

By way of friendly introduction

TOWARDS A NEW SOCIALISM

UTOPIA CONTINUES

Our Agenda was born and continues to journey under the light and stimulus of Utopia. It twists and turns with time, but it is unwaveringly linked to our commitment to an integral and complete humanism.

Every year, the Agenda has had a central theme. Specialists reflect on and approach the theme from different angles. The themes have been grand and ambitious: intercultural dialogue, the media, democracy, politics, the indigenous world, migration, external debt, and our *Patria Grande* ...I say they are grand topics because they encompass peoples and nations, our Continent and the Third World, solidarity with the First World and the transformation of international institutions.

Last year's theme was another grand theme, urgent and conflictive: we considered the politics that have died or that need to die. We then proposed another politics based on justice, equality, and dignity, diverse in its concrete expressions but authentically global in the face of the perverse globalization of neoliberal capitalism.

For centuries, humanity has created ways of doing politics—conflictively and fumblingly—in concrete historical experiences. Sometimes these ways are contradictory and even inhumane.

Logically, talking about politics meant talking about citizenship, co-responsible participation, systems, governments, and political parties. In this 2009 Agenda, with a trembling spirit of adventure, we ask ourselves how we can create a systemic approach that leads to a truly humane and global politics.

Today the emperor has no clothes. The Third World, above all, has bitterly experienced the iniquity of this homicidal and ecocidal system: a capitalism that has become neoliberal and global. Mário Soares suggests that “the neoliberal system is showing clear signals of exhaustion and incapacity: a new economic world order is required.” With indignation and nostalgia, attached to so many dreams and struggles, and responding to the disfigured dignity of the majority of our human race, we turn again to socialism: a new socialism, as the title of the Agenda prays. Obviously we are not trying to repeat experiments that—too many times—have culminated in deception, violence, dictatorship, poverty, and death. We do not want to “look back with anger” and we do not want to return to models that have been surpassed. We try to revise, learn from the past, update our strategies, and avoid becoming complacent. In doing so, we seek to live, here and now, locally and globally, the ever new Utopia.

The subtitle of the Agenda categorically proclaims that Utopia continues on, that it is not a chimera but a challenge. Thus, we ask how we are doing with Utopia. Preoccupied by the daily construction of politics as the art of the possible, have we lost sight of what seems impossible but yet is truly necessary? Do we have to content ourselves with electing somewhat leftist governments and continue, submissive and defeated, under the same right-wing capitalist system? What has happened to the old capitalist-socialist disjunctive? (Of course plenty of people say that the times of left and right have now passed. To which the satirist responds: “Just because there isn't a left and a right anymore doesn't mean that there's no up or down.” Cervantes would say “the haves and the have-nots.”) Is socialism still possible? Or are we too late? Isn't Utopia still just as necessary as “our daily bread”?

But which socialism or socialisms? We advocate a new socialism. One that corresponds to the newness of radicalized democracy—universal and encompassing the economic, social, and cultural realms. “No longer will there be socialism,” states Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “but socialisms. They will share the common understanding that the definition of socialism is democracy without end.”

The Agenda asks us: what changes have we experienced as a result of the lessons history has taught us? What attitudes and actions should we take today for a militant socialism? Nobody is born a socialist; socialists are made, personally and communally. There are basic referential values that are the foundations of the new socialism: human dignity, social equality, liberty, co-responsibility, participation, the right to food, health, education, housing, work, and a healthy environment, and the desabso-lutization of private property because of the recognition that it is part of a greater “social mortgage.”

“No socialist structure,” insists Frei Betto, “can produce, by mechanical operation, people of generous character and willing to share. Rather, a pedagogy must be adopted that is capable of permanently promoting this moral development; this pedagogy must be capable of making socialism the political name for love.” It is a voluntarist illusion,” warns Wladimir Pomar, “to establish rigid forms for the necessary transformations and for the radicalization of democracy...These, the transformations, depend on many factors that transcend our simple desires and they demand time and sweat. Without a clear vision in respect to each socialism, we run the risk of descending into either chaotic democratism or authoritarianism.” Clearly, a socialism that deserves the name rejects, by definition, all dictatorship and imperialism; it also rejects any democracy that is merely formal.

Agustí de Semir emphasizes that “given the failures of democracy, there are many who place themselves outside of the system and speak about working in networks. They begin their struggle from another point of departure, with social forums, land occupations, the welcoming of migrants, the creation of alternative media, etc. Working in networks means working in a horizontal but coordinated way, growing from below and in a decentralized manner, strengthening local control and direct action.”

“Socialism,” affirms Paul Singer, “signifies an economy organized in such a manner that all people or groups of people enjoy access to credit to acquire the means of production that permit them to engage in the activities of their choosing.”

Socialist François Houtart proposes four principles/objectives for a new socialism:

- Priority on using natural resources in a renewable manner
- The predominance of the value of use rather than the value of exchange
- Democratic participation in all sectors of collective life
- Interculturality

Utopia continues on, despite its many challenges, scandalously outdated in this hour of pragmatism, of production at all costs, of chastened postmodernity. The Utopia of which we speak we share with the millions who have preceded us—giving even their blood—and with the millions who today live and struggle and march and sing. This Utopia is being constructed: we are the artisans of Utopia. We proclaim it and we make it happen: it is the grace of God and our achievement. With this “utopian agenda” in our hands and in our hearts, we want to “give a reason for our hope.” We announce and we intend to live—with humility and passion—a coherent, creative, and subversively transformative hope.

