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Argentina

Birth of our power

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Some images recall the Paris Commune of 1871. Not because they are comparable events, of course, but because they bring to mind Marx's phrase, 'the political form at last discovered'. [1] Pre-revolutionary crisis, dual power, revolutionary days, insurrectionary situation. Crisis of bourgeois hegemony and complete loss of the legitimacy of its state mechanisms of domination. Categories abound, multiply and repeat. Although it is difficult to contextualise them in a landscape where daily life is broken (as Trotsky would say) and the 'civil society', the 'multitude', the 'nation', the 'people', are in a state of insubordination, and self-management, exerting forms of direct participatory democracy (without any political-institutional mediation).

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/gif/arg2.gif>]

Nobody sleeps anymore, the Neighbourhood, Village or Popular Assemblies - however they are described - take place at night and have become generalized. Thousands of people communicate, listen, deliberate and propose, in hundreds and hundreds of meetings. They organize the protests and demonstrations of the week.

Coordination

Every Sunday, in the Centenario Park of the Federal Capital, the coordination of the Assemblies of Buenos Aires takes place. Here the young, the unemployed, the working, the swindled savers, pensioners, women, children come together, as well as the militants of the left organizations who must hang up their party flags and handle the questions wisely. Although the political weight of its presence does not go unnoticed, in particular the diverse Trotskyist organizations (PO, MST, MAS, PTS), the Communist Party and the Corriente Clasista Combativa (in which the Maoists of the PCR predominate).

The assemblies are built in opposition to the 'multi-sectoral dialogue' proposed by the government and the Catholic Church, with the support of the trade union bureaucracies of the two CGTs. What is at stake, however, is not only the rejection of this manoeuvre from above for 'discussing the problems of the country'. It is true that there is an instinctive feeling of opposition to 'politics' (mainly against the disguised corruption of politics), but the deputy Luis Zamora (Autonomia y Libertad) can take part in meetings, marches and cacerolazos, [2] without being insulted or regarded with distrust. Moreover, this power from below is developing a consciousness 'for itself' and a movement where anti-neo-liberal and anti-capitalist demands are advanced.

What began as a movement of indignation at the 'financial corralito' ('little ranch' or 'playpen' - ed.) and the dismissal of the infamous Supreme Court of Justice, advances in the direction of a true transitional program.

Non-payment of the foreign debt; breaking with the IMF; rejection of the Free Trade Area of the Americas; against dollarisation and for a South American currency; nationalization of the banks; renationalisation of privatised public companies; taxes on speculative financial capital; suspension of all dismissals; immediate food and medical assistance to the unemployed; creation of a million jobs; unemployment benefit of 380 dollars a month; derogation of the law of labour flexibility; elimination of the tax of 13% on wages and pensions; suspension of the cuts for nonpayment of public service charges; one to one weighting of all debts and credits; immediate return of the money of the small savers; distribution of the indebted companies to the people; increased budgets in education and health; free and public education at all levels; cuts in military and police expenditure; judgment and punishment of those responsible for repression; reduction of the pay and privileges of politicians.

To the general demand "that they should all go, that not a single one is left" (referring to the political leaders and governing Peronists, radicals and Frepaso), is now added the slogan of a 'Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly' and above all 'five representatives of the Popular Assemblies in the Congress' (for the discussion of the national budget). Cuba and Plan Colombia are not absent from the Assemblies: the demand to end the imperialist blockade is expressed and solidarity demonstrations are held.

Obviously, there is a link that connects the struggle of the masses in Argentina with the revolts of Seattle and Genoa, the movement against capitalist globalization and the World Social Forum, the insurgencies in Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia and the formidable radicalisation of ever wider layers of youth.

Polyclass

How should the 'social composition' of the Assembly be defined? In a provisional fashion: it is not 'working class', nor is it an amorphous partnership of the middle class. The Assembly is 'polyclass'. It expresses the deep mutations of the social framework and the devastating effects of an imposed neo-liberal model. But, first of all, the Assembly is 'popular' (a term preferable to that of the 'multitude', used by the Italians Antonio Negri and Paolo Virno), somewhere the small saver, the housewife, the worker or the unemployed are no longer humiliated and find a common identity.

On Monday, January 28, this common 'popular' identity was finally able to express itself on a broader scale: a march of 20 thousand piqueteros [3] started from the locality of La Matanza (Province of Buenos Aires) and ended in the historic Plaza de Mayo. This immense column of the working class met with the enthusiastic support of the vecinos [4] and retailers, facilitating the insurgent union between piqueteros and cacerolas.

The stores did not lower their shutters for fear of being looted, but offered coffee and refreshments to the demonstrators. In any case, as the self-organization movement is constructed and the social laboratory develops new experiences, the dilemma becomes more urgent: how to translate this democratic political radicalism into a real socialist alternative of power.

[1] Karl Marx, 'The Civil War in France', p. 290 in Marx and Engels, Selected Works, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1977.

[2] Popular demonstrations in the course of which people march in the street striking saucepans.

[3] Movements of unemployed workers.

[4] Participants in the popular assemblies are known as vecinos or 'neighbours'.