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Argentina

The anti-capitalist left surge in Argentina and the letter that sparked a crucial debate

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Against the backdrop of a Javier Milei government in crisis and Peronism's [1] decline, polls are showing a surge in support for Myriam Bregman, a Workers' Left Front – Unity (FIT-U) MP. With between 9–14% support and a strong social media presence, the FIT-U is emerging as an alternative for millions. However, historic difficulties that have plagued Argentina's radical left have also re-emerged. Despite its combativeness, the radical left remains fragmented and, in some cases, very sectarian.

Israel Dutra interviewed veteran Argentine revolutionary Eduardo Lucita about Argentina's emerging political landscape. Lucita is a Fourth International member and co-coordinator of Argentina's Left-Wing Economists (EDI) collective. Lucita, along with other comrades, initiated a debate with an open letter addressed to the parties in the FIT-U, "The Left Faces a Major Challenge". The letter has been circulating in Argentina for over a month and was recently followed by a second letter, also signed by well-known left-wing activists. [2]

As we believe it is important to raise awareness internationally about what is happening in Argentina, we interviewed Lucita, a signatory to both letters, on May 27. He discussed this process, provided an overview of the international situation and argued the case for building on the successful anti-fascist conference recently held in Porto Alegre in Brazil.

Your open letter addressed to the parties in the FIT-U has had a big impact within left-wing circles and beyond. Its impacts have even been felt here in Brazil. Could you give us an overview of the letter's purpose and why it was published now?

I will focus on the letters' main points. To start, there is a broader context to bear in mind: the deepening social crisis and young people's sense of a lack of future; the president's declining popularity and strong rejection of his government's actions; the serious difficulties Peronism has resolving its internal crisis; and the rise of the anti-capitalist left, embodied in the figure of Myriam Bregman. This general context seemed to us a turning point in the political situation, as well as both an opportunity and a challenge for the left.

So, the first objective was initiating a debate about this juncture, which I view as exceptional. Judging by the comments, criticisms and suggestions we have received, and that the Socialist Workers' Party (PTS), Workers' Socialist Movement (MST) and Socialist Left (IS) [all parties within the FIT-U] published the first letter on their websites, I think this first objective was achieved.

Beyond the analyses and characterisations, the letter also puts forward concrete proposals, such as creating "Committees of Struggle and Support for Myriam Bregman," and establishing technical working groups to develop the left's program with greater precision. We believe this would help consolidate its rise.

As for why now, the idea flowing through the text is that, for the first time in more than 40 years, the chance exists to mobilise sections of the masses to support a workers' government and, within a broader perspective, raise the idea of contesting for real power. As we say, the committees could play an important role in this. It strikes me as an unprecedented situation that we must capitalise on.

Polls show surging support for Bregman, in terms of her image, approval and voting intentions. Did this

surprise you?

Well, Bregman's profile has been rising for several years. She is a left-wing activist with a long track record around human rights, and supporting trade union and social struggles. She is also a very powerful voice in the National Congress.

But I would be lying if I said that the surge in support for her over the past two months did not take me by surprise. She is the only political figure in the country with a positive approval rating and has an average voting intention of 10%. I am pleasantly surprised by all this.

What do you think explains this explosive rise in the polls? Is it her personal qualities, the policies she proposes, or rather the political and social situation being ripe for a figure as disruptive as Milei was in his day?

It is a combination of several factors. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the socio-economic situation carries significant weight. This is reflected in Milei's falling approval ratings — now at their lowest point since he came to office [in 2023]— and, above all, by the 60% disapproval of his government's performance.

The shift to the right within Peronism is also important. The party's leaders have drifted a fair way from its historic base, which is fragmented, leaderless and disoriented. In a recent conversation with colleagues from some outer Buenos Aires suburbs, they said they had observed a shift in voting intentions within Peronism away from traditional figures towards Juan Grabois [who leads a progressive wing of Peronism closely linked to sectors of the Catholic Church], but now, for reasons unknown, Grabois's rise had stalled and people were looking to vote for Bregman. I do not know if that is exactly the case, but such anecdotes are worth bearing in mind.

I believe her role as an uncompromising opposition figure who has never made deals with any government (just like the other FIT-U MPs) has been decisive. Her personality and charisma also carry weight. She is pleasant to deal with, always smiling, cultured and intelligent. She is also not afraid to speak out in parliamentary debates, to put her body on the line on the streets and to speak with the media, becoming the most sought-after figure these days.

I would also add that she has been a member of a Trotskyist party [the PTS] for 20 long years. You, as a full-time party activist, and I know full well the demands such parties entail. Bregman's personality stems from her DNA, but I also believe it comes from being shaped and raised within that party.

The first open letter disagreed with statements by Bregman and Christian Castillo [another PTS leader and FIT-U MP] that the conditions do not exist for a left-wing government, nor for contesting power, as there is no powerful social movement or organs of dual power.

In my opinion, those statements were rather unfortunate. It is not that they are entirely wrong, but they failed to account for the context and came across as defensive, whereas we believe — and the letter makes this clear — that the conditions exist for a more active stance, putting forward proposals and seeking to overcome resistance.

Fortunately, our comrades have not repeated those statements. I think there was a process of reflection, and Bregman recently said in an interview: “Of course we want to be in government, of course we want to have the power to transform this situation at its roots.”

You also controversially characterised the current moment, saying that “an electoral breakthrough is more

likely than an insurrectionary one”, before proposing “Committees of Struggle and Support for Myriam Bregman”. Is this not a sign of electoralism? How does this fit with the PTS’s proposal for a new workers’ party? And is the open letter not overly optimistic?

Well, in the face of so much resignation and despair that others want to impose on us, we have opted for the optimism of the will. But not in the abstract; rather, an optimism based on the shifting situation.

As for a workers’ party, I cannot answer definitively, as I am not clear what they are proposing. Speaking at the Ferro stadium on May 1, Bregman referred to a workers’ party, then to an instrument of the workers, then a party of the new working class, and finally a new historic movement. I suppose this proposal will be more defined in time and be discussed within the FIT-U, whose coordinating committee I understand is due to meet in the coming days.

As for electoralism, no one doubts that capital, led by Milei, is waging an offensive against working people’s living conditions, environmental protections and women’s rights, the LGBTQ+ community and various minorities in the country involved in multiple resistance movements.

But a common feature of these struggles — which all indications suggest will intensify — is that they are dispersed, fragmented and often influenced by identity politics, which hinders attempts to unify and centralise them. To make matters worse, leaders such as those of the CGT [General Confederation of Labour] favour negotiation over confrontation, or simply look the other way.

No one believes a social uprising is imminent, although the class struggle is obviously unpredictable. Otherwise, we would have all predicted the 2001 uprising [against neoliberal policies that forced the resignation of several presidents]. As I am older, I remember the 1959 conflict at the Lisandro de La Torre meat-processing plant, which culminated in a general strike organised via word of mouth. But it is a fact that the polls show electoral progress is far more likely to occur today than an uprising.

In the second letter, “Some reflections on the tasks ahead”, you place great emphasis on the committees, presented under the slogan “For a workers’ government: Myriam Bregman for president”.

Yes. The proposal for committees — which, it must be acknowledged, Bregman took up in her May 1 speech when she spoke of “organising support” — seeks not only to unite activists from parties in the FIT-U or other organisations and movements, but also intellectuals, artists and, above all, those leading the currently scattered and fragmented struggles. It aims to call for the broadest possible unity so that we can discuss together a minimum program to address the emergency we face and opens possibilities for profound transformations.

In recent days, the PTS launched its public call of “We need you.” We support this as a step forward, which invites people to organise around the idea of a workers’ government. It also raises the idea of a workers’ party and/or a new historic movement, but as I said, this requires more in-depth discussions.

Logically, these committees, convened by and rallying behind Bregman, should also be involved in election campaigning. The reality is that we will most likely enter a lull period now, due to the World Cup. But elections will be happen soon after it finishes. And they will be important, not only because many think things cannot go on as they are, but because within the ruling classes there is a sector already doubting that Milei will be re-elected, or if it is even in their interests if he is. So, there is no shortage of people wanting to drop him to save their project, and are already looking for a replacement.

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So, for me, this is not electoralism. It is about seizing an unprecedented opportunity. But looking at the two open letters, you will see that they insist on not abandoning the struggles or the streets. The electoral arena is just another battlefield. As they used to say in the past, we must not ignore the battles on the terrain that the rulers dominate.

You also talk about shifting from defence to offence. I find this interesting, and not just for the Argentine left. Can you explain what this might look like?

It is clear that Bregman's support and the shift in public sentiment that I have described — and it is not just me talking about this — will not automatically translate into organised support or votes. Achieving this political objective requires a sort of cultural shift on the left, here and around the world. It involves leaving behind a simply self-serving or self-referential politics and prioritising the general interests of the workers' and popular movement. That is to say, less vanguardism and more mass politics to reach broad sectors hit hard by the crisis, including those who do not identify with anti-capitalism or socialism.

In our case, we need to reach out to the many groups and sectors within Peronism that are now directionless — without a project, program, or clear leadership — and who have repeatedly expressed their intention to vote for Bregman, to ask them to join the committees.

This leads us to the need for left unity, not simply because together we are more, but because it allows us to jointly think and act. This unity cannot simply be declared, it has to put aside fruitless arguments and create independent, democratic and autonomous committees as a common space for uniting the activist energy currently dispersed across multiple, often ineffective, spaces.

Making progress on this front requires a change in attitude among the members of the various parties in the FIT-U. If we manage this, we can leave behind the defensive position we have been stuck in for a long time, and go on the offensive. This would allow us to go beyond just resisting to envisioning ways to transform this intolerable reality, deal with the problem of power and forge the alliances needed to make this possible.

We have an unprecedented window of opportunity that also poses a major challenge for the left. This opportunity is not open-ended. We know politics abhors a vacuum. If the left does not occupy that space, others will. There is no time to lose.

I also have the international situation in mind. In that sense, how do you see what is happening in Argentina, but also in Bolivia, fitting into a world marked by geopolitical tensions, the rise of the right, and a figure like Donald Trump?

Well, Argentina is, to some extent, an exceptional case. We have a president who defines himself as an anarcho-capitalist and is at the ideological vanguard of the right's global rise. As if that was not enough, he has also subordinated the country's foreign policy to Trump's US and Netanyahu's Israel.

On the other hand, we have an anti-capitalist left, I believe, unlike any other in the world at the moment. It is spearheaded by an electoral alliance (the FIT-U) of four Trotskyist parties, which has existed for 15 years now, something equally unprecedented.

Bolivia is undergoing a severe political crisis fuelled by a workers', indigenous and peasant uprising that has blocked the country's main roads and cities. They demand the Rodrigo Paz government, elected just over six months ago, resign. If this happens — and we should not rule out that something similar could happen in my country, given the

critical social situation — it would have a tremendous impact internationally.

Even defeating Milei in the 2027 presidential elections would be significant. It would concretely demonstrate that, whether through insurrection or the ballot box, the far right can be defeated. And if the anti-capitalist left plays a decisive role in these movements, it would serve as an example for the left internationally.

As for Trump, it is clear that he heads a decaying empire seeking to take refuge in the “Western bloc” and that, as it declines, has become more aggressive and predatory. This was demonstrated by the military invasion of Venezuela and kidnapping of its president, the threats and strangulation of Cuba, and his remarks about annexing Canada and Greenland.

Trump allowed Israel to drag him into the Middle East war, while letting Israel run rampant in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. Trump became involved in the war without a clear entry or exit strategy. It is now clear that he will emerge weakened from this self-inflicted chaos. This could have consequences for the US November mid-term elections.

The flip side is the rise of China, now the main reference point on the global chessboard, as a Spanish political scientist put it. In just under a week, China’s president Xi Jinping received Trump and Vladimir Putin on state visits to Beijing and signed various trade and political agreements with both, granting neither anything of significance. He forced Trump to back down on arms sales to Taiwan and made clear to Putin that China is more important to Russia than Russia is to China.

We face a changing world order, and everything indicates that we are heading towards a division of spheres of influence. This may stabilise the situation for a while, but tensions will return, especially considering that global capitalism’s unresolved crisis underlies all this.

Finally, here in Porto Alegre, we held the 1st Anti-Fascist Conference for the Sovereignty of Peoples in March, with a significant delegation from Argentina. What were your thoughts on this event and how do you see it developing in the future?

I do not know if you are aware, but I collaborated with Eric Toussaint in organising the conference. I no longer travel, but from the reports I received and comments from various comrades, the conference was a success in terms of participation and the diversity of topics debated in the various panels and self-organised activities.

There is no doubt that this success stemmed from focusing on the common objective of an international convergence to confront far-right forces across the world, an objective shared by various parties and social movements in Brazil and internationally by organisations such as CADTM [Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt], the Fourth International, Jubilee South and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

A large delegation from my country took part, comprising members of anti-capitalist organisations and centre-left and/or progressive movements, as well as some prominent intellectuals.

I believe the conference must be followed up. This was also the view of the International Committee, which decided to organise two events, one in Mexico and another in Argentina. We will see when these can take place. The decision has been made and it is our duty to carry them out.

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[1] Peronism has been the dominant political force in Argentine politics since the rise to power of President Juan Domingo Perón in 1946. Currently in opposition, it has also been the main ruling party since the end of the military dictatorship in 1983. As a broad political movement, it encompasses a wide spectrum of politicians (from right-wing to centre-left and progressive), including the previous centre-left administrations of Nestor Kirchner (2003-07) and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-15).

[2] Among the signatories of these open letters are also Ariel Petruccelli, a renowned intellectual; Juan Pablo Casiello, a well-known teachers' union leader from Rosario, and Aldo Casas, a lifelong revolutionary socialist.