



**Nahuel Moreno**

**Characteristics  
of the  
revolutionary  
party with mass  
influence**

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## Characteristics of the revolutionary party with mass influence

1984

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# Foreword

In December 1983, Moreno conducted a “pilot course” in Buenos Aires with a group of mixed comrades to prepare the party cadres’ school to be held at the beginning of 1984. The topics of the course were:

- Introduction: On historical materialism,
- I. Stages and situations,
- II. What is a revolution
- III. The theory of permanent revolution,
- IV. The revolutionary party, the working class and the mobilisation,
- V. Characteristics of the revolutionary party with mass influence,
- VI. The Marxist method (to be developed with examples throughout the course).

After the pilot course, Moreno held two talks with the attendees. In *Party Cadres’ School: Argentina 1984* (available at [www.nahuelmoreno.org](http://www.nahuelmoreno.org)) are available transcriptions of the course on the theory of permanent revolution and on the different types of revolutions.

As study material in the groups of the party cadres’ school that summer, Moreno and his collaborators prepared a series of “leaflets”, which in total were 13. The first was *Historic Materialism: Elementary Concepts*. From II to XII they were collected and published in the book *Revolutions of the 20th Century*. And the work *1982: The Revolution Begins* was also required reading. All three are available at [www.nahuelmoreno.org](http://www.nahuelmoreno.org).

We now reproduce the last leaflet, XIII. To frame the debate and concerns that arose in the pilot course, to which Moreno responds and directs with this text, we quote the end of the first talk to the students (*Party Cadres’ School: Argentina 1984*, pp. 55–57).

“And the course has to be critical: may they learn that Lenin and Trotsky were wrong and that we also make a lot of mistakes.

“All the theoretical part of this course aims to end in the practical part: what party we build. We want you to learn that democratic centralism means critical centralism. Democracy means criticism. Democracy means doubt. Democracy means permanent ongoing discussion, constant doubt; fundamentally in the rank-and-file comrades. We want to educate rebels, revolutionaries. That is people who live in doubt, who live criticising and discussing. We’ll have a great party when everyone is like this. Hence, the theoretical part of the course is to avoid believing that it’s a Bible type course, a dogma. On the contrary, [it is intended] to be something alive. You critically open the discussion to the extent you can. Let’s see whether afterwards, we change or not, to the extent that we see how far the course goes.

“We put this course at the end as a trap, to see if we can achieve this education of what should the party be. Previously, we had the hypothesis the chapter on the party was an indispensable course and the most important. After the first round [the pilot course] we have become convinced that it’s the most important chapter. Because, comrades, we have discovered something hurtful, that when we said that in the party the rank-and-file is consulted on how many newspapers to sell, or how much to contribute, there wasn’t a single comrade who said that in their region the rank-and-file is consulted. It was emotional, comrade, of sentimental type. I’m not exaggerating. It was the course that had the most impact. It continued like this. They all said they had never been told that, everyone.

“It’s shameful for us. It has to be an embarrassment to you. So, I authorised the comrades, because they were middle cadres, to tell the rank-and-file that the party has serious bureaucratic deviations due to its clandestinity.

“The comrades say they never [are consulted]. They are only issued orders. Therefore, we don’t educate rebels, but soldiers. The course is useless if the conclusion isn’t that we educate rebels in the realm of theory. It will also cause charlatans but... well; it’s the price we pay. But the price we pay to have our party. Because the other price, having soldiers is very expensive, because it’s the price of having a party opposite to ours: it stops being a revolutionary party. There can’t be a revolutionary party without revolutionary militants, without revolutionary sympathisers. The whole atmosphere has to be the opposite [of what it is].

“And I make it clear that the comrades have been left speechless. A new female comrade took me aside to tell me this was the best part of the course.

“When I asked: ‘Isn’t this what you’re explained?’

“‘No, comrade’, they answered. ‘We’re told otherwise. It’s the first time we hear this.’

“I told them that the instructions of the Secretariat were to go to local headquarters and ask each comrade how many newspapers he requested, and once the comrade gave the amount he was to be told: ‘Lower the number! Don’t be a show-off. Don’t give a high number’. If the comrades told us five, or 10, we, the leaders of the local headquarters, we had to say half or a third: ‘Don’t take five; take two, three’. When I told them that, frankly, we almost had a fit, they were astounded; we almost have to bring an iron lung. The first surprise was: ‘What? Are the comrades to be asked? And once they answer they are challenged to sell only half?’ They looked stunned.

“Beware: from this, they concluded that our party wasn’t disciplined. Happily, they said it and then we could clarify that yes, there is a strict discipline, and they have to try [to keep it].

“But discipline is top-down and democracy bottom-up. What does this mean? I am afraid that many of you won’t understand it, that there is a contradiction, because I saw it on the course. When they understood me well, they said, “Ah, fantastic, then we sell the newspapers the comrades told us. We even have to consider the possibility of being told a quantity and fewer being sold”. Then the party is a free-for-all. How many newspapers are sold? The leadership says: ‘Ask the rank-and-file’. Everything the rank-and-file says is added up and that is what we sell. But, as we’re ultra-democratic, as we’re in favour of anarchism of the rank-and-file, for the following issue we sell half and say, ‘Let’s sell half’. And we always do what the rank-and-file says.

“And this isn’t the case. In the party what the leadership says it’s done while there is no Congress. And the Congress, in turn, is one of the leaders, because they are the cadres elected by the rank-and-file. The party’s Congress isn’t an assembly. And this they didn’t understand. So, what are the discipline and the calculations? The leader has the obligation to know what his local area, his region is. And when the meeting of the Executive Committee is done, he— though the rank-and-file told him five and he said two— has to say: ‘I will sell seven’. Because he, in his own analysis, may think they are seven, but not demand it from the rank-and-file comrade. How do you sell seven? I’m sending him to sell two, and he will sell them so easily that the next day he will say that two is too few; then I’ll say, ‘You know what? You were right. You could sell five. How right you were! Instead of five, sell seven’. It’s the policy of the leader. He adds up everything they requested and amounts to 20, and he reports: ‘I sell 50’. It makes to the condition of leader.

“And this same analysis goes up until it reaches the Central Committee or the Executive Committee: ‘We will sell 30 thousand newspapers with such a political operation’, which is disciplined. But, at the rank-and-file, almost no discipline. Even if they tell us they can’t sell them we make no issue, no mess. The one who made a mistake was the leader who said: ‘This comrade, who told us that he can sell five, was right’. We even have to combat the danger that he will pay them out of his pocket. Let the comrade himself notice that the important thing is that we want to know the truth. Let him tell us: ‘No, look, within my life regime I can only sell two.’ And let him notice that we see this as ok, without making any ideological terrorism. Then there is a dialectic of discipline and democracy.

“Those who have to meet the commitments to the bitter end are the leaders, and the higher [in the leadership] the more to the bitter end. And the further down we go, who can have the luxury of not complying with anything or almost anything is the rank-and-file militant. But the leader will have to explain why a certain line was developed.

“Is that clear, comrades? Because we will begin to be very strict with the leaders and increasingly anarchic with the rank-and-file comrades. And we will demand that the leaders be anarchic with the rank-and-file comrades.

“Well, comrades. I don’t think I’ve forgotten anything. If I forgot something charge it to my account as the tango *Mano a mano* says but adapted to Marxism. Charge on the account of the course, not the ‘otario’.”<sup>1</sup>

In the leaflet that we reproduce, Moreno developed step by step by the positive the central aspects of the regime and methods of the revolutionary party linked to what he had detected in the pilot course, to contribute to combating these weaknesses in the building of the party.

The Editors  
August 2021

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1 In the tango *Mano a Mano* (Head to head) paraphrased by Moreno, “otario” is a term of the slang of Buenos Aires generally meaning silly; it is used to define a man who, seduced by a woman, agrees to all her demands and ignores her infidelities.

## Characteristics of the revolutionary party with mass influence

Party-building is a very important and difficult issue because it has stages, it depends on the class struggle and it is not an automatic process. The big problem is how to build a nucleus of firm, serious and strong revolutionary parties before the rise of the masses. We will point out some fundamental laws that have to do with its building.

The first is that a Marxist begins by being serious and objective in analysing the party situation. Although we cannot say that it is fundamental, it is important when it comes to a small party. We must know: what is the party? This is the starting point; a group of 10 students is different from a group of 100 where there are students and workers. When we did the rally for Nicaragua, it was a great concern, almost an obsession, to know how many people would be present, of what social composition, how many came to listen to us. In other words, to know clearly and objectively: what we are, what strength we have. Not all who call themselves Marxists have this method; for example, PO (Workers' Party) always told its militants that it had the same strength as us. After we held the rally at Luna Park, logically, the rank-and-file militants demanded that the PO leadership hold a rally at Luna Park as well. They did so and their rally was a total failure, they had around 2,500 people attending. The lack of seriousness in the objective analysis of their own party led PO to lie about the parity of forces between them and us and that lie led to a total failure in the central rally of their campaign.

We also made mistakes in the electoral campaign, because although the party line was to work on working-class neighbourhoods, in some places we did not work on well-structured neighbourhoods, and we did not analyse what these neighbourhoods were like socially. Now we are discovering it, and we should have discovered it sooner. We thought we had more workers than we actually have, even though we have many. Although the electoral campaign was a success — everywhere we go there are people from the party — we do not even know some of them. In any case, we made a mistake, there was a deviation, we did not correctly analyse what the party was, and where it was heading at the local headquarters. The second mistake was not to define that we should open local headquarters in the centre of those neighbourhoods, this would have allowed us to work on the worker and student sectors and not in peripheral areas, which is what we did. Now we find that in very important population centres of the workers' movement we do not have headquarters open.

### The Marxist method in party building

When the group is small and therefore its leadership is that of a small group, its analysis is going to be incomplete and generally wrong. In the international organisation, added to the inexperience in the case of young groups, the margin of error will be very high.

In this framework, knowing that we will make mistakes, the important thing is to try to make, first of all, an analysis of the situation of the country and of the class sectors that are in struggle. We must ourselves some fundamental questions: Were there general strikes? Will there be other general strikes? Is there a trend towards a general strike?

Here we are investigating a perspective that will not have a correct answer if it is not placed within an overall analysis of the national and international reality. That is, we must apply the laws of dialectics, the Marxist method for the study of reality. The first law is to see how society works, in the same way as when we open a watch, we see what parts it has and how it works; this is how we analyse bourgeois society. This society works with imperialism, the bourgeoisie, the working class and a modern middle class. We analyse how it is structured, what elements compose it and how they relate to each other. This is the law of relationships or structure.

There is another law as important or more than this one — the law of motion. In politics, it has decisive, fundamental importance.

We first analyse the structure of society, but now the determining factor is to analyse where it is going, because phenomena are in motion, they go from one place to the other, we must analyse where we started from and where we are going to. That is, to anticipate the trend, the movement of these phenomena. For example, if we have to analyse the Alfonsin<sup>2</sup> government we start from the electoral campaign and we must specify where it is going. Is the tendency to increasingly starve the workers' movement or to make concessions? Are there going to be strikes that will be defeated and a fascist regime will come? Are there going to be strikes that are lost and Alfonsin strengthens and stabilises the situation? What can happen if there is a wave of strikes? What if the workers' movement wins? If the strikes are lost, will the masses go to the left or on the contrary to the right or towards passivity?

The answer to all these questions means to anticipate the movements. For this we must be very objective, very self-critical, to know that error is inevitable, to look for the facts of reality that show that our forecast was wrong and correct our analysis.

Where is the working class going? Where is the bourgeoisie going? Where is the country going? What fights are going to take place, who can win them? We must always define where the phenomena are heading.

Without this analysis, the party cannot place itself in the reality of the class struggle. Within this analysis, we distinguish four fundamental laws or tasks:

1) Specify which sector of the mass movement will be the most dynamic, the one that will fight the most. In the history of our party, by not analysing this aspect we made a tragic mistake for eight or ten years, which did not allow the growth of the party. We only worked in the big factories and the most exploited sectors, not on the tradesmen of factories and workshops, or the students. This is why the party was made up of the most backward sectors of the proletariat. The large factories, the most concentrated at that time were textiles and meatworks and so we concentrated our activity in Alpargatas and Anglo Ciabasa. But when we entered the meatworks, it had been defeated in two strikes, it was a branch of production in decline. We had seven or eight years of defeat after defeat and each time we were fewer. In the student movement, there was a very large current of the left but, since we did not go towards it, we gained a very small sector. We were active in a sector that instead of advancing was going backwards, that is, it was not the most dynamic sector of production, it was not going to fight, while the student body was going to the left. We worked on the most exploited sectors and we did not see that among the specialised workers important cadres can emerge and be the most dynamic.

2) Once we define the most dynamic sectors, we need to specify in which or which ones the party works. One of the great flaws of small groups is that they work on all fronts, they disperse and do not achieve a common experience that allows the group to advance. We must privilege a sector

<sup>2</sup> **Raul Alfonsin** (1927–2009) was one of the main leaders of the bourgeois Radical Civic Union (UCR). He was the president of Argentina between 1983 and 1989, following the military dictatorship.



within those that move the most, we define it as the most important and most of the militants work on it.

3) The program: we must draw up a program within the framework of the stage of party building. The program has to be general, but we must also specify the slogans that help the immediate struggle of the working class, specify the slogans for which we fight.

4) Every revolutionary Marxist program must have slogans against the government and the regime. There is a tendency to forget that the axis of our program is the regime and the government. Sometimes we make very revolutionary programs, forgetting about the slogan against the government. For example, PO during the military government stage never raised the slogan "Down with the military government"; there. it only proposed democratic tasks, playing into the government's hands with an economic and democratist policy. It only raised "Down with the military dictatorship" when the whole country was already raising it. For us, the central axis was "Down with the government" and "For a Constituent Assembly". Everything else was secondary. In our program, there must always be slogans to fight against the government and the regime, and for which government and which regime we want.

We counter oppose our government to the bourgeois government and against that regime, the regime that we want. If this is not part of our policy, it is not a revolutionary Marxist policy, it is right-wing, even if it seems super-revolutionary.

## Democratic centralism

A party that can confront the regime, a party that is built for action must be centralist. If we raise a slogan and 1000 raise it, it seems they are 10,000; if 10,000 say it, it seems they are 100,000. The slogan of "Non-payment of the foreign debt", at first it was raised only by our party. We fought so hard with it that towards the end of the electoral campaign the whole country wondered whether the debt should be paid or not.

Instead, if we agitate different slogans or take different positions on the work fronts, we appear divided and this party is not useful for action; it is not useful for promoting mass mobilisation. The party has to be centralist and disciplined. That is a *sine qua non*, indispensable condition, otherwise, we cannot participate with the same line in the struggles, we cannot face repression. Without centralism, without iron discipline, there can be no revolutionary party. This is one of the great teachings of Lenin and one of the theoretical conquests of Marxism in this century. Lenin concluded that a centralised and disciplined party was needed to be able to confront the Russian police, the tsar, the repression, the clandestine conditions that existed under tsarism. The discipline and centralisation proposed by Lenin is not the one proposed by the guerrillas, which imposes military discipline in the political arena, demands that everyone accept what the commanders command, it does not allow discussion, political problems are orders: you have to support this or that government; it is military centralism for political issues.

Lenin insisted on centralisation and also on the other pole, the democratic one. Centralist is the super-disciplined party in its actions and internally with extraordinary democracy: this is what we call democratic centralism.

How much centralism and how much democracy should there be in the party? It is relative to the moment the party lives. If the situation is one of clandestinity, the centralist and disciplinary pole will be the determining factor, it will weigh more than the democratic one. If there is a lot of legality, the latter will be the one with the greatest weight but the centralist and disciplinary pole always subsists. There is no strict formula for how the two poles act, it depends on the stage the party is going through.

Centralism demands an iron discipline; democracy demands certain conditions. No militant, tendency or group that is formed within the party respecting the statutory norms and that is not against the party's program can be expelled. We discuss with these tendencies or groups in the

periods of congress, sometimes also outside the congress period, but not everything and at all times. Months before the congress, all the militants have the right to set themselves up as a tendency or faction. If congresses are held every two years, it will be six months before. If the congress is annual, two or three months before the militants have the right to be a tendency or a faction.

The faction is to fight for party leadership. Sometimes, inexperienced comrades build factions for pleasure and even secret ones, as if it were a game. They generally reflect a student or bohemian base. Militants have the right to request a congress at any time if an important part requests it. For example: a third of the CC or a third of the party members, a third of the local headquarters, of the teams; this varies according to the statutes but the important thing is that there must be a mechanism by which, if an important minority of the party asks for a congress, this is carried out.

Tendency is any group of comrades who believes the party line is wrong, either on an important point or in general; but they consider the leadership, in general, is ok, that it is the party's political or theoretical positions that are wrong. A tendency is not a discussion group, a tendency will fight to impose its line that it considers being the correct one, without posing that it is necessary to dismiss the leadership. For example, the tendency may be of the opinion that the situation is not revolutionary, that the work must be propagandistic in nature, that the essential thing is the internal work of the party, the courses, the study and not the activity outside. The comrades produce a document, ask for a congress and become a tendency.

The party must give it all the facilities for its positions to be known. Polemize in the newspaper, if it is a large party, allow it to meet as tendency and draft common documents.

Instead, it is faction when it is considered that not only the political positions of the party are incorrect but the entire leadership is bad and must be changed. The faction imposes strict discipline, the faction's discipline is stronger than that of the party, it is a party within the party. Each member of the faction acts in the party in the manner determined by the faction. No longer one position or another are discussed, but it is rather a confrontation with the leadership in all areas. The faction is set up when the situation of the party is considered very serious when it is considered that the leadership must be removed because the orientation of the party is in danger and an organisation with stronger, almost military discipline must be created. Nobody can do anything without the authorisation of the faction's leadership. There are factions with almost military discipline when the leadership is considered bureaucratic.

## How is democratic centralism applied?

The leadership of a party is first and foremost the leadership of the whole party; inclusive of the leadership and militants of the tendency or faction, even of the secret faction. If this were not the case, the leadership itself would act as a tendency or faction that continues to fight the other. When encountering a tendency or a faction, the first thing the leadership has to see is whether those comrades are with the party or are its enemies, not whether they are with the leadership positions or not. All the militants who are with the party, whether or not they are in tendencies or factions, are sacred to the leadership. If the militants of tendencies or factions are with the party, they are like any other militant and the leadership must be respectful of their positions and guarantee their discussion throughout the party.

Democratic centralism is applied differently depending on whether they are rank-and-file militants, middle cadres or members of the Central Committee (CC). It is not the same for everyone. In a rank-and-file meeting, it is essential that the militants feel the party is theirs, that they can have an opinion, they can do whatever they want, under certain limits. They must feel that their opinions are heard and are of great value to the party, they can take initiative. The party is the opposite of their workplace and the bourgeois society that exploits them, represses them and does not allow them to express themselves. The rank-and-file activist must feel that in the meetings he is not an object, one more who will be just a number but, on the contrary, he is a subject and therefore an active part in the construction of the party and the elaboration of its political line. His opinions, what he thinks,

what he wants to do is what is worth to the party. This is why the meetings of rank-and-file teams cannot be done with administrative or discipline reports: how many newspapers are sold, how much is contributed, how many subscription bonds are sold, how many contacts do they have, and so on.

This is the least important aspect of the meeting. The focus of the meetings has to be the political discussions and the permanent concern is that the militants give their opinion and participate actively in the elaboration of the political line. Democratic centralism is not to bring down orders for the rank-and-file activists to apply, for example: bring down the order to duplicate the sale of the newspaper and then report that the duplication was voted.

Instead of democratic centralism, this is bureaucratism and bureaucratic centralism.

As we move up in the party and into the leadership bodies, democratic centralism is applied differently. Centralism and discipline are increasing, a member of the CC cannot go to their region and state they are in doubt with the line voted, their doubts must be discussed in their body, abide by the political line voted by the CC. But as we go down, democracy is greater, when it reaches the rank-and-file it is total, it almost gives the impression of an anarchist party. Stalinism has completely disfigured Lenin's conception of democratic centralism by setting up monolithic parties, whence from top to bottom everyone thinks the same, everyone does the same. Our party is democratic centralist, but centralist and disciplined. The leadership is the leadership of the entire party, including those who break discipline while they are not expelled from the party. The leadership belongs to all the militants. Discipline the higher you go, the more severe it is, the lower it is, the less severe.

Why do we work like this? Because in these political questions we move by class interests. This functioning of the party serves enormously for the elaboration and adjustment of the political line. No leadership by itself, neither Lenin, nor Trotsky, nor Marx completely succeeds in their political line, even if they are correct for the most part, they must always modify, adjust with the facts of reality; virtue is the speed in which we notice the mistakes and change the line without fear of saying we were wrong. To know whether our line is correct, whether we should make adjustments or not, the opinion of the ranks is essential. A rank-and-file comrade with a low political level can give the party very important political and theoretical contributions; permanent consultation with the rank-and-file of the party allows us in many cases to specify that fundamental law of Marxism that we pointed out before, which is the movement, where the political situation and that of the working class are going towards. This allows us to corroborate a line or, on the contrary, to see that we are wrong and to be able to change it quickly. This is the fundamental role of democratic centralism. The political lines are often incorrect because the leaderships are weak, because none have yet passed the test of leading the workers' and mass movement. We must always ask ourselves whether we are applying a correct line or not, we have to go to the ranks to corroborate it; we must corroborate it every day with Lenin's method, not to try to get what we want to be corroborated but what the rank-and-file really think. We want to know the truth and educate the whole party on the truth.

## The leadership

The basic problem in the building of the party is the building of the leadership, regional leaderships, zone leaderships, and the national leadership. The organisational deficiencies that we have pointed out are because the leaderships have little experience, they are weak, even the party leadership. The great secret of all leadership is the ability to make a team. Every leadership should be a team, not a person who helps others. The most important thing to make a team is to convince ourselves that comrades can do things, move forward; nobody is irreplaceable. The most difficult task is to be an organiser, not an administrator, keep accounts well, but an organiser. The organiser has to have a host of conditions — to be well-positioned politically, to know what the fundamental task is, which is the one that he has to organise and he has to be a great psychologist. He has to discover who are the best comrades for this or that task, with whom you can make a team according to their characteristics. A leader has to see what militants he has, what their strengths and weaknesses are and see how he develops them and how they serve the party.

Superior to the leaders are the leadership teams. To say that the most difficult type of leadership is organisational is to run the risk of falling into the trend to believe that the focus of party activity is organisational. This is not the case: the focus of the party's activity is political and above all at the rank-and-file. A great meeting at a local headquarters, very political, greatly increases the efficiency of everyone who attends. Not seeing this means not believing in our class and we must leave the party. We cannot make the revolution if we do not believe that our comrades change, they advance; the workers, the students, they learn and can participate actively. We must be consistent. We intend to change society, make a revolution and it cannot be that we do not believe that we can make a revolution in each of our militants.