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THE CHILEAN COMMUNIST PARTY (P.C.CH.)
AND THE ORIGINS OF ITS POLITICAL
PROJECT.-

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The Chilean Communist Party (P.C.Ch.) and the origins of its political project (1951-1956).

The crisis of the Chilean left stems from the defeat of September 1973 and from the difficulty to reach an agreement on a project that could replace the military dictatorship, particularly the kind of political project, alliances, means by which the labour movement could be again the social force that is to rebuild the country. The defeat of 1973 is the defeat of a political project that has been implemented particularly by the Communist Party; a project that had as its main issues: the "peaceful road" to Socialism, a broad alliance between labour movement and other social and political forces of the Chilean society, the absence of the determination to defend the Popular Unity government by means of military force. Although after seven years of military dictatorship Chile needs more than ever a strong alliance of the left in order to overthrow Pinochet and its camarilla, there is not this perspective. One of the reasons is the dispute around the political project put forward by the Communist Party, more or less the same kind of strategy that it maintained from 1952 on. In this paper we shall attempt to look after the origins of this strategy, without enter in discussing "Our Democratic Project".

1. "The Communist Party declares itself opposed to any policy of exclusion of democratic forces, wherever it may come from. We repeat that anti-fascist unity does not require that anyone

renounce their principles, it simply places common objectives to the fore. It maintains that in the face of fascism, account must be taken not of the past but of the present attitude of parties and men. It defends understanding with all democratic parties and not with sectors thereof. It considers the fundamental objective to be unity at the base, but it also assigns the necessary importance to the dialogue and understanding between leaders, without which it is more difficult to advance"⁽¹⁾. This is the essence of the strategy put forward by the PCCh, the union of all political sectors (and consequently the classes they represent) in order to return to the democratic system, and to organize a new State, not a Socialist one, but a progressist one.

If we are to look at the origins of this conception we have to go back to 1948, when the PCCh ceased its collaboration with the Radical Party, and more general to the failure of the Popular Front and Alianza Democratica strategies.

In 1948 ends the period of class collaboration between the Communist Party and the Radical Party. The PCCh ends its epoch of finding a coherent political strategy that took the Party from the line of "Party of all poor people" (Recabarren) to a Party of unique sectarianism that reduced it to a small sect ("Third period" policy), to a Party with a considerable influence (Popular Front Strategy). With the Law n.8.987 of "Defensa Permanente de la Democracia" the PCCh is forced to go underground and this starts a period that (particularly during the years 1949-1955) will change its forces, its organizational structure and its political project. When the PCCh emerges with legality in 1958, its leadership will have also changed.

For a political party a period of underground is decisive; it could produce the destruction of the party, or it could induce that party to "disappear" for a period, preserve its cadres and its structure. For two reasons this is not the case of the Chilean Communist Party: not always during the period 1948-1958 was the PCCh persecuted. The peak of the repression was during 1948-1950 and late in 1955. We could assert that from 1951 to

(1) Cfr. Luis Corvalán, Our Democratic Project, Taller Ricardo Fonseca, London 1979, p.28.

1954 and from 1956 to 1958 the PCCh was a semi-clandestine Party. In fact it maintained representatives in the Senate in the first period of underground and took active part in the trade-unions movement. It also maintained its ideological review Principios and supported Salvador Allende Gossens in his first Presidential candidature. Secondly, it was during its underground period that the internal debate between the Luis Reinoso group and the rest of the leadership developed the first step of the elaboration of the political line that will contribute to the creation of the Frente de Acción Popular (FRAP) alliance, 1956. Thus in synthesis, when we talk about the underground period of the PCCh it is important to take into account that this period is not comparable with the repression of 1930 or after the coup d'Etat of 1973. What is evident is that in the case of the PCCh (as in the case of banned political parties a a determinate period of authoritarianism) it suffered at the beginning with a confuse reaction to the repression from Gonzalez Videla's government, like the difficulty of communicating within its different structures, the isolation of particularly sectors and regions, the difficulty in elaborating an homogeneous strategy that could save the party from disappearing and the possible different interpretation of the Party's directives. In the case of the PCCh a different interpretation of the Party's directive from a group of important cadres lead to a series of disagreements that produced the expulsion of an important group⁽²⁾. However, at the same time the issues involved in the dispute were to produce a different political project from that existing before 1948. After the expulsion of the L. Reinoso group and the rejection of his militant policy the PCCh is well united and implementing the line of the Programa de Emergencia launched in 1950, the union of all Chileans to free the country from the "imperialistic and oligarchic domination" by means of the realization of the basic reforms that could lead the country towards peace, prosperity, etc. in the Programa de Emergencia there are not substantial differences with the policy that the Party followed

(2) For details of the dispute between L.Reinoso and the Political Commission of the PCCh, cfr. C.Furci, The Role of the Communist Party in the elaboration of the "Chilean Road to Socialism" (1950-1979), Thesis in progress, London School of Economics, University of London, II Chapter.

during the Popular Front strategy. Except they stress that the government of Gonzalez Videla must be replaced because of its antidemocratic policy towards the left, its alignment with the U.S.A. and the consequent military links. Even if it appears that the PCCh continues to implement its line of the 1940s, it seems to me that they are putting forward the same kind of programme but, with a different kind of government, what sort of government? A government where the hegemonic force lies in the labour movement, and this because "the people of Chile saw(...) the treason of a sector of the bourgeoisie and the inconsequences of others. So that the people understood that the working class is the only one of consequences in the struggle against imperialism and oligarchy. Under the direction of its vanguard (the Chilean Communist Party) it is the only one that can and must lead towards victory in its struggle for democratic-bourgeoisie revolution (agrarian and anti-imperialistic) by means of nationalization of industries in the hands of the American monopolies and a consequent agrarian reform"⁽³⁾. The General Secretary of the PCCh at the time, Galo Gonzalez, stresses the fact that the Radical government did not carry out the anti-imperialistic programme and there was thus the need of a different political leadership in the country. This is quite important, as firstly the PCCh realized that the most advanced sector of the Chilean bourgeoisie has not been able to implement the democratic bourgeoisie revolution, and that secondly it stresses that only a movement lead by the working class could realize the democratic-bourgeoisie revolution, as a transition towards socialism. G.Gonzalez stated that the Programa de Emergencia (starting from the supreme necessity to develop a struggle of the various social sectors in favour of peace, national independence, against imperialism and oligarchy) "represent the right political strategy of the working class in order to reduce to a minimum the damage of the reactionay sectors, and to safeguard the immediate interests of the popular masses, and from there, to implement the democratic-bourgeoisie

(3) Cfr. Galo Gonzalez, La lucha por la formación del Partido Comunista de Chile, Ed.Austral, Santiago, 1958, p. 76-77.

revolution and Socialism"⁽⁴⁾. The PCCh believed that if the working class continued to play a secondary role in the alliance with a sector of the bourgeoisie, this kind of programme could not take place. The importance of the Programa de Emergencia consists in the fact that, for the first time, it assigns to the working class the hegemonic role in that kind of political alliance. When Ramirez-Necochea, in dividing the history of the PCCh in four periods asserts that the period starting with the Conference of 1933 goes up to 1965 (when he was writing his book) he makes an historical mistake.⁽⁵⁾ If the method he used in dividing in four periods the political trajectory of the PCCh is in accordance with the major changes in its political line, the period of the Popular Front strategy should end in 1948. In fact, even if in general terms the programme could (more or less) be the same, the political subject who was supposed to carry out that programme is different. By admission of the leaders of the PCCh when analyzing the Popular Front strategy, "the working class and its parties acted in alliance with the bourgeoisie circles, and this produced the victory of 1938 and the creation of Pedro Aguirre Cerda's government. What was wrong with it? there was something. The wrong was that the working class acted in alliance with the bourgeoisie, but we, Communists and Socialists acted separate. The problem was that we had illusion in relation to the bourgeoisie, and we did not achieve to transform the working class into the hegemonic force of that popular movement"⁽⁶⁾. If the question by 1950 was to find a way to carry out the same programme but with a different balance of political force then it seems to me that by 1951 there were important changes in the political strategy of the PCCh which suggest that the period starting in 1948 could not be a linear consequence of the Popular Front strategy. Nor is there any relation of consequence between the Popular Front strategy and the FRAP. Even if in the "Programa de Emergencia" there is not an organic political project, certainly is the starting point of the strategy that the PCCh maintained for the years to come.

(4) Ibid

(5) Cfr. H. Ramirez-Necochea. Origen y formación del Partido Comunista de Chile, Editora Austral, 1965 pp. XII-XV.

(6) Cfr. G. Gonzalez, Informe al X Congreso del Partido Comunista de Chile, in "Principios", n. 141-142, 1971. p.94.

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The IX Conferencia Nacional (August 1952) of the PCCh has an historical importance within the process of formation of its new political strategy. It is in that Conference that the Frente de Liberación Nacional was launched. Although the Programa de Emergencia was already launched in the direction of the new line, the IX Conference has been the moment of systematization of it; particularly because with the formation of the Frente del Pueblo alliance supported by the PCCh, in 1952, the Party felt the need to offer a solid and organic programme. In the IX Conference the PCCh stated that "we could have new victory of the people(...) if we achieve the democratic-bourgeoisie tasks that are mature, and provided that we will unite all the Chileans in only one movement of national liberation, the working class will be in the conditions to implement this movement through the consequent struggle against imperialism and the oligarchy (...), unifying around its programme all the progressive forces, including the advanced sector of the national bourgeoisie, and first at all the peasants"⁽⁷⁾. Further, in stressing the fact that the unity of action with other political forces was to be vital, the PCCh stated that "the unity of action is the road of the democratic-national-liberation-front. With the unity of action we have to consolidate and extend the People's Front (...). Through the unity of action in a second stage it will be possible to organize the big National and Social Liberation Front"⁽⁸⁾. What were the conditions and the national reality that, according to the PCCh, could be favourable for this kind of policy?

- 1- The profundization of the general crisis of the capitalistic system and the disintegration of the world market because of the consequences of the II World War, plus the imperialistic role of the United States.
- 2- The War policy inspired by the United States and the effects of it on Chile because of the pro-U.S.A. policy of Gonzalez Videla.
- 3- The necessity to implement a peaceful policy that

(7) Cfr. PCCh, Informe a la Novena Conferencia (Agosto 1952) por el Secretario del PCCh, Galo Gonzalez.

(8) Cfr. PCCh, Informe al DecimoOctavo ampliado del Comité Central del PCCh, por Galo Gonzalez.

reduce possibility of War and create a movement of peace and collaboration.

4-The weakness of the working class and its vanguard (the Communist Party) when collaborating with the Radicals government .

G.Gonzalez stated that the PCCh had "to explain to the people that the governments of Aguirre Cerda, Antonio Ríos and Gonzalez Videla, did not touch the interest of the imperialism and oligarchy, and in the case of Videla these interests have been favoured, because in those government the fundamental influence was exercised by the bourgeoisie, and this is a vacillant and inconsequent class, unable to carry out the struggle against imperialism and oligarchy. We have to explain that (...) the working class was not the central force of the popular movement"⁽⁹⁾. If we analyse this strategy of National Liberation Front we could see some contradictions that sooner or later arose and produced a very interesting debate, particularly with the Socialist Party. First of all the PCCh offers a political project where the working class was to be the hegemonic force, and I think is very difficult to suggest the formation of a determinate political alliance and at the same time declare that this or that class-party was to be the hegemonic force. A political alliance is the result of many compromises, but more important, the assumption that the dispute to hegemonize the alliance was going to be the result of the political confrontation to come. It seems to me that the PCCh was elaborating an interesting project but without taking into account the real size of its forces. By 1952 the PCCh was a small Party, and certainly it is quite hard to pretend to exercise an hegemonic rol in an alliance where its position was going to be very weak, particularly if we consider that the Socialist Party (that the PCCh estimated to be an important force in the alliance) had more influence. Secondly, what did the PCCh mean when referring to an alliance with the "progressist sector" of the bourgeoisie? Its answer in not convincing, it said, "we know that between the bourgeoisie and the working class there are contradictions, struggle of interests, and in this struggle the PCCh stands with the working class. But we also know that there are contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the oligarchy (...). The idea that

(9) Cfr. PCCh, Decimo Octavo Pleno, op.cit.

the bourgeoisie is the ally of the imperialism and oligarchy is wrong. In different aspect the bourgeoisie is inclined towards them, but this situation is not definitive, but transitory, and we could modify it if we polarize the contradictions. More importantly, in the determinate period of our history; for example during the Popular Front, the majority of the bourgeoisie was united with the working class. In other periods, for example during Videla's government, it was united with the oligarchy"⁽¹⁰⁾. The PCCh has always considered that one of the reasons for the emergence of the new political strategy was the failure of the Popular Front Strategy and of the secondary role played by the working class. Consequently (according to the PCCh) the programme was not carried out. Its point of view was now that : because of the hegemony that the working class was to exercise (and certainly not in that period, 1955) and because of the alliance between the Parties of the labour movement, the progressist sector of the bourgeoisie was to be an ally of the Frente de Liberación Nacional policy. The PCCh will receive the answer to its prediction in 1958 and 1964, when in the presidential elections the progressist sector of the bourgeoisie presented its own candidate, and did not join the FRAP alliance. This issue was also present in 1970 and 1972-73, when Unidad Popular and the Allende government tried to gain the support of the Democracia Cristiana, but the answer of this sector was to support the coup d'Etat. Within the strategy of the Frente de Liberación Nacional there was a key-question: by what means was the PCCh to carry out this policy? In an article in Principios (october 1956) Galo Gonzalez stated that "the realization of deep changes, of revolutionary reforms, are not always necessarily followed (in all circumstances) by a political action meaning civil War, the armed insurrection and a violent and extreme change. In our country there are examples that urge us to think in the possibility to transform the actual political system by pacific means, i.e. by parliamentary means"⁽¹²⁾. According to G.Gonzalez the experiences of the Popular Front and Alianza Democratica demonstrated that it was possible to carry out great reforms without using violence.

(12) Cfr.G.Gonzalez, "La discusión interna en el Partido Comunista de Chile", in Principios, n.37, October 1956.

(10) Cfr. PCCh, Informe del Secretariado al Vigésimo Primer Pleno del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Chile, por el Secretario General, Galo Gonzalez, Septiembre, 1955.

According to E.Halperlin, the Chilean Communists justified their policy of peacefull road before 1956 because "the masses were not ready for revolution" and that Lenin had declared it to be a stupidity and crime to start an insurrection "with the vanguard alone"⁽¹³⁾.

The PCCh had never to justify the peacefull road because it never declared the armed confrontation as the only means to power; even more, from its foundation the policy of peacefull road has been underlined. This issue become important in 1956 because of the revision by the XX Congress of the PCUS where in view of the increased strength of the Socialist camp and other force of peace, Lenin's doctrine of the inevitability of War was declared no longer valid. And the doctrine of the inevitability of violent revolution was replaced by the statement that socialism, in view of the growing strenght of the popular force could in some countries come to power by the peacefull road⁽¹⁴⁾. In the case of other Communist Parties this revision had a great importance, but in the case of the PCCh we could suggest that did not influence it.

G.Gonzalez wrote that "the possibility of a peacefull revolutionary transition in Chile has not been planted by the Congress of the PCUS but by the new international situation prevaling in the World and by our conditions and national characteristics"⁽¹⁵⁾.

What the PCCh did not appreciate of the XX Congress was the criticism of Stalin; they tried to justify him by saying that "there have been some mistakes, big mistakes, but all this will stop (...) and Socialism will continue to advance and to illuminate the road of all people"⁽¹⁶⁾. Even if the PCCh had a considerable degree of autonomy in the development of its political strategy, its international link has been always dependent on the Russian; for example supported the invasion of Hungary by declaring that "what has happened in Hungary is something very complex, but we can distinguish in one hand a tentative to restablish capitalism and

(13) Cfr. E.Halperin, Nationalism and Communism in Chile, the M.I.T. Press, 1965, p.60.

(14) Ibid.

(15) Cfr. G.Gonzalez, Informe al XXIII Pleno del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Chile, 1956.

(16) Cfr. Galo Gonzalez, Informe al XXIII Pleno del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Chile, 1956.

to establish a fascist regime, yet in the other the right process of democratization of that country (...). Intervening in Hungary the Russian defend socialism and peace"⁽¹⁷⁾.

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In April 1956, in spite of being underground, the Chilean Communist Party celebrated its Tenth Congress. This Congress has an historical importance (a) for the circumstances of being underground, (b) because of the codification of the political strategy that it was been elaborated from the Programa de Emergencia, and (c) because it was the first Congress after the PCCh has been outlawed. The Congress adopted a new programme: the consolidation of the labour movement unity and of all democratic forces, the alliance of the progressist forces (their social base constituted by the organized masses, small bourgeoisie, group of progressist intellectuals). The programme stated that from the objective situation and from the fundamental contradictions, the stage of development that the country was going by was a period of struggle for the Anti-imperialistic, anti-feudal, anti-oligarchic and democratic revolution, a revolution of "national liberation" aiming at the liquidation of the economic domination of the U.S.A., the financial oligarchy and the landowners. The Congress officially stated that such a revolution could take place in a peacefull process⁽¹⁸⁾. In his report to the Congress G.Gonzalez said that "the possibility of a peacefull revolution depends on two factors; (a) the resistance of the hostile classes, (b) the capacity of the working class to conquer by means of elections the majority of the nation"⁽¹⁹⁾. In the call for united action between Communist and Socialist G.Gonzalez warned that it was necessary to avoid sectarianism. The Congress also gave importance to some measures directed to the democratization of the country: abrogation of the repressive laws, elimination of the presidential system, right to vote for soldiers and the illiterates. We could summarize in six points the

(17) Ibid.

(18) Cfr. PCCh, El Decimo Congreso del Partido Comunista de Chile, Informe del Secretario General, Galo Gonzalez, Moscow, 1957, p. 11.

(19) Ibid.

programme that the PCCh launched in its Tenth Congress;

- 1- The organization of all working people from urban and from countryside in order to achieve the national unity of the labour movement.
- 2- The solution of the agrarian problems by means of expropriation of the latifundo and the assignment of the land to the peasants.
- 3- Consequent struggle for the nationalization of the industries that belongs to foreign companies and the end of the imperialistic domination in Chile.
- 4- Full and concrete democratization of the State.
- 5- Coherent struggle for national policy of independence.
- 6- The realization of such a programme by means of the peaceful road.

This programme was to be supported, according to G. Gonzalez by (a) the working class that has to implement the revolution that the bourgeoisie did not carry out, (b) the hegemonic role of its political vanguard, the Communist Party, (c) the necessary alliance between the PCCh and the Socialist Party.

Between 1951 and 1956 the PCCh developed the political project that was to last (in the fundamental issues) until 1973, going through three stages: (1) The Programa de Emergencia, (b) the Frente de Liberación Nacional and (c) The Revolución anti-imperialista, Anti-feudal y anti-oligarchica.

This was the origin of the PCCh's strategy in Chile. In the fundamental issues Our Democratic project does not represent any major change, the PCCh continues with the same project.