

# INTERVIEW WITH CUADERNOS DE NEGACIÓN

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The following is an English translation of a written interview with *Cuadernos de Negación* (Negation Notebooks) from May, 2014. *Cuadernos de Negación* is a publication based in Argentina. The questions are from members of the French collective *L'Asymétrie*, who were traveling in South America at the time.



**How would you define your group's origin and objectives? Please mention, among other things, your relationship to the anarchist movement and other revolutionary currents such as left communism.**

Cuadernos de Negación (Negation Notebooks) came out of both a desire and a necessity that we felt to begin circulating material with a radical and revolutionary critique. As part of this process, we were interested in translating the text *Work Community Politics War* by prole.info, from English into Spanish. The text presented the kinds of themes we were interested in dealing with: a critique of capital and wage labor, a critique of the state including a critique of politics and democracy, and all from a class perspective rather than one that was attempting to add more supporters to an anarchist or marxist ideology. So we decided to publish the text, along with an introduction and some excerpts from *Against Democracy* by Miriam Qarmat. On the last few pages we shared links to interesting web sites that showed our general orientation: revolutionary agitational materials from the anarchist movement, from (non-Leninist, non-Trotskyist) communists, and from the Situationist International. This first edition was published in the fall of 2007.

While the group formed within the anarchist movement in our area (some of us having participated in it for years and others coming from other places), it was never our intention that the publication would stick to an anarchist ideology or any other ideology. We were interested in continuing to be a part of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and not so much in the various ways in which different "isms" define themselves. This does not diminish our interest in the historical revolutionary movement, which called itself, and was condemned as, *anarchist* or *communist*. We agree with Debord when he described each of these tendencies as containing "a partially true critique, but each losing the unity of historical thought and setting itself up as an ideological authority".

For those who come from the anarchist movement, and are sufficiently critical of its dogmas, it is a nice surprise to find out that the critique of the state is not the private property of anarchism. Similarly for those who come from a Marxist background but are not dogmatic, it can be a nice surprise to find comrades outside those circles. In this respect, before starting our project, the journal *Communism* from the International Communist Group was an important point of reference, as well as *Antagonismo* from the Núcleo de Ira (Nucleus of Rage), and the writings of Guy Debord, Gilles Dauvé and other communists and / or marxists that rejected parliamentarianism, trade unions and social democratic reformism in general.

Our perspective, and this we made clear immediately in our second issue, was that we are opposed to capital and the state, not because of a particular ideological hat we are wearing, but because we are wage workers, who are exploited and oppressed in all aspects of our lives, and this pushes us to fight. For this reason we were never interested in publicizing an ideology in order to attract followers but instead in criticizing this world in order to subvert it. So since that second issue, we have put the following quote in every edition of Cuadernos. It is from the Núcleo de Ira (a group that dissolved itself in 2006 in Chile): "We have nothing to sell and we are not trying to seduce our fellow workers. We are not a sectarian group competing for prestige and influence with other groups or parties that claim to represent, and want to govern, the working class. We are proletarians fighting to free ourselves with the means at our disposal, and nothing more".

In the second issue, in addition to raising the question of ideology and the false dichotomy between communism and anarchism, we considered the question of class struggle and revolution in more depth. To do this we presented "our" class perspective ("our" not in the sense of our particular group, but in the sense of the historical perspective of the proletariat). Far from being a defense of the industrial worker or a sociological definition, it was an attempt to put into words a reality that is in motion: the class antagonism, the opposition that exists between human needs and capital. These needs are expressed in the struggles of our class, struggles that need to be taken to their final consequences. These are struggles for better working conditions and wages, for better living conditions, or against the attacks of the state and its repressive forces. Or simply when we expropriate our expropriators, when we choose to spend our time on our joys and sorrows instead of producing for the profit of

the bourgeoisie. We must be clear that all these needs are inseparable from the need for revolution. For this reason we have to fight against the channeling of our demands into mere reforms.

Generally, it is problematic to speak of the opposition between the proletariat and capital as the opposition of human needs to the needs of valorization. We have no deterministic starting point or supposed human essence to defend. We begin from the concrete reality of how we live and how we feel under the domination of capital, from work as an alienated activity, from private property as a lack of the means of living, from commodities as social relations that come about when human production only happens through the main social relation of exchange, from nature as a natural resource, from the quantitative over the qualitative. From our rejection of all these comes our affirmation of our own needs and the possibility of a different humanity.

For us then, revolution is a possibility and a necessity — a necessity that comes out of our reality of being exploited and that will only be realized in so far as we overthrow this world. And our claim that once again a revolutionary transformation of society is possible is not just based in our condition as exploited workers, but, more importantly, on the history and current reality of proletarian struggles against exploitation. Every time that the bourgeoisie has tried to bury us with repression and ideology, the proletariat has resurfaced again as a revolutionary class. For years, all kinds of theories about the “subjects” of the “revolution” have been picking up support, especially in Latin America. They talk about women, peasants, indigenous communities, precarious workers, etc. . . . But for us, dealing with the issue in this way makes it impossible to talk about revolution. These sociological categories can only be subjects of reforms of this world. We continue to affirm that “The proletariat is not weak because it is divided, it is divided because it is weak”.

Of course being part of the proletarian camp does not mean accepting current major features of the oppressed: religion, nationalism, racism, machismo, and other aspects of modern alienation. Still, as Dauvé put it, “We do not live in a world of dominations, where capitalism is one discrimination among others, the biggest maybe, but no more important than dominations based on ‘gender’, sex or ‘ethnic’ origin. Although the most important domination phenomena (private property, family, religion, the State) were born a few thousand years before the industrial revolution, it’s capitalism that structures them now”. It is not that class antagonism is everything but that without understanding it, you can not understand anything else.

We had said somewhere that we are not waiting for the exploited and oppressed to take the streets with a banner that reads “proletarians,” and this is not because we are pessimists, but because this is a formalist dream belonging to bourgeois

ideologies “for proletarians”. Lots of social democrats and other reformers of capital have used words to justify their opposite, just as important revolutionaries from all over the world have not used, or even rejected, those words. This is not a fatal flaw, but it can become an obstacle. A failure to come to terms with our practice on the level of positions and concepts, in the long term, has facilitated weakness, confusion and counterrevolutionary recuperation.

While almost all of Marxism took it upon itself to distort the questions of class antagonism and the tasks of the proletariat, these same questions were increasingly rejected in anarchist, libertarian and similar circles, either from the defense of the individual, because “talking about class sounds Marxist,” or from a postmodern defense of society where class supposedly does not exist. In spite of this, we feel the need to bring up the question of class in relation to the society we live in and want to supersede in order to pursue the issues that we thought and think are necessary to consider: wage work, commodities, value, the state, democracy, science, urbanism, art, sexuality. This is not a whimsical attitude or a magic word or incantation we can say. It is what allows us to critically discuss this society, the way our lives unfold and the opposition that could — eventually — lead to revolution. We do not speak about class because we consider it a category or a theoretical novelty. The existence of social classes in this society and the material antagonism between them does not depend on your point of view. It is a certainty that we have to understand and destroy.

We know that a publication like ours is not distributed on a very large scale. We know that it will not find much support except with people who are already involved in, or at least sympathize with, certain kinds of struggles. Because of this, since we began, our intention has been to deepen the critiques and positions that already exist, or are beginning to exist and need to be radicalized (that need to go to the root). We do what we can to take on positions, theoretical developments and experiences of struggle against capitalism, and investigate their potentials and weaknesses, in order give them more depth and power. In this task, we read, we write, we note down fragments of texts that speak to us, we have internal discussions and we take contributions and comments from other comrades. Our aim with this publication is to share “our positions,” to contribute to the historical revolutionary movement and to establish communication with the revolutionary minorities that are already active and with others who are involved in one way or another in the revolutionary movement. In this way, we think that Cuadernos can also be a good starting point for people who, because of the realities they live, are curious about revolutionary ideas and feeling the need to change this world.

## Could you sum up the other issues that you have published?

We have already spoken about Cuadernos de Negación issues 1 and 2 in the previous question. Those two issues along with 3, 4 and 5 make up a kind of block or group of themes that serve as a sort of basis for the later issues. We could sum them up as: social antagonisms (issue 2), wage work and commodities (3), the state (4) and democracy (5). The critique of the state and democracy were originally going to be in one issue, but we had too many pages and they ended up being published separately. This is an example of why, although we published themes separately, we consider them to be part of a totality. It was a matter of conveniently developing the themes as best we could.

Issue 3 was entitled *Against the Generalized Commodity Society*. In it, we explain that capitalism, as a social relation and not just a category, is the generalized commodity society, where all production is commodity production, where this tries to occupy the totality of social life and where even human beings relate to each other with commodities. We critique both wage labor and capitalist leisure, and both commodities and the proposal to “free work” through self-management. On the question of commodities, we included an article by Anselm Jappe (On the metaphysical subtleties of the commodity).

The title of issue 4, *On the Necessity of Destroying the State*, is more than clear. There we explain that the state is our enemy, not as a matter of taste, morality or ideology, but because it is a fundamental power structure that guarantees our submission to wage labor, that permits and defends the destruction of nature in pursuit of economic production and that leads to wars as a method of economic restructuring and social control. This is not about particular bad or ambitious characters but about the government of capital. This is not about trying to reform the state or destroy it overnight because the state is not a building or an institution but a form of social activity. In this issue, we included a long quotation about the state from Agustín Guillamón, the writer and editor of the journal *Balance*. We also stated that our struggle against capital and the state is anti-political because it tries to break with politics as a fragmented perspective. Politics in many cases appears as a preoccupation with generalities, and from there everything could be interpreted as political. But this preoccupation itself tends to turn into a specialization that loses the totality, starting with those who want to oppose politics to economics. Some insist that “Everything is political”. We say that everything is social and that politics itself is a fragmented perspective of this society that we must go beyond. We not only consider ourselves outside and against the state and its

organizations, but we also reject the poverty of the specific interests of organizations, with their acronyms, the separation between decision and action and all the traces of democratic ideology that influence the structure of proletarian groups.

And in issue 5, entitled *Against Democracy, its Rights and Responsibilities*, we lay out a critique not only of representation and elections, but also of democracy as a class dictatorship, as a guarantor of the economy as the exchange between independent production units and as its necessary repressive apparatus. This is a delicate subject in our region because, all over Latin America, the memory of the bloody civic-military dictatorships<sup>1</sup>, especially in the seventies, is still strong. Many proletarians are surprised when you criticize democracy as they think of it as the result of a successful struggle, and the sectors of the bourgeoisie that have come to benefit from these processes have taken it upon themselves to re-enforce this idea by speaking of the threat of “dictatorship”. People are even more surprised when you criticize democratic rights and responsibilities. In any case, this is nothing new. Karl Marx wrote, “The right of man to liberty is based not on the association of man with man, but on the separation of man from man. It is the right of this separation, the right of the restricted individual, withdrawn into himself”. Or, on this side of the planet, in 1888, a group of workers in Havana, Cuba, organized around the paper *El Productor*, (The Producer) told us, “The laborer, the wage worker, will continue to be the wage worker, that is to say, the slave of the capitalist. One might as well give the freedom to walk to a paralyzed person... ‘We are equal,’ the proletarian will say to the posh gentleman, ‘thanks to democracy I have the right to tell you to your face: we are equal.’ And the bourgeois, looking at him with disdain will continue on in his carriage and murmur through his teeth, ‘Idiot! You’re my slave!’”.

These issues, 2 through 5, are recognizable by their covers, which were all illustrated with the crisp, beautiful graphics of Gerd Arntz. To date (May 2014), we have put out three more issues. These were issues 6, *Down with the Kingdom of Heaven!*, 7, *A Tour of Capitalist Territory* and 8, *A Critique of Capitalist Rationality*. The themes are once again entangled and maybe cannot be disentangled.

In issue 6, we tried to tackle a major aspect of human activity and undoubtedly the biggest in terms of the variety of its idiocies: religion. We considered its institutional form, as well as its more modern and new age forms, always in relation to its role as an accomplice of class domination throughout history. We also dealt with the influence of religion on the

<sup>1</sup> These used to be called “military dictatorships” but in recent years people have started to refer to them as “civic-military dictatorships” to highlight the complicity of civilian elements within them.

revolutionary movement and with the question of atheism, and we began our critique of the supposed contradiction between science and religion. This last critique we took up again in issue 8 where we set out a critique, not only of science, but also of technology and the notion of progress and how it imposes on us a specific way of perceiving the world and acting. From this perspective, radical critique and revolutionary struggle are seen as crazy, because they make no sense within the parameters of the dominant rationality. In this issue, we affirm that the dominant rationality is bourgeois because, as an idea and as a material force, it acts for the benefit of capital. Research and development for technological progress never has the goal of satisfying our needs and desires but instead needs to create profit for capital and to maintain, widen and reproduce the dominant order. Here we consider it vital to think about and attack our current culture of the internet and of citizen outrage, as well as to critique medicine<sup>2</sup>, the catastrophe of progress and the hope of a “revolution” in the name of bourgeois liberty and equality, science and reason, efficiency and progress.

And in issue 7, as we did with other themes, we take up the critique of urbanism that others have made before us, trying to bring out or point to the most important things: that space has been reduced to a thing by capital and that, as with everything related to capital, it contains and hides social relations, thus its material and abstract character are presented as inseparable. We are not trying to look for definitions or answer the question, “What is space?” Instead, we want to reflect on the meaning of space in relation to us; what is our human experience of space and, more precisely, as proletarians with respect to space under capitalism?

A compilation of our early issues was recently put together in Chile, and in the introduction we underlined that revolutionary theory is an inseparable part of practice. Theory is not something opposed to or separated from practice, something that should be realized before or after or at the same time as it. It is the form in which practice expresses itself and is passed on. The moment that a theory becomes something separate from practice, it becomes ideology. Although the reverse also exists: activism, even though it presents itself as antagonistic to theoretical abstraction, is just the other side of the same separation, dismissing whatever smells like theory to cling to what seems to be practical.

In this way, we remind those who might read our publication looking for “solutions” that the deepest understanding of this society can be found in its most ruthless critique, the struggle against it. And meanwhile, we are laying out what we are against, which is by no means a small thing.

2 For more on the critique of medicine that we are making, see the section “Science and Sickness” in Cuadernos de Negación number 8.

## **What are your group’s upcoming publications? What aspects of theory are you currently working on?**

At the moment we are editing issues 1 through 5 in order to republish them. This is because there are some things that could be said in a better way, others that could be extended, and whole paragraphs that we are deleting because they are confusing or do not add much. The idea is not to change the content or retract anything but to make the reading a bit easier. Our positions have not changed. We will publish hard-copies of these edited versions and they will be available on the web as always.

We are also working on our next issue in which we are trying to write a critique of economics and the economization of life. Instead of adopting an economic perspective, we are fighting against the brutal economism of our times. We start from the understanding that the critique of economics comes out of a rejection of and struggle against this society and that the theoretical aspects of this critique are inseparable from this struggle. While much of these theoretical developments start from “economic” concepts, the meanings of these concepts completely change within the critique of economy. We are speaking about social relations and material forces, not ideas and concepts with which to mold reality. Those who acknowledge the need to destroy value, capital, commodities, private property, work and the state are submitting them to the weapon of criticism and the criticism of weapons. At the same time, economists of all stripes just present them as natural and eternal in order to defend and continue reforming this society.

For this reason, the critique of economics is a critique that targets the root of this society. It is not economic. It targets the totality. Without it, it is impossible to understand the critique of politics, democracy, the state, religion, etc. In turn, we plan to present the critique of the value form, which is not well known here. This is because there is not much available material on the subject, perhaps due to the lack of translated texts, or the fact that the main texts from Marx, Rubin and other more recent authors, are and were treated with contempt, hidden or forgotten. In general, due mainly to Marxist distortions, the issue of value is usually approached from the purely quantitative aspects of the theory of value-work, and ends up trying to define the prices of commodities by the amount of work incorporated in them, attempting to create a better distribution of production on the basis of work time. For us, the important thing to understand is the qualitative aspect of value. That is to say, we want to unveil value as a social relation where human activity is reduced to abstract work, an activity in which it does not really matter what we



are doing while we are producing value. It is not that exchange is based on value as a supposed principle that things have in common but that, on the basis of relations of exchange, value arises and starts to take over society and make it move.

With this critique of value, once again we will have to dedicate two or three issues of Cuadernos to the same themes. We also want to include a detailed critique of proposals for worker self-management, which have been especially popular in Argentina since the 2001 crisis and have been repeated in other countries around the world, their proponents again and again pointing to Argentina as an example.

On the other hand, in a past issue we left open the idea of *subsumption*. This has begun to interest us because of the things that have come out of our debates about formal and real subsumption and the periodization of capitalist development based on these concepts. Looking at the international reality, it is impossible for us to think of the work process as having demarcated stages. This is especially true when technological innovations in certain branches of production, in certain regions of the world, are only possible thanks to the imposition of miserable working conditions in other branches and / or regions.

For us, the process of subsumption is important as a way to critique the supposed opposition between labor and capital, and as a way to understand that capital does not dominate labor but rather that it makes labor into capital including labor within itself. For this reason, we do not understand the claim that formal subsumption affects the immediate work process while real subsumption extends outside the sphere of production to society as a whole. It is obvious that both forms of subsumption affect the immediate and the global, the particular and the general; they affect more than just the immediate process of production.

In the future, we plan to dedicate time and space to considering art, sexuality, language, war, and proletarian struggle, but we still do not know how to organize, link and approach these themes. So, at the moment we are continuing to read, take notes and collect material on the themes that interest us.

## **Can you explain the period of struggle in 2001 and the historical process that lead up to it? What happened following 2001 and how does it relate to what is happening now in Argentina?**

To briefly review the current situation in Argentina, we think it is necessary to go back to at least the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, a high point of proletarian struggle in the region and throughout the world. At the time, the proletariat was in the streets, fighting the harsh repression of the *dictatorship*<sup>3</sup>. Clearly, speaking of a “military dictatorship” is insufficient because all these dictatorships were civilian and military, but you understand what we mean.

The important days from that era were the “azos:”<sup>4</sup> the *tucumanazo* in November of 1970, the *rosariazos* in May and September of 1969, and, most importantly, the *cordobazo* of May 1969. These were proletarian protests that escalated into a situation of urban insurrection, with barricades, factory occupations and armed clashes. The army intervened to stop the insurrections, but the discontent remained.

The city of Córdoba, one of the country’s main industrial centers, was the scene of constant factory occupations, violent street protests, and an important development in proletarian organization that in many cases went beyond the union channels and the social democratic groups of the time. Among these groups, the main militant ones were the Peronist left, the Trotskyists and Leninists organized in the PRT-ERP (Workers’ Revolutionary Party–People’s Revolutionary Army), as well as “revolutionary” syndicalists of various tendencies. In addition to the insurrectionary moments, there were other expressions of rupture, such as when the groups of workers autonomously organized at their workplaces, like the SITRAC-SITRAM (The Union of Fiat Concord/Materfer Workers). These were factory-by-factory unions similar to those formed on a large scale in Italy at the same time.

Unfortunately, as happened in many other regions, this level of militant organization and capacity for class struggle was gradually giving way to its weaknesses: politics and armed struggle. These ideologies that would define the region after 1973, the year of democracy’s return and the return of Perón. The bourgeoisie also launched an efficient strategy of dividing

3 Since the 1930s, Argentinian politics has alternated between dictatorships and parliamentary governments. In this instance, we are talking about the period of dictatorship known as the “Argentinian revolution” (1966–1973), with Juan Carlos Onganía as its main leader.

4 Translator’s note: “azo” is a Spanish suffix that can make a place into an event. So, the “tucumanazo,” “rosariazo,” and “cordobazo” are events that occurred in the cities of Tucumán, Rosario and Córdoba respectively.

the labor movement in order to raise house rents and lower wages, and entrusting the recently created vigilante organization, the AAA (The Argentinian Anti-communist Alliance), with the task of murdering militant workers. In this context, the armed struggle escalated as well as the state's response. It reached a breaking point when, on March 24, 1976, the armed forces again took control of the state, in what was known as the "National Reorganization Process".

This dictatorship, we assume, is well known not just for its brutal murders but also for disappearing thousands of people, mainly militants, and in many cases kidnapping their children and giving them to bourgeois, pro-regime families to adopt. At the same time, many other people were forced into exile. These events and the emotional trauma caused by feelings of betrayal, distrust and constant fear created generational wounds that have yet to heal today.

When the dictatorship ended in 1983, it gave way to a weak government that took up and continued the military government's project of deindustrialization, flexibilization, inflation, and generalized poverty. This led to the first outbursts of widespread anger in 1989. Supermarkets were looted in the country's major cities, and there were clashes with the police. But the most notable aspect of these struggles was that the proletarians were showing a lack of experience and ability. In the 1990s, this same phenomenon would appear again as each sector within a divided class struggled individually, without a general project or ability to act. Experience and organization within our class would be missed, as would the militants murdered by the military dictatorship. State terrorism, which had deepened during the dictatorship, left indelible marks: fear, distrust, a lack of links between proletarians and a bourgeois ideology of "mind your own business" (which refers both to minding your own business by not getting involved "in politics," and minding your own business by not being interested in what happens to the person next to you).

For these reasons, even though the years leading up to 2001 saw growing social unrest, they did not appear to have direct links to the struggles of the 1970s. Unfortunately, during this resurgence of struggle, as well as during today's struggles, it is very difficult to get a historical account of the agitation of the 1970s from comrades who participated in it and still maintain revolutionary positions or who have looked at the events from a revolutionary perspective. The dominant story was constructed in large part by those survivors who are part of the government today or were bought off by it. This reduces the memory of the struggles of those years to one of mere struggles for national liberation and democracy. Many have come to say that the country we have today was the dream of that generation. We do not want to idealize these

struggles; we know they were plagued with weaknesses that were apparent in the main organizations of the time. But it is equally ridiculous to reduce these experiences to the formal level by only analyzing the history of a few organizations and not the class as a whole.

In the second half of the 1990s, there was an increase in workers struggles, mainly those of teachers, railroad workers, and oil workers. Strikes and absenteeism became widespread, as did roadblocks which were mainly carried out by proletarians without work. By the end of the decade, this situation of growing conflict provoked state repression, and police and gendarmes were sent to many areas of the country. Unlike in previous eras, the unemployed played an important part in the struggle; that is to say, a large group of proletarians had found themselves without jobs due to the deepening of the economic policies imposed in the 1990s and the lack of a class response. The unemployed did not have a workplace to occupy or production to sabotage, so they poured into the streets and highways to interrupt the physical circulation of commodities (including, of course, the commodity labor power). The first pickets were organized outside of parties and unions. They were violent and stood firmly against the state. Later, the lack of a clear perspective condemned the "piqueteros" to making demands of the state, and their organizations became comparable to unions, in that, along with other complexities, they negotiated with the state, controlled anger and set a price on life within a dynamic of leaders and followers.

Still, it was not until 2001 that the crisis began to be felt by the whole proletariat—not only by the unemployed. This included of course those proletarians who considered themselves middle class. To a greater or lesser extent, these failed bourgeois, these workers of various social statuses who saw themselves as floating between classes, also found themselves pushed into the streets by the hardship of the times. For its part, the government could not give an intelligently bourgeois response to the pressures coming from international organizations, from the Peronist opposition, and from this new flimsy alliance of workers in struggle and the unemployed with the self-described middle classes. Throughout all of 2001, the government took defensive measures, taking out massive loans to ensure the continuity of banking activity. But it was not enough, and in early December, they enacted a new law, —the famous "corralito"— that placed severe restrictions on the withdrawal of money from banks and placed various limitations on the conversions of pesos into dollars and vice versa.

Until that time, the dollar was commonly used in Argentina. And in the 1990s, with the "one to one" (one peso

equaled one dollar, guaranteed by the Argentinian Central Bank), the dollar became indispensable for investors but also for anyone with savings in banks. It was in 2001, with the run on the banks, that this guarantee would end.

In mid-December 2001, everything exploded as the “corralito” was enacted, people lost the prospect of recovering savings in dollars, workers suffered massive layoffs and living conditions drastically worsened in the neighborhoods of the main cities.

On December 19th, faced with widespread looting of supermarkets, the government declared martial law (which had not been implemented since the military dictatorship), militarized the whole country and banned gatherings of people in the streets. It is very important to point out that all the protests took place in direct defiance of this decree of the government. The police can arrest a few but not thousands.

By the end of December 20th, the president had resigned, and despite the repression and the murder of 23 people across the country, people did not leave the streets.

The response from society was massive. There were *cacerolazos*, protests where people banged pots and pans, at all hours. Neighborhood assemblies were organized in the country's main cities. There were *escraches*<sup>5</sup> against banks and state institutions. The unemployed movement became stronger and much more organized, blocking highways and streets across the country. It was at this time that the slogan “que se vayan todos” (“They all must go”) became popular, in complete rejection of politicians of every kind. And, although less often, one could also hear “piquete y cacerola, la lucha es una sola” (“Pickets and pot bangers, one struggle”). Unfortunately, this last slogan was not widely taken to heart. Perhaps because of cultural barriers, the pot bangers (pot banging being the symbol of the “middle class” protests) did not recognize themselves in the pickets of the unemployed and vice versa.

“They all must go” was heard throughout the region. When journalists or members of leftist parties challenged protesters

5 In the 1990s, the practice of “*escrache*” consisted of going to the house of specific members of the former military dictatorship and pointing out where they lived, as well as covering the neighborhood in posters with their faces, names, addresses and slogans such as “A murderer lives 100 meters from here”. There were threatening demonstrations at their houses, and there were spontaneous “*escraches*” if they were seen eating in a restaurant. The intent of “*escraches*” was to harass those who were considered responsible for horrible acts and not to let them live in peace. This practice has lasted in popular culture and today it is a tool of proletarian struggle as well as a way to “*escrache*” owners of football teams that are not scoring goals. Recently it has been used in Spain against evictions, and a similar practice exists in Chile called “*funa*”.

asking what would happen when they all had gone, the protesters often responded strongly, “They can keep going”. This lack of faith in politicians was total, a rejection that translated into politicians being heckled when they were seen on the streets and even assaulted throughout all of 2002. Something similar happened with the police. There was even talk of extra psychological support being offered to the force because of the depression the constant insults at protests and elsewhere were causing these murderers. People sang “For a pizza, you'd beat up your mom,” a song that was already popular in football grounds and at rock shows. And this is important because most, if not the majority, of the young protesters came from these scenes, not from the tradition of activist struggles. The positive side of this was a knowledge of street fighting and a level of solidarity, but the limit of this kind of natural rebelliousness is that at some point it has to address things beyond the most immediately visible targets (the politicians, the police, the banks, the government headquarters). With that many people in the streets, a qualitative leap was necessary. The “popular assemblies” and the productive enterprises for surviving the shortage of money were attempts to do this. But, as we will see later, the meanings of a mere organizational form like the popular assemblies, or a form of survival like the productive enterprises, changed. They were converted into cornerstones of the struggle, leaving further and further behind the possibility of revolutionary transformation.

In the months that followed, the bourgeoisie tried to organize a response, although it was slow and disorganized. President followed president until Eduardo Duhalde, a suspected narco-trafficker and murderer, and favorite son of the Peronists, took charge of the situation. The project of this new batch of politicians was once again “divide and conquer”. Duhalde promoted an alliance with the “middle class,” patching up the financial situation, putting the economy on the peso and stabilizing inflation within limits. On the other hand, he killed picketers blocking highways in the famous Massacre of Avellaneda on June 26, 2002.

In time, the labor movement regained its usual form: clinging to its usual weaknesses, strengthening “fighting” unions and promoting self-management of factories that had been abandoned by their owners. All these proposals gradually distanced the labor movement from the unemployed, who were at the same time in the middle of a process of politicization, entering fully into a paternalistic logic of demanding subsidies and make-work projects from the same state that was murdering them.

We think it is necessary to stop here for a moment to discuss the subject of assemblies and self-management. An ideology of self-management was set in motion at different

levels. This came as much from the unemployed who had no other way of finding a job as from the workers who had to start up their workplace after their indebted bosses had fled rather than face their employees. In many neighborhoods, these projects were part of a palpable class solidarity. People were in the street, protesting and solving their problems without asking the government for anything. For example, a neighbor would open their house and oven for common use and whoever needed to would come and make bread to sell. These situations were common, and they created a greater understanding between proletarians and made links that were less weak than those in times of apparent social peace. Still, without the prospect of revolutionary struggle, these situations retreated into self-managementism, which means: continuing to survive within the capitalist system without looking for a way out.

As we mentioned before, we know that in various countries, Argentina is brought up again and again as an example of self-management. For this reason, we think that it is extremely important to explain that it was and is a break on anger and proletarian creativity in the moments of revolt that occur in these times of global crisis. Self-managementism forgets, and wants to make us forget, that exploitation resides in the conditions of capitalist production and can not be stopped by a changing of labels, much less by good intentions. Concealing exploitation is concealing the class character of the society we live in; it is concealing the extraction of surplus value by the bourgeoisie. After a period of adjustment and the recovery of the national economy, the current president of this country publicly thanked those who had continued running the factories where they worked without a boss, and she declared that Argentina is like one big reclaimed factory. We think that this is further evidence of the counter-revolutionary character, not of the struggle of proletarians to survive, but of managing the economy without a boss and putting ourselves at the service of capital with a lowered wage and worse conditions in periods of crisis. The bourgeois are thankful when, in times of great need, the proletarians do not loot or destroy what is destroying them but tighten their belts for the nation. Just as they are thankful when many of the militants that were in the streets in 2001, today, stick to official proposals for self-management. It is not the first time that the weaknesses of the proletariat in a period of conflict have been presented afterwards as “virtues” to be defended in a time of passivity. The same thing that happened with an ideology of politics and parliamentarism in the first decades of the 19th century happens today with an ideology of self-management.

The other important phenomenon was the so-called “popular assemblies”. In almost every neighborhood, there was

the “Popular Assembly of...” and some of these continued functioning for years afterwards. This meant in any instance of social upheaval, the assembly was one of the tools most readily available for coordination. The successive elections demonstrated the lack of confidence in the leaders. Although voting in Argentina is obligatory, barely half of registered voters voted, the other half being divided between abstention, spoiled ballots and blank votes. It was so strong that today, through a recently computerized system, those who do not show up to vote are pursued and fined. Still, this “crisis of representation,” as specialists like to call it, along with the assemblies was not enough. Just as getting rid of the bosses and middlemen is not enough to get rid of capital, criticizing representatives and political parties is not enough to get rid of politics. Still less if a political and democratic ideology is reproduced in the form of assemblies. To illustrate this, we can point out that recently in many neighborhoods, neighbors met in the streets and formed horizontal assemblies that in some cases went so far as to attack police stations, demanding more police and a heavier hand from law enforcement. Without needing to go to this extreme, we think it is necessary to critique assemblyism, including even when it has good intentions. This is mainly because revolution is not just a problem of organizational form but especially one of real social content. Of course we have to organize ourselves and do this outside —yes this is possible— and against the state and all bourgeois structures. The proletariat will find its own means according to each situation. Assemblies are simply a way of acting, of doing, of being the revolt, but they are not their only way, much less a guarantee of anything. In a revolt, the important thing is to take on a common content more than a common organizational form. There are things that cannot be decided in an assembly. There are times when an assembly holds us back and it is necessary to continue without it. Not taking these issues into account leaves us helpless for the next time, always beginning again from nothing.

Returning to the question and to the current situation of this country, we should mention that the presidential elections that, according to the bourgeoisie, were finally going to stabilize the country took place in April of 2003. In the first round —with 80% turnout of registered voters— the winner was the ex-president of 2 terms in the 1990s, Menem (a Peronist and caudillo from the province of La Rioja), with 25% of the vote.

However, due to a long list of corruption cases, his image was overwhelmingly negative, and, rather than risk an embarrassing defeat in the second round, he resigned. This left Nester Kirchner as the winner. He was another Peronist caudillo but from Santa Cruz, a southern oil and wool producing



province that he had governed for 12 years. Unknown in most of the country, Kirchner had slowly been increasing his public profile since 1997 when he began to oppose Menem's policies of privatizing state enterprises.

The government of Nestor Kirchner, from 2003 to 2007, could be characterized as a masterpiece of Peronist and Latin American populism. While the external debt was being paid and renegotiated, the government invested profits from agriculture in increased social benefits and promoted foreign investment in specific areas of industrial production. On the other hand, it took it upon itself to force all social organizations to take a position in favor of or against its national project. Popular schools, neighborhood community centers and groups of young militants fell in line with Kirchnerism. They were encouraged by his supposed renewal of the country, his economic stimulus and his government's image as a "human rights government," after the resumption of the prosecution of members of the military junta of '76. This image was another masterpiece of public relations because, as we know, the state's repressive apparatus continued and would continue intact. In Argentina, there are disappeared under democratic governments, thousands of people murdered in police stations or by trigger happy police officers ("gatillo fácil,"), and there are thousands of prisoners and prosecutions for involvement in social struggles. The government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner continued the policies of her husband, now deceased. Some are amazed that on the one hand the anti-terrorism law is approved and on the other so is same-sex marriage, but these are not contradictory measures. Progressive and leftist ideology remains bogged down in these classless questions of laws and rights. Progressivism is the progress of capital, no matter how much it wants to think of itself as the progress of society against the advances of capital.

The country's public opinion today is polarized for or against the government, in two bourgeois groups that face off against each other to control the country. The anti-government side is associated with people with direct or indirect links to the previous military dictatorship. For this reason, many "progressives" feel more attracted to the government. For many proletarians, it is because of specific economic benefits. The country is now supposedly politicized and committed to dealing with its social problems, so every anniversary of December 2001 we remember "how lost that Argentina was that demanded 'They all must go!' and how those confused citizens can become politically active and form parties, groups and NGOs".

An inability to imagine options other than managing the state's institutions is shared by the whole political spectrum. Even independent groups and / or libertarians, who uphold

the possibility of managing in a horizontal way, without leaders, look for a "valid interlocutor" in the state, the boss or the employer.

In Córdoba, there is a protest camp against Monsanto that has been going on for an extended period of time. They still have not, however, faced up to the fact that they are dealing with the threat to humanity from capital, and so they are demanding that Monsanto leave Argentina, and the boldest are demanding that they leave Latin America, as if the proletarians of the rest of the world should have Monsanto inflicted on them. The perspective of this kind of resistance is still framed within the bounds of patriotism, anti-imperialism, and reformism. This is opposed to the radical struggles and internationalist perspective that we need, not for ideological reasons, but because capital is global.

Responses to the repression against the proletariat have also been developing, although they are still small. This repression has come in the form of prosecuting the oil workers of Las Heras under the new anti-terrorism law. This has set a precedent for dealing with struggles in the future and in the short term, as this year there have been massive increases in the price of food and housing. They have also tried to neutralize struggles with an as yet unused anti-picketing law that will make it easier to repress those who block highways and interfere with the free movement of other people. Added to this is "the war on drugs and crime," which has meant the installation of street cameras in many of the country's cities and an aggressive police and military presence in towns and neighborhoods, setting the stage for state repression, repression which is unfortunately approved of by, perhaps, the majority of the population.

## What can you say about Peronism and its importance to Argentinian politics and the history of the workers movement in the region?

Despite its close connection with so-called totalitarianisms (even though each of those has its own characteristics), Peronism is a somewhat unique phenomenon in the world. This is because of its scale, its cross generational permanence and its ability to include so many different ideological tendencies that in other places could never coexist in the same political party.

But before getting into the question of Peronism, it is important to remember the beginnings of the workers movement, a movement that was buried mainly by Peronism. Influenced largely by the various waves of immigrants that were coming mainly from Europe, it developed into an important labor movement in the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th. From the beginning, anarchist and socialist ideas began to take hold within this movement. Groups and organizations abounded, as did publications and newspapers in various regions of the country. One of these, *La Protesta Humana* (The Human Protest) even had two editions every day. There was social upheaval in various regions of the country, and strikes and mobilizations followed one after the other. In Cuadernos issue 7, we remember the tenants' strike of 1907. In 1904, as a product of the break between anarchists and socialists, the FORA (Workers Federation in the Region of Argentina) appeared. In their 5th congress, they declared that anarchist communism was their objective.

Through repression and the economic crisis of the 1930s, the Argentinian economy was restructured. This had a considerable effect on the workers movement, which continually gave ground to reformism, parliamentarianism, unionism and nationalism, a process that was finally formalized in the CGT (General Confederation of Labor). Even though various organizations co-existed within the labor movement, it was the CGT that began to assume leadership of the movement. This was the basis for the emergence of Peronism. In 1943, the young Colonel Juan Domingo Perón was the popular Secretary of Labor in the military government of the time, and the national economy found itself in a highly favorable situation due to the war and the demand for raw materials. With this influx of international currency, the state was able to undertake its first project, the massive industrialization of the main regions of the country. In this context, and with the start of a new wave of workers struggles, Perón made himself into a popular hero by mediating many of these struggles from a pro-worker perspective.

When, in 1945, there was internal conflict within the military government between different factions within the army, Perón was removed from office and arrested. In response, a massive demonstration of *cabecitas negras* paralyzed the capital and demanded the liberation of their leader. "Cabecitas negras" ("little black heads") was a racially derogatory term used by the bourgeois of Buenos Aires to refer to the poor. The mobilization succeeded in its objective, and the president found himself forced to reinstate Perón and fill the cabinet with ministers who were loyal to Perón. Then, in 1946, Perón was elected president, an office to which he was re-elected again in 1952 with another massive victory as he continued to forge for himself the myth of the great leader.

Since before his first presidential campaign, Perón was accompanied by his wife, María Eva Duarte (Evita), who also quickly turned herself into a popular figure because of the social programs that she promoted through her Eva Perón Foundation. She also promoted women's suffrage, which became law in Argentina in 1947. In 1952, at the height of Peronism, she died of cancer at the age of 33, and a huge myth was created around her. Many go so far as to say that if she had not died, Peronism would have had a different outcome, and it is common for expressions of Peronism today to use her figure and not that of Perón's.

The Peronist formula of a pact between the bourgeoisie and the workers worked perfectly well in a favorable global economic context. Perón had two or more approaches which he employed according to the occasion, and with his charisma he convinced everyone: industrialists, union leaders, international politicians and grassroots worker activists. He met with Franco in Spain and said that Ernesto Guevara was a Peronist. He reassured businessmen, telling them that the workers had been domesticated, even while they were singing about "fighting capital," a line from the anthem "The Peronist March". But, at the same time, there were sectors that were not convinced, particularly the large agriculture and livestock producers. With their never-ending sectoral struggle, they did not agree with the national project of industrialization, which took money from them (in the form of export taxes) in order to fund projects that did not promote their interests. Together with the church, who saw the growth of the state and of secularism as a threat to their power, they began plotting their revenge. It follows from this that today, in a "new situation," where almost identical interbourgeois conflicts exist, the Kirchnerists accuse those that defend the agriculture and livestock sectors of plotting coups.

In 1955, there were various coup attempts by the armed forces and the anti-Peronist opposition, including a brutal shelling of the Plaza de Mayo and the Casa Rosada (the

presidential palace) in June. In September, their coup finally succeeded. Perón was exiled, the mention of his name was prohibited, and Peronist organizations were broken up. But during these outlaw years, his myth grew even more. Guerrilla groups that answered to Perón and received orders from him in Spain were formed. These groups assassinated members of the military who were guilty of killing Peronist militants. At the same time, Peronist militants secretly promoted a rejection of the dictatorship in factories and as union delegates.

By the end of the 1960s, the project of the armed forces was weakening, and in the streets and at various protests throughout the country, the demand “Perón will be back” grew louder and louder. In 1973, after many years of pressure for a return to democratic government, Hector Cámpora was elected. He was a loyal Peronist, with links to the left wing of the Peronist movement. The slogan read “Cámpora in government, Perón in power”.

After 18 years in exile, Peron returned to the country in June, and the ceremony to celebrate his return turned into what was called “The Massacre at Ezeiza”. The AAA and the right wing Peronist groups opened fire on leftist groups such as the FAR (Revolutionary Armed forces) and the Montoneros and on other unarmed groups, killing 13 and wounding more than 200. It seemed as though the big tent that was Peronism was going to tear itself apart. But the leftists within Peronism did not grasp the magnitude of these events and blamed those around Perón, his second wife and the Interior Minister Lopez Rega, for all the problems affecting the movement.

A year later, with Perón as president, there was a May Day rally in the Plaza de Mayo. After chants against right wing groups and loud demands for “the general” to speak, Perón criticized “esos imberbes” (“those beardless kids”), accusing the leftist youth groups of being stupid and not respecting the union members that had spent years in a grassroots struggle for his return. Faced with this situation, the young people left the square and built up their clandestine armed groups.

It seemed that this situation was finally going to clarify the political landscape of the main organizations. But no, the leftists stuck stubbornly to their Peronism, going so far as to talk not only about left Peronism but about “Peronism without Perón”. In this regard, it is fundamental to understand the figure of Evita and the mythology surrounding her, as mentioned above. These groups never abandoned their Populist perspective and, in moments of repression, would even turn to an ideology of armed struggle. For the proletariat, this meant a kind of channeling towards reformism that in turn made repression easier.

On July 1, 1974, Perón died. In the government that followed, headed by his wife Isabel, there were no traces left of

the leftist militancy that had held a central position of power years before. State terrorism became more and more flagrant, and the groundwork for a new military coup began to be laid—a coup that happened in 1976.

In 1983, with the return of elections, the Peronist organizations reassembled themselves and, in the weak economic situation, found strength in neighborhood activism. Although they lost the national elections, Peronism was becoming stronger and infectious, with a strategy of including many tendencies, mainly of the left. It is from then that we can say—exaggerating slightly—that Argentinian society is, in a sense, an ideologically and culturally Peronist society. This is because, for a lot of people, whether self-declared “Peronists” or not, the reasoning that generally has the most currency is Peronist. Almost everywhere in the world has seen the triumph of the glorification of the worker as long as he stays at work, of “every man for himself” behind a show of solidarity, of blind fanaticism and ignorance. In Argentina, it is Peronism that articulates this culturally. Its influence is such that even for young people—mainly students—who get involved with political activism of the left, whether parliamentary or not (and this includes anarchist groups), the first thing they do is repeat the old formula of how to practice militancy in Argentina. This translates into going to poor neighborhoods, helping with schoolwork, opening soup kitchens, asking the state for subsidies and developing a strongly paternalist attitude towards other people. Anything else is considered extremism, incoherence or being out of touch with reality, unless it is union organizing (or other forms of workerism), political parties (or other forms of politics), “cultural resistance” (that is to say, nice harmless actions), eco-activism or other forms that do not radically question capitalist social organization.

Another characteristic of Peronism has been its extreme nationalism, which can become Latin Americanism when it is trying to re-enforce the alliances between the states and the bourgeoisie of the region, as is now happening with Morales, Mujica, Maduro, etc. For us, all states are imperialist as they all defend the interests of particular bourgeois and none can defend the interests of the proletariat. But in this, we can not only blame Peronism and progressive governments. Trotskyists, Stalinists, Guevarists, Leninists, etc. have historically promoted nationalism within the proletariat and have benefitted from populism and the nationalist idea that each region should be able to manage its own misery. What they have always tried to pass off as internationalism is no more than the sum of national liberations.

We emphasize that we do not want stronger states. We want to do away with the state. We do not want to make weak

economies grow. We want to do away with the economy. We are not looking for a better place in the international division of labor. We want to get rid of the market and wage labor. We remind the hypocrites who say that we do not want better conditions that we do not want to shed our blood in vain and that we already know where reformism and nationalism lead.

We continue to affirm that the proletariat has no country, that we have to be against “our” state and “our” exploiters at the same time that we support, in whatever ways are possible, proletarian struggles in other regions of the world. This does not mean that we only need to understand the international reality of our class but that we should take seriously and practice internationalism, reconstructing links between proletarians with coordinated discussions, materials and actions. We hope our materials in Cuadernos make a contribution to this, and we very much appreciate this interview as it may allow us to get in contact with more comrades.