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A new era for socialism

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With this document, I would like to provide some ideas as to what we understand as socialism. We must be aware of the values which guide us and, above all, how they may be applied in a new world. Of course, those of us who arrived at the democratic left in the 1960s and 1970s are now working within a different context. However, the values which guide us towards action are exactly the same.

There is not a single day that goes by in which we don't face cases of injustice. There is not a single day in which we don't feel that something is wrong. There is not even a moment in which we cease to think about the billions of people who live in terrible conditions. That is what unites and calls us together as socialists.

We ask ourselves why we do the things we do. Why are we present in every neighbourhood, in every city, and why do we call people to work collectively? We do it because we firmly believe that society can change and we are convinced that no one must endure injustice and inequality. All human beings are entitled to the right of a dignified life.

The Socialist Party has existed for 120 years. Its legacy is one of many important struggles and battles which resulted in real transformations in the lives of citizens. Many of the rights enjoyed by Argentinian society were proposed, above all, by socialists. Men and women who came together to pursue obvious goals: that workers, women, and young people might have the right to a better life. So many others around the world acted in a similar way. Socialism is an international movement which seeks peace, democracy, and equality. It is a movement which unites with those who have the least, with those who are most in need, because it recognises that inequality and poverty aren't natural, but rather that they are social



constructions which cannot be attributed to individual responsibility or to the indirect influence of the markets.

The world changes and socialism should change with it. If it does not, it will become rigid and will end up turning its back on those which it was conceived to represent. It should propose a new future which acknowledges the changes in production methods, in social relations, and in the connections and new means of communication between human beings. If it does not, it runs the serious risk that as a political alternative it will lose out. This would mean surrendering to those who, instead of seeking justice and equality in a period of globalisation, solely aim to sustain the status quo and increase the power of the already powerful. Or, even worse: it would give in to those who wish to return humanity to worse times. Therefore, now more than ever, we must adapt in order to create a new socialism.

Socialism for the modern world

During the last decades we have seen important global changes. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, capitalism has continually conquered markets and developed new production systems. The so-called globalisation of the economy, in its day welcomed by a range of social and political forces around the world, ended up being straitjacketed within the realms of the political right. Neoliberalism, as a new version of capitalism after the Welfare State, finally won the battle.

As socialists, despite the inevitability of globalisation, we work to reverse its most negative impacts: the concentration of wealth in few hands. We began a courageous struggle against inequality and poverty, and we attempted to contribute to a process which would result in equality and solidarity. Where socialism governed, the globalisation process assumed a more human side. However, today we see how social democracy, as a system of ideas and as a political project, has lost its drive. We have done something wrong.

Those of us who belong to the democratic left have a strong tool to overcome our current state: self-analysis. We must think about the



mistakes we made in search of our undoubtedly honourable objectives. This critical exercise allows us after all to establish a future projection, to develop new ideas, and to face the challenges ahead.

From the mid-1970s, when the Welfare State started to enter into a crisis, we as socialists put all our efforts into defending its achievements. And then, when neoliberalism arrived following the fall of the Berlin Wall, we tried to restrain the social crisis: we fervently fought for the right to healthcare, education, and work. We wanted to protect the achievements reached so far and for which we had fought over so many years with the aim to improve the quality of life for workers around the world. Yet we were incapable of transferring this struggle to the cultural sphere. We were incapable of performing a deep analysis of the consumer society, and of seriously widening the scope of democratic participation. We were incapable of responding to new political and cultural demands of the citizens who felt a greater need of increasing their rights. In short, we assumed a cultural paradigm which was not our own. Today, we are faced with the challenge of reversing that trend.

When we refer to the cultural sphere, we should make a clear statement: we manifest, above all, a critique of a political culture hijacked by neoliberal narratives. The political left has not been able to change the fundamental trend of that system which places *having* above *being*. An immeasurable number of messages of the consumer society link the idea of being human to the possession of goods. It is obvious that the political left is advocating and fighting for equal access to goods and services, but not for their accumulation or squandering. The culture of *use* and *discard*, of constant novelty, of spending resources without taking care to preserve them, has profoundly penetrated contemporary society. In this sense, socialists should once again advocate a new lifestyle. If there is any purpose for us, it is to put forward an alternative and to make it a reality amongst ourselves. We must live soberly, connect with each other, educate ourselves, and be capable of living with a concept of space and time which appeals to the fellowship of human bonds and not to the mere speed of a consumerist world. These are essential tasks for those of us who promote the ideas of a democratic left.



The modification of an established social and political culture means assuming that socialism, rather than being a final objective, is a daily task, a way of being and acting, and that the values which we propose constitute the basis of our lifestyle. This involves developing new patterns of behaviour, creating a new way of interacting with each other, adopting a sustainable consumer conduct, contributing time and effort towards others (towards loved ones and those that most need it). We must give the public space priority over the private sphere in our lives and our culture, place relationships above interests, follow up ideas instead of taking an opportunistic stance, respect our nature and environment and protect it against destruction.

There are those who ask if socialism will be able to find the adequate answers to the current challenges of the global situation today.

In different countries, those of us who belong to political organisations on the democratic left are aware that the world is changing at a rapid pace, whilst social relationships are weakened, community bonds are diluted, and social links are fading in an individualist culture. And everyone wants to know if we can do anything against it.

We know that the future is not yet written and that it depends on the action which we take. On the 130th anniversary of the death of Ferdinand Lassalle, the founder of the German Social Democratic Party, Zygmunt Bauman claimed that “the misfortune of modern social democracy is that there isn’t any alternative vision, any utopia”.

Socialism should create precisely that alternative, based on an interpretation of the current situation and with a Utopian vision in mind, to give a purpose to our lives and reach a level of satisfaction different to that provided by the market.

Bauman’s statement contains a clear message that a powerful global transformation of societies is needed and he alerts us to the dangers we will face if we repeat the strategies of the past. In a society undergoing tremendous transformations we cannot refer again exclusively to the strong argument to keep the Welfare State.



The Welfare State, with its significant public expenditure and policies aimed at guaranteeing work and social rights, is unfortunately an experience of the past. To suggest rebuilding it now as it was before is an unviable option. It was linked to a specific phase of capitalism and, when this came under severe pressure, it began to falter. There is no doubt that social democracy achieved significant progress within a defined period of time and in an area essentially limited to Europe. It produced powerful States, with models based on increased public spending which balanced out the relationship between capital and labour, and which strengthened union and workers' movement organisations. Its policies resulted in levels of development and equality never before seen in history. It did this, indeed, in a context of political conflict: in the midst of the Cold War, the world was forced to choose between two evidently conflicting systems. One sacrificed freedom for the sake of an equality which, on the other hand, was understood as uniformity. The other guaranteed freedom and a rights-based State but which didn't fulfil the equality and welfare expectations for which socialism was conceived. The social democracy model, which undoubtedly was produced from within capitalism, was an intermediate alternative which managed to alleviate - given all the contradictions of hybrid processes which are not put forward as the final solution for human conflicts - the contradictions of both the wildest capitalism and the regimes of the so-called "real socialism". This model was based on freedom and political pluralism, considered the existence of political parties and open associations to be an essential condition and at the same time supported the idea that if democracy wants to be successful it must increase the margins of social equality.

As previously mentioned, socialism cannot simply offer a new economic model to achieve potential improvements in the living standards of citizens, or to make capitalism fairer. Today, perhaps more than ever, it must propose a new way to structure society and a new idea of improving social interactions which foster respect, participation, and solidarity. The most important aim for socialism is to promote a better life in community. To achieve this, it is important to strengthen not only a new relationship between the State and the



market, which only understands society in economic terms, but also strong cultural values and definitions which facilitate civic participation, support cooperative movements, associations and other forms of shared economy, and ensures the involvement of individuals in tasks which contribute towards a better society.

In short, socialists should begin to outline a new paradigm. Some years ago, a number of theorists manifested their support of the “Welfare Society”. Instead of considering things merely from the perspective of the State - in societies in which state power has declined in the wake of globalisation - we should be brave enough to promote the idea of participation and association, and thus alleviate the social paternalism which has smothered social policy in red tape. This would allow us to achieve transformations along with social organisations and movements, with civil society associations, and with different communities. If we do not go for it we will just be part of a new failure.

Societies, overwhelmed by globalisation, demand exactly that: to be listened to and looked after. Around the world, and as a result of an economic crisis which is, fundamentally, a cultural and social model crisis, thousands of people are protesting with outrage in the face of inequalities. Many people call it an uprising against the “political establishment”, against the “old representations”, and against “the system”. However, what it is really about is citizens demanding action and answers to their requests and needs.

Undoubtedly, economic globalisation, confined within neoliberalism thinking patterns, produced imbalances which seem to be unresolvable today and which have left millions of people out of any networks of social relations. Today, these people feel that they have the right to rebel against such a situation. In the same way, other groups of society lost their former political identities and important sections of the population have been excluded from the Welfare State altogether. Many traditional jobs were replaced by new technologies, especially in sectors which traditionally had been strongholds of organised labour and were represented by the left. But social democracy did not have the adequate means to bring them



back onto the labour market. As the Spanish theorist Ignacio Urquiza put it, social democracy lacked the courage and tools to put the right measures in place. Today, it is this courage that we have to regain if we want to challenge the anti-political mood which rapidly gives way to authoritarianism and populism.

The key word of our present time is “uncertainty”. Such feelings lead to outrage and fear. They also spawn political options which attempt to take advantage of citizens’ disaffection. We do not know where we are heading or who is at the earth’s helm. We only feel that, day by day, States are losing their influence. However, it is not the people who are gaining power: it is the markets. Deregulation and ever increasing flexibility cause more and more unemployment, the elimination of our rights and threaten to take over our lives.

Uncertainty has become a general feature of our time. There is a fear of losing your job or fear of never even finding one. People are afraid that their living standards will decline and that technological progress might threaten their very existence.

The development of anti-political positions – and in some cases anti-establishment ones – forces us to rethink our role in the political systems of the modern world. The political structures of the Western world have indeed become obsolete. In many cases, members of the parties and civil servants are entrenched in their institutions. Citizens have the feeling that they are left out, that they have been “hijacked” by a bureaucracy that does not tend to build bridges towards participation.

This anti-elitist rebellion is the expression of anger of those outraged by a globalisation which has not included them. Yet there is also the underlying danger of nationalism, of particularisms, of the hatred against the others, and of the rejection of foreigners. What is at risk is even democracy itself.

We socialists have the obligation to recover our identity to avoid such phenomena. We need to provide answers to an exclusive globalisation, generating opportunities for the most disadvantaged and extending democracy. We have to include all those who most need it, those who do not feel represented. In short, we have the



obligation to take care of citizens' demands. Only by doing so will we create a political system which is not seen nor understood as distant or far-off. Only by doing so will we be able to reduce the scope of action of those who abuse their authoritarian positions to take advantage of the legitimate feelings of disaffection and anger of the people.

The Trumps, the Le Pens, and the neo-fascists which appear across Europe benefit from the feeling of helplessness experienced by millions of workers. Yet honest men and women need a fair and not a demagogic answer. The promises of the right – and also of some of those on the left – are not the solution to the problems of the vast majority of men and women excluded from globalisation. The answer is to increase rights and freedoms, to review our political processes and to take forward the proposals which allow us to pave the path towards more cohesive and inclusive societies. This needs to be done together with the society and not just in a top-down approach carried out by the state.

What is happening now in the world is not new. It is the inherent contradiction between a capitalism which favours isolation and inequality, and the democracy which promotes equality and community. As it has happened in earlier stages of history which we thought had long gone, democracy and human rights are again threatened by those in power.

Fortunately, those citizens who feel indignant do not always seek answers from the extreme right. They also look to the left. There are the thousands of North Americans who backed a socialist candidate like Bernie Sanders, or the British people who made Jeremy Corbyn the leader of the historic Labour Party. There are the Germans who back Martin Schulz as candidate for Chancellor, and our friends in France who support the civic socialism of Benoît Hamon. There are also the socialist governments of Portugal, Uruguay, and Chile. In many other societies, social democracy is slowly rejuvenating, but with the awareness of a need to offer answers to citizens who, at times, have felt abandoned.



Socialism is a wide and varied movement. Within it there are different perspectives and there is an ongoing process of analyses and studies on what type of policies need to be promoted. In contrast to other movements on the left, it is not dogmatic. That is its main benefit. Not all socialists think the same way, nor do we offer the same solutions. Yet, apart from any dispute, we share a set of common values as to how we want to shape the future. If we endorse these values we will be able to ensure the growth of socialism and to improve the future of our world.

Socialism, technological change, and the future of labour relations

We should understand, however, that today's answers are more complex than those of yesterday. Socialist ideology was forged in a different context, with a relatively stable and productive capitalism which extended its reach with a thriving and growing industry. In this context, it was possible to control and democratise it, especially following the 1930s crisis. It was a capitalism which, in certain areas of the planet, could expect full employment with a powerful industrialisation and manufacturing sector.

Following the crisis in the 1970s, and especially with the development of new production and especially the information and communication technologies, capitalism ceased to offer the certainty it once provided. We live in a period in which jobs are being destroyed, while at the same time considerable progress is made in the technological and productive sectors.

The expression of "technological unemployment" was already introduced by John Maynard Keynes at the beginning of the 1930s. With this term he attempted to express the social changes which were taking place at that time. He feared that one day technology would replace the force of human workers and that the consequences would be exactly those that we are experiencing today: structural unemployment in various parts of the world.

What is certain is that new technological processes have changed production relations and have transformed the basic structure of



societies. There are those who predicted “the end of work”, others who have spoken of “societies without jobs”, and there were also those who have advocated the production automation without worrying too much about the social consequences of it.

The automation of production generates the previously described consequences. Yet it also presents an opportunity: to share the workload and thus reduce the working hours. It also allows us to reflect on a society of free and associated producers, such as those created by socialists two centuries ago. At first sight, such processes and progressive developments seem to be quite far away from socialism. Yet examined in detail, they may bring us closer to a fairer society.

In this context it is important to understand the workers’ situation: their jobs are often based on short-term contracts and the companies are not committed to paying any additional benefits. As Sennett once said, in neoliberalism time is short and institutions are fractured. Jobs are replacing careers and they are no longer life-long, as it was the case in the Welfare State. This has a clear impact on the subjective situation of the workers and their collective actions. On the other side we must not forget to mention another critical point of the current labour situation: an enormous number of jobs are not officially registered. This shadow economy has grave consequences for workers and their families, and also for our societies. Informal workers are left outside social security networks, with no prospects of advancement, without a decent salary, being at risk of falling into poverty. And it is mainly the young generation which is faced with most obstacles: difficulties accessing their first job and, if they manage to get onto the labour market they usually start out with informal jobs under precarious conditions.

There is no doubt that we will need more qualified workers, and new functions will be introduced in the production processes. These functions are already creating new jobs, but these are usually restricted to specific areas in the technology sector. Perhaps this is the right time to develop some courageous proposals: if not everybody can have a job under the present conditions, why not



think about new ways of distributing employment? Why not think about a basic universal income which ensures certain rights for all citizens from the moment they are born?

The neoliberal discourse always gets to the same conclusion, namely to accept a culture of precarious conditions. This means to assume that there are people who are “of no use to the world”, that human beings should only be measured in terms of their use calculated in economic figures, and that economic productivity will only increase if the rights of workers are slashed. But what would happen if we refute such ideas and instead use the advantages of social change on a global level to the benefit of the majorities in our societies? What would happen if we complement the unstoppable change in a globalised world with innovative and progressive components? What would happen in a world where each individual enjoys the same opportunities?

Socialists should be prepared for such a new world. The so-called “shared economy”, including transport and accommodation services, which today has been captured and dominated by an unregulated and predatory capitalism could be perceived from the left as an opportunity if it is democratised as a service for citizens. In a world in which each individual can create certain goods and offer services, what is required is to give it the right direction. And only democratic socialism can offer that.

If we want to use the progress made in telecommunications, the production sector, and in the area of new technologies to improve the living and working conditions of the people, a firm voice and strong guidance are needed. As socialists we cannot really oppose progress, because that would go against our own convictions. Our aim is not to deny the strong impact of historical processes, but to turn this into an opportunity. Where capitalism only want to grab the economic opportunities with no regard for the millions of men and women around the world losing their jobs and their lifestyles, socialists must see the possibilities which this process offers for positive change: we must advocate a reduction of working hours,



share the workload and promote a society in which each individual can create and decide on their own future perspectives.

Socialism and democracy

Socialism can only create policies within the matrix of democracy. Incredibly, over 16 years into the 21st century, it is now once again necessary to reiterate the democratic will of the left. In a world which only seeks solutions to the crisis from opportunistic authoritarian or demagogic positions, always ending in violence, we have to underline that our framework of action is the rule of law.

An old motto of Jean Jaurès says: *Democracy is the minimum of Socialism, Socialism is the maximum of Democracy*. It refers to an old idea which was used to fight dictatorships and authoritarian processes established in the name of leftist ideals. When many people supported violent movements in some countries, democratic socialists went into opposition, confirming that our idea of society was incompatible with political violence. In the end, if we seek to create a fairer society with better opportunities for all, there is no other option than doing so with cooperation and respect for different political and social identities, with the plurality of voices and diversity in all its forms.

For socialists, however, democracy is not only the political framework in which we develop our actions. Democracy is much more: it is an indispensable value which allows us to unite with all our differences. Socialists, in contrast to other left tendencies, do not simply believe that democracy is one of the many instruments available for us to achieve our goals. For us, democracy is in itself a value. It is not only a mechanism by which to elect those in power, but the best way to live together.

Behind all of socialism's proposals is democracy. In fact, the founders considered democracy to be the final purpose of the project. It was about extending it to all citizens. From that came the idea of social democracy. When we seek better rights for workers, when we stand beside those disadvantaged by the capitalist system and seek daily



improvements for them, when we propose local, regional, national, and global political initiatives to improve the lives of the deprived, what we are doing is extending democracy. That is called socialism.

Socialism and Latin America

The democratic left in the world experiences, as previously mentioned, moments of retreat. Latin America, our part of the world, has experienced in the last decade political movements which have been marked by the fragmentation of the left. Even with all their differences, they were able to work together in a common regional progressive effort to respond to a crisis of the neoliberal model which, throughout the 1990s, has caused huge damage to our countries. But after a time of successful development thanks to record-high commodity prices, these experiences ended in a crisis.

After years of left governments in Latin America, with evident successes in social terms, there has been a fall, and a peak in the efforts of a “new right” which, in many aspects, is extremely similar to the old right. Progressive forces of different tendencies had managed to put the state back in its role of the main political actor. This led to an end of the anti-state mindset of the neoliberal period. The levels of poverty and inequality had been reduced considerably. But after all the success achieved by progressive forces these forces are now in decline. We must pose the question of what has happened to them.

There is always an easy and simple answer. That is blaming everything on the right, or stating that it was impossible to defeat such a powerful enemy. We could also come with the argument that the loss of support was due, solely, to the conspiracies of dark forces. But the truth is that such an analysis is undoubtedly poor and complacent. And the left was not conceived to be complacent but to be critical.

After years of governance in various countries, and with even more successful experiences such as in Chile and Uruguay, many of the countries in this area fought important economic and political battles. As previously mentioned, poverty and inequality were reduced, and



the State again became a key player in social organisation. However, what happened to the important cultural struggle? What did the progressives do to change the way of how people certain patterns in society? How did they work with each individual to develop a new concept which would shake off the capitalist culture?

This is where the progressives lost in their own territory. The purported idea that the right develops economic growth and that the left redistributes a growth which it hasn't created resulted in the re-establishment in power of liberal and conservative options once growth exhibited signs of stagnation, or even decline.

The progressives also failed when they had the capacity to promote progressive tax reforms which would result in fair fiscal policy: those with more wealth should pay more. The post-neoliberal political processes in Latin America were limited to capturing a portion of created income, as was mentioned before, from the exorbitant commodity prices in order to redistribute this throughout society. They did not know how or were unable to change the ravaging financial system. They had obvious problems in proposing political and institutional structural reforms.

Corruption, which consumes and devours social bonds, also began to incessantly expand to those countries with low levels of institutionalisation. Although each government adopted measures to combat it, the influence of economic power and, above all, of political financing put an end to the best of intentions.

The different experiences of the left in Latin America proved to us that there cannot be authoritarian progressivism. The worst experiences have been, undoubtedly, those that intimidated part of the population, even when they had been relatively successful in social and economic terms. There is nothing which does more damage to progressivism than falling into corruption, authoritarianism, and demagogy. This makes ideas weak, devalues projects, and damages the ability to offer an alternative for the future.

The Argentinian case was an obvious example. Although Argentinian socialism brought about important decisions such as, for example, in



terms of human rights, we need to point out the inconsistencies and the limitations of a process which became trapped in a superfluous, unnecessary, and misleading war of rivalries.

Socialism in Argentina

Socialism has had a rich history in the Republic of Argentina. Although it has often been forgotten and scorned, it has contributed towards many of the rights obtained by society. It does not matter that this was not achieved due to efforts by the government: there were thousands of engaged activists who took to the streets at the end of the 19th century to defend the rights of workers. There were thousands who joined the demonstrations to fight for 8 hours of work per day, for female suffrage, for the extension of democracy to the most disadvantaged social classes, for an independent justice system, against monopolies in the economy, and for a social solidarity model which never definitively materialised.

Within that rich history, socialism undoubtedly made good and bad decisions. Yet the force of our values and ideas placed socialism, finally, on the side of ethics, honour, and progressive positions. In recent years, with the experience of governing in the city of Rosario, in the Province of Santa Fe, and so many other institutions, Argentinian socialists have demonstrated that we not only knew how to plan and propose ideas: we also know how to make them come true.

The political reality in which we have had to develop has never been easy. When we entered government in the city of Rosario, the neoliberal decade was just beginning. Menemism destroyed social relations and privatised the national economy. We had to fight against this from our city and we did it by focusing on the public, by working together with our citizens. When we entered government in Santa Fe, times had changed. Peronism, now in a Kirchnerist fashion, displayed a progressivism which did not fulfil its promises. Hermes Binner, who later took the Socialist Party to the highest point in our history in a national election, demonstrated that he could govern in the province of Santa Fe by expanding an honest and responsible



social model with great planning and administrative abilities. The work of Hermes Binner became fundamental in the construction of a new era for socialism in Argentina. With pluralism and transparency, he demonstrated that socialism could open the way for a solid and coherent national perspective, expanding its horizon and its focus towards diverse sectors of the population. There is no doubt that comrade Hermes Binner brought the history of Argentinian socialism a great step forward. He positioned us as a powerful force, able to compete for power and to make the case for our positions, based on firm political and ideological convictions.

However, the fluctuations of Argentinian politics made the development of this process impossible on a national level. But in spite of this, socialists never abandoned the consequent fight to develop in Argentina a progressive and fair alternative.

For 12 years, Argentina experienced a unique political process with proponents and detractors. Kirchnerism, which emerged from the 2001 crisis, was a contradictory process which, whilst presented as a regional progressive rejuvenation, had clear light and dark aspects.

Although with differences in style, the administrations of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner increased the value of politics and, particularly, the role of the State. After decades of privatisations, of neoliberal politics, and the abandonment of the State as the regulator and voice of society, the Kirchnerist administration turned politics again into a fundamental element in society. A large section of the youth felt again attracted to participate in politics, and society began to debate public issues. However, the way in which power was conceived and exercised by the State, and the lack of mediation between leaders and society led to the undermining of debates. The ways in which Kirchnerism promoted its policies and communication, and the “friend-enemy” concept regarding the opposition politicians, provoked divisions and growing tensions. A large part of the opposition also worked in the same way, and numerous other forces echoed the mistakes of Kirchnerism to attack the government.

Throughout this period the Socialist Party attempted to establish its position. It accompanied some rightful policies of the Kirchnerist



government, particularly its attitude towards human rights, a field in which it managed to reopen the investigation of cases of torture and genocide perpetrated during the last military dictatorship. Additionally, socialism advocated the nationalisation or re-nationalisation efforts, such as in the case of Argentinian Airlines and YPF. It supported the re-nationalisation of AFJP and the return to a system of state pensions.

However, the Kirchnerist administration did little or nothing to end the neoliberal structure and dependence of the Argentinian economy. In this sense, they wasted a historic opportunity for growth which would have allowed the country to establish a new model for development. The new technologies of small and medium industries did not make them more competitive, the tax system continued to be regressive, and in spite of some political statements, it also failed to reduce the power of financial speculators. Argentina was left with a poverty rate of 29%. As various studies and analyses show, Kirchnerism favoured a “versus” strategy: it started out to oppose neoliberalism – at least in theory – but ended up being a reflection of it. The result was the reproduction of many of its economic policies. In this sense, there was a heterodox application of economical orthodoxy. In contrast to other regional examples, Kirchnerist Argentina did neither made serious progress in overcoming neoliberal structures, nor in the creation of an innovative and collaborative concept of the economy. On the contrary, it reproduced neoliberal ways, although it tried to provisionally ease some of its worst effects. In spite of considerable differences between other regional economic and institutional examples, some of them were superior to Kirchnerism: they proposed a new common idea of life, favouring alternative forms of social organisation, and they gave more importance to civil society when taking economic decisions. The “versus” strategy only served to reproduce old structures. This was, obviously, Kirchnerism’s failure.

For socialists, Kirchnerism represented a project which included at its core many progressives, and which attracted many important sectors of society, yet which was incapable of progressing in a truly positive sense. Corruption became a core element and the divisions between



organisations in civic society were apparent. The “friend-enemy” narrative only served to divide progressive sectors, union organisations, and even human rights bodies. The co-optation of formerly independent organisations further stirred the population’s collective mood as it saw its purchasing power fall in the latter years of the administration.

Undoubtedly, we would have preferred things to have happened differently. Yet Kirchnerism chose: between progressivism and the diversity of a Peronism which contained elements of the right, it chose the latter. This prevented it by its very nature to working towards the extension of social policies to the category of rights. It developed a socio-political model which it did not afford the time to flourish, it provided rejuvenating support yet did not provide the economy with a proper structure by which to sustain these policies, and it abused its discretionary power.

Kirchnerism was incapable of fulfilling the expectations of many progressives who saw a potential alternative in it. It refused to promote policies such as the proposed pension of 82% of the former salary, it refused to eliminate the income tax for workers, and to cooperate with other progressive sectors which in the end were dismissed. In short, it set the stage for the right to emerge, resulting in the current Maruicio Macri government.

The Socialist Party has affirmed its opposition to the direction laid out by the Macri government. It was clear that citizens demanded a change, but as socialists we can only state that this is not the right direction to take. In little more than a year in power, Macrism has revealed itself as a government which is incapable of responding to the vital issues of the majority of Argentinians. And its proposed plan, developed by “experts and specialists” is noticeable for its absence. What is apparent, therefore, is a return to liberal orthodox economic policies and continuous excuses regarding the “overwhelming legacy” of the past. After a year in government, there are no valid excuses. However, we can clearly see that there is a lack of effective governance and a style of politics which is destined to



concentrate wealth amongst those who already have it. They have widened the gap of inequality.

Mauricio Macri's government, which began by declaring a definite change of direction compared to the Kirchnerist administration, has already been involved in some of the worst practices in Argentinian politics. Corruption is no longer only a presumption: it is an evident reality. The irregular situation of the Panama Papers, the waiving of the Argentinian Post's debt – in which the Socma group is involved, which is related to the family of the president and of which the president himself was a member – and a policy of erratic money laundering which pardons fraudsters and tax evaders, all clearly speak of the perverted new direction of the country. Indecency and corruption are far from having been displaced: they are expanded with business links and relationships with the private sector. Proposals to create greater State transparency, to strengthen public affairs, and to eliminate all shadow of doubt over wrongdoing, are notable for their absence.

The abolishment of the withholding tax of mining companies, the liberation of imports, the mismanagement of the dollar and other currencies, have all demonstrated what the idea of change in Mauricio Macri's government was. The promised influx of investment has not yet happened, and the expectation that it will do so in the second term has basically vanished.

Dramatic slogans from the government cannot hide the attempts to appoint Ministers of the Supreme Court of Justice, nor the lack of desire to resolve the problems of workers with decreasing purchasing power. They can neither hide the indiscriminate dismissals in the public administration, its lack of support for a fairer and more inclusive education model, and the permanent attacks against science and technology. Small and medium producers feel increasingly plagued by ill-judged policies. There is a distinct lack of understanding of the regional economies, openness to imports, rising fees and lack of soft credits for capital assets. This government has chosen to remove taxes from champagne and high-class imported cars, but maintains regressive tax measures for workers and the middle class.



As socialists, we should reaffirm, then, our ethical proposal: a progressive and fair style of politics. In the face of a government which has in one year increased poverty levels to 32.2% and which has developed policies resulting in a fall in real-term salaries, a human and compassionate approach is required. In the face of a government which covers up for tax evaders, a promise to effectively tackle fiscal fraud and corruption is necessary. In the face of a government unconcerned about justice, which acts slowly and in which white-collar criminals are never prosecuted, it is essential that socialism firmly expresses its position in favour of an independent judiciary.

Changing this situation will require the cooperation of different sectors. The configuration of a Progressive Front which includes not only political parties but also social and trade union organisations, and all those citizens who long for a solidary and pluralist alternative. Socialists are on the journey. We are going to create that alternative from the plurality of voices and from our diversity.

A new era for socialism

Argentinian socialism has an opportunity. In the face of a government of adjustments and reductions of opportunities, and with a society which demands respect for its rights and for what it itself has achieved, socialism should offer itself as the alternative; one which will not be possible without activism. Socialism should be implemented through the work of its activists. All those who approach us should be welcomed and included. We should create an atmosphere of action for all those who come to us.

Does anyone honestly believe that transformation can be achieved without participation in unions, in intermediary associations, in cooperatives? Does anyone believe that society can be transformed without university activists, without the participation of local groups, or without activity in social movements? Does anyone believe that the system can be changed without assuming a new style of politics which democratises the rules of the game and which supports an autonomous civic debate?



The challenge is to increase and develop this task. One of the worst habits of politics is bureaucratisation. There is a trend to remain comfortable in our own places and to not take part in those real areas of transformation. Socialists are called to work with and in society to design and develop change.

In order to change it is also essential to have a clear vision and to know what needs to be changed or developed. And you need the audacity to carry it out. One of the biggest deficiencies in the social democratic movement has been, in the past years, the lack of creativeness. Unfortunately, for many years, some socialists abandoned their most ambitious proposals. They refused to recognise the contradictions in the system and simply continued to work within it. We believe that a capitalist society is not transformed with blows or violence as this only contributes to the negation of democracy, but rather precisely by slowly democratising the social structures. However, we do not want to adapt ourselves to the market nor to the way of life which it offers to us. We want to sincerely and earnestly implement structural reforms.

The reformist idea has always been a complex one. For some, anxious to see rapid transformation, it suggests an idea of political moderation. However, there is no style of politics more revolutionary than reformism. Democratic socialism believes that society does not change with speed (it is possible to change policies but for the rest of society to remain unaltered). The complexity of existing social relationships requires permanent work on the structures of real politics. In this way, the progressive advancement towards a more equal society is already socialism. The path towards that goal is the goal itself. In other words: reforms *are socialism*. Undoubtedly, it is a difficult task to slowly developing policies for transformation. But it results in immense benefits and success: transforming society without damaging it with violence or unresolvable antagonisms.

What it involves is clearly putting forward the proposals of socialism for this new era. If our objective is not only to be the opposition but, above all, to be an alternative to the government, then we must employ our powerful arsenal of ideas for the present and the future.



Now is the time to forcefully propose our position: a health system based on primary care, an inclusive and responsible federalism, a policy of education based on values which lead to access to knowledge, and a security policy which establishes limits for crime and at the same time is working on the underlying social causes. Now is the time for socialism to develop, on a national level, a set of public policies which show it for what it stands: a genuine political alternative.

Its development will depend on whether we are able to tackle those topics which society demands. There will be no socialism without an ecological and sustainability proposal, without incorporating the question of gender, without a political proposal of and for young people, without promoting diversity, amongst so many other topics. The last few years have shown a serious decline of our natural resources at an accelerated pace. Climate change and the destruction of land due to production facilities which contaminate the environment change the political patterns that we should follow with our actions. In this way, it is not only about redistributing goods in a better way, but about guaranteeing the further existence of the planet. Sustainability is, today, one of the most urgent challenges of progressive forces. In contrast to many of the parties on the right who still refuse to discuss the need for renewable energy, for the much-needed policies against climate change, or for respect for the earth in which we live, socialists believe this is part of our fundamental purpose.

For too many years, we advocated productivist proposals. In summary, they involved producing more and better to be able to equitably distribute the wealth generated. The State played an essential role as a modelling agent of society, attempting to reduce the dangers presented by a merely capitalist “appropriation” of wealth. But it was not attentive to the new conflicts which mass production generated on the very production locations. To tackle these issues is the challenge today.

We cannot, in any way, avoid proposing the need to fight against domestic violence, against female murders, and against the



discrimination of a patriarchal society which continues to affect women. Economic and social disparities are unjustifiable, and for socialists this should be a central part of our agenda. It is not about “just another topic”, but about a vision of society and of the world. It is not about a range of themes but about incorporating values from a humanist perspective of life and of respect for women and her view of the world.

If we want this process to advance, if we want to transform society in a new way, we should learn from our youth. It is not enough to let the young people speak, but we must take on board their comments. We cannot confine the youth debate to “meeting their needs”, but we should give them opportunities to shape their own future.

Socialists think that diversity enriches us all. We must allow that all differences can be seen and join in. In the end, this is what nourishes us as a society.

Socialism is the tool which Argentina needs. It is called to respond to the problems of men and women who live in uncertainty in a world in crisis, which moves speedily towards individualism and a culture of consumerism, which leaves millions of people outside of the system. We socialists should strengthen our efforts and our struggle, our political training, the exchange of ideas, our studies and daily work.

Socialists should offer a compassionate alternative to those who are afraid and uncertain. We should defend equality. We should continue increasing and strengthening the areas of participation which serve as a guarantee for social democracy. We must insist on our demand that those who have more wealth have to pay more. And on the benefits being distributed amongst those who most need it. We should re-invent institutions, and shape an original style of politics in the light of changes in technology and social relations. We should work tirelessly to understand and promote a new way of sharing work and resources.

We should show that our ideas and our efforts are conducive to forming a powerful movement which transforms the future of our citizens.

We are called to do it. And we will do it.