

Eternal Builder of Dreams and Hopes: Marta Harnecker (1937 - 2019)

By [Marta Harnecker](#) and [Network of Intellectuals, Artists and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity](#)

Global Research, June 19, 2019

[The Bullet](#)

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)
Theme: [History](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

“Well, friends, that’s it for today. You have to live in uncertainty and get ahead no matter what it takes. A hug as always, full of dreams and hopes.” – Marta

With these words Marta Harnecker bade farewell to all her friends in her last mail on April 24th, after giving us her last brave report on the course of her illness. In these lines lies also her personal philosophy of life: even if we live in uncertainty, our steps must never stop because it is our duty to make this world full of dreams and hopes a reality, where peoples will finally reach justice, peace and full realization.

On Friday June 14, Marta, surely against her will, had to cross the threshold from this concrete plane to that of historical immortality. Her ideas, her tireless proposals for the construction of new worlds, her unshakable faith in the capacity of people to fight against the suffocating forces of the capitalist model and to make a real, substantive democracy prevail from an economic model, aimed at satisfying the material conditions of life for all without exception, are already part of the history of Our-American thought.

That was always the *télos* of her intellectual trajectory; a thought that was born from the oppressed South and was a forceful counter against the colonizing and exploiting forces of the North. That is why she tirelessly sought the keys to the new paths that would lead us to that world we must build: from her experience of decentralized participatory planning in Kerala, India, to participatory and protagonist democracy, proposed and activated by Hugo Chávez in Venezuela through 21st Century Socialism, and to which Marta Harnecker dedicated her years of greatest intellectual strength.

Along with her beloved companion, Michael Lebowitz, an equally brilliant intellectual mind, Marta managed to sketch to a great extent the coordinates of that world to which all thinkers committed to the struggles of our peoples aspire. In this struggle, we will always have the rich arsenal of ideas that Marta left embodied, even in her last days, in the great number of works she published (and those in preparation) several of which received international recognition through distinctions such as the Liberator Award for Critical Thinking in 2013.

For all these reasons, the Network of Intellectuals, Artists and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity, of which Marta Harnecker is one of its founders and was an active participant in all its meetings, forums and public expressions, we honor her. And although today we feel her physical departure, greater is the feeling of being more committed to reinforce the passage that is in transit through the new roads marked by Marta towards that world that

between all of us, together with the peoples, we are obliged to build as the only way to safeguard humanity and the planet.

Dear Marta, wherever you are, we join you in an embrace, one full of dreams and hopes.

In Our America, this June 16, 2019.

Network of Intellectuals, Artists and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity

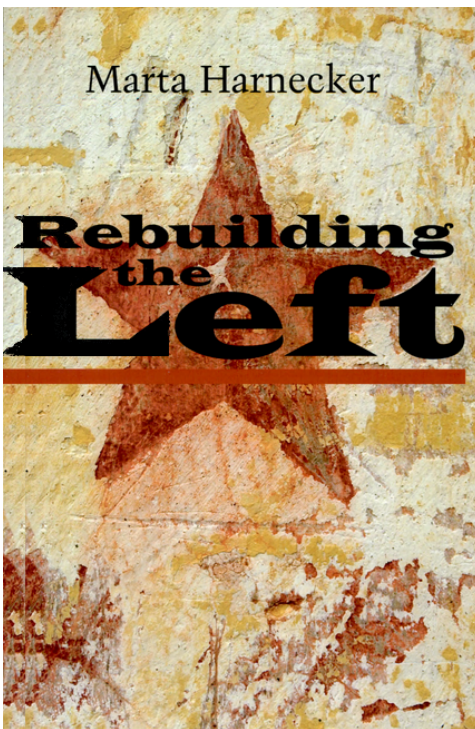
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A Political Instrument Appropriate for Each Reality

by [Marta Harnecker](#)

A. Why Is a Political Organization Necessary?

1. The recent mobilizations occurring in Latin America and in the world confirm what Lenin wrote in 1914¹: “Without organization the masses lack unity of will” and without that they cannot struggle against the “powerful terrorist military organization” of the Capitalist states.



2. In order for political action to be effective, so that protests, resistance and struggles are genuinely able to change things, to convert mass uprisings into revolutions, a political instrument capable of overcoming the dispersion and fragmentation of the exploited and the oppressed is required: one that can create spaces to bring together those who, in spite of their differences, have a common enemy; that is able to strengthen existing struggles and promote others by orientating their actions according to a thorough analysis of the political situation; that can act as an instrument for cohering the many expressions of resistance and struggle.

3. The history of triumphant revolutions clearly demonstrates what can be achieved when a political instrument exists that is capable of raising an alternative national program to unify

the struggles of diverse social actors behind a common goal; that helps them to cohere and that elaborates a path forward for these actors based on an analysis of the existent balance of forces. Only in this manner can actions be carried out at the right place and the right time, always seeking out the weakest link in the enemy's chain.

4. The political instrument is like a piston in a locomotive which transforms steam power into the motion that is transmitted to the wheels, driving the locomotive forward, and with it, the whole train. Strong organizational cohesion does not alone provide the major objective capacity for acting, but at the same time, it creates an internal climate that makes possible energetic interventions into events, profiting from the opportunities these offer. It must be remembered that in politics one does not only have to be right but one must also be timely and rely on strength to achieve success.

5. On the contrary, not having clear ideas of the reasons to struggle and the feeling of not relying on solid instruments that permit adopted decisions to be put into practice, has a negative influence, resulting in action being paralyzed.

ii) A Workshop for Strategic Thinking

6. A political instrument is required because we need a body that sets the scene for the first draft of a proposal, a program or national project that is an alternative to capitalism. This programme or project serves as a sea chart for finding the way, for making sure we don't get lost, for putting the construction of socialism on the right road, for not confusing what has to be done now with what has to be done later, for knowing what steps to take and how to take them; in other words, we need a compass to ensure the ship doesn't run adrift, but rather, reaches its destination safely.

7. This task needs time, research and knowledge of the national and international situation. It is not something that can be improvised overnight, much less so in the complex world in which we live. This project must be set out in a programme that serves as that sea chart we talked about earlier and that becomes something concrete in a national development plan.

8. The initial preparation will always have to be done by the political organization, but I believe we must be very mindful that, as it progresses, this project should be enriched and modified by social practice, with opinions and suggestions from the social actors because, as previously stated, socialism cannot be decreed from on high, it has to be built with the people.

9. Rosa Luxemburg never tired of repeating that the path to socialism was not laid down in advance and that neither were there predetermined formulas and blueprints, since the "modern proletarian class does not conduct its struggle according to any blueprint reproduced in a book or a theory. The modern workers' struggle is a part of history, a part of social evolution and we learn how we should fight in the midst of history, in the midst of evolution, in the midst of the struggle."²

10. The political instrument must stimulate a constant debate on the big national issues so that this plan, and the more concrete programs that stem from it, are constantly enriched. I agree with Farruco Sesto that these debates cannot be limited to a simple confrontation of ideas but should "lead to the collective construction of ideas and of answers to the problems [...] Arguments added to or raised against other ideas will allow a shared truth to be

created.”³

11. The political organization should be – according to Sesto – “a huge workshop for strategic thought, deployed all over the country.” I in particular think that the political instrument should not only encourage an internal debate but should also endeavour to facilitate active participation in spaces for public debate – such as those we have previously mentioned – on subjects of more general interest in which all concerned citizens can take part.

12. For this reason, I find myself once again in agreement with Farruco that since the party is not something apart from the people but rather has to make “its life within the people” the ideal place for this debate is “in the bosom of the popular movement.” Moreover, “if one of the strategic lines of the revolution is to transfer power to the people, that implies transferring not only the ability to take decisions but also that of working out the bases for that decision [because] producing ideas and making clear the road to take is the most important activity in the exercise of power.”

iii) A Guide that Details the Steps to be Followed

13. The political instrument is necessary, not only to coordinate the popular movement and promote theoretical thinking, but also for defining strategy. A political guide is needed that details the steps to be followed for implementing proposed theory, in conjunction with the analysis of the existing correlation of forces. Only in this way can actions be launched at the most opportune time and place, always seeking the weakest link in the opponent’s chain, taking advantage of the steam contained in the boiler at the decisive moment, converting it into an impelling force, and avoiding it being wasted. Of course, as [Trotsky said](#), what moves things is not the piston, but the steam; that is the energy that surges from mobilized masses.

14. And if a political instrument is necessary for success in taking power, it is also fundamental in the construction of the new society, an alternative to Capitalism, as we spoke about before.

B. Overcoming the Subjective Block

15. We are aware that there are a number of apprehensions toward such ideas. There are many who are not even willing to discuss them. Such positions are adopted because they associate this idea with the anti-democratic, authoritarian, bureaucratic and manipulative political practices that have characterized many left-wing parties.

16. I believe that it is very important to overcome this subjective block because I am convinced, as I said earlier, that there can be no effective struggle against the current system of domination, nor can an alternative socialist society be built, without the existence of a body capable of bringing all the actors together and of unifying their will for action around the goals they set.

17. It is paradoxical that Hardt and Negri who admit that we live in a ‘global state of war’, that the full democracy we want has yet to be built, who justify the use of violence as self-defence against imperial power, who say that the multitude, “is a project of political organization and thus can be achieved only through political practices,”⁴ and that “the multitude must be able to make decisions and act in common,” do not accept the idea,

however, that there should be a “central point of command and intelligence”⁵ and have no suggestions whatsoever of how to implement the decisions taken by common action.

C. Why a Political Instrument and not A Political Party

i) Lenin Against a Universal Vision

18. Owing to the growing disparagement of politics and politicians, many people tend to reject the term ‘party’. That is why I prefer to speak of the political instrument.

19. But this is not the only reason; there is a more fundamental reason that seeks to emphasize the instrumental character that all political revolutionary organizations have to have.

20. If what is at issue is the leading of the struggle of popular sectors, organizational questions cannot become the objective itself, just a tool that enables this objective to be reached.

21. And the form which this struggle takes depends on the reality of each country. One cannot have a single formula for the organization; it must be defined to fit the characteristics of each social reality.

22. Contrary to many of his followers in their first attempts to create a revolutionary party in Russia, Lenin was absolutely clear that it was not a question of developing a universal formula. He knew well how European social democracy, functioning under bourgeois democratic regimes, was organized: in order to fight electorally, it was organized into strong legal parties; therefore, their characteristics could not be transferred mechanically to czarist Russia, whose autocratic regime prevented all open revolutionary political organizations. And neither could the model of the old Russian clandestine revolutionary organizations be used, although it was necessary to learn from them about certain conspiracy techniques.

23. What was to be done to create a revolutionary party in Russia – a country in which a terrorist state existed, which relied on a very minimal, highly concentrated and very combative working class? According to the Bolshevik leader, what had to be done was to create a closed party of disciplined militants – true revolutionary groups – and with them go “in meeting with the spontaneous movements of popular sectors, or more precisely, the proletariat of the factories, to create an organization for this movement which was necessary for the conditions” of the country.⁶

ii) The Third International and the Communist Parties

24. For Lenin, it was absolutely clear that there is no universal formula. He always saw the party as the political subject par excellence of social transformation, as the instrument that would provide political direction to the class struggle – a struggle that always takes place under specific historical, political and social conditions. He therefore believed that the party’s organic structure should be adapted to the reality of each country, and modified according to the concrete demands of struggle.

25. These early ideas of Lenin were ratified at the 3rd Congress of the Communist International in 1921. In one of his works⁷ he argues the following: “There is no absolute form of organization which is correct for Communist Parties at all times. The conditions of

the proletarian class struggle are constantly changing, and so, the proletarian vanguard has always to be looking for effective forms of organization. Equally, each Party must develop its own special forms of organization to meet the particular historically-determined conditions within the country.”

26. Nevertheless, in spite of the International’s instructions, communist parties in practice followed a single model in spite of the differences between the countries where they were founded.

27. That could be explained in some way if two criteria are taken into account that Lenin considered of universal application. The first referred to the concept of the revolutionary party as a party of the working class and the second, the demand that in order to belong to the Communist International, each one of these parties must necessarily adopt the name Communist Party.

28. Such assumptions were applied dogmatically by the Latin American section of the International, whose influence was extremely damaging. Their leaders devotedly copied formulas invented for an undifferentiated Third World and ignored the specificities of Latin American countries. We don’t have to go too far back to be reminded of the problems [Mariátegui](#) faced when he did not respect the International’s decision about the name of the working class party he founded; he called it the Socialist Party and not Communist Party, a prerequisite for joining the International.

iii) Important Popular Sectors are Ignored

29. The acritical emphasis placed on the working class led to Latin America parties ignoring the specific characteristics of that continent’s revolutionary social subject and to not understanding the role that indigenous people and Christians can play in revolutions in Latin American.

30. It is obvious that, at this time in our countries, the popular struggle is developing in very different circumstances from those of czarist Russia. But it is also obvious that Venezuela is not Cuba nor Nicaragua, nor is Bolivia the same as Ecuador. In each country, there are different circumstances that mediate the strategy and modify the forms of popular struggle. Consequently, I do not believe it is useful to propose a template with a formal structure that the revolutionary instrument would have to be.

31. The mistake of many parties and movements in Latin America is that they have prioritized the problem of organizational structure over the needs of the struggle, when it ought to be the reverse.

32. One way in which this can be seen has been the tendency to apply very sophisticated forms of organization that do not correspond to the development of the revolutionary movement itself, copying them from other experiences that very few see as their own. One extreme deviation of some groups of the Left in Latin America, defining themselves in favour of armed struggle, was that of creating structures and military rule without possessing any military force.

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Marta Harnecker (1937 – 2019) is originally from Chile, where she participated in the revolutionary process of 1970-1973. She has written extensively on the Cuban Revolution and on the nature of socialist democracy. She lived in Caracas and was a participant in the Venezuelan revolution. Her latest book is [A World to Build: New Paths toward Twenty-First Century Socialism](#).

Notes

1. V. I. Lenin, "[The Collapse of the Second International](#)," Ch. 6.
2. Rosa Luxemburg, "The Politics of Mass Strikes and Unions."
3. Farruco Sesto, *Que Viva el Debate!*
4. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York: Penguin, 2004, p.226.
5. Ibid p. 222.
6. V.I. Lenin, "[Our Immediate Task](#)," 1899.
7. V.I. Lenin, "Thesis on the Structure, Methods and Action of Communist Parties," in Alan Adler (ed.), *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*.

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