just declared bankruptcy: the de facto relegation of a Member State to the status of protectorate openly contradicts the democratic principles of the European Union.*

That is to say that, according to Habermas, within the "economic subsystem" strangling Greece may have been correct, although the Greek Government must be distrusted given that it would not agree to the terms of the unconditional surrender (the so-called agreement) to which it was subjected. Later Habermas talks about the "toxic" mix of the structural reforms that he considers "necessary" (sale at a low price of the national heritage, etc.) and the discouragement of the Greek population by the imposition of new neoliberal measures.

And thirdly, Habermas talks about the political bankruptcy of the European Council that "openly contradicts the democratic principles of the European Union".

<sup>7</sup> ↪ The actions of the European powers are not only mafia-like but criminal. In addition to exploiting Africa's natural resources and its inhabitants for centuries without any regard, they have waged wars of aggression together with the United States against countries of that continent and the Near East and promoted inter-ethnic struggles that have led to the disintegration of some of these countries, with the result of the recent emergence—with the evident foreign support of Saudi Arabia, a close friend of the USA—of DAESH, a great powerfully armed force that acts with extreme savagery and controls an enormous territory. The result is widespread chaos in the region with hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of displaced people, many of whom are trying to reach Europe, with thousands of them drowning in the Mediterranean, before the indifference of the European Union, whose main concern is trying to prevent them from achieving a foothold in Europe. And for those who manage to enter Europe, most of the time they are treated worse than cattle.

<sup>8</sup> ↪ The European Parliament, which has some representation but very little power, is under the close surveillance of the European Commission. A Spanish journalist writes: *A fascist arbitrariness of the European Commission has surfaced against the deputies of the Euro-parliament and the free trade and investment agreement (TTIP) that is negotiated very secretly by the European Union and the United States. The EU only allows MEPs to read the negotiated text of the treaty for two hours! Unfortunately, it prohibits MEPs from speaking to anyone about it. The short reading time of the dark treatise must be in a safe room, without recorders, tape recorders or other electronic devices. Not even paper and pen and under surveillance. We do not know if the guards are armed, but we do know that the legitimate representatives of European citizens are treated as suspects of a crime.* (Xavier Caño Tamayo, Prevent the treaty between the United States and Europe, CCS - Center for Solidarity Collaborations, 03/20/15). We have been able to confirm this really grotesque situation with a member of the European Parliament.

In other words, according to Habermas, what he calls in his theoretical works the "economic subsystem" has its own rules and acted correctly by strangling Greece. But he made the mistake of "invading" what he calls the "world of life" which in this case would be the European Union and its "democratic principles" and where "communicative action" would function without hindrance. The circle was closed when Alexis Tsipras, in an interview reproduced in the French PC newspaper *L'Humanité* on July 31, 2015, invoked Habermas to justify his capitulation and the betrayal of the unequivocal mandate he received from the Greek people, in the election and in the referendum.

Immanuel Wallerstein, in an article published in *La Jornada de México* on 8/8/2015: Greece: who is guilty and of what? writes:

*... What conclusions can Syriza (and the rest of us) draw from what has happened? The first thing to highlight is what is not being debated. From the beginning, in 2004, Syriza pledged to seek state power to implement its goals. It appears that no alternative political routes were envisioned. But, of course, seeking state power carries with it some very serious costs. One such cost is that governments, all governments anywhere, are forced to negotiate in their dealings with the rest of the world. Eventually this leads to the kind of division Syriza is currently suffering.* (Our underline).

Wallerstein says that if you want to govern you have to be willing to make commitments to the rest of the world. We do not know what Wallerstein means by "rest of the world" because this notion is very imprecise. But the facts—in Greece's case—clearly indicate that the real meaning of "the rest of the world" is international financial capital and the governments and institutions at its service and that, in practice, it is not a matter of "negotiating" or making commitments to that "rest of the world" but of unconditional surrender. The other option is to break with that "rest of the world" and choose your own path. In the case of Greece leaving the euro would be much less expensive socially than submitting to the Eurozone's blackmail.

Professor Slavoj Žižek, regularly quoted and published by left-wing intellectuals and media, wrote in August 2015:<sup>9</sup> *Many left-wing commentators (Habermas included) were wrong to read the conflict between the European Union (EU) and Greece as the conflict between the technocracy and politics: the EU's treatment of Greece is not technocratic, but political in its purest state, even against its economic interests (as the International Monetary Fund, a true representative of cold economic rationality, clearly stated, that declared the rescue plan unfeasible). In any case, it was Greece that represented economic rationality and the EU that represented ideological political passion.*

Reading Žižek we learn two things: that Habermas is leftist and that the European Union acted against Greece out of pure "ideological political passion"; not by economic interests. In any case, as with Habermas and against all evidence, it splits the spheres of the political and the economic.<sup>10</sup> And he further states: *And by the way, most of the money given*

<sup>9</sup> ↪ (El Apocalipsis griego, diario Página 12, Buenos Aires, 21 de agosto de 2015, Mediapart 21 agosto, <https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/idees/20150820.OBS4459/exclusif-l-apocalypse-grecque-versailles-ou-brest-litovsk.html>

<sup>10</sup> ↪ It is commonplace that, if at any time the political sphere had any autonomy from the dominant economic interests, today the politics of the elites are totally subordinated to big capital. A tangible demonstration of this is the "rotation" between high finance and leading political posts, the so-called "revolving door." It is a constant in the United States and in recent years it has acquired almost grotesque characteristics in Europe: Mario Draghi, the President of the European Central Bank, was Vice President for Europe of Goldman Sachs International and as such worked to disguise part of Greece's sovereign debt; Lucas Papademos, who was Prime Minister of Greece until May 2012, as President of the Hellenic Central Bank, participated in the concealment of the Greek debt with the advice of Mario Draghi; Mario Monti, who was Prime Minister of Italy, was an international advisor to Goldman Sachs and Luis de Guindos, Minister of the Economy of Spain, is a former Lehman Brothers employee.

The large European transnational companies, grouped into UNICE—Union of Industrial and Employer Confederations of Europe—closely control the European Commission and the 39 members of the employers' organisation maintain permanent representations in Brussels and a veritable army of "lobbyists" to influence the decisions of the Commission.

Let us see what UNICE says about itself (<http://www.unice.org/> Le porte-parole des entreprises en Europe).

*UNICE is the voice of the business world before the institutions of the European Union. Its 39 members are multisectoral industrial organisations and employers' organisations from 31 European countries and represents more than 16 million companies, mainly small and medium-sized. UNICE is also an interlocutor in the European social dialogue at the level of the European Union. UNICE's main task is to inform and influence decision-making processes in the European Union, so that policies and legislative proposals with an effect on economic activity in Europe take into account the needs of companies. UNICE's first priority is promoting competition in the economic environment and investment at a European level, the only way to achieve higher development and lasting employment. The business world needs an effective commission.*

*to Greece goes to Western private banks, which means that Germany and other EU powers are spending taxpayer money to save their own banks, who made the mistake of giving bad loans.*

He repeats the argument of the right that it is European taxpayers who pay the apparent "errors" of the big banks that lent to an insolvent state, when the reality is that Greece has been and continues to be a source of enormous benefits, especially for France and Germany, which have sold to it arms for billions of euros under fraudulent conditions, issuing loans to it at usurious rates and now, in the framework of the latest memorandum, they will plunder its assets (they are already doing so), including basic infrastructure.

Zizek maintains that leaving the euro would have been "crazy", with social consequences for the Greeks far more serious than capitulating to the Eurozone. And he concludes that a next crisis in Greece must be expected—as if Greece is not already in a crisis—that Syriza will face with a well-crafted plan.

A more rigorous analysis can be made, beyond the previous interpretations of Habermas, Wallerstein and Zizek—which are at the very least ambiguous—of the role played by the state and the institutions of "representative democracy" in the current conditions of transnationalised capitalism.

A first observation is that, as long as the dominant system has the consensus of the popular majorities, that is, as long as they accept the delegation of state leadership to the exploiting classes and their political agents, the system can afford the so-called democratic regimes and even "progressive" ones that are better guarantors of its continuity and stability than openly dictatorial regimes. When the consensus ends, "representative democracy" ends and coup d'etats take place and dictatorships are installed.

But this finding would be incomplete if we did not refer to the attempts in recent history of some nation-states to break with their submission to the dominant system on a world scale and undertake socioeconomic reforms of a popular nature, based on the general interest, but harmful for the interests of the big transnational monopolies; that is, attempts to give real content to "representative democracy". In these cases, it has been the great powers directly and / or through local agents who were in charge of putting an end to these attempts and to "representative democracy" in those nation-states.

### Some examples

- ❖ In 1953, with the decisive intervention of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), a coup d'etat took place in Iran against the government of Dr. Mossadegh, who had nationalized oil, thus contrary to the interests of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. After the coup, a consortium of eight companies (US, English, and Dutch) retook control of the oil.
- ❖ In 1954 a military action forced the resignation of the constitutional president of Guatemala, Jacobo Arbenz, during whose government important economic and social reforms had been carried out for the benefit of the most disadvantaged sectors of the population, including agrarian reform. The repression against peasants and union activists after the overthrow of the constitutional government was extremely violent. The promoters and funders of military action were the CIA and the transnational company United Fruit Company (currently Chiquita Brands),

with enormous interests throughout Central America and the Caribbean, and who were particularly dissatisfied with the agrarian reform ordered by the Government of Guatemala.

- ❖ In early 1963 Juan Bosch was elected president of the Dominican Republic in the first free election after the Trujillo dictatorship. The Bosch government immediately initiated social and political reforms in favour of the most vulnerable sectors of the population: workers, peasants, women, etc. In September 1963 he was overthrown by a military rebellion. In April 1965, another civic-military rebellion led by Colonel Camano attempted to restore Bosch to office. But the US ended the insurrection by sending 42.000 "Marines" to Dominican territory.
- ❖ In 1973 the constitutional government of Chile was overthrown and the President, Salvador Allende, was murdered. The intervention of the transnational company International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) in promoting and financing the coup d'état has been amply demonstrated, as has the direct intervention of the United States Government and its Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).<sup>11</sup> ITT was affected by the nationalisation of the phone company, where it owned 70 percent of the shares. The nationalisation of the copper mines, which were owned by US companies, was also a major trigger for the coup against the Allende government.
- ❖ The years of government of the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua (1979-1990), were an attempt to apply its own model of human development, with a number of achievements in its assets (agrarian reform, education, food, etc.), but the economic, military and paramilitary war that the United States waged against the Sandinistas, which even led to a conviction of the International Court of Justice (Matter of the Military and Paramilitary Activities in Nicaragua and Against it (Nicaragua vs. United States of America)) radically changed the course of events.
- ❖ When Aristide took office in Haiti in February 1991, he proposed raising the minimum wage from \$ 1,76 to \$ 2,94 per day. The United States Agency for Investment and Development (USAID) criticised this initiative, saying it would mean a serious distortion of the cost of labour. The American assembly companies based in Haiti (that is, almost all foreign companies) agreed with the USAID analysis and, with the help of the Central Intelligence Agency, prepared and financed the September 1991 coup against Aristide.<sup>12</sup> An international reaction (the embargo) and internal chaos paralysed the work of US companies in Haiti, thus US troops reinstated Aristide in the government in October 1994, while ensuring impunity and a comfortable retreat for the military chiefs, the coup plotters.
- ❖ In 2004 the 1991 script was repeated with a politically discredited Aristide economically besieged by the United States and suffocated by the International Monetary Fund. This time Aristide's expulsion was orchestrated by the United States with France as a second violin and legitimised ex post facto by the Security Council. In today's Haiti, occupied for eleven years by foreign troops under the UN flag, the vast majority of the population lives in extreme poverty and is unable to recover from the disasters caused by natural disasters and the cholera epidemic. An indication of how "representative democracy" works in Haiti is that in the first round of the legislative elections held—several years late—in August 2015, the participation rate was 18%.

<sup>11</sup> ↪ Covert action in Chile margo 1973: *Staff Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities*, United States Senate, 18 December 1975 (Church Committee). Quoted in: Jac Forton, *L'impunité au Chili*, Editions du CETIM, Genève, 1993. A part of the Church report is also available online: <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/chile/doc/encubierta.html>.

<sup>12</sup> ↪ *Haiti After the Coup. A Special Delegation Report of the National Labor Committee*. Education Fund in Support of Worker and Human Rights in Central America, New York, April 1993.

- ❖ With Obama, the form but not the substance of these types of operations changed. During the short-lived coup against Chavez in Venezuela in April 2002, the United States ostensibly supported the coup plotters. In contrast, the coup in Honduras in June 2009 was criticised by the US government, which supported the decisions of the international organisations (UN and OAS) demanding the reinstatement of the deposed president. Even Hillary Clinton received Zelaya. Yet it is incontestable that without the green light from the United States the coup would not have taken place, since that country has control of the Honduran armed forces through its military base in Soto Cano, essential for the subregional geopolitics of the United States. For example, from there, logistical support was provided to the Nicaraguan "contras". President Zelaya had set out to add civilian use, beyond US control, to the airport at that base, something the Pentagon—whose employer, Robert Gates, Secretary of Defence with both the Obama and Bush administrations—could not admit.
- ❖ The Cuban Revolution must be assessed taking into account its achievements in health, education, housing, etc., without forgetting its shortcomings in other aspects, first of all an excessive concentration of decision-making power, which cannot be disguised with the existence of grassroots organisations whose participation in general policy decisions is purely formal. However, the enormously negative influence, not only economic but also political (permanent internal tension) of more than 50 years of embargo by the United States, plus the terrorist attacks promoted and organised from United States territory, contributed to a progressive internal deterioration. The reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the United States in 2015 was not accompanied, as might be expected, by the demand of the Cuban Government of the simultaneous lifting of the embargo and for discussions to be opened on the reparations that the United States owes to Cuba for the immense damage caused for more than half a century of embargo. The absence of these demands is a capitulation of the Cuban Government, consistent with the turn to capitalism that has been taking place in Cuba for many years.<sup>13</sup>
- ❖ At the time of decolonisation, African leaders such as Patrice Lumumba emerged in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Amílcar Cabral in Guinea Bissau and later Tomas Sankara in Burkina Faso, who fought for an independent route for their peoples, contrary to the interests of the former metropolis and its large companies. All three were assassinated and replaced by dictatorial leaders, corrupt and faithful to the great neocolonial powers. France and some other European countries contributed their *savoir faire* on the matter to eliminate these popular leaders.

## The Socialist Perspective on Democracy

The analyses of Marx and Lenin constitute an indispensable tool to study the issues of the state and of "representative democracy" and to place them in their historical, economic and social context.

<sup>13</sup> ↪ "The Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investments, Rodrigo Malmierca, presented to managers and officials of the Brazilian government institutions the Mariel Special Development Zone (SDZ), an ambitious project underway on the island, which offers new opportunities for foreign investment. Detailed information was offered on the possibility of investment in the area, business guarantees, free transfer abroad of dividends and profits "... (Cubadebate, 11/20/2013). The opposite face of the SDZ in the matter of private initiative in Cuba is self-employment: "Private initiative in socialist Cuba and with a centralised economy is making a place for itself in an unthinkable area: garbage collection and recycling ..." Right now There are 5,800 reclaimers with self-employed licenses, but we know that many more have not registered, "says Marilyn Ramos, the deputy director general of the Union of Raw Material Recovery Companies, the state entity that deals with recycling waste." (InterPress Service, Havana, October 22, 2013). Perhaps the turn to reestablish capitalism in Cuba began when Che Guevara's positions were defeated in the Cuban leadership in the debate that took place in the years 62-63 (See, by Teresa Machado Hernández: The controversy around the law of value and its manifestation in Cuban economic thought. [http://www.nodo50.org/cubasigloXXI/congreso08/conf4\\_machadoh2.pdf](http://www.nodo50.org/cubasigloXXI/congreso08/conf4_machadoh2.pdf) - <http://www.eumed.net/eve/resum/06-04/tmh.htm>).

Lenin,<sup>14</sup> contrary to the bourgeois theorists of the state who consider that it is above the classes and acts as an arbitrator between them, states that the state is a product of class society and functions as an apparatus of class domination and repression dominating over subordinate classes. All of its classes carry out this function: the elites and the ruling bureaucracy, the army, the police, the judiciary, the educational system, etc.

Through the state, an exploiting minority exercises its dictatorship over the exploited majorities. Although it reviews the form of a representative democracy.

Lenin writes: *According to Marx, the state is an organ of class domination, an organ of oppression of one class by another, it is the creation of the "order" that legalises and strengthens this oppression, cushioning the clashes between the classes. And later he quotes Engels, who wrote in 1891: In the democratic republic wealth exercises its power indirectly, but in a much safer way, and it exercises it, first of all, through the direct corruption of officials (North America), and, secondly, through the government's alliance with the Stock Exchange (France and North America).*

And Lenin continues: *At present, imperialism and the domination of the Banks have "developed", until turning them into an extraordinary art, these two adequate methods to defend and put into practice the omnipotence of wealth in the democratic republics, whatever they may be ...* On the next page Lenin quotes Engels again:

*Therefore, the state has not existed forever. There have been societies that managed without it, that did not have the slightest notion of the state or state power. Upon reaching a certain stage of economic development, which was necessarily linked to the division of society into classes, this division made the state a necessity. We are now fast*

*There cannot be socialist democracy without a socialist economy, and neither can there be and prevail a socialist economy without socialist democracy.*

*approaching a phase of production development where the existence of these classes is not only no longer a necessity, but a direct obstacle to production. The classes will disappear in the same inevitable way they arose in their day. With the disappearance of the classes, the state will inevitably disappear.*

*Society, reorganising production in a new way on the basis of a free and equal association of producers, will send the entire machine of the state to the place that then it must correspond to it: the museum of antiquities, next to the spinning wheel and the ax of bronze.*

From this depiction of the bourgeois state, Lenin concludes that the first task of a socialist revolution is to DESTROY the apparatus of the bourgeois state and build what he calls a "proletarian semi-state" with characteristics absolutely different from those of the capitalist state. This semi-state is also a dictatorship, because by its nature, the state is the way in which a class exercises its dictatorship over another or others. But, unlike the bourgeois state, the "proletarian semi-state" is the dictatorship of the exploited majorities over the exploiting minorities and must exercise violence against them to the extent that they attempt through violence to reestablish the capitalist system.

From the very moment of its establishment, the proletarian semi-state begins a long process towards its extinction that progresses as the economic bases (the collective ownership of the means of production) are established, the classes are extinguished and, therefore, the antagonism between them.

Then, Lenin says, the administration over people ceases and only the administration over things remains. This process of progressive extinction of the state cannot take place if the economic changes aimed at totally suppressing capitalist

<sup>14</sup> ↪ Lenin, *El Estado y la Revolución*, 1917.

exploitation are not deepened. Experience indicates that when this path is not followed, the regression and restoration of capitalism and of its inherent exploitation is inevitable.

Also, as historical experience shows, stagnation and regression can occur if socialist democracy is not permanently deepened. The deepening of the socialisation of the economy and the deepening of socialist democracy are interdependent; they are two sides of the same coin: there cannot be socialist democracy without a socialist economy, and neither can there be and prevail a socialist economy without socialist democracy.

Democracy is, according to the current definition, the political system of government whose authority emanates from the people or, as Lincoln defined it, with a certain lyricism: the government of the people, by the people and for the people.

But what is democracy specifically in the context of the capitalist system and what should socialist democracy be? Lenin writes: *We are in favour of the democratic republic, as the best form of state for the proletariat under capitalism, but we have no right to forget that wage slavery is the destiny reserved for the people, even under the most democratic bourgeois republic. Even more, every state is a "special force for repression" of the oppressed class. Therefore, every state is neither free nor popular.*

The basic principles of a socialist democracy are explained by Lenin in paragraph 2 (What to replace the state machine with once destroyed?) Of Chapter III (The experience of the Paris Commune of 1871. Marx's analysis) of *The State and the Revolution*:

*In 1847, in the Communist Manifesto, Marx gave this question a still completely abstract answer, or, more precisely, an answer that pointed out the tasks, but not the means to solve them. To replace the state machine, once destroyed, by the organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class, by the conquest of democracy: such was the response of the Communist Manifesto. Without getting lost in utopias, Marx expected from the experience of the mass movement the answer to the question of what concrete forms should this organisation of the proletariat take as the ruling class and in what way would this organisation coordinate with the most complete and more consistent conquest of democracy. In his Civil War in France, Marx subjected the Commune experience to the most attentive analysis, however brief this experience may have been. Let us quote the most important passages from this work:*

*In the 19th century, parting from the Middle Ages, the centralised power of the state developed with its omnipresent organs: the permanent army, the police, the bureaucracy, the clergy and the magistracy. With the development of class antagonism between capital and labour, the Power of the state increasingly acquired the character of a public power for the oppression of labour, a sort of a machine for class domination. After each revolution, which marked a step forward in the class struggle, the purely oppressive character of Power was increasingly exposed. After the revolution of 1848-1849, state power became a national weapon of capital's war against labour. The Second Empire consolidates it. The direct antithesis of the Empire was the Commune. It was the definite form of that republic which was not to abolish only the monarchical form of class domination, but class domination itself. . . What, concretely, had this "defined" form of the proletarian, socialist republic consisted of? What was the state that had begun to create? ... The Commune replaces the destroyed state machine, apparently "only" for a more complete democracy: suppression of the permanent army and complete eligibility and immobility of all officials. But in reality, this "only" represents a gigantic change from some institutions to others of a different type in principle. Here we are precisely faced with one of those cases of transformation of quantity into quality: democracy, carried out in the most complete and consistent way that can be conceived, turns from bourgeois democracy into proletarian democracy of a state, from a special force for the repression of a certain class into something that is no longer a state proper. It is still necessary to repress the bourgeoisie and*

overcome its resistance. This was especially necessary for the Commune, and one of the causes of its defeat is not having done this with sufficient determination. But here the repressive body is already the majority of the population and not a minority, as it had always been, the same under slavery and servitude as under wage slavery. And, from the very moment that the majority of the people are themselves repressing their oppressors, a "special force" of repression is no longer necessary! In this sense, the state begins to become extinct. Instead of special institutions of a privileged minority (the privileged bureaucracy, the chiefs of the permanent army), the majority can carry this out directly, and the more the whole people intervene in the execution of the proper functions of the State Power, the lesser is the need for such Power.

In this sense, one of the measures decreed by the Commune, which Marx underscores, is singularly remarkable: the abolition of all expenses of representation, of all pecuniary privileges of officials, the reduction of the salaries of all state officials to the level of a *worker's salary*. This is precisely where the shift from bourgeois democracy to proletarian democracy, from democracy of the oppressing class to democracy of the oppressed classes, of the state as a *special force* for the repression of a certain class against the repression of the oppressors by the joint force of the majority of the people, the workers and the peasants. And it is precisely in this quite evident point—perhaps the most important, as regards to the question of the state—that Marx's teachings have been most relegated to oblivion! In the commentaries on popularisation—of which there is an innumerable quantity—there is no mention of this issue. It is "customary" to remain silent about this, as if it were an old-fashioned "naïveté", something akin to when Christians, after Christianity became a state religion, "forgot" about the "naïvetés" of early Christianity and its democratic-revolutionary spirit.

The reduction of salaries of high-ranking officials of the state seems "plainly" the demand for a naive, primitive democracy. One of the "founders" of modern opportunism, ex-social democrat E. Bernstein, has devoted himself more than once to repeating those trivial bourgeois taunts about "primitive" democratism. Like all opportunists, akin to the current Kautskians, he did not understand at all, firstly, that the transition from capitalism to socialism is impossible without a certain "return" to "primitive democratism" (for how, if not, to pass to the execution of state functions by the majority of the population, by the entire population as a whole?); and, secondly, that this "primitive democratism", based on capitalism and capitalist culture, is not the "primitive democratism" of prehistoric times or of the pre-capitalist era. Capitalist culture has created wide-ranging manufacturing, factories, railroads, postal and telephone services, etc. On this basis, a vast majority of the functions of the old "State Power" have been made so utterly simple that they can be reduced to rather basic operations of record keeping, accounting and control, in such a way that they are totally accessible to all who know how to read and write; thus they can unequivocally be performed for *the common salary of a worker*, who can (and should) be stripped of all reminiscence of something privileged and "hierarchical". The complete eligibility and removability at any time of all officials without exception; the reduction of their salaries to the limits of *the common salary of a worker*: such democratic measures, simple and "self-evident", while concurrently unifying the interests of the workers and the majority of the peasants, serve as a bridge that leads from capitalism to socialism. These measures concern the reorganisation of the state, the purely political reorganisation of society, but it is evident that they only acquire their full meaning and importance in connection with the expropriation of the expropriators already in progress or in preparation; that is, with the transformation of capitalist private property over the means of production into social property. Up to here Lenin's quote (the underline of the last sentence is mine).

A few pages later Lenin points out: *We will organise the great production ourselves, the workers, starting from what has already been created by capitalism, based on our own working experience, establishing a very rigorous, iron discipline, maintained by the state power of the armed workers; we will lessen state officials to being mere executors of our directives, responsible, removable and modestly paid "inspectors and accountants" (in association, of course, with technicians of all kinds, of all types and degrees): that is our proletarian task, that is where you can and must start by*

*carrying out the proletarian revolution. This beginning, on the basis of large production, leads in itself to the gradual "extinction" of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of an order—order without quotation marks, an order that will be nothing like wage slavery—an order in which the increasingly simplified inspection and accounting functions will be performed by everyone in turn, will eventually become customary, and will eventually disappear as special functions of a special layer of society.*

Later, in Paragraph 2 of Chapter VI of *The State and the Revolution*, Lenin insists: *The workers, after conquering political power, will destroy the old bureaucratic apparatus, will dismantle it even to its foundations, they will not leave it stone on stone; they will replace it with a new one, made up of the same workers and employees, against whose*

*This relative autonomy of the state and its role as mediator has ceased and its complete submission to capital has culminated in the transnationalisation of the economy in recent decades.*

*transformation into bureaucrats the measures analysed in detail by Marx and Engels will be addressed immediately: 1) Not only eligibility, but mobility at all times; 2) salary not exceeding the salary of a worker; 3) everyone immediately will carry out functions of control and inspection, for all to be "bureaucrats" for some time, so that, in this way, no one can become a*

*"bureaucrat". And Lenin adds in one of the last pages *Under Socialism* everyone will intervene in turn in the leadership and quickly get used to no one leading.*

The ideas of Marx and Lenin about the state remain fully up-to-date since they do not consist of an idealistic, ahistorical, static and schematic representation of the state, but starting from its multiple aspects, in a process of synthesis, rescue its essential features that persist, for it is not an abstract state, but a capitalist state, which is adapting to the changing conditions of the dominant system. It is the method of analysis exposed by Marx, among other places in his work in the "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, 1857, Cap. III, The method".

## The Capitalist Perspective on Democracy

Hence it is appropriate to assess the contemporary state in relation to the current state of the capitalist system, characterised by being a totally transnationalised system and practically in a permanent crisis.

The modern state responds to the need to manage the social relations in a certain productive system whose essential features are the private ownership of the means of production and the market economy; that is, the exchange of goods between owners and producers through their common equivalent, money. Among the goods exchanged is the labour force, where there is no exchange of equivalents.

The state appears as a mediating administrative apparatus between groups and classes with contradictory interests (the owner keeps the surplus—surplus value—produced by the producer) to preserve the "general interest" that is nothing other than reproduction—preferably peaceful—of the current system.

This mediating function of the state was relatively real in the early stages of the evolution and consolidation of the capitalist system. We say "relatively real" because the state has always functioned as the guarantor—by peaceful or violent means—of the reproduction of the system.

But this function of mediator, writes Hirsch, *is modified with the progressive penetration of capitalist relations, in which the "only power of economic conditions" (Marx, Capital) installs the organisation of domination as an instrument for the establishment of capitalist relations, where capital reproduces itself and where finally the "complete submission of the state organism" (Marx, Grundrisse) to capital determines the form and function of the state.*<sup>15</sup>

This relative autonomy of the state and its role as mediator (both of national and international interstate organisations) has ceased and its complete submission to capital has culminated in the transnationalisation of the economy in recent decades; a submission accentuated by the almost permanent crisis of the system.

A group of French economists described this in 1983 with remarkable accuracy: *The culmination of private monopoly regulation on a global scale will lead to a drastic, and undoubtedly irreversible, restructuring of nation-states. These will become amorphous territories whose economic functions will be determined from the outside by international oligopolies. Those territories will be both large and fragmented open spaces. A dualistic structure will be imposed, made up of a "modern" and a "traditional" sector. The first will be widely internationalised, holding the headquarters of large groups, high-tech industries, and the seats of large educational institutions, with the best trained leaders and engineers, with themselves very mobile and speaking the same language, concentrating all the laboratories and the entire international media complex. The "traditional" sector will group the mass of the population, with low remuneration and qualifications, dedicated to the tasks subcontracted by the modern sector in which, perhaps, a shorter work time will be compensated by the reduction in the coverage of social needs, which will be preferred to unemployment, whose rate will be high.*<sup>16</sup>

While a system of national economies prevailed, in which production and consumption were carried out fundamentally within the territory, the de facto "social pact" was possible between capitalists and employees as consumers within the framework of the nation-state. But in the current "globalised" system, production is bound for a global market of "solvent customers" and the purchasing power of the population at the place of production is no longer of interest. And the nation-state tends to become an amorphous entity within a de facto world state and made up of various global, regional, and bilateral institutions and treaties (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization, OECD, "Group of 8", European Commission, European Central Bank, Investment Promotion and Protection Treaties, etc.) dominated—politically, economically, militarily and culturally—by transnational lofty capital and its managers, the political leaders.

Under conditions of monopoly and imperialist capitalism and recurring crises, new forms of state and interstate intervention are produced to ensure the reproduction of the system and the rate of profit. In addition to the institutional

*From the origins of capitalism to the present day, the state has been and is an essentially capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists*

ones just mentioned, the state participates in certain industries and services (especially non-profitable ones), in scientific and technological research sectors, in the constitution of military coalitions to attack countries in the name of "human rights" but in truth to subject them to their geo-economic and geostrategic

sphere, until, in some cases, they are blown apart as States, as has happened, for example, with Libya and, and to a large extent, with Iraq. With the collateral result of chaotic situations from which very powerful terrorist organisations and extreme savagery have emerged.

<sup>15</sup> ↪ Hans Joachim Hirsch, "Elementos para una teoría materialista del Estado", publicado en castellano in Críticas de la Economía Política, edición latinoamericana, núm. 12/13, México, El Caballito, 1979, pp. 3-75 and in French in *L'Etat contemporain et le marxisme*, Critiques de l'économie politique, Ed. François Maspero, Paris, 1975.

<sup>16</sup> ↪ Michalet, Delapierre, Madeuf y Ominami, *Nationalisations et Internationalisation*....Ed. La Découverte/Maspero, Paris, 1983, p. 147. Quote from my book « La armadura del capitalismo. El poder de las sociedades transnacionales en el mundo contemporáneo ». Editorial Icaria, España, 2010.

From the origins of capitalism to the present day, the state has been and is *an essentially capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists* (Engels, Anti-Dühring, quoted by Hans Joachim Hirsch, op. Cit.).

## Corollary

It is not a question, then, of "improving" the State, but of dismantling it (destroying it, Lenin said) and replacing it with other totally different institutional forms that confer decision-making power on those who work (which is not the same as formal "participation" in the decisions made by the "leaders") and constitute an insurmountable barrier to the formation of bureaucracies (brief, revocable and non-renewable mandates at all levels). At the same time, capitalist production relations are suppressed, socialising the instruments and means of production and exchange.

In other words, a democratic and participative socialism consisting of a system—hitherto unheard of in the world—founded on the social or collective ownership of the instruments and means of production and exchange and on institutional forms that allow the active and conscious intervention of individuals and communities in decision-making at all levels and at all stages, from determining the objectives and the means to achieve them to putting them into practice and monitoring and evaluating the results.

This should be the project of those who really want a radical change in society that leads to the liberation and the realisation of the human being as such. Those who should prefigure it in their own organisations, with the periodic rotation of their leaders and the true participation of all its members in decisions. Because, as the International says:

There are no supreme saviours,  
Neither God, nor Caesar nor tribune;  
Producers, let us save ourselves.

This is something that, unfortunately, has not happened yet in the vast majority of cases, be it trade union organisations, "progressive" or "leftist" political parties or other organisations.

In leftist parties, even those who declare themselves to be opposed to the *partycracy*, the idea prevails—and they put it into practice—that the leading and representative functions should correspond mainly to the intellectual elites (for obvious economic-social reasons stemming from the middle and upper social classes) who would be better prepared to exercise them than the "common" workers.

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### Useful links:

- The Jus Semper Global Alliance
- Alejandro Teitelbaum: [To Die for Wall Street](#)
- Alejandro Teitelbaum: [To Radically Change the Prevailing Social Order](#)
- Alejandro Teitelbaum: [Planetary Offensive Against Social Security](#)
- Alejandro Teitelbaum: [Inside Capitalism](#)
- Álvaro J. de Regil: [Transitioning to Geocratia the People and Planet and Not the Market Paradigm — First Steps](#)
- Adolfo Gilly & Rhina Roux: [Capitals, Technologies and the Realms of Life. The Dispossession of the Four Elements](#)

❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Jus Semper Global Alliance aims to contribute to achieving a sustainable ethos of social justice in the world, where all communities live in truly democratic environments that provide full enjoyment of human rights and sustainable living standards in accordance with human dignity. To accomplish this, it contributes to the liberalisation of the democratic institutions of society that have been captured by the owners of the market. With that purpose, it is devoted to research and analysis to provoke the awareness and critical thinking to generate ideas for a transformative vision to materialise the truly democratic and sustainable paradigm of People and Planet and NOT of the market.

❖ **About the author:** Alejandro Teitelbaum is a Fellow Associate with Jus Semper since 2010. He worked for many years on the issue of human rights in the realm of global corporations and other business enterprises. As the former Permanent Representative, successively from 1985 to 2006, to the United Nations Office in Geneva, for the International Federation of Human Rights and the American Association of Jurists, he spent time toiling with the bureaucracies of the UN and member states in pursuit of an international legal framework that would harness the business activity so that it would stop violating a wide array of human rights in its sphere of influence, as is customarily the case today. As such, he witnessed how, time and time again, the bureaucracies succumbed to the will of the leading economic powers, that were adamant at maintaining the preeminence of corporate interests over their responsibility for their infringement on human rights Alejandro Teitelbaum is a Lawyer, Universidad de Buenos Aires, and a Postgraduate in International Economic Relations at the Institute of Economic and Social Development Studies, Université Paris I.



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