

Methodology of Coyuntural Analysis

Notebook # 8: The Problems of Foresight or The Analysis of the Stages in
the Conuncture

Part Two

GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF THE SERIES

This material that you have in your hands is the product of a practice and reflection of many years of work. As a product of this process, we in SIPRO arrived to this systemization with the contribution of many people and with the valuable collaboration of Enrique Valencia who made the basic text of this edition possible. From his document we try to be loyal to the methodological process he plants in a difficult theme, but essential for those who carry out a labor of education and accompaniment to social processes and the reality of our country.

These materials are aimed at contributing to all of those people from the NGO's, promoters, advisors, students, professionals, educators who accompany processes of popular education and of social organizations, and for those intellectuals who produce coyuntural analysis.

The notebooks we present here are a basic text, a contribution that does not signify the last word over this subject. There is a lot still to be said, proposed, and written over it. For many, the approaches and concepts can be debatable, questionable and anachronistic. We are in agreement over that and that is what it is about: generate a reflection and understanding that begins to find new roads and horizons in this galloping reality.

The content of these notebooks can be used in multiple forms depending on the interest. It can easily be part of an extensive course, used for a more deep and focused discussion on the theme, or it can be used as a tool for consulting. It does exempt its readers from the task of going into depth, questioning, criticizing, connecting, proposing changes and even less so of the challenge of sharing in a more accessible way if the theme is deeply comprehended. This would be the central objective of our proposal.

In the face of the disordered reality in which we live, we see the necessity of stopping to analyze it with the objective of accompanying the historical process of change and be participants of it. That is why in *Servicios Informativos Procesados, A.C.*, we revisit this document and we retransmit it for those actors who want to be an active part of their own history.

We hope that the systemization of these notebooks can be a modest contribution and useful for the best development of the analysis of coyuntura.

Gustavo E. Castro Soto

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Problems of Prevision or Analysis of Scenarios in the Coyuntura

A. Placing the Problem

We have already shown in the coyuntural analysis as a study **in and of the present** it is necessary to include the **future**:

As an anticipation of the posible transformation and conservation of social relations.

With what we have developed so far, we can recognize **projects of transformation and conservation of the fundamental social relations that structure social formations.**

The **projects of transformation** involve two things:

1. the **destruction**??? of a domination/hegemony
and
2. the **structuring** of new relations of power

The **projects of conservation** involve two things:

1. the **defense**¹ of fundamental social relations
and
2. **maintaining** the same fundamental social relations (not imobilization nor passivism toward the dominant/hegemonic class)

Example 1

For example, we can discuss the confrontation between political parties in their struggle for certain projects.

El Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) wants to sustain a conservation project, whose characteristic is to be a State Party with a politics directed towards the working sector, campesino/peasant, magisterial class, etc., that would protect a political economy that reinforces the neoliberal project, privatization of the economy, control of the electoral apparatus as a guarantee of the perpetuation of power in defense of the interests of the hegemonic block in the country and in alliance with other economic and political groups or parties.

On the other hand, El Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), the EZLN, campesinos, indigenous peoples, unions, other parties and the forces of opposition, intend to create a transformation project involving the deconstruction of the hegemonic block. The project is characterized by the struggle to modify NAFTA,

¹ See Maccichi, 1977: 110-111

renegotiate government debts, change social politics relating to all sectors, reinforce municipality power, achieve social justice, peace, democracy, etc. This way, allies are created in order to achieve the transformation.

It is necessary to clarify and distinguish between the **project**, whether it has to do with conservation or transformation, and the **allies, tactics, strategies, and scenarios** that are used to achieve it.

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When **Gramsci** speaks of the concept of “**passive revolution**” he refers to the dominant classes recognizing and ceding restorations that are a part of demands from below.

Example

1. **The appeals of society to the PRI are oriented on various levels: better salaries, eliminating the state party, less taxes, increased municipal participation and autonomy, a new federalism, justice, peace, changes in the electoral law that guarantee equitable elections, debt renegotiations, fiscal modifications, etc., etc.,**

In this manner:

To the EZLN, the PRI offers social investment, opportunities to enter political life, etc. On the other hand, intimidation, militarization, etc.

To the PRD, the PRI offers some municipalities “dialogue”, etc. On the other hand, assassinations of political militants.

To the PAN, the PRI offers some states, participation in the government, etc. On the other hand, compromising agreements with the government.

Businessmen and women are offered modifications and adaptations to the General Work Law, credits, etc. On the other hand, devaluations, fiscal control etc.

To foreign investors they offer easier investment, industrial stockholding, sales of government assets, etc.

The people are offered some “heads” who pay assassins and are responsible for corruption, etc. On the other hand, assassinations of members of popular organizations, tax increases, etc.

To the media, they offer “freedom” of the press, tolerance, etc. On the other hand, assassinations of journalists, increases in the cost of production, etc.

To the PRI they offer independence with respect to the government, an end to tokenistic appointments, an end to centralism, etc. On the other hand, the maintenance of state structuralized power, protection of the corrupt and the political “dinosaurs”, etc.

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In any manner, despite these modifications or as the government calls them, “structural adjustments”, the dominant hegemonic block is not altered substantially, they only incorporate some demands in order to achieve legitimacy and to sustain their hold on power.

Because of this, we arrive at the **nodal aspect**

COYUNTURAL ANALYSIS ASKS FOR...

The **correlation of present forces** between these projects (past and present)

AND

Feasible correlations in the coming future.

It is the **analysis of potentialities of totality**:

Is it possible to critically sustain this THEORETICAL ANTICIPATION?

In this booklet we will discuss and debate in relation to the **anticipation of possibilities for transformation/conservation.**

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QUESTIONS

1. Explain with your own words the central question of Coyuntural analysis.
2. Give examples of conservation projects, what characterizes them, their allies, and which strategies and discourses do they focus on and create.
3. Give examples of transformation projects, what characterizes them, their allies, and which strategies and discourses do they address and create.

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B. The concepts of prevision, prophecy and scenarios.

Theoretical anticipation can be understood in 3 ways:

1. **Act of prophecy**
2. **Control of variables**
3. **Prevision**

Let's take a look at each one of these:

1. **Act of Prophecy**

This can be understood as a product of minds that are especially gifted, clairvoyant spirits or very intuitive minds. It is the type of readings of the future in a crystal ball, going beyond the social sciences, and with a system of magic prediction²

2. Control of the variables

It is the type of variable controls of natural science experiments: if “a” is given, then necessarily we have “b”.

These two theoretical anticipations we can characterize as

“closed previsions”:

The exact prediction of an event that absolutely will happen.

This is not possible as a scientific method of *coyuntural analysis*³, because:

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The analyst is confronted with an object of study whose variables cannot be controlled as if it were an experiment in a vacuum.

In the coyuntura, many imponderable happenings present themselves.

Examples:

New Developments

The will of different actors many times is unknown by the investigator

New scientific and technological discoveries

The influence of unforeseen natural phenomena

The variation of forces in the actual moment of analysis independent of the will of the analyst.

The surprising apparition of previously passive actors.

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For that reason, one should not demand that the coyuntural analyst always have an accurate aim of closed or prophetic prevision. The analyst is not a fortune teller.

To uphold such a position or demand on the contrary would be ignoring the complexity of social dynamism of the present.

Nevertheless, if we strip coyuntural analysis of all **capacity of prevision**, it would simply signify a break with the possibility for:

***conscious and transformative practice**

² Jimenez

³ See ididem: 6 and 7, Luengo, 1982:296

***projecting the future and
*effectively carrying it out in the present**

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3. Prevision

“The practical way of creating a collective will”⁴, based on conscious action of future potentialities.

The **future** included in *coyuntural* analysis:

Is not the only future, nor is it predetermined forever⁵.

It is a future open to displacements in the correlation of forces.

The **contradictory and unfinished totality** (a society that is being constructed through the struggle of contradictions) therefore contains different possibilities.

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Because of this,

***Coyuntural* analysis is:**

The diagnostic of the potentialities, the feasibility and the conversion into an actual event.

This **future** corresponds to:

Open prevision:

The theoretical anticipation, in the present, of multiple potentialities, especially the most feasible to fulfill.⁶

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Therefore, the implicit relation is:

The case in which “**a**” coincides with “**c**”,
Probably “**b**” will follow,
Depending on different variables.

⁴ Gramsci, 1975c:139

⁵ Jimenez, 1987:13

⁶ Ibidem, 6.

Since the previous booklets, we have stated that our methodological proposal refers to the coyuntural analysis of a Nation.

Because of this, the scenarios en this analysis refer to:

The disposition that is encountered in the correlation of forces of a Nation.

We utilize the concept of scenario in a different manner than does Gallardo, who identifies scenario with “a space or place where the struggle is developed”. This concept can be more useful for regional, local or sectoral analysts.

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The closeness of these last ones can be considered according to **E. Jimenez**, on three levels⁹:

- a. The determination of posible futures.
- b. The delimitations of the feasible scenarios.
- c. The selection of the most feasible scenarios.
- d. The delimitation of the most favorable scenario of the strategy it is defending.

This is not the most feasible necessarily, but the collective will can direct itself to convert it not only in the most feasible, but even in the actual scenario.

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The **feasibility** that we are talking about is not a absolute determinism. There can be important changes thanks to an intelligent collective will.

Reconsidering the indicated outline from page 24, the question would be:

How is it possible for “a”, “c” to concurr in order for “b” to occur effectively?

In periods of the relative permanence of the equilibrium of forces, the scenarios most feasible can be an extension of the present. The prevision can have better success.

FUTURE>>>>>

In moments of sharp transformations of forces, the characterization of the feasibilty???are made difficult by the continuous changes and require a special analytical position.

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Questions:

⁹ Jimenez, 1987:21

Intuitionism:

*We do not propose to ignore intuitive capability.

*However, we must question the validity of prevision intuitive systems theory: permanently and systematically guided by informal presuppositions of every day life.¹¹

*Claims to save oneself from methodical considerations¹².

*It is the path to fall into prospective error, not taking into consideration diverse possibilities methodically.

Willfulism???

*Projects “subverted present”¹³ in the future.

*Or the present victories are generalized as total victories.

*The lack of necessary things and defeats of today transform themselves from desires, mythically, into wealth and victories.

*“the struggle remains in dreams and expires in dreams”¹⁴, but reality remains intact, or worse yet, it accelerates defeat.

However, nor can we assume absence of will.

What is a **strategy**, if not **collective will**?

But efficient **will**, “intelligent will”¹⁵, is part of the actual conditions and warns/prevents?? in order to transform them.

On the contrary, **Defeatism**:

***Will** is generalized in the future as always being incapable of generating transformative initiatives.

*It is the best cultive stock of weak historical politics that leave everything in the mechanism’s hands or to simple development called **objective contradictions**.

*It does not develop complex predictions practically, with different possible **forces of correlation**; rather it creates pesimistic prophetism.

¹¹ Jimenez, 1987:7.

¹² Bourdieu, 1975:85.

¹³ Gramsci, 1977:15.

¹⁴ Ibidem: 16.

¹⁵ Ibidem: 17.

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We do not want to say that defeat should disappear as a possible complex and open **prevision**.

Within the “struggle, defeat should always be foreseen”¹⁶ as a possibility which demands a collective of alternatives.

For **example**, what can be done in the case of the loss of leadership in a movement?

It would be very useful explicitness and critique of personal desires and fears in regards to the struggle and its possible defeats in order to analyze scenarios.

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3. To propose a collective of possible scenarios, construct them mentally.

In order to do so, it is necessary to have a base of the following variables:

- *principle actors (present or potential)
- *possible events or actions
- *changes in the correlation of forces

These scenarios could, then, be characterized in the context of the struggle for:

DOMINATION/HEGEMONY AND TRANSFORMATION/CONSERVATION

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The idea is not to construct scenarios until infinity, rather a collective generally considered as feasible in short and long terms.

The imagination of possibilities is not a logical excersize, to see how many there are, rather:

A prevision of the hypothetically appointed???, like those that have larger margens to make themselves actual (this is what we call feasibility in order to distinguish it from simple possibility)

This criteria can concrete itself in a double entrance to a scene for each principle actor, and can be either present (those that en the real coyuntura are protagonists) or possible (those that interrupt en the next scene according to the analyzed tendencies).

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¹⁶ Gramsci, 1975a: 49

This **scenario** needs to be analyzed more at length, especially when referring to the consequences for each **protagonist**.

How does it affect their strength?

How does it affect their strategy?

What tactics could each protagonist implement?

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Of course, the **scenario** should be confronted, in this manner, with its own project in which the analyst inscribes it to be and concludes the alternatives on the path to their **strategy**.

How can one face this scenario in order to accumulate more strength or lose the least possible?

OR

So that the adversary accumulates the least possible?

The scenarios will begin changing according to the *coyunturas* and the moderation/measure in which the social practice advances begin opening new possibilities.

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Example:

1. In many contested elections, the modification of the forces of correlation in the electoral balance can have opportunistic origins, in political errors of the adversary, in a good, orchestrated campaign for the mass media, etc.

Winning the sympathy of the voters is the objective, and the political parties take to the streets in order to expound their government proposals.

After the elections, the supposed irregularities of the electoral process can bring to change the struggle's scenario towards the official requests to refute the results.

After not receiving a favorable response, the struggle to obtain a popular, representative position in the government, the people manifest in the streets, in marches, meetings, town squares with hopes to negotiate.

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Example

2. Workers fight to modify the rules of the game boss-worker, where better salaries and compensation are demanded.

The syndicate dialogues with the owners of the factory. After not receiving an answer, they go to the political parties chambers who assume their demands with the ends of promoting legislative modifications in favor of the working class.

Since there is no response, the workers take to the streets or strike in order to bring the negotiation to favorable grounds.

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You finish the story: are they repressed?, do they gain alliances?, do they achieve their demands?, will they touch the root of the problem?, etc.

Who is the principle enemy of the workers?: the state party?, the enforced legislation?, the bosses confederations?

What is the actual, possible scenario in order to attack the problem?, who are the alliances?

EXAMPLE

3. The peasants (*campesinos*) are looking for better life conditions in the country. The bureaucracy, the corruption, the boss (*cacique*) interests, drug traffickers, etc., keeps them from access to better conditions in the country. They are looking to legally join forces in order to defend their rights and to have access to better forms of organizing and financing.

Despite all of this, they do not gain access. They change their struggle's scenario and their strategy, tactics, alliances, etc... You finish the story...

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5 Identify between the feasible scenarios the most favorable and most feasible for your own organization's strategy or block and compare it with the most feasible scenario in general terms.

Sometimes there will be a distance between the two, at other times they will coincide.

- A. If they are distant, it requires a balance of forces in order to conclude if it is possible to try to modify the circumstances, so that the most favorable will effectively be the most feasible.
- B. In case the outcome is positive, it could guide itself towards the identification of alternatives that are on the same path.

- C. In case the outcome is negative, identify alternatives in order to confront the situation.

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The implicit criteria is that there are possibilities to **choose alternatives** that are on the same path as the most favorable and feasible scenarios, in other words, one that permits, given the existing circumstances the largest accumulation of really feasible forces, in order to direct the success of the strategy.

In other words:

It is not only possible to construct *coyunturas*, rather it is necessary, departing from a prevision of scenarios, from the “strategic preparation” that “tends to reduce the imponderable factors to zero”¹⁷ and the generation of a “permanently organized force and predisposed over the long term, that can make advances when a situation is judged to be favorable.”¹⁸

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The previous reinforces the idea that social practice is necessary, the PRAXIS, in order to generate projects.

Sinthesizing, we can present the following outline:

THE PRECISION OF THE REAL SCENARIO (FORCES OF CORRELATION)

>>>>>>

MAKING EXPLICIT THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL OBSTACLES OF PREVISION

>>>>>>

PROPOSING A COLLECTIVE OF POSSIBLE SCENARIOS (COLLECTIVE OF ACTORS—ACTIONS AND CHANGES IN THE FORCES OF CORRELATION)

>>>>>>

DELIMITING THE MOST FEASIBLE SCENARIO (BASED ON REAL TENDENCIES)

>>>>>>

DELIMITING THE MOST FAVORABLE AND FEASIBLE SCENARIO

>>>>>>

STABELIZING ALTERNATIVES FOR THE PATH MOST FAVORABLE AND FEASIBLE.

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¹⁷ Gramsci, 1975a: 83.

¹⁸ Ibidem: 75-76.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain in your own words what you understand “intuitionism” to be. Give a few real examples.
2. Explain in your own words what you understand “willfulism”???? to be. Give a few real examples.
3. Explain in your own words what you understand “defeatism” to be. Give a few real examples.
4. What is the difference between “principle actors” and “secondary actors”? Give a few examples.
5. Give a few examples of modifications in the forces of correlations that you have seen lately.
6. Explain in your own words what you understand “tendency” to be. Give a few examples.
7. Elaborate an exercise of application of the five criteria in order to define the scenarios.

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ANALYTICAL INDEX