



# **GLOBAL DIALOGUE**

*FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE*

## **Where Are We Today? What Do We Do?**

Report on the seminars organized by Global Dialogue for Systemic Change,  
December 10 and December 15 2020

January 2021



## Introduction

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Global Dialogue for Systemic Change recently organized two seminars to focus on the current crisis and grassroots responses to it, with an emphasis on Latin America and the United States.

The first seminar (December 10) was about “Where Are We Today?” while the second seminar (December 15) was named “What Do We Do?”, both focusing on important processes that bring to light critical issues for campaigns, programs and alliances, such as recent struggles in Chile, Poland, the Black Lives Matter in the United States and the Amazonian Assembly.

Around 50 people attended both seminars, which were held on Zoom. Simultaneous translation was provided into 4 languages: English, Spanish, French (only the first seminar), and Portuguese, allowing for a rich, international discussion.

Further information on Global Dialogue can be found at <https://globaldialogue.online/>.

# First seminar

Where Are We Today?

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## Dominant trends in the capitalist world system in the context of the pandemic

Edgardo Lander<sup>1</sup>

1. With the pandemic, debates that had already been taking place from a wide political spectrum of questioning neoliberal globalization are accelerating. The fragility of the productive chains long established with the aim of maximizing short-term corporate profits has fallen to bare in their extraordinary vulnerability. What happens in one link in the chain can have global consequences. Dependence on imports for materials is as critical as basic health equipment and food. This situation has placed in political debate the need for higher levels of self-sufficiency or sovereignty in many different countries of the world. The pandemic has stripped the world like never before. While richer countries are grabbing vaccines for their population and refuse to relax the rules on protection of intellectual property controlled by pharmaceutical corporations developed thanks to massive public funding, many countries in the South will not have widespread access to vaccines until 2022, according to estimates by the People's Vaccine Alliance<sup>2</sup>.

2. In the context of the pandemic, many old debates have been reopened, from the broadest political / ideological spectrum about the role of the State, about the need for universal public health systems, and about the irrational dogma according to which the market is the best answer to all the problems we face. Could this lead to change, or will we return to normal once the pandemic is over?

3. The most important and urgent challenge facing humanity is the global ecological crisis. Despite many international conferences and agreements in recent decades, we are witnessing the continuous devastation of conditions that make life on planet Earth possible, the accelerated reduction of biological diversity, dynamics of deforestation, air, water and land pollution, overfishing and GM monocultures, all being accelerated. There is little time to avoid not only

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<sup>1</sup> Edgardo is an emeritus professor at the Central University of Venezuela in Caracas and fellow of the Transnational Institute.

<sup>2</sup> The alliance brings together Oxfam, UNAIDS, Amnesty International and many more.

catastrophic, but irreversible transformations. There is a sort of apathy towards the idea that, even if we know the gravity and urgency of the situation, we can make drastic changes in the patterns of production and consumption, altering the deep inequalities prevailing in access to the planet's common goods. The interests of short-term maximization of profits of capital continue to impose themselves on life.

4. Technological transformations of our time are, in essence, oriented by corporate powers and political elites of the world. Consequently, far from developing capabilities to respond to the ecological crisis and the needs of most of the population, they deepen the problems we face. Despite the central role that technological patterns play in shaping contemporary societies, these developments are everywhere outside the democratic control by the population and essentially outside the public debate. Among others, there are three areas where new technologies are crucial:

1. Military technology, focusing on issues such as a new generation of tactical nuclear weapons (which makes their use more probable) and drones equipped with autonomous capacity to decide when and whom to murder.
2. Genetic engineering that, through manipulation and appropriation of life and privatization of seeds, is part of a global cultural war against peasant life and human food. This is a war directed at the control of the production and commercialization of food all over the planet.
3. And the technologies of surveillance capitalism, such as those that make possible the system of Chinese social credit, in the tradition of Orwell's dystopia (1984), whereas, since the beginning of the pandemic, the use of these surveillance systems has accelerated to the extent that these new systems will be difficult to reverse.

5. The left continues to go through a deep crisis. The experiences of the left in power, particularly with socialism of the Soviet bloc in the twentieth century and the progressive Latin American experience of this century, far from invigorating the pursuit of another world (the slogan of the WSF), towards more egalitarian and pluricultural society, against state-centrism and patriarchy, have been not conclusive. Restrictions on democracy and corruption have been part of these experiences, allowing conservative and extreme right forces to gain ground carrying the banner of democracy and honest administration. In addition, the left has often adopted policies promoted by neoliberalism such as it was in the case of Latin American extractivism. In many cases, the left has been unable to reflect critically on these experiences, therefore imposing severe obstacles to anti-capitalist struggles and imaginaries. In Venezuela, the political / cultural effect of the 20 year experience of the Bolivarian process has been a clear displacement of Venezuelan society from a social-democratic consensus to the right and a growing depoliticization.

6. In different parts of the world today, the extreme right and new forms of authoritarianism are flourishing on the tradition of governments in the Southern cone imposed by military repression. They take new forms based on growing conservatism and social authoritarianism. These policies put forward by Trump, Bolsonaro, Duterte, Modi and Victor Orbán have enjoyed very broad support of their respective populations. Many of the people that used to support socialist and social democrats in Europe vote today for the right-wing parties and even for the far right. In the United States, they vote for Trump, where liberal democracy is in crisis while racism and white supremacy have grown stronger.

7. With the pandemic, in addition to the impacts on health, hundreds of millions of people have lost their sources of employment. Hunger is generalized. At the same time, the concentration of wealth is accelerating, which extraordinary qualitative leaps. Between the months of March and November of this year, the total fortune of the five richest billionaires in the United States increased by 34.2%.

8. We are witnessing an increase in militarization and what many experts see as a new wave of wars. The United States is challenged to maintain its full global hegemony, especially in the economic field, while China is becoming a superpower that threatens its supremacy and, because of that, is assuming an increasingly aggressive posture towards China and Russia. The consequences are strained relations, characterized by intense technological competition, aggressive trade war and a significant reorientation of both the military doctrine of the Pentagon, the war against terrorism of Bush and Obama, and the long-term strategic competition with China<sup>3</sup>. These geopolitical rearrangements can hardly occur peacefully. The threat of a nuclear conflict reappears on the horizon.

9. The reactions, resistance and opposition to these now hegemonic trends have been vigorous in different parts of the world. This is certainly the case in the US where mass mobilizations continue against racist police brutality illustrated by the killing of George Floyd. The powerful activism of Black Lives Matter (BLM) has highlighted the extraordinary weight of the United States' colonial and slave capitalism history, reproduced by systemic racism in the contemporary era. In India, the peasant movement against market reforms and deregulation of the agricultural sector which threaten their way of life has faced stiff resistance. Policies by the Modi government are resisted, including a recent national strike and several multiclass and multi-caste mobilizations throughout the country. The authoritarian posturing of the Chinese government has faced massive and determined opposition from the people of Hong Kong. In Latin America, when it seemed that, with the failure of the progressive governments, a marked shift to the right would be taking place, we witnessed the vitality of the broad Chilean popular movement, converging to the call for a new Constituent Assembly. In the recent Bolivian elections, a strong rejection of the racist right was expressed. In Brazil, Bolsonaro has lost in the recent municipal

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<sup>3</sup> National Security Strategy, Pentagon, February 2018.

elections. In Italy, activists are taking steps to re-articulate diverse anti-capitalist social movements and organizations at the national level. After years of struggles, women's movements in Argentina appear to be close to gaining approval for the decriminalization of abortion.

In brief, we are not facing a world unable to resist hegemonic tendencies. In the second part of this seminar, we will reflect on the multiple struggles, projects and proposals as alternatives that are now in debate. The question is: What do we have to do? What are, or can be, today's systemic alternatives to this exploitative and destructive global order of life?

# The Failed State

Phyllis Bennis<sup>4</sup>

Last July, Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, increased his wealth by 13 billion dollars in one single day. In the meantime, our social safety net is collapsing. One out of 6 children goes to sleep hungry. For many of the more than 140 million people who live beneath or barely above the poverty line (that number was before the pandemic), any problem becomes catastrophic. For sure, this disproportionately affects people of color. From the onset, capitalism in the United States has been racialized, with race and class and race and class oppression operating one inside the other. And now during the pandemic, the US is quickly becoming a failed state.

This year we have seen the brutality of systemic racism at the forefront of public attention and of popular resistance. Some past gains, like the Voting Rights Act won in 1965 by the massive civil rights movement of the 1960s, are being seriously eroded by the US court system, especially the Supreme Court which has been packed with far-right judges. With a stated goal of working to “destroy the administrative state”, the Trump administration has aggravated neoliberalism in its crudest form by weakening and hollowing out crucial agencies (from the post office to the Environmental Protection Agency to the State Department), and mobilizing people against governmental, especially national governmental power.

This right-wing mobilization resulted in over 70 million Americans voting for Trump last October. Trump voters were overwhelmingly though not entirely white, the largest percentage being white men. For many of those white males it seems the motivating factor was anger and fear at losing some of the white male privilege they had come to expect, even in periods of economic crisis. It does not necessarily mean their conscious goal is to overtly promote racism, homophobia, anti women policies, but since their priority is to defend their privileges, they are clearly prepared to accept the racism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, etc of the Trump administration to defend their own privilege.

The result is we have a deeply divided society – about 70 million voted for Trump, about 75 million for Biden, and another 70 million or so did not vote. (It should be noted that many non-voters were kept from voting but various right-wing/Republican efforts at voter suppression, not because they did not want to vote.) And now nearly half the population are hesitant or opposed to Covid vaccinations, and many will not be concerned if the other 50 % get sick and die. Much of the divide is rural/exurban vs urban/suburban, with people of color largely though not entirely concentrated in rural areas.

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<sup>4</sup> Phyllis directs the New Internationalism Project at the Institute of Policy Studies in Washington.

If we look at the Democratic Party agenda, we cannot be too buoyant. Opposition to Trump has been powerful and urgent, and at the level of the Democratic Party establishment that has often meant instinctively opposing anything Trump supports, regardless of the substance.

Establishment Democrats, for instance, largely oppose the military pull-out of US forces from Afghanistan, claiming that the timing is wrong, or we are “abandoning our allies” or some other excuse. They show little initiative towards developing a pro-peace strategy, but plan to increase the techno-wars which depend on airstrikes, drones, missiles, and special forces, as we see it in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, etc., even if they later move towards pulling out ground troops (who are already small and not responsible for most of the US-caused civilian casualties).

The militarization of US policy in Africa is likely to continue with AFRICOM, a very large US militarized infrastructure built in that continent. Apart from maintaining military incursions in the Middle East, the Biden administration is expected to continue Trump’s version of what they call “near peer competition” against China and Russia. Currently, 53 cents from every federal dollar is spent on the military - \$738 billion in this year’s military budget, \$740 next year. And half of that goes directly to big military corporations.

There are hopeful signs, especially when we look at the social movements that have been on the rise in the year of the pandemic. The most powerful is the Black Lives Matter movement, which is not an organization, rather a permanently evolving alliance; the Movement for Black Lives is the policy-focused component of this movement, another critical part is the Black Voters Matter organization. One of the successes of this resistance has been to normalize critical discourses, like defunding the police and instead funding social programs, which is now, while still contested, considered by many as a legitimate and normal demand. We have seen other mobilisations, like the First nations struggle at Standing Rock, along the walls that separate families along the Mexican border, against the Muslim ban early in Trump’s presidency, the Women’s March right after his inauguration, etc. Intersectionality is central to movements’ agendas, working to link class-specific demands and a focus on the breadth of poverty and economic inequality, with opposition to systemic racism, militarism and environmental injustice.

One thing to note, while self-described socialism and socialist organizations are on the rise in the US, particularly among young activists including many of color, the language of many sectors of the progressive and left movements in the United States do not refer specifically to socialism or imperialism. Some of the key movements, such as the Poor People’s Campaign, are faith-based, using the language of morality and good vs evil, while maintaining clear anti-racist, anti-exploitation, anti-militarism and pro-environmental justice policies.

One last change to increase our hopes is the surging of a self-defined left pole within the Democratic Party and within governing institutions, from local city and state governing structures to Congress itself. The famous “squad” composed of 4 brave women of color elected



in 2018, will soon be joined by at least 8 other progressive elected congress members voted in in the November 2020 election. The Democratic Socialists of America have substantially augmented their membership and support, including with several of their members (beyond Bernie Sanders, their champion) being recently elected to congress. All of this is already leading to confrontations with the Biden administration even before it takes office, including pressure on policy priorities and choices of cabinet-level and other officials.

The challenge for the left is to build a large popular front, fighting local and national battles against what will likely be a centrist or even center-right government, but one which faces strong challenge from the progressive wing of its own party which played a major role in getting the Biden-Harris ticket elected, as well as being central in electing many progressive Democrats to congress. In recent days we have seen nominations of top officials in a couple of areas – most especially climate-related – who are quite progressive, some with ties to the climate justice movement. It shows the potential influence of the progressive wing there. Some indications in the economic sphere as well. But in other areas, the appointments, while reflecting broad demands for diversity of race and gender, are largely returning Obama-era officials unlikely to move on their own beyond the centrism of the Obama years.

In foreign policy and the military there are problems. Biden has shown no indication that he feels accountable to any pressure from the left on issues of ending wars, nuclear weapons, the challenges re Palestine-Israel, Iran, China, Latin America, etc. Foreign policy is the arena in which the centrist and progressive wings of the Democratic Party are the farthest apart, and Biden believes he is an expert already, having served for years as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and handled foreign policy issues as Obama's vice-president. So, he is unlikely to feel accountable to progressive voices; except on a return to the Iran deal (which will likely be significantly more difficult than he believes because of the legacy of US sanctions against Iran), Biden foreign policy is likely to reflect a return to Obama-era centrism and a kind of less-vicious-than-trump kind of imperialism. A return to the UN and to the WHO but refusing to join the People's Vaccine campaign; a return to the Paris climate accord but refusing to take any concrete actions needed to make the commitments of Paris real...

# New Horizons for South America

Ana Cristina Carvalhaes<sup>5</sup>

Latin America is still marked by the colonial experience succeeded by regimes acting as subalterns of the imperialist powers. With the pandemic, the effects have been disastrous with over two million contaminated people. According to the IMF, the economy is expected to hit a sharp drop in 2021. The most serious impact has been on poor communities, especially Afro-descendants, indigenous, women. The pandemic aggravates social and racial polarizations.

In return, this is transformed into a crisis of the political system, on the idea of democracy and representation, whereas growing numbers of peoples do not believe in the system, as we have seen recently in Argentina, Guatemala, Peru. In Brazil, resistance is particularly strong with the First nations in the Amazon, as well as with Afro-descendant poor people in the favelas, who have been very impressed by the BLM movement in the United States.

In the context, the right and the ultra right have flourished, sometimes with the open support of the United States, as it has been the case in Venezuela and Bolivia after the right-wing coup last year. The illegitimate “constitutional coup” against Dilma Roussef in Brazil, the defeat of the Frente Amplio in Uruguay, the shift to the right in Ecuador have hit hard, but contrary to conservative expectations, they have not paralysed popular forces.

Mas mobilizations have indeed won the upper hand in the second half of the year, based on intersectional movements involving women, indigenous, deprived communities, in Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, even Colombia after a long period of repression, whereas urban youth became very militant. The triumphant return to power of the MAS in Bolivia is also a sign that people say no to the right-wing. This is not unique in this world. According to Médiapart, 140 countries were the scene of rebellious movements in 2020.

In Brazil, the Bolsonaro regime is weakening. The latest municipal elections indicate the trend that turns in favour of the more traditional centre-right parties and to a certain extent, towards the left. This represent new horizons to reinforce social movements, although there should not be any illusion about the growing gap between resistance movements and large segments of the community of peoples who have been dispirited by the experience of the "progressive" governments who prove incapable of resisting growing inequalities and the terrible consequences of extractivist policies. For many people, especially indigenous communities, the progressive governments have failed to adopt less predatory programs.

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<sup>5</sup> Ana Cristina is a journalist and a leader of the left-wing Party for Socialism and Liberty (PSOL) in Rio de Janeiro.

Despite that challenge, many in the “progressive parties” refuse to honestly assess their limitations and mistakes. Lula, Maduro and others seem incapable to face the necessity for a broad renovation of the left. However, the pressure is much stronger than before. Out of this, Brazilian movements are ganging up to formulate an all-encompassing transitional program that will fill the gaps and enlighten coalition-building that we have seen recently in Sao Paulo, Belem and other cities where the left has significantly advanced.

# Highlights of the discussion

## Strengths and opportunities

- The left needs to and can develop its critical perspective on the social and ecological transition further, transcending traditional policies that dominated the left in the last century.
- The feminist upsurge challenges patriarchal policies put forward by traditional conservative forces, but also segments of the left, proposing new alliances between women's demands and popular/class issues. The idea is to rebuild convergence, as it has happened with the movement for the Constituent assembly in Chile.
- Identity demands are not necessarily anti class demands. The new socialist project is learning to be intersectional.
- We have in front us the perfect storm, combining health, economy, climate and political collapse. Things are changing all the time; one positive thing is the strengthening of local communities and practices of territorial self-management.
- The left needs to renovate its "grammar", how it structures its strategies and perspectives.
- The right-wing, contrary to appearances, does not have a hegemonic project. Rightists and ultra rightists have big disagreements. The ultra right is not dominant.
- We need to reach out to "uncontaminated" political actors, such as the Indigenous peoples in the Amazon.

## Weaknesses and threats

- The politics of identity can challenge class alignments and augment social and political fragmentation unless it is checked by progressive forces.
- The "progressive" parties will not likely change on the fundamentals. They do not recognize their incapacities and their subsequent defeats which they see as successful right-wing conspiracies instead of the consequences of their social and political weakening. They tend to adopt "campist" policies supporting competing powers of the United States (like China, Iran and Russia), thinking that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend".
- The non-stop rise of Evangelicals depoliticise communities and inspire a culture of fear and impotence. This is aggravated by the myopia of certain sections of the left that do not

understand that this "return" to conservative religious projects reflect the desperation of the poorest parts of the population. In certain cases, such as in Bolivia, this Evangelical rise even penetrates sections of the left.

- Capitalism is transforming towards systems of control and capital accumulation (digitalization). Isolation and dissociation facilitates that restructuring.
- "Progressive" governments cannot do much in the present moment, they are overwhelmed by the intensity of the crisis and they remain stuck with the idea that capturing state power is the only way. With this chaotic capitalism, there will be no "return to normal".

# Second seminar

## What Do We Do?

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### Systemic Transitions

Pablo Solón<sup>6</sup>

The following proposals<sup>7</sup> seek to motivate reflections on how to deal with the systemic crises. These are ideas that arose from a South American and in particular, a Bolivian context.

- 1) We must rethink the processes of transitions based on the systemic crises that the Earth community is now experiencing. Although there is no doubt that the ecological and climate crises are the most relevant because they put at risk the continuity of life as we know it, transitions must be multidimensional and inclusive of our relationships with nature, our daily behavior patterns, the State and the political system, the economy, the social, the spiritual, energy, international relations and ethics.
- 2) The main focus of our attention should be the strengthening of the organization and articulation of the diverse social movements for the self-management of their territories: indigenous-peasant communities, factories, schools, neighborhoods, etc. The vast majority of the left fail because they bet mainly on the State rather than on promoting the self-determination of social articulations that are creative and disruptive of the State. In some cases, it may make sense to relate or pressure the State as it can play a positive role to confront the commodification and privatization of life, but this cannot be the sole strategy, as the State is still an apparatus that has its own logic that it shares with capital the addiction to growth and productivism, and manages violence in favor of the sectors that hold power.
- 3) The autonomy and self-determination of social organizations is essential to: a) expand the practice of the commons at different levels, b) radically transform the State, c) contain the social decomposition that is underway, and d) counteract the logic of state power that captures and

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<sup>6</sup> Director of Fundación Solón-Bolivia and member of the Systemic Alternatives initiative and the Global Dialogue for Systemic Change.

<sup>7</sup> This document is based on the presentation I made at the seminar "What should we do?" organized by the Global Dialogue for Systemic Change on December 15, 2020. The proposals presented in a schematic and summarized manner have been enriched with the comments and contributions received during and after said event.

transforms social and left leaders. It is essential to dismantle the cult of personality and caudillismo that undermines the capacity for self-management of social movements.

4) There is not one left but multiple lefts. The left is a relative concept that should be valued not only in relation to the right and imperialism, but also in relation to central issues for systemic transitions such as extractivism, productivism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, capitalism, racism, the state, human rights and the rights of nature.

5) For democracy to flourish it is essential to promote initiatives outside the political party systems. Indigenous peoples, women's organizations, workers, Afro-descendant communities, LGTB, students and others must be able to participate in national and sub-national elections independently of political parties. The monopoly of political parties from the right or the left must be replaced by a diversity of forms of democratic participation of the different social actors.

6) We must revolutionize representative democracy also in its anthropocentric character, incorporating the election of delegates who represent nature, defend the rights of Mother Earth and the balance of the Earth system. We need to put into operation, justice mechanisms for the Earth and instruments such as the Ombudsman of Nature.

7) Systemic crises are unleashing constituent processes in several countries that should serve to raise multidimensional structural proposals and empower traditional and new social movements. It is important to promote constituent processes that go beyond normative discussions and that contribute to build in practice forms of self-managing power.

8) The alternative to capitalist chaos is not capitalist or supposedly socialist statism, but rather the empowerment and expansion of the commons for a participatory democratic management that encourages care policies. The nationalization by the State of key sectors of the economy must be accompanied by deep processes of transparency, social control and transfer of certain sectors so that they are self-managed by society. The nationalization and universalization of public health, water, energy, education and digital communication services are essential for survival in times of chaos. The expansion of food sovereignty, dismantling the power of agribusiness, is key to guaranteeing the right to food.

9) The transition towards post-extractivist, post-productivist and post-capitalist economies is not a task for the future but rather a present emergency policy that requires encouraging simple, moderate and respectful ways of life with the other and with nature. The systemic crises will blow up financial bubbles and speculative markets. The need for a non-speculative economy and the nationalization of the financial system will be increasingly essential.

10) Redistributive processes must be structural and never used for electoral purposes or political co-optation. The expropriation of landowners and the distribution of land-territory to indigenous

peoples and the landless, preserving the vital cycles of nature, are fundamental for systemic transitions.

11) The dismantling of patriarchal structures that promote a hierarchy of values and practices that devalue and exploit women, peoples and nature requires not only normative processes and equal rights, but also the elimination of privileges and the concentration of power in both public and private spheres.

12) The eradication of systemic capitalist racism against human beings and beings of nature requires: a) subverting the logic of capital and the State that is at the service of capital, b) breaking with the culture of fear of the other, c) recognizing and dismantling one's privileges, and d) establishing reparation policies for the victims of systemic racism.

13) It is urgent to promote systemic alternatives that recover and coexist with the life cycles of the Earth system and fight against false solutions such as geoengineering, market mechanisms and the financialization of nature that are already being promoted by capitalism to supposedly face the ecological collapse.

14) In response to the false dilemma of trade liberalization agreements or abusive practices of national capitalisms, we must promote asymmetric complementarity processes that recognize the disparity between countries, establish limits to commercial exchanges that destroy nature and social organizations, forgive the external debt, alleviate poverty and unemployment, and contribute to the regeneration of the Earth's ecosystems.

15) You cannot resort to any measure to confront the reactionary right and imperialism. The means must be in accordance with the end. Violations of democracy and inconsistencies with progressive discourses favor authoritarianism of the right and the left. It is essential to guarantee the human rights of all, including those of our adversaries. It is not about eliminating the other, but about seeking transformative complementarities in order to isolate fundamentalist extremisms.

16) There are declining imperialisms and emerging imperialisms. It is a mistake to surrender to some to defend oneself against others, creating new relations of dependency and colonialism. It is necessary to overcome national borders to face the preservation of eco-regions such as the Amazon and transform the current multilateralism by suppressing the veto power of five countries, giving participation to the peoples and nature. It is key to promote new processes of integration and internationalism, building supranational management and compliance mechanisms to stop ecological collapse.

17) Wars and violence will emerge at every moment and will become a privileged mechanism for capital accumulation in times of chaos. The bunkers of elites and digital surveillance systems will multiply. Forms of apartheid will re-emerge. The dismantling of the military complex is an



urgent necessity for the survival of life. The demand for peace will become increasingly revolutionary.

18) To advance in systemic transitions, it is essential to change the correlation of forces through partial victories that galvanize processes of change at the national and international level. The social conflicts that can generate multiple shock waves are those where different social actors converge raising structural demands. That was the experience of the water war in Bolivia in 2000 and it may be again on a global scale in this decade due to the commodification and privatization of water, droughts and natural disasters caused by climate change.

19) To deal with the growing uncertainty and chaos it is necessary to learn from the Andean indigenous communities who planted in different ecological floors to cope with the instability of the climate. This implies constructing our struggles, alternatives, and articulations in various spaces, dimensions, and scenarios to deal with the sudden changes in this time of absence of lasting normalcy.

20) Ethics is at the heart of all systemic transition processes.

# To confront the state, we need to change ourselves

Thenjiwe McHarris<sup>8</sup>

In the United States, over 300 000 people have died from COVID. While there is no precise data on race and class, it is widely known that African Americans and poor people in general have disproportionately hit. In addition, the pandemic has had very negative effects on popular classes, Millions have joined the number of poor people estimated at 150 million<sup>9</sup>. Many people are at risk of eviction from their rentals. Food distribution is overwhelmed. In the meantime, 650 new billionaires have joined the select club of the 1%. For many Americans now, the link between COVID and capitalism is pretty evident.

However, media have been focusing on the US election and especially on the madness of the Trump presidency. It is many ways a diversion, although the Trump issue is real. But the fundamentals of the present crisis are not mainly related to Trumpism. The rise of the right and the different forms of authoritarianism are related to deeper causes. Before Trump, state-led violence was on the rise. Militarized forms of policing have resulted in more killings, especially in the African American community, with Indigenous peoples and immigrants. In New York city alone, the police budget is over 6,9 billion dollars annually. Rising tensions and acts of violence are growing everywhere. Extreme-right groups are proliferating under the banners of white supremacy, patriarchal violence, anti Semitism. We should not forget, also, that the climate crisis started way before Trump. For years now, there has been a steady rise of uncontrollable wildfires, floods and violent hurricanes.

The other side of that story is the rise of resistance. Following George Floyd's murder, a vast number of people participated in mass demonstrations, from approximately 70 cities in the country. The mood was radical, challenging police violence and economic violence, calling for defunding the police, major changes in security systems. It confronted the mainstream narrative, including by mainstream "liberal" media, as well as the leadership of the Democratic Party (Joe Biden, Barack Obama, etc.). A new consensus was developing within the multitudes participating in the largest civil movement since the 1960s, against neoliberalism which we saw as paving the way for neo-fascism.

What we see coming is a dual movement, arguing, on the one hand, for austerity policies on the political side, and opening, on the other hand, new spaces for right-wing movements, struggling to shift the policy agenda towards white supremacy restructuring and patriarchal domination,

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<sup>8</sup> Co-Founder, Black Bird Team.

<sup>9</sup> In US statistics, poor people earn less than 25 000 dollars for a family unit of four.

while preparing the next big electoral battle of 2024. There is no alternative to struggle. And for that, we need to change ourselves:

- Ensuring grassroots leadership and preventing the hyper-professionalization of our movements.
- Focusing on clear analysis, vision, principles, as well as a long-term strategy (30 years).
- Resisting sectarianism, divisionism.
- Changing the culture so that it stops eating itself, while promoting healthy debates and struggles.

# Highlights of the discussion

## Strengths and opportunities

- Concentrate on issues where everything intersects, for example, WATER. El triunfo electoral del MAS fue posible por las guerras del agua y el gas entre 2000 y 2004. Nos olvidamos de lo más potente del proceso de cambio boliviano y creemos que el cambio empezó con el triunfo electoral.
- Learning how to leave our silos and come together is the key. It requires the different “languages” used by movements involved in climate change, economic justice, white supremacy, migrants, not expecting that everybody can be an expert on everything.
- Today, there are many big mobilizations, but organizations and parties are small. Some reasons explaining this apparent paradox: activists today benefit from a higher level of education. There is less of a need for professional organisers. Activists discuss directly using the digital tools. When movements are approaching power, this spontaneous “digital” elaboration is not sufficient. How to recreate organizations that can help convergence and strategy remains a question in this unstable world.
- Tenemos que aprender de las élites económicas para resolver los debates. Ellas están capaz de aceptar que haya un partido defendiendo sus intereses en el Estado, sin que esto quiera decir que tienen que subordinar su agenda a la reproducción del partido en el poder.
- La Asamblea Mundial por la Amazonía, que fue capaz de involucrar a miles de redes y activistas locales y al mismo tiempo para la acción política global.
- The political left does not exist anymore in Italy. Big movements are dislocating. We notice the growing influence of neofascists in popular classes. Rebuilding convergences can emerge around demands for a society of CARE: a society that takes care, protects all life, social reproduction and not production.

## Weaknesses and threats

- The left has failed because it concentrated on the State.
- En Bolivia durante el primer mandato cometimos un grave error que ahora lo estamos reflexionando. Las organizaciones sociales se volcaron a la redacción de textos constitucionales en vez de tomar en sus manos la autogestión territorial. Pecamos de un

exceso de legalismo en vez de ejercitar el poder desde abajo y descuidamos el control de quienes habíamos entrado circunstancialmente al gobierno.

- Lo que hizo Morales en su primer mandato permite hacer un salto cualitativo a las demandas de los movimientos sociales (constitución y nacionalización). Entonces, no es el político o los partidos políticos que hacen problemas, sino la manera con la cual se usa del político y de los partidos políticos (en particular después del primer mandato). El problema que tenemos en la izquierda es un problema de crisis del político y de la representación política.
- En el caso venezolano, más allá del exceso de legalismo, el efecto negativo estaba en la polarización política porque anuló cualquier tipo de crítica y debate, favoreciendo la profundización del autoritarismo.
- En Venezuela, el tema de la cultura rentística que se fortaleció como un mecanismo de control social aprovechando. El último boom petrolero que vivimos, lo cual ante una ausencia de crítica y de poco control del Estado-partido, se fortaleció la corrupción a todo nivel. Aquí se tuvo la aberración por parte del presidente Chávez de hablar como un símbolo positivo del "socialismo petrolero".
- In the United States, contradictions exist within the ruling classes on several tactical issues. There is a consensus between the right and the far right on protecting capitalism and capitalists. Even Trump's critics benefited from tax cuts and privately celebrated what Trump achieved in advancing the pro capitalist agenda.
- Our biggest challenge is to oppose hyper individualism. The system has to a certain extent undermine the spirit of the collective. Identity politics, hyper individualism and institution-building hampered our efforts. Individualism feeds institutional and organization building, instead of building the collective. Failures happen when movements do not have an intersectional internationalist perspective. We are not successful if we stay within small groups. We need to establish equitable relations on how we manage resources, and build relations with each other, leaving out the power game. power hungry.
- We need to transcend weak ideological alignments. We tend to go for the "quick road", politicking struggles over issues. We need an efficient infrastructure to train individuals and major investments required in political development so as to build up global articulations and gather millions.