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(Article begins on next page)

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***Conversation series* | Pursuing Tenant International: Learning from struggles for home in Abya-Yala | Part III**
Edited by Ana Vilenica

It's not about building houses; it's about building people's power

Conversation with Carmen and Andrea from the Movimiento territorial de Liberación (MTL) Buenos Aires

Carmen and **Andrea**
Movimiento territorial de Liberación (MTL) Buenos Aires

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Abstract

This conversation offers a look into the practices of the Movimiento Territorial de Liberación (MTL), a political and social organization in Argentina. It highlights the organization's history, values, and significant projects, such as housing developments and community initiatives. Founded in 1999 after a break from the Argentine Communist Party over ideological differences, the MTL has its roots in Marxist-Leninist thought. Their work include building neighborhoods and developing collective housing for those displaced by neoliberal policies. The MTL's projects go beyond merely providing shelter; they aim to foster a way of life that embodies their values of self-management, solidarity, and resistance against capitalist exploitation. Carmen, a leader within MTL, shares their journey, the challenges faced, and the ideological foundations of their work. Andrea, another key figure, manages finances and emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability in their operations. The conversation also touches on the broader Latin American and global context, situating MTL's struggle within a larger framework of resistance against neoliberalism and imperialism.

Keywords

Territorial movements, housing, internationalism, Argentina

The Movimiento Territorial Liberación (MTL) is a social and political movement of employed and unemployed workers founded in 2001, representing over seventeen provinces in Argentina. **Ana Vilenica** is a feminist, no border and urban activist and organiser from Serbia currently living in Italy. She is a member of the Beyond Inhabitation Lab, the Radical Housing Journal Editorial collective and the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC research). **Moisés Quiroz** is a historian, urban planner, specialist in social development and PhD candidate on Urban and environmental studies at El Colegio de México. He is an activist for social and cooperative housing in Mexico City.

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Introduction

We met Carmen and Andrea from the MTL in a cafeteria near Parque Patricios, a neighborhood that they have built with their comrades. The idea was to go to the MTL's office, but there was an issue with the key. The offices were closed, so we had to follow plan B which was talking in the cafeteria. Before we started recording the conversation, they invited us for a meal and we talked about the popular canteens they have been organizing, feeding over 800 people per day. They told us about the celebration that took place at one of these canteens the other day with a roast and Russian salad, which ended with music and singing. A few days later, we made another visit to see the neighborhood, the popular high school, cooperative businesses, Radio Sur and talk to people from the neighbourhood.

Carmen: There are a lot of things we have to talk about— a bit about who we are and where we come from. We are a political and social organization, the MTL. Until a couple of years ago, after the death of our national leader, it was renamed the MTL, Carlos Chile. I am responsible for the organization. There is a board of directors, and Andrea is on that board. She is in charge of finances for the movement, making her strategic.

Andrea: The one where the money sits.

Carmen: She also runs the administration. She is starting to experiment with our soup kitchens in a new way. I mean, there is a discussion between those who think that the soup kitchens are for filling bellies and those who think they are not. We say that the soup kitchens are a space for training on how we want to live and eat, what we want to eat, and what concept of life we should contribute to.

Ana: Can you tell us a bit more about the neighborhood you are building?

Andrea: We have finished it.

Carmen: But we have new land, and we are going to build the second one. We are going to build the second neighborhood. Don't ask us how we are going to do it under these conditions, but we are going to do it. There is a promise that in the second half of January, they [the state] will give us the land. The agreement is already signed. It is ours. They had to hand it over to us. They are going to have to face other organizations that will come and claim their land. In other words, we are opening a door. If they deny us the land, we will have to fight. We have the project, we have the architects, we have the sociologists, everything that is needed on the X axis. We have an interdisciplinary team made up of a social worker, sociologist, lawyer, accountant, and architects.

Ana: What was your experience with your first project?

Carmen: Let me tell you something about our past. The organization began in 1999. Most of us came from the Argentine Communist Party, where we stayed for a little while, but we left the Communist Party due to our differences. We believe that a sector of the party chose "possibilism," embracing a false progressivism that abandoned Marxist-Leninist principles for a form of socialism that had historically failed. They wished to use the

movement to further the party's policies rather than focusing on popular organization, which could serve as a foundation for development and community organization. We departed and were left on our own. Time proved us right.

There were issues with tenants in hotels in the city.[1] The country was federalized, and Buenos Aires became the Federal Capital. A city constitution was established, and within that Constitution, we included articles that align with the National Constitution, particularly Article 31. This article emphasizes access, the right to housing, and the right to land ownership. [The article applies not] only to the nationals, but also for Andean compatriots who have ties to Argentina. Following the Constitution, Law 341/2000 was enacted. Many individuals fought for the passage of that law, and it was successfully implemented. With this law in place, we began searching for a piece of land and acquired a significant plot here in Parque Patricios, spanning over a block. The 'land', in quotes, belonged to Molinos Río de la Plata, a transnational Argentine company. They not only controlled the block but also the street and everything within it at the time. Over time, the area was neglected, becoming a dark and foreboding place. Crimes occurred there, giving it a negative reputation. However, we saw this place as our potential home and decided to purchase it.

Back then, it was the Municipal Housing Commission (CMV). Today, it operates differently; now it is the IVC (Instituto de vivienda de la Ciudad), the Housing Institute of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. When the city transitioned from being federal to the CABA, the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, the nature of the CMV also transformed. At the CMV, we signed the contract.

The Bunge and Born people, part of the economic group that owned Molinos Rio de la Plata, hesitated to engage with us due to class differences. We assured them that we had no issues and were not focused on associating with them. Instead, we signed with the workers of the CMV, the Municipal Housing Commission of those years. They eventually purchased the land from us.

The question arose: who would undertake the construction? As a movement mainly comprising *piqueteros* (unemployed people) with few professionals, we sought out a team of architects that you should consider interviewing and getting to know. These architects were exiles from the seventies, with extensive experience building in slums in France, Italy, and other peripheral areas. They were involved in projects such as constructing railways along the coast and the Alto Palermo shopping center. A highly acclaimed architect team, they were responsible for designing gaming casinos in cities like Valparaíso and Viña del Mar. Their international experience was invaluable to us. As an organization of *piqueteros* and activists, they imparted significant knowledge to us. They displayed

[1] In Buenos Aires, hotels (*hoteles-pensión*) emerged in the 1950s as a form of low-cost housing, and they continue to exist amid the current housing crisis. Although they generate significant profits for landlords, tenants are often forced to live in highly precarious conditions, facing poor living standards and a lack of legal protections.

Figure 1
Parque Patricios neighbourhood. Image: Ana Vilenica

remarkable dedication by assembling professional teams and assisting us in our journey. The achievements of these architects were truly impressive.

Ana: Can you tell us a bit about what the living conditions of these people in the hotels were like and how they became part of the movement?

Carmen: The movement was almost exclusively made up of *piqueteros*. Remember that we were coming out of the Menemism policies, where Menem privatized everything. The only things we were able to save were health and education.

Why did we choose Parque Patricios? In that neighborhood, in that factory, there was an event- I don't know if you've ever heard of it. It's called La Semana Trágica (Tragic Week) at the Martin Fierro square by 1919. It originated in a strike of metallurgical workers for improvement of work conditions. Workers marched from Petit and Alcorta to the Barcena workshops and most of them ended up dead; killed by police and military. In that area, that you can see, the military shot at the working class in the Barcena workshops, who attacked the police to pick up their dead. The Tragic Week lasted seven days. That's why it is called the Tragic Week. So, Parque Patricios and that whole area is an area of workers' struggle. It has historical value. During that Tragic Week, Albino Argüelles was there, later a protagonist of the Patagonia Rebelion, several men and women from this neighborhood went to fight in the Chocón or the Cordobazo. That's why we chose that area, because we were attached to a historical question that also reopened the issue of access to housing as access to habitat.

We fought against the hotels, the law on hotels, which was a business in a black box. She (pointing to Andrea) was evicted with her children.

Andrea: I was evicted with my children. There were eight of us in the same three-by-three room. The Spanish, the Galician, they were the owners of the hotels. To them, this was not a problem. They only cared how much they would be paid for each person.

We claimed that these hotels were public prisons. Children were not allowed in the corridors. We had schedules to receive phone calls on the landline, we had schedules to cook, schedules to bathe, to go in and out. We couldn't receive visitors, it was horrendous. And we lived in total marginalization. We used to say that even the worst cell in a prison was more decent than a room in a municipal hotel.

Carmen: And it was run as a business. The municipality was involved, the municipality here in the city. It was a lot of money. So we made a proposal to the city government to annul the hotel law and set up collective housing called Transitional Housing. We had ten families in our hotel. In some, there were 50 families and in others 200.

Andrea: 215.

Carmen: Yes, 215. She lived there. Thank you. That is transitional housing. That is social responsibility. Collective living. Andrea can tell you about that. In some of them we run our soup kitchens, in others we run a textile factory that we started with two machines to produce clothes for the children and uniforms for the nurses and doctors in the hospitals. And today we have 18 machines, some of them are very modern, they tell you when you sit down, what your name is and what your job is. Now the machine enslaves you, not the boss.

We were born fighting evictions. We are the organization that resisted. We resisted around 42 evictions in the city, massive and hard evictions. 21 Corrientes, 15 Ayacucho, etc. We went there at night and we waited for the police to come. We resisted the police with kerchiefs, with gas tanks, with rubber tires, with whatever it took to stop the families from being evicted.

We resisted, not the eviction, but the proposal for collective housing that was made. Today, the law is a program that can be used by many organizations, friends, sisters for permanent housing. We were an organization of the *piqueteros*. We were part of the ANC, the National Assembly of Occupied Workers, and Piqueteros. Here there were some sheds, everything was occupied there. We held assemblies at the UNT Universidad Nacional de Tucuman, 50,000 comrades came from all over the country. As an initiative, we set up the Coordinating Centre for the struggles. The MTL was nourished by those in need in the slums. The first occupation we did was in Villa 21. When you come next time, we can take you to see what we took. We installed electricity, sewers, everything.

We also have a soup kitchen there. Food is provided to minors without parents.

Ana: Do these children live on the streets?

Carmen: They are not sleeping on the street; they are under a roof in the slum. Families who take care of the children without parents are humble families who already have children. There was, for instance, a case of a family where the parents disappeared. They left eight children behind and different neighbors took them into custody. Those children are given lunch, they are given other assistance too. Those families know that in the canteen, they are going to get support.

So that's not where we're going to take you. A mafioso from Villa 21, Guillermo, was the owner, like the boss. And we took his place. We built 50 houses there, and a street. We broke the aesthetics of the villa. We made the corridor with the street.

We have also been denounced by neighbors. They ask, why do we give to the kids and we don't give to them? The denunciation of poverty against poverty, you understand? Well, this is because it is very rare.

Ana and Moisés: Did you propose a social program?

Carmen: We proposed this program. And we won it, and we had our first ten social housing units there. All those who lived in those houses now live in Monteagudo. They moved on to their definitive housing and now they are waiting for their land to go to their definitive housing. But this is already an outdated version of the first stage. They already have social consortiums; for example, they manage their money for cleaning, because they have to live better, because the cable doesn't have to hang, because the cockroaches don't have to walk around. Because being poor doesn't mean being dirty, because you have to respect your neighbor's space, because you have to have rules of coexistence. They are in a different stage, there is an improvement. We have learned a lot. Not all the people. The social subject is complex; it was complex and it is complex. It is very difficult to separate different opportunisms. This in the social subject that runs after you in a kind of blackmailing way.

Andrea: It's not that I'm poor, you have to solve it because I'm poor.

Carmen: Poverty is generated by the capitalist system; it is generated by neoliberalism. There is also mental poverty. You allow yourself to be won over by the system. We in the MTL tell our comrades that they have to stop being an object of some people's politics and that they have to become protagonists in building a new stage in their history, which is what

Figure 2
Mural in the courtyard.
Image: Ana Vilenica

the tool is for. In 2002, Law 341 says that for you to build, you have to be a cooperative or a civil association. We are a cooperative. We have 326 cooperatives; it is a lot for Argentina and Buenos Aires, a lot.

Ana and Moisés: What are the roots of the MTL?

Carmen: We are very Latin Americanist. We are part of the defense of the self-determination of peoples. We have a glimpse of Ernesto Che Guevara's concept. His internationalism. That's why Palestine and Bolivia hurt us so much. When Evo Morales and Álvaro García Linera had to leave the country, not entirely agreeing with Eduardo del Castillo, we were hurt by Castillo. We have an internationalist vision that has to do with the young people and the resistance in Chile against ferocious institutional repression. Fortunately, now we have won the rejection of what they wanted to impose, the reinforcement of the Constitution of Augusto Pinochet.

Our roots are in Chechen, European. Kenyan, Nigerian, Paraguayan, Peruvian, Bolivian, Chilean movements. Movements from all over the world. I don't like the term, but someone would say it was a melting pot. We made the cooperative. We were born from many countries. Here in Argentina, as an international we have a beautiful history of beginning of how almost most of the provinces were born. We had national land recuperations, companies, mining, briquette and coal enterprises, livestock enterprises, and national schools. It is impressive what we did in this neighborhood, in the resistance, in the evictions. The magazine that I will give you will tell you who we are, where we come from, and where we are going.

I was the president of the cooperative. First, there was another person, but she got caught stealing. She was kicked out for embezzlement and for covering up other, more delicate things. And they asked me to take the lead, and I had no choice. So, I took on the responsibility, understanding that it's a task. There are comrades who think that because they are president of a cooperative, it is not a political task. The organization doesn't have to manage people; it has to organize them. For example, I am responsible for the MTL, she is responsible for finance. Andrea, how many people do you work with?

Andrea: With five.

Carmen: She doesn't ask me what she has to buy. She doesn't ask me what she has to pay. She doesn't ask me what she has to do with the money. She has autonomy. Her job is to see that the movement pays the bills. The room, the fee, the lawyer, the accountant. There are a lot of internal expenses that we have to cover for the mobility of the *compañera* and another *compañera* Ana, who also travels with her to all the meetings. In other words, we have to pay for fuel. I started to mobilize in this way to try to make sure that the movement and the women who are at the front have a way to get there and that the movement runs properly. And every month we present a balance sheet to the comrades because it's everyone's money.

Ana: Where does the money come from?

Carmen: It is a voluntary contribution. And if you, as a militant, receive money through your movement, the least you have to do is to go out and fight. When you see that there is a call to gather in the square or in the Courts against this decree, many comrades go. From the heart.

Moisés: You raise awareness among comrades.

Andrea: That is our mission. At least that's how I see it. I've been organizing with her for 15 years. I learn a lot from her. I live in the house in Constitución. There are 50 flats. We have a kitchen and a bathroom inside. We don't just share a corridor and entrance with the rest of the housemates. There are 50 of us, of which I have been the administrator for about ten years, managing everyone's money to pay for the electricity in the hallway, the water pump, the girls who clean, the cleaning supplies and other expenses. What we always have to have is the fire extinguishers up to date, the exit signs, the entrance, the staircase, all the protocol, everything that is required to be in order.

We now have to set up the consortium administration for the others, for 2024, so that a group of comrades are trained to be able to make the balance sheet, to be able to take minutes, to make everything transparent, so that there is no disagreement because there is always one who doubts, always, and to those who doubt, we have to show them transparency. There is nothing to hide.

Everyone needs to know where the money goes. I invite them to the office. On such and such a day you will find me there. I don't have anything at home. It's all in the office, and I can show you the book, the receipts, vouchers, everything. If you have any doubts? You sit down, I'll show you. That's how I manage it with comrades who are suspicious, and many are suspicious because of the diversity of culture. We are from different places. They are from very different countries, and there are some *compañeros* who are more distrustful than others. For those who keep on suspecting I always invite them to work with me. That led me to study social psychology. Next year, I'll have my degree and I'll

Figure 3
Mural in the garden.
Image: Ana Vilenica

be doing fieldwork. With my organization, there are a lot of us and there are different people, and you have to know how to work with this. People say the rotten apple should be kept in the drawer. Here we don't have rotten apples, the drawer has to be cleaned and washed. That's my theory.

Ana and Moisés: And how did you organize a construction site?

Carmen: It was a process from the beginning to set up the construction site. The project lasted for three years. Yes, 2002, 2003, 2004. In 2006, it was finished and as soon as it was finished, we handed it over to the comrades. Families were selected. It was quite a tough debate. Months of discussion. Who should live there? Today we have this situation again. Three hundred families, plus those from the villas, Villa 31, and Carbonilla. All of them signed up for the project. We have a plot of land in Lugano. We have another piece in Flores, another one in San Telmo. We also live there. And we also have the one that will be handed over to us now. All these places are going to be built on.

Moisés: Could you please tell us how did they obtain this land for the projects? Did you buy it with savings or loans?

Carmen: Loan. Government loans from the city. The land belongs to the city. They give us the money; we build and then we pay them back.

Ana: And how do you resolve the ownership of the housing that you build? Are they titled individually or collectively?

Carmen: We don't have collectively owned housing because it doesn't legally exist in Argentina. If I ask the IVC to grant me the right to have the deeds drawn up by the cooperative on behalf of everyone, the IVC will do it for me; it will issue a mortgage. When the person moves into their home, they say: "Now I want my title deed." It happened in La Fabrica; it happened in El Molino; the cooperative was appropriated by the sectors that wanted the individual structure. They lost the administration board of the cooperative.

There is a point up to which all people would like to live in a collective housing. But then if I leave, would my grandchild be able to use it, or another cooperative member? This is the issue. No matter how much we talk about it, reality shocks us. People are afraid that if they die, their children will be thrown out. We are going through a worldwide civilizational crisis, the biggest in the history of the world. And that's what organizations are going through and that's what individuals are going through. Part of what is happening to us is disbelief. Look at our social movements. Look at how blurred everything is. Look at cooperativism in Latin America. One of the first cooperatives in the South was in Chile and today there are no cooperatives there. Look at our historical inspiration in Uruguay. The government was so clever to make the cooperatives into cheap labor force. They are the ones who dress up slums with bright colors. They are the ones who go around cleaning up the rubbish in the corridors of the slums with their little canteens, the rubbish where the lorries can't get in. They are the cheap labor of the state, of an absent state that instead of generating decent and genuine work makes it precarious by using the cooperatives. But

they also use the cooperatives to cheat, to steal. I'm sorry I touched on this. There are people who resent it. And there are people who say: "Yeah, mate, I'll give it to you. Go on, paint this block. How much is all that going to cost? You're going to give work to all of them. You, to all your slaves (irregular workers) from the cooperative", because that's what they tell you. And 60 million pesos. And I say, but how can I do it with 30. Well, but it's 30 for the project, 15 for you, 15 for me. There it is. They installed corruption together with change.

Just like Kirchnerism when they came to power in Argentina. They came with a favorable correlation of forces: Chávez, Fidel, Evo. Remember that (in IV Cumbre de las Américas in) Mar del Plata, the people said no to the FTAA. Fuck the FTAA. There was a Latin Americanist effervescence. But "The Guys" said no, no to another Cuba, no to another Chávez, not here. And then they began to reduce Colombia and they put together their strategy, the national security policies, the low-intensity warfare, the Santa Fe, the Esquipulas. All the platforms of the United States for the domination of our continent, they never stopped. Operation Condor never ceased to exist. We bought into the democracy verse, and that's the way it went, didn't it? This is a big problem; they are still painting the iron bars.

In Latin America, there are people who stood up. Like the historical guerrilla in Colombia or the forces in Peru, or the Frente Patriótico Rodríguez and the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria in Chile. I could name more, but it's not the point. Now there is nothing, "They" studied us well, they gave us positions in governments. Fantastic. We bought the possibilism up. They built their social base. La Cámpora (Peronist organization) was born, they took base neighborhoods, they took a number of base organizations with them. In this second government (Alberto Fernández) there was no Chávez, there was no Fidel, there was no Evo. A coup d'état in Bolivia. Terror. We arrived at a possibilist government like that of Boris. But all that is symbolic. It is of no use to us when it comes to traction.

And this one? What did they do? They put them at the head of the ministries. And the comrades who for us were the pride of the excluded poor became the administrators of poverty. And the smaller organizations like ours and others, because we are not in all the provinces, we are not the Coordinadora Sindical Clasista CSC, we are not the Unión de Trabajadores de la Educación UTE. We are part of ourselves; we are part of the tail. The National Federation of Territorial Lands and Territorial Organizations is all over the country, but the MTL is in only 12 provinces, that's all. Then there are others, but we all make up the Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina Autonoma (CTAA). It is led by a man you should know, Omar Giuliani, from Ruca Hueney or the movement The Boys from the Village. He has a name, but he's such a classy guy that you'll be impressed if you stayed longer. Warrior. Spectacular, young, with flair, discipline. Political judgment. We need more Ana, more Andrea, more Rosa, more Mariano in charge of the radio. We need to multiply these men, these women, so that the organization is strengthened. And what are we going to do at this stage?

Because we are not going to give ourselves away, to anyone because we have already been through it. I lived through the Pinochet dictatorship, they took a child from me, I was

able to get my daughter back when she was 40 something years old, they exiled my mom who died in Sweden. I was able to get my oldest daughter back when she was 19, because one person believed in the insurrection of the masses. I didn't believe in their "kind of popular religion", but OK. And when the boys sit down to negotiate and give you their whole soul, they drop their trousers, they give themselves for free. I was 23, 24 years old they told me, that's it, guys, go home, go study. So it was, we survived. We come from a very harrowing stage, and it was not easy to leave things behind. I joined the military when I was 14 years old. And I realized when they negotiated the exit with the United States, with the CIA, the Pentagon and the mother in the car that I no longer had anyone. My *compañera*, a mother of eight children, was killed in an attack on a roundabout. The other one they put in prison, the other they made them disappear. They put Rucio in prison. Ramiro was imprisoned in Brazil. It was a disaster. I'm the lucky one. I won the lottery. I'm alive. I live in Argentina, and I have two granddaughters to raise. So just imagine. I'm the happiest woman in the world. I got my daughter back. It was very hard for us. So you have to be very careful at the forefront because there are human lives at stake, there are families. There were also mistakes. We very much regret the death of Facundo Molares, the internationalist comrade who was killed in the Obelisk, who came from Colombia, who was imprisoned, I don't know if you know Facundo Molares. Facundo would be just like Comandante Ramiro. He belongs to one of the FARC columns, but he came to die in the Obelisk in the most idiotic way I have ever seen in history, in my life, in an action to tell the people, this society, this bureaucratic society of voting that there was no need to vote, that there was an electoral farce. But he didn't have forces on his side. If I would be with him, I would say, take me, don't take him. We grab each other's fists. We do something. But on a platter, he went delivered. Facundo It was a very complex situation. The truth is that it was very sad, terribly sad. I knew him when I was a young boy. He came from the military. The MTL was the slaughterhouse manager before Elvis. Ah, look, he stopped being one when he left for Colombia. Well, we were part of the whole campaign to get him released.

The incorporation of women is extremely important, as is the issue of apprenticeships. Well, everything we did there was impressive. I have to tell you about it in detail. I have to show you videos. I have videos of what the land was like, of how we were building it, I have all the information, photographs. Then, well, I can show you the spaces, take you on a tour of the houses so that you can listen to the comrades. Even though I am the referent (representative, deputy) for the capital, I manage the housing area, so I always form groups. This year we formed 50 comrades in Habitat. This neighborhood, apart from having a lot of working-class people, has the largest concentration of hospitals. The most important hospitals are here: Garrahan, Nacional, Internacional, Gastroenterología, Malbrán de Bacteriología, Muñiz Infecto contagioso, the maternity ward, El Pena. Here there are more than 10,000 public health workers concentrated in this commune, in this place. We trained a lot of people during all these years. Some of them are still with us, others have returned to their countries, but they are not forgotten. It's not about building houses, it's about building people's power. That is our fundamental objective.

In the early stage of the movement, we have had male leaders. Our leader was Carlitos Chile, an internationalist. Carlito Chile was born in Argentina; his family was Chilean. He went to fight in Chile, he was caught by the dictatorship, and they exchanged him for another prisoner. They released him here as an Argentinean and sent a Chilean there. He came here to fight against the dictatorship. He was one of the guys who promoted the Social Constituent, which was a very high expression in Argentina, that we are saying today that we have to start discussing the Constituent and the Coordinating Centre of the Social Constituent.

We are talking with other organizations, making plans. I am of the theory that everything the state gives you is a borrowed column. You have to take all that the state gives you and use it to build your column. So when the kid gets angry and takes the ball away, let him take it, it doesn't matter. You've already made your ball. So this is what we are discussing with many comrades, isn't it? And what this whole process means. What is happening is horrifying. I mean, one would get up in the morning.

Ana and Moisés: You are also a general secretary of the CTA?

Carmen: I am the general secretary of the CTA of the Southern Regional. We are two women and we are also members of the Carlos Chile union movement in Callao. Chile has a trade union part; we are setting up the CPI, the political current of the left, which is a new expression, more inspired by the 26th of July in Uruguay, more inspired by organizations that have had in Mexico and in other countries of a unitary character, of a good character that have to do with women, with children, with university students, with adolescents, with the dispute for state parity. We don't know when we get up, and when we go to bed. But we are happy to be able to fight.

Ana: Your organization is inherently internationalist. What are the mechanisms and infrastructures of it?

Carmen: Yes, we are connected with Venezuela, with Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Chile. That's also another network Elena. It's fundamentally based in Mexico. The trade union meeting of our America. We recently had a meeting here, the International Human Rights Meeting for the Habitat International where the activist Montón was present. We won the second place. I'm going to show you the diploma we got. Cuba won the first place and we won second place in the self-managed project. We were given two keys in those years. The first was that they gave us 26 million pesos to build and when they came to measure it they found that there were 34 million and they never knew where we got the difference from. There was no theft, there was no money for the companies. Number two, we delivered it in 2007. We had zero taxation signed. A flat of 100 square meters where one of our partners lives, the couple plus six children. It has a bathroom, a toilet, a kitchen, a living room, a dining room, and four bedrooms. It's more than 100 meters with a balcony. Do you know how much a neighbor pays? Zero rate, $700. Less than a coffee. This cost twice as much as the flat fee. Yes, but we built it ourselves. That's self-management. Not a penny to anywhere. We had a canteen on the construction site because here the construction workers bring their food, those who have it eat, and those

who don't, don't they? Well, here there was a canteen for everyone. We all ate the same, and we put in a peso, and with that, we all ate.

We rejected the single-pay system. What did we do? We regularized all our workers. How much money we owed the Administración Federal de Ingresos Públicos AFIP? Millions of pesos. They expired. We never paid them a peso. But the money, the holiday, the Christmas bonus, all in the worker's pocket. That's why we're crazy. I have to show you on the blackboard so that you can understand the structure we have. It is a heavy structure. But we are never going to brake and throw stones from the pavement. We go first to the government and say look, this is wrong. You are spending millions of pesos of our money. We are proposing this. Put it in the hands of the social organizations.

No child is born a thief. It is a lie. Kids are not born as delinquents. These are issues that we have been working on. We have been digging, debating, and we believe that we have to do it and that we have to start discussing a different way of life, a different option. And we believe that cooperatives can play a fundamental role, that liberation movements can play a fundamental role. So there is a lot to talk about in the project, about what we have as a concept. The national law does not belong to an organization, it belongs to Pedro, it belongs to the Confederation of Cooperatives, it belongs to everyone. We all have a copy. We were part of the presentation when Alberto Fernández said he was going to approve it. But well, we all know what the most absent president in Argentinean history felt.

We've been talking for a long time now and I really have to go. But we will see each other on Wendnesday, right?

Ana and Moisés: Thank you so much for sharing all of this with us. We are humbled to be given this chance to give this important story about your struggle to the RHJ readership. And yes we will see you on Wednesday!

About this Conversation's participants

The Movimiento Territorial Liberación (MTL) is a social and political movement of employed and unemployed workers founded in 2001, representing over seventeen provinces in Argentina. In Buenos Aires, MTL emerged in response to the housing crisis, focusing initially on resisting evictions. By 2006, MTL had established a neighborhood in Parque Patricios, featuring 326 apartments, various community facilities, and Radio Sur, a community radio station launched in 2008.

Ana Vilenica is a feminist, no border and urban activist and organiser from Serbia currently living in Italy. She is a member of the Beyond Inhabitation Lab, the Radical Housing Journal Editorial collective and the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC research).

Moisés Quiroz is a historian, urban planner, specialist in social development and PhD candidate on Urban and environmental studies at El Colegio de México. He is an activist for social and cooperative housing in Mexico City.

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