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Uruguay

# "A period whose outcome is open"

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**At a time of the debacle of neo-liberalism and a loss of governmental legitimacy (see [IV344](#))** coinciding with a growth of workers', popular and student struggles, the Third Congress of Uruguay's 'Corriente de Izquierda' (CI) was held on September 14-15, 2002. The CI has 350 activists and some 800 members. It groups radical left militants of diverse origins (Trotskyists, Tupamaros, independents).

[[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/19\\_Favella.jpg](https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/19_Favella.jpg)]

It is part of the Frente Amplio (Broad Front), a permanent united front structure of the left set up under the military dictatorship, inside of which the Socialist Party is today dominant. At the elections for the FA leadership last May, the CI list obtained nearly 6,000 votes out of a total of 200,000). *The congress approved a political document (113 votes for, 28 against and 11 abstentions) of which we publish extracts below.* [the document has been much shortened for space reasons - gaps in the text are indicated by (...) and the subtitles are ours]

"The decay of the 'model' shows reveals the most varied and eloquent signs of a total socio-economic catastrophe: unemployment, poverty, misery, expropriation of the most elementary human rights and workers' conquests, backward march in the field of democratic rights.

Simultaneously, indignation and popular resistance, however fragmentary, express the will to struggle and opposition to capitalist barbarism. The manifestations of revolt and disobedience as well as collective action, organized or spontaneous, weaken incessantly the pretensions of reviving an 'integratory social consensus' which is already dead and buried. The depth of the crisis and the uprising of those condemned to hunger by the system have more force than any attempt to make the Frente Amplio play the role of social shock absorber.

The confluence of these explosive factors has deepened both the loss of political and ideological credibility of the coalition government and the weakening of its social and electoral base. That is why the period will be marked by political instability as well as a growing presence of the class struggle. We are in a period whose outcome is open, where one cannot, a priori, rule out any outcome and where popular resistance - in the framework of the social and economic crisis - will play the role of protagonist, albeit with inequalities and different rhythms.

The three key components which have underpinned the neo-liberal discourse (efficiency, stability and legitimacy) have collapsed. It is not simply a crisis of the paradigm presented as being the sole 'model of growth' possible, but a crisis of the state, the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie and the post-dictatorship political regime of domination, installed through 'representative democracy'. The capitalist crisis and the loss of legitimacy of the coalition government, political agent of the dominant classes, acquire a new dimension in the face of the gigantic confiscation of incomes, jobs and savings with the goal of continuing to pay the foreign debt, the programmed assault against the public bank and services and the operation to bail out private and foreign financial speculators. The government has sealed and riveted dependence, erasing (through legislation) any vestige of sovereignty and national independence. As in a vice regency, the taking of economic and political decisions has been delegated to the US government, the Department of the Treasury and its international collaterals: the IMF, the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank. The Parti Colorado and the Parti Nacional (with the Nuevo Espacio Independiente as grotesque fellow traveller) have ended up signing the new colonial pact that involves total subordination to the project of imperialist re-colonization. (...)

## 'Culture of government' put to the test

Despite all the efforts made by the Frente Amplio to engage in dialogue, despite its desire to gain agreements to avoid 'chaos', the latter has arrived and it looks like staying. This chaos lays bare the strategy of 'democratic governance' and 'constructive opposition' predominant in the leadership of the Frente Amplio. The defeat of the strategy of 'social concertation' supported until now by the majority of the leadership of the PIT-CNT (the single trade union federation) has also been palpable.

The majority of the Frente Amplio (FA) leadership, who have moved towards the centre, with its strategy of institutional alternation and left managerialism modelled on the municipality of Montevideo, must, before the breadth of the crisis, face the challenge to its policy of institutional 'loyalty' and its adaptation to the electoral timetable. The famous 'culture of government' is being put to the test now. Increasingly broad popular sectors now demand that this pro-imperialist, inept and corrupt government goes. They want to take a road leading to another 'project of country', that the FA assumes the historic commitment of presenting itself as the alternative to the right, without playing about or betting on a year 2004 (year of the national elections) which is distant and uncertain. The defeat and paralysis of the majority of the FA leadership, as well as the gravity of the socio-economic crisis and the loss of legitimacy of the right, strengthens the social and political legitimacy of the proposal of the Corriente de Izquierda (CI, - Left Current) 'Battle and the IMF out of the government. Elections now!' [1] This proposal implies a perspective of rupture with the electoral timetable, with a radical democratic conception of the right of recall and the exercise of a participatory and direct democracy. It is the same conception that guides us when we propose a law of popular initiative so that the people, directly, decides and exercises its right to legislate on the economic, social and political necessities. The same sense motivates the proposal for a popular and sovereign constituent assembly, integrating the political parties and the social and popular organizations, which would discuss and decide on the societal project we want. This political proposal, radically democratic, implies a rupture with the idea of elections as instrument permitting the replacement of political personnel and also implies a rupture with the initiatives which begin to be floated around a 'government of national reconstruction' of class conciliation. (...)

## The camp of resistance

Recent months present a landscape of 'popular belligerence' that extends as far as the consequences of the crisis. (...)All this movement of protest, organization and resistance opposes - and this is true also on the concrete terrain of the class struggle - the ideological myth held to by the bourgeoisie of the 'Uruguayan exception' and 'social peace'. In this context, the 'shock absorbers' lack time and space given the necessity of recuperating basic social rights, unless one expects the Three Wise Men to arrive bearing in their sacks the present of a productive country. It is the working class (wage earners and unemployed) that is the protagonist of these demonstrations. It is a 'mass of wage earners', public and private and thousands of social 'subjects' who form part of a process as broad as it is heterogeneous of popular reorganization.

In this sense, we can say that the camp of resistance and protest is broad and varied. That there is no privileged point for social accumulation and the intervention of left militants. That the tendencies towards self-organization are strengthening. That this vast ensemble of collective actions of struggle is the response to socio-economic transformations and the disintegratory effects of the neo-liberal counter-reforms on traditional social links. A camp of resistance and protest which does not confine itself to the structures of organized trades unionism or those of the radical 'classist and combative' opposition. There has been a change in the culture of the popular struggle as well as in individual and collective strategies of survival.

The crisis has developed an intelligence and an elementary class identity, opposed in practice to the hybrid formulae of 'civil society' and the 'multitude'. This class identity has come to confront the abusive use of the category of 'citizen'

(or 'citizen-worker' and also 'citizen-entrepreneur', where rich and poor are 'citizen-neighbours'). Precisely, it is impossible to deny and reject the class struggle because the conflict is inside the very system of exploitation and it broadens because of the current turn of capitalist globalization and 'market democracy'.

## The anti-capitalist left

The need to strengthen the radical political identity of the CI, as well as its organizational bodies and its functioning, responds to the acceleration of the political tempo imposed by the socio-economic crisis and by popular resistance. The 3rd congress cannot then ignore these fundamental challenges.

The first challenge is that of organizing a 'class struggle' left, revolutionary and socialist, capable of articulating an ensemble of emergency proposals (democratic, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist) so as to ensure that the adjustment plan, the unemployment, the poverty and hunger so not impose a defeat on the popular and workers' movement. This 'programme' should be in harmony with the basic social needs, capable of halting the process of expropriation led by the bourgeoisie. The second challenge is that of articulating, in action, the accumulated political and militant experience of this revolutionary and socialist left, both in the Frente Amplio and in the movements that support the broad and plural social resistance. The radical camp goes beyond the CI. Nobody can deny it, just as one cannot say that the CI is the 'only radical left in the country'. Indeed, in the social movements and in the FA, and even in the sectors which are not part of the organic framework of left unity, there exists a radical, class practice and in some cases a reflection which orientates towards a perspective of revolutionary unity.

This perspective informs and traverses different groups and identities. These 'transversal sections' are today more significant than ten years ago. The landscape of spirits and faces of the insurrection is multicoloured and thus more broad also, which contradicts any determinist vision. All these activists can be found as much in the Movement of National Liberation (MLN, Tupamaros) and the Communist Party as in the Movement of March 26 (26-M, left Castroist) and the Party for the Victory of the People (PVP, a left current of radical origin), and even in the Socialist Party (PS, social democratic).

The 'transversal sections' are not the fruit of 'subjectivity' but of objective conditions, of a political process expressing the modifications of the 'social tissue' (fragmentation, reorganization) and the exhaustion of political experiences and of organization, obliging the militants to reformulate several things. Thus, not having a policy of alliances towards the 'left of the left' amounts to attempting to play a messianic and sectarian role.

In opposition to the tendency to integration in the system of the majority of the FA, which privileges institutional action, there is a left which proposes another road: a democratic radicalization involving 'structural reforms', opposed to the neo-liberal counter-reforms; it proposes initiatives tending to associate the everyday 'anti-neo-liberal' struggle with an anti-capitalist struggle, knowing that these struggles are in relation with a strategy of revolutionary accumulation and a socialist programme (although this socialist programme is not the logo of presentation); a left which fights the ideology of 'useful' concepts which justify proposals to 'humanize capitalism' or which preach the inevitable and insurmountable character of 'globalization'; a left, finally, which seeks to demystify the 'sociological' formulae (like those of the 'war of the poor against the poor') whose goal is to erase any class vision of society from the memory and collective consciousness.

## Articulating a political and social left

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It is, then, about rethinking a strategy of accumulation of forces in the political and social struggle that does not fall into peripheral sectarianism or institutional opportunism. A strategy where resistance (or, better said: the necessity of resistance) summarizes and translates the reflections and experiences of struggle of the social movements. What are the tensions that we must now confront? Those of placing in their true tactical dimension (which does not mean tacticism) the demands associating, in the social imagination, the concrete everyday needs with the need to transform society.

We are for an organized popular mobilization. But in what sense and around what proposal? In the sense of a new creation and a democratic reappropriation of the conquests stolen by the capitalist offensive. A mobilization where the conflict opposes the rights of society to the 'right' to private property. A left which defines itself as anti-capitalist cannot fail - under the pretext of the next referendum, the next strike, the events of tomorrow night - to work on the dimension of (revolutionary) rupture which exists, albeit sometimes in a confused manner, in the perception of a broad sector of 'social combatants' and of a sector of the mass movement.

These latter are conscious of the uninterrupted expropriation of their most elementary rights as 'citizens'. Is the question of another political legitimacy and another 'model' of society completely absent from popular consciousness? Do 'the people' only think of immediate demands? Do they fight only for reforms? Has the 'tepidity' of the discourse of the FA finally put consciousness to sleep? Could one be underestimating popular intelligence? The sacrosanct respect for the 'state of law' and of private property is not a blank cheque for life. The process is slow, molecular, but it exists. Still in the framework of perceptions and levels of class-consciousness which are intertwined and often diffuse.

To misunderstand this process can only lead to a verbal sectarianism that falsely claims to be revolutionary. The challenge of politicizing struggles, articulating social resistance with organization and political perspective will avoid an absurd division of labour between 'reform' and 'revolution'. 'Revolutionary accumulation' is unthinkable outside of a framework which should be capable of integrating reform and revolution in order to 'transform the established order', as Rosa Luxemburg put it. The militant component of this anti-capitalist left, the potential of struggle for socialism, is in the organizations and social movements as well as in the FA. It is for this reason that the construction of a revolutionary alternative must articulate the social and political left and thus guard against any institutionalization, any dispersion of forces, contributing at the same time to fixing a common horizon.

This moment of accumulation in the perspective of a reorganization of the anti-capitalist left, that is the CI, is still weak, and this despite the fact that the right and its reactionary press ('El Pais', 'BÀ"squeda', 'El Observador Economico'), as well as the majority sectors of the FA leadership, allude constantly to the 'radicals of the CI'. For them these 'radicals' are the main factor of destabilization, throwing spanners in the wheels of 'democratic governance'. The 'radicals of the CI' are the false note in the reformist concert disguised as 'realism' and 'ideological updating'. (...)

This weakness is explained by political reasons and the 3rd congress has debated them collectively and deeply. The congress is the framework composed by militants engaged fully in the real movement of political and social struggles: from the smallest union or the smallest town on the border, far from the capital, to the activity of local elected representatives or members of 'neighbourhood councils'. These are the organized militants who think and act, who share political and social experiences with thousands of comrades in different posts of combat.

Thus, the 3rd Congress has discussed successes and errors, with the perspective of strengthening the CI as a unitary and plural organization that fights to 'make the revolution'. In the sense that it is clear that the revolution will never come at 'the right moment'. Without risks and without surprises, the revolution will only be a laboratory caricature. Precisely, the revolution is by its nature 'premature' or, as Che said, it is a creative imprudence.

[1] Batlle is currently president of Uruguay.