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FROM SOCIAL TO POLITICAL POWER: COLLECTIVE SELF-EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

This paper is about the urban poor of Latin America. But to label people poor is the wrong way to frame the question. They are not so much poor as disempowered citizens of their own countries. The term citizen here has a double meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the rights and duties of membership in a political community. Among the most important of these rights is voting; of the duties, paying taxes. On the other hand, citizenship can also be claimed in an economic community where rights to a decent livelihood are staked out. This second meaning of economic citizenship is not universally acknowledged. Like the vote, it is a right that has to be fought for.

The disempowered citizens of Latin America are the majority of the people. I recently visited five of the large cities in South America. Bogota, Lima, Santiago, Buenos Aires, and Sao Paulo. In the metropolitan areas of these cities, four of them national capitals live approximately 40 million people. More than half of them belong to what in Spanish is called the *sector popular*. There is no precise equivalent of this term in English. Working class covers some but not all of the sector popular where unemployment, of irregular employment, is rampant. What unites them is their physical segregation in massive suburbs of poor people's housing far from work and out of sight of the middle and upper classes, and their incorporation into the economy at the very bottom of the scale.

Perhaps a third of the 20 million plus who belong to the popular sector live in absolute poverty: hunger is their steady companion. Of the first job-seekers, young men and women between the ages of 16 and 25, perhaps 40 percent are without regular incomes. Families of 5 or 6 members get by on \$ 100 to \$ 150 a month. And their numbers are rapidly increasing. Precise figures are not available, but it is almost certain that if total urban population is growing at an average of 3 percent, the popular classes are increasing at 5 percent. That means a doubling of population in fourteen years. By the end of the century, the „urban poor“ in the five cities I visited will have grown to forty million, equivalent to the *total* population of these cities now.

There are several reasons for this difference in growth rates. Young people continue to migrate to cities from a countryside where they can no longer scrape a livelihood together – a countryside from which in many cases they are expelled by agribusiness and large-scale commercial farming. And, being younger on average than the remaining population, they also have a higher rate of natural increase. Young people in the popular sector tend to marry ten years younger than middle class couples and consequently have more babies. A third reason for the extraordinary high doubling rate is downward mobility. What we are wit-

nessing in Latin America is a process of gradual impoverishment. Industrial restructuring, as in Chile, leads to massive and permanent layoffs of formal-sector workers. The purchasing power of wages is decreasing, a result of hyperinflation, even as the wage itself is declining because of official income policies and the weakening power of labor unions. In many countries, real wages have slipped back to what they were twenty years ago. Income distribution in Latin America, not to speak of the distribution of wealth, has of course always been uneven. But in the last two decades, such limited evidence as we have suggests that the spread between rich and poor has become even greater. The top ten percent of households receive between 40 and 60 percent of all income. At the bottom, where the majority live, income shares have shrunk to 5 percent for the 40 percent of the poorest households.

None of these figures is very precise, and there are important differences in the incidence of poverty among countries and even among cities. But the contours of the social disaster which is Latin America today are there for all to see. What is less clear is how this disaster might be mitigated. Only this much is certain: you cannot escape the pressing needs of day-by-day survival if you are unlucky enough to be among the „urban poor“.

What I should like to do in the next few pages is to introduce a few concepts that I believe may be helpful in understanding people's struggle for survival. Being clear about concepts is important in two ways. First, because private organizations trying to help the poor secure a livelihood in the city need to have a better theoretical grasp of what is happening, so that their praxis (which is action grounded in knowledge) may be improved. And second, because we need a language that allows us to talk about new social policies by national governments whose energies are now almost entirely absorbed by the difficult problems of debt-restructuring, but which need to face the social realities that are accumulating in large cities.

Political and economic citizenship are linked, and the future of democracy in Latin America depends in part on whether economic rights can be secured for the majority. But even the violent abolition of political citizenship, an ever-present threat in Latin America, would not be an effective answer to the massive impoverishment to which we are witness. I shall argue instead that it is precisely the active participation of disempowered people in the processes of their own empowerment, which is an exercise of their fundamental political rights, which is the surest way, for them as well as for us, to recover a sense of hope in the future.

The Household Economy and Strategies for Survival

As North Americans, we are used to thinking of the individual as the smallest social atom. We are concerned, for example, with individual human rights, and with happiness, which is a state of the soul. But when we are talking about survival and livelihood, especially in a Latin American cultural context, then we must take the household as the smallest unit of analysis. Households, of course, are composed of individuals who share a roof and eat, so to speak, out of the same

pot, but their separate livelihoods are intertwined to such an extent that one can treat each household as a separate decision-making unit. Not all households are families in the traditional sense; what is important is the extent of personal interaction in what we may call the production of life.

As with all social units, there is a certain arbitrariness about where we place its limits. Extended families may be to a certain extent interdependent even when they are composed of several households. And the internal governance of households — their mode of arriving at decisions about the use of resources, for example — will vary. Typically, Latin American households have a male head, though the number of female-headed households is large and perhaps growing. One can also think of them as constituting the smallest political community. Like all political communities, households are characterized by relations of power which are heavily influenced, in turn, by the access of adult household members to the outside world, such as having a job or running a small business. The job or business can be turned into a power base in the struggle for household domination. This becomes especially apparent when women, whose usual occupation is at home, begin to enter the labor market, earning a little money of their own. Financial independence is not usually appreciated by their menfolk, though increasingly it is the only way that households can meet critical needs. Broken homes are often the result.

The household economy participates in five spheres of potential action. The relative weight attached to these in the way household resources are allocated among them will vary a good deal. The allocation of the time and skills of each household member among the five spheres with a view to survival is what we call survival strategy. The term strategy is perhaps a misnomer, conjuring up, as it does, the imagery of a command economy. Nothing so grand is intended. But households do make decisions about whether to send their children to school, whether to enter the labor market, or whether to participate in a self-help community effort. Every such decision produces a different pattern of resource allocation and a different set of outcomes.

What are these spheres of action or participation? The first and most important is obviously that of the household itself. A minimal life space must be secured for household survival. It is here that household members eat, drink, sleep, and procreate; that they prepare food, nurture the young, tend to the sick; that the dramas of their daily lives are enacted. All of this work takes place outside the market sphere and is therefore not remunerated. Most of it is women's work, though older children also contribute, as to some extent do men.

The second sphere is that of civil society. This is the sphere of social relations, of friendships and reciprocities, or church membership and participation in the activities of social clubs such as Centros de Madres (Women's Centers), soccer clubs, and Neighborhood Assemblies (Juntas de Vecinos). It, too, constitutes a relatively autonomous space where the capacity for action is not fully controlled by either the state or the corporate economy. Under conditions of prolonged economic crisis, it is the sphere which must substitute in part for the loss of market power (wages and other income). At the present time, it is undergoing

rapid expansion in terms of the quantity of household resources invested in it.

The third sphere is that of the state. It is not so much a sphere of potential action as of participation. Two modes of participation make claims on household resources: education for the young and military service. Not all countries, of course, have compulsory military service, and education is obligatory only to a certain age. Still, the sphere of the state is important to the household economy. The young going to school are not available for work in either the household or the market and may make additional economic demands on households for uniforms, books, fees, etc. On the other side of the ledger, some household resources may be saved through school lunch programs, and there is the long-term contribution which education makes to household income, just as military service may lead to the acquisition of skills that may later be translated into civilian income.

The fourth sphere is that of the market which, in our case, means specifically the labor market. This is the principal source of monetary income, and it is the only one of the five spheres for which accounts tend to be kept on a regular basis. An important exception to this is the so-called informal or unenumerated sector which, though part of the market economy, functions outside the usual accounting systems even as it plays an increasingly critical role in Latin America. Labor markets are controlled by employers and are partially structured by legislation. But relatively unskilled and inexperienced workers from the popular sector, the young especially, find access to labor markets difficult. The same is true of skilled industrial labor that has been displaced from their jobs in the formal sector. These are the least protected groups by legislation such as the minimum wage, and are therefore also the most exploited. Under conditions of hyperinflation, wage adjustments inevitably lag behind the cost of living, taking their bitter cut out of people's already meager livelihood.

The fifth and final sphere of potential action is the political community. As the political face of civil society, it is the sphere in which civil society attempts to convert social into political power. The central institutions of the political community are political parties independent of the state. Social movements whose objectives are ultimately political, such as the human rights movement in Argentina, also occupy the space of political community. Under military dictatorships, political communities are not allowed to function, or are severely restrained. The ensuing struggle for democracy is thus essentially a struggle for the reconstitution of a free political space in which social power can be transformed into political power.

Popular sector households are severely limited in the kinds of choices they can make among these spheres. The domestic sphere, for one, is inescapable, since it ensures the social reproduction of the household. It consumes an enormous amount of time: eighty to ninety hours of women's work a week is not unusual. The state also makes compulsory claims on household resources. An iron minimum of cash is needed to buy essential food and water, transportation, and clothing. So the necessary time must be saved from other activities to ensure that

minimum cash flow into the domestic economy. But the needs of most households are likely to exceed this minimum, and so community associations are flourishing, as people cooperate with each other to start allotment gardens, soup kitchens, collective food purchasing arrangements, sewing circles, day nurseries, and the like.

Organized civil society is not always viewed benignly by the state which may regard civil empowerment as a potential threat to its own power. During the period of military dictatorship in Brazil and Argentina, as is still the case in Chile today, the majority of acts of physical repression were carried out against the leadership of popular neighborhood communities. At the same time, the state is attempting to wean people from community action through direct subsidies of some household expenditures, such as food, in return for traditional clientilistic relations.

There are still other reasons why people may not want to take part in community action. Time is always in short supply, and there may be better ways for the household to use its scarce resources. Male heads of household may put pressure on their women to stay at home rather than venture forth into the community where they would find support groups among women neighbors: a case where household patriarchal rule feels threatened. There is also the very real physical danger of going out at night. Poor people's neighborhoods have become unsafe places especially for women. Drug abuse, youth gangs, muggings and rapes are part of everyday reality in communities where a third or more of the population may be without regular employment. It is the dark underside of the household economy which prays on its own as victims.

When all of these restrictions are accounted for, however, there remains the fact that organized civil society has become a vital force in securing household survival. As many as ten or fifteen percent of households may at any one time participate in community organizations, finding strength in numbers and a new social identity in the intimate circle of self-help groups.

Poverty as Lack of Access to the Bases of Social Power

If we want to understand what happens in popular sector neighborhoods, we have to revise our notions of poverty. Being poor is usually defined by those who are not poor, such as bureaucrats or social workers, in terms of low income; in the extreme case of "absolute" poverty, a more physical measure may be used, such as caloric intake. Those who fall below an imaginary "poverty line" are defined as poor. It would be more accurate, however, to speak of poverty as a condition of relative powerlessness. Power, in this case, means social power (in contrast to political and economic power); more precisely, it refers to household access to the *bases* of social power. One of these is financial resources, including income as well as credit and financial subsidies. But money is only one of the bases. There are at least seven others.

First, there is *time* over and above that required to ensure minimal subsistence; in other words, free, unstructured time. Without time at their disposal, households

are unable to improve their situation. Making time available can thus be an important step in helping households achieve their goals. Examples are reductions in the time required for the journey to work (which may take up to three to four hours each day), reducing the time required for gaining access to key social services, such as health, or freeing women's time through the installation of creches and communal kitchens.

Another critical base of social power is the necessary *space to carry out life-support activities*. The most obviously necessary space is a secure space for the household economy itself: a bit of land, basic utilities, a shelter, access to transportation. People who are forced to live on sidewalks or under bridges are disempowered; they are poor in the most basic sense. They are citizens without any rights; they are disenfranchised citizens. The most elementary requirement for economic (and indeed political) citizenship is to have a permanent address, a defensible space. But the requirements for adequate space go beyond this. Any productive activity requires a certain amount of secure space, whether it is a small repair shop or even an ambulatory trade. Street rights may have to be bought from willing police or through the more formal channel of business licensing. A bit of space must be rented to run a TV repair service. Educational services require a school, health services a clinic. The right to a life space (as I shall call it) is thus one of the most elementary of human rights. Where this right is denied, there we shall also find the greatest incidence of poverty.

A third basis of social power is *relevant knowledge* (knowing *what* and knowing *how*). The key word here is relevant. A knowledge of Latin may not be very useful to a 16-year-old apprentice auto mechanic. Knowledge of how to take apart and reassemble a carburetor would be relevant. Other knowledge relevant for people living in popular sector neighborhoods would include techniques of family planning, nutritional knowledge, environmental sanitation, baby care, how to conduct neighborhood meetings, and citizenship rights and entitlements.

A correlative basis of social power is *accurate information* which is needed to make most kinds of knowledge effective. Since it is variable, information introduces a time element into knowledge. One of the most important kinds of information concerns conditions in one's own community: who are your neighbors; how many of them there are; what parts of the community are served by electricity and which are not; what skills are available; what are the environmental conditions in different sectors; and so forth. It is the kind of information that can become available through self-study. But information originating in the outside world is also important. It is here that community newspapers can play a vital role.

A fifth basis of social power is *social organization*. Those who are isolated from others lack an important dimension of power. Once mentioned, this is pretty obvious, but unless they are controlled by the state (or by the dominant political party), community organizations are often perceived as a threat. And yet, *without* organization very little can be accomplished. The struggle for space is typically a collective struggle (squatter invasions), and the effort required to provide essential community infrastructure is a collective effort, requiring organization. In a highly politicized environment, it would be naive to expect that community-based

organizations will remain free of political influence. But political influence does not render them ineffective; on the contrary, it is often the very condition of their effectiveness.

A sixth and correlative basis of social power is household access to *social networks*. Typically, social networks are of three kinds. There are the networks which are formed by kin and fictive kin (like the Latin American institution of *compadrazgo*). There are clientilistic networks usually involving some intermediary person who has useful „connections“ in the world of work and politics. And finally, there are networks that grow out of associations with community-based organizations and which may lead to international funding agencies, the Catholic Church, political parties, and so on. The importance of networks in securing a livelihood may help explain the persistence of familistic relationships in contemporary Latin America. But this much is clear; those who are disempowered need the „protection“ of the strong. Clientilism in Latin America is thus alive and well despite its traditionalistic taint. What is new is self-organization, usually involving an outside catalyst, such as a Church-based group, and finding within these organizations new ties beyond traditional kinship and client networks through which household objectives may be materially advanced.

Finally, there is the social power which derives from having access to the *instruments and tools of production*. Here I mean to include access to good health, for I consider the body of a person the most important „instrument of production“. If a healthy body is empowering, then, among disenfranchised citizens, it is also the rarest of powers. Infant mortality is high, and so are serious nutritional deficiencies. Intestinal and pulmonary disease are prevalent. Drug and alcohol abuse are rampant. Work place accidents are far higher than in advanced industrial societies. Access to good health among the urban popular sectors is thus in jeopardy and this is one of the reasons why they are poor. In addition, having access to the tools of production means having a job or the capital to start a small business of your own, say a fruit stand in the market or, more ambitiously, a delivery van. That is why the correlative base of power here is access to financial resources, especially credit.

This attempted redefinition of the meaning of poverty in terms of access to the bases of social power has far-reaching implications. The poor no longer appear as „consumers“ (low-income persons) but as producers of their livelihood. The new definition shifts the emphasis from the individual to the household as the relevant economic unit. And it considers a wide range of „powers“ which can be variously used by households in the achievement of their own objectives.

The reason I refer to them as bases of *social* power is that all of them, to be secured, require a socially organized effort. There is very little that the disenfranchised household can do to improve its situation with respect to these bases, unless it joins with other households in organization and struggle. It is for this reason that we can speak of the process as one of *collective* self-empowerment. But this way of speaking, although correct in one sense, is misleading in another. It seems to suggest that the poor can escape poverty simply by joining in community-based efforts. This is an over simplification. Cooperation and organization are

necessary but not sufficient conditions. What is needed as well is a state whose social policies facilitate, complement, and support community efforts at self-empowerment. Only the state can legalize access to urban land. Only the state has the resources to provide the thousands of tons of construction materials necessary to build shelter for the millions who will have to be housed. Only the state has the ability to deliver health services to the organized community.

I emphasized the role of the state, because in recent years there has been a tendency to downplay its role in favor of non-governmental organizations, or NGOs. These organizations have blazed a trail into the relatively unknown territory of community self-organization, and we have learned important lessons about what it means to mobilize effective participation in community self-help efforts. But the growing scale of urban poverty in Latin America far exceeds the ability of even all the NGOs in the world. It requires a new kind of social policy which sees the organized community as a „partner“ in gaining access to the bases of social power.

The groundrules for the „partnership“ remain to be worked out. They will involve the allocation of new resources, the definition of new roles for provincial and municipal governments (the local state), the democratization of the local state, the representative organization of the local community, and the opening up of a new political terrain at regional and local levels. This is a large agenda that will take many years to accomplish. But without it, the problem of urban poverty remains without solution.

A major focus of the new strategy is what I call the neighborhood or *barrio* economy. It is to a discussion of this „economy“ that I now turn.

The Barrio Economy

The intimate environment or life space of popular sector households is the neighborhood of *barrio*. Middle and upper middle class households are less dependent on their immediate surroundings. They live in houses (or apartments) that are completely serviced and they can buy whatever services they need. For transportation they enjoy the mobility of the private automobile which, in less than an hour, takes them anywhere in the city. Their networks are established at the university, at work, in social clubs to which already their parents belonged. Their life space, then, which is the space they need for the achievement of their goals, is the city entire, perhaps even the country as a whole. Middle class people start life with a lot of access to the bases of social power.

Poor people are more restricted in their movements. What they want to do will often depend on the willingness of neighbors to do favors for them, or on their willingness to work cooperatively together. Poor people live in bare shelters, they cannot afford to buy the services they need, they are dependent on public transportation, their social clubs are not designed to give them a head start in life. And so, popular sector barrios, the neighborhood areas which we may arbitrarily define as lying within 30 minutes on foot from any domicile location, may be

considered as an extension of the household economy, as that area which is essential to the production of life (and its social reproduction from one time period to the next).

We can perhaps better understand its economic role, if we consider that households are likely to regard the *barrio* economy as a vital resource. On closer examination, of course, it may not be the *barrio* as a whole which serves as a resource but only certain networks defined by reciprocity relations and built on mutual trust, or community-based organizations serving some specific purpose, such as negotiating with the municipality, the cooperative production of some necessities, or the joint purchasing of bulk food items at reduced prices. Some of these organizations, called popular economic organizations (PEO) in Chile, also promote convivial activities: fiestas, picnics, anniversaries, sporting events. In the *barrio*, the convivial and the functional tend to merge, reinforcing each other as they bring people out of impotent isolation into a group of friends and neighbors — *los vecinos* — where their joys and sorrows can be shared. The breaking down of isolation barriers is a particularly important achievement for women, traditionally confined to the domestic sphere. Women have assumed leading roles in the organization of PEOs, thus providing further evidence that household and *barrio* economy are closely linked. Like household work, work in neighborhoods goes largely unremunerated. But even though they may be difficult to quantify, returns on community „volunteer work“ are likely to be very substantial.

Because the *barrio* economy constitutes a major life space for its population, we are justified in referring to it also as a political community. By this I mean that its inhabitants will tend to think of their *barrio* as a relatively autonomous space over which they can exercise something like a „sovereign“ right. It is this self-perception that lends legitimacy to claims for social participation in decisions affecting community. *Barrio* inhabitants will refer to themselves as a collectivity, a „we“, and spokespersons may be elected to defend the community's interests vis-a-vis the state. Their claim to sovereignty, of course, is a relative one: full sovereignty is rather a set of national rights and obligations. The desire for limited autonomy at the *barrio* level is nonetheless real and related to the territorial rights people claim over the domestic space of households, rights that in many countries are secured in constitutional law. In the future, *barrio* citizenship may also require legal definition, especially if it is to play the increasingly important role assigned to it in the formulation and implementation of social policies.

If we are prepared to consider the *barrio* as a political community, it ought not to surprise us that more than one community-based organization should compete for citizens' attention. Reflecting linkages to the outside world, such as the Catholic Church, evangelical churches, political parties contending for votes, and even the state, this competition for citizen allegiance is not necessarily a bad thing, though it will tend to divide a community that needs to discover its strength in solidarity relations. The liveliness of competition is a sign that the *barrio* economy (and its correlative political community) exists as a vital dimension of national life. From a localist and pragmatic perspective, the question posed by *vecinos* is simple enough: which of several outside agents can effectively deliver

the most resources for *barrio* development? And which of them will do the most for the progressive self-empowerment of individual households? In a national perspective, on the other hand, ideological questions tend to predominate.

Barrio self-organization will sometimes extend beyond the *barrio* itself into federations of community-based organizations at the municipal (or regional) level. But such organizations may become top-heavy with their own bureaucracy, they may fall prey to factionalism, and may pursue objectives that are not necessarily in the immediate interest of *barrio* populations. A *favelado* organization in Rio de Janeiro, for example, does not appear to be a very effective advocate of *favela* interests, and a similar organization in Mexico City is riven by factional disputes. A more positive story comes from Lima, Peru, where a mass organization of neighborhood women, the *Comites Vaso de Leche*, have been successful on a metropolitan scale in directing resources from the state toward their own communities.

Whatever the experience to date, one thing remains certain: Popular sector *barrios* cannot remain encapsulated in the localism of their own communities for long, without becoming entrapped in their own powerlessness. We have already argued the case for „bringing the state back in“. Just as organized labor has to struggle for a national voice to defend its interests, so the organized *barrio* must strive for influence at the national level. To remove the stringent limits on access to social power, such social power as *barrio* populations already have must ultimately be translated into political power.

From Social to Political Power

Experience of *barrio* populations in their encounters with the state has been largely one of antagonistic struggle. In the lead is the perpetual struggle over land, as migrants from small-town and rural areas seek to gain a foothold in the city. Squatter movements, land invasions, and confrontations with police and politicians are part of almost everyone's history, the lore on which poor people are raised and which is etched deeply in their memory. Some have a more bitter story to tell, recalling how entire communities were eradicated by bulldozers, and how families were uprooted and displaced towards the distant periphery of the city among strangers. And although they would not speak of it in these terms, the language being unfamiliar, most have been systematically denied their economic and political rights as citizens. Anti-inflation and pro-accumulation policies have shifted economic costs to the waged sector of the population, whose real incomes declined, and many of whose jobs were lost as industries, unable to compete against cheaper imports, had to close down. Police harassment, early morning police sweeps into the *barrios*, and the arrest (and occasional torture) of community leaders are part of the unwritten history of poverty. There is, thus, every reason to resent the state. Occasional counterevidence only confirms the general trend. During the 1960s, under General Velasco in Peru, an attempt was made to shift toward a more benign posture, and squatter areas were renamed *pueblos*

jovenes, young settlements. It is perhaps a sign of the times that they are now called *campamentos*, encampments, a term at once more military and defiant.

And yet, without appropriate action by the state, the massive impoverishment of the popular sectors will only get worse. By common consent among Latin American intellectuals, the economic crisis which, with slight variations, has held the countries of the region in an iron grip for over a decade, shows no sign of slackening. It is a structural crisis marked by hyper-inflation, high levels of international indebtedness, capital flight, and slow, even negative, growth. There are few prospects of productively absorbing additions to the rapidly growing urban labor force. Modernization in the countryside, encouraged by countries' need to export, drives small peasants from the land and into the cities where they remain unemployed, earning irregular incomes that are insufficient to sustain life. Given this context, and the state's needs for legitimacy, something other than continued antagonistic struggle is needed to halt and, if possible, reverse the further deterioration of conditions.

What poor people need above everything is improved access to the bases of social power at a scale commensurate with the scale of urbanization. Community action is vital to the success of an approach that respects people's own priorities and enlists their resources in the implementation of new programs. The desire for active participation in all facets of program development, from initial conception to enjoyment of the benefits from collective efforts, is genuine and deep. The question therefore is not whether the state will solve the problem of disenfranchisement and massive poverty: it cannot. The question is rather whether the state is prepared to support the processes of collective self-empowerment we have discussed.

It is true that states don't usually act on their own initiative; they have to be pressured, pushed, and cajoled into new policies and forms of practice. Converting social into political power, therefore, will require concerted citizen action. It will require political mobilization. Three examples may be cited. In Colombia within the last two decades there have been nearly 200 *paros cívicos* (civic strikes) protesting various injustices. As with labor strikes, these *paros* have been quite focused on specific issues, such as electricity, water, urban services and prices. How successful they have been is debatable, but they have demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for massive, multi-class action rooted in civil society. In Peru, the United Left (Izquierda Unida) has been successful in mobilizing *barrio* populations for a number of campaigns of which the *Vaso de Leche*, already alluded to, was perhaps the most spectacular. And in Brazil, the so-called ecclesiastical base communities were instrumental in the formation of the Brazilian Labor Party (PT) which in recent elections in Sao Paulo polled nearly a fifth of the votes.

Other instances of this latent capacity for political mobilization could be cited. Whether institutionalized or not, these mobilizations have potential for influencing government policies.

The critical point of encounter between civil society and the state is the municipality, which is the lowest unit of general-purpose government and local administration. Until quite recently, and despite energetic efforts to reform

municipal government in countries such as Venezuela and Brazil, municipal authorities were appointed rather than elected, thus ensuring complete state control over local affairs. Most municipalities had barely enough financing to cover the salaries of the local bureaucracy. Its functions were few: city beautification, traffic lights, supervision of the municipal slaughterhouse. Mayors spent a good part of their time sitting in the antechambers of national ministers, in the hope of extracting some resources for public works in their communities. But all this is changing now. By the time this essay is published, the first municipal elections ever will have been held in Colombia. And even the Chilean government is channeling additional resources to municipal administrations (there are no local elections), and municipal powers have been expanded. In the state of Sao Paulo, over a thousand programs conceived and carried out by local government and involving intense participation of barrio populations have been recorded. In Bogota, the first cautious steps have been taken in the direction of „popular planning“ or what, in Anglo-Saxon countries, we would call counter-planning. All these examples suggest that a new political ballgame is being mounted. The national state is too preoccupied with managing the debt situation, battling inflation, and promoting a few superinvestments with international agencies to attend closely to the details of daily life in the thousands of *barrios* throughout the country. I believe that this is the main reason for renewed interest in local government. Local government must now reach out to *barrio* populations in a partnership beyond the old antagonisms.

Here are some of the things that may need doing:

- * facilitate permanent access to land and the progressive incorporation of new settlements into the fabric of urban public services at prices that people can afford
- * create a legal framework for community-based organizations
- * encourage self-reliance and self-provisioning in the poorest areas, including such innovative approaches as communal gardening
- * promote the production of wage goods through labor-intensive methods and their distribution through cooperative channels
- * organize urban extension services, especially focussed on women, channelling useful knowledge and information on nutrition, health practices, etc.
- * assist in the organization of nurseries and kindergartens designed to relieve women's work and free them, if they desire, to take on income-generating work.

This list is no more than a suggestion of the sorts of things that may be worth doing in *barrios populares*. But non-antagonistic relationships between *barrio* community and local state, which this agenda implies, requires a still more fundamental reform: the devising of a charter of political and economic citizenship rights at all political levels, from household and *barrio* at one end to region and nation at the other. A citizen charter would recognize claims for the relative autonomy and inviolability of life spaces; for participatory decision-making; and for certain basic rights of access to the bases of social power. Like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it would establish an historical benchmark for legitimate social struggle. It would define a consensus on goals and an agenda for action.

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ATOMTOD ODER HUNGERTOD – WOVOR DAS ÜBERLEBEN SICHERN?*)

Strittige Fragen von Friedensbewegung in Afrika

Das Dekret für den Frieden aus den ersten Stunden der siegreichen Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution markierte nicht nur seinem Inhalt nach den Beginn einer neuartigen, eben sozialistischen Friedenspolitik als oberste Staatsdoktrin für die Gestaltung der internationalen Beziehungen, sondern auch darin, an wen es direkt gerichtet wurde („allen kriegführenden Völkern und ihren Regierungen“), womit nicht nur Regierungen, sondern Völker selbst als *Subjekte des Handelns in der Weltarena* anerkannt waren.

Die wechselvolle Geschichte hat seitdem gezeigt, daß das unmittelbar aktive, kontinuierlich wirkende und politisch bewußte Handeln von Massen bei der Entscheidung über die Frage aller Fragen in unserer Zeit ein erhebliches Gewicht besitzt. Das ist bei aller Unterschiedlichkeit in den Formen, in denen sich ein solches Engagement in erster Linie verwirklicht, offenkundig geworden, wenngleich es sicher schwerlich möglich ist, die jeweils tatsächliche Kraft jenes Druckes auf die Entscheidungen von regierenden Kreisen im kapitalistischen Teil Europas oder Nordamerikas auszumachen, der eben vom *organisierten Friedenskampf als Massenbewegung* auszugehen vermag.

Ein Blick in die moderne Geschichte Afrikas eröffnet uns eine durchaus nennenswerte Tradition einer Verbindung des Strebens der Völker nach der Verwirklichung des Rechts auf nationale Selbstbestimmung mit dem Eintreten für die Sicherung des Weltfriedens, vor allem gegen atomare Rüstung, durch ihre organisierte nationale Befreiungsbewegung, und dies sowohl in der Mobilisierung von Massen bzw. ihrer Aufklärung über die damit verbundenen Gefahren in den einzelnen afrikanischen Kolonialgebieten selbst als auch mit der Repräsentanz einer Reihe hervorragender Persönlichkeiten des antikolonialen Kampfes aus Afrika in Gremien der organisierten Weltfriedensbewegung (1).

I.

Wenn heute von Friedensbewegung in Afrika die Rede ist, gibt es eine übereinstimmende Meinung von progressiven Staatsmännern, Politikern, Vertretern von demokratischen Organisationen, Wissenschaftlern und anderen Kreisen darüber, daß diese „relativ schwach“ ist und in keiner Weise imstande ist, das gegen den

*) Ein Beitrag zur Konferenz-Diskussion zum Thema: Die Entwicklungsländer – Probleme des Friedens und der Sicherheit auf der 9. Plenartagung der MPK, Dushanbe, November 1987.