Ukraine war exposes the pro-imperialist politics of the “Left Workers Front” in Argentina

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Amid the usual electoral horse-trading and nationalist campaign statements ahead of the 2023 elections, the so-called Left Workers Front-Unity (FIT-U or FIT) in Argentina is providing a political platform for ardent supporters of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

Even as the presence of NATO forces in Ukraine and their role in provoking and conducting the war becomes undeniable, two leading partners of the pseudo-left electoral coalition, the Socialist Left (IS) and the Socialist Workers Movement (MST), have continued to campaign for sending more money, weapons and volunteers to the front against Russia.

The FIT-U’s other two leading partners, the Socialist Workers Party (PTS) and the Workers Party (PO), claim to oppose NATO’s imperialist war, while politely telling their “comrades” in the IS and MST that they all can agree to disagree. For these forces, open support for imperialism is no impediment whatsoever to running in elections under the same banner.

What unites all of these tendencies is their nationalist orientation, which ties them inextricably to their own national bourgeoisie. To the extent that they now find themselves divided on the Ukraine war, this reflects divisions within the Argentine capitalist ruling class itself, as it seeks a means of balancing between its continued subordination to US imperialism and the IMF, on the one hand, and the growing economic and political influence of China — and, to a lesser extent, Russia — in the region, on the other.

Similar calculations are being made throughout the hemisphere, as evidenced by Brazilian President Lula’s trip to Beijing and his questioning of the need for the US dollar in international trade. It is worth noting that Argentina’s President Fernandez was meeting with Vladimir Putin in Moscow on the very eve of Russia launching its “Special Military Operation” in Ukraine.

Given their subordination to the bourgeois national political milieu, unprincipled positions on international questions usually fail to raise any eyebrows within pseudo-left circles in Argentina. But this time around, the group Workers’ Politics led by Jorge Altamira, who was a founding member of the FIT-U, will be running separately in the 2023 elections. Hence, it has found it politically expedient to denounce the FIT-U for “supporting NATO.”

In a recent polemic, Workers’ Politics denounced its former allies in the Morenoite PTS for “supporting the war against Russia by Zelensky, a direct agent of NATO.” The article charges that the PTS’s ally in France, *Revolution Permanente*, has promoted NATO propaganda about supporting “Ukraine’s independence.”

“Along with the rest of the FIT-U,” it adds, the PTS has been using the demand for the “dissolution of NATO” as a cover for supporting the war.

In a radio interview last year, Altamira had argued that the FIT-U was suffering from “a lack of socialist politics” as demonstrated by its “support for NATO.” A report on the interview adds that the FIT-U raises jointly the demand for Russia to leave Ukraine, “which is NATO’s goal in the war.” Calling for peace on these terms, moreover, would mean a NATO victory and set up Russia “for territorial division”.

The report complains that the FIT-U has pursued no initiatives in Congress to demand the end of the war and concludes that, regardless of its claims to oppose NATO, “this left is firmly united” behind “a pro-imperialist outlook.”

“Left” Argentine conduits for NATO propaganda

While highlighting the right-wing character of the FIT-U, these criticisms are hypocritical and have nothing to do with “socialist politics.” The MST and IS have become “left” Argentine conduits for NATO propaganda, justifying the use of Ukrainian workers and youth as cannon fodder in a proxy war aimed at the imperialist carve-up of Russia and the preparation for a wider confrontation with China.

Not content to merely propagandize in support of the Ukraine war in the name of defending “democracy” against Russian “imperialism” and “totalitarianism,” both tendencies and their partners in Ukraine are raising money for weapons and volunteers, while acting as apologists for the fascistic forces that predominate in the military and the Zelensky government.

The leading figure in Ukraine of the International Socialist League (ISL), which is led by the Argentine MST, is Oleg Vernyk, a union official who has worked to drum up support for the Zelensky puppet regime and mobilized volunteers to follow the marching orders of NATO on the war front. Vernyk has sought to justify these policies and his orientation to far-right Ukrainian nationalists by rehabilitating the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which collaborated with the Nazis during the Holocaust and World War Two. Vernyk has falsified history by claiming that the OUN represented some sort of an alliance between far right and left tendencies for democracy and national self-determination.

For its part, the Socialist Left sent its national legislator Juan Carlos Giordano at the head of a delegation of the International Workers Unity (UIT) to Kiev “in order to deliver material and political aid.” Their Ukrainian liaison who received the aid is Sergei Movchan, the leader of “Solidarity Collectives,” an initiative focused on arming military volunteers.

In February, Movchan spoke before the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which is associated with the pro-imperialist Left Party in Germany. He stressed “the general insignificance of far-right violence [in Ukraine]” and

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claimed that his group enjoys a "truce" with the far right in the country. "Recently I even met in the street an old acquaintance of mine who is a far-right activist. We had a nice chat and he even offered to help me in some matters," he said.

After years of collaboration and campaigning under the same banner, Altamira and company share responsibility for these right-wing policies, and their criticisms today are merely an attempt to cover this up.

The current electoral campaign of Altamira's Workers' Politics is essentially in line with that of the FIT-U or, for that matter, the other bourgeois parties. It is concentrated on vague provincialist proposals and relegates the war and the resurgence of the class struggle globally to secondary matters.

"Whoever breaks with the FIT commits suicide"

Altamira was the FIT's first presidential candidate and famously said, "Whoever breaks with the FIT commits suicide." Now he claims that the coalition is "a variant of Kirchnerism," the ruling bourgeois Peronist tendency. However, this never stopped Altamira from partnering with them before.

He continued this alliance even after his coalition partners became cheerleaders for the CIA-sponsored regime change operations against Bashar al-Assad in Syria and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, including their calls for arming what they called "popular rebellions" and "democratic revolutions." In 2014, even as the IS celebrated as a "democratic revolution" the fascist-led and State Department-funded movement to overthrow the elected, pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovych, the PO led by Altamira and the PTS saw no reason to break their alliance. It was this coup that brought a pro-US puppet regime to power in Kiev and effectively launched the current war against Russia.

There is no reason to believe that Altamira would not be campaigning again shoulder-to-shoulder with the IS and MST and denouncing any criticism of FIT-U as "sectarian" had his tendency not been expelled from the PO after an unprincipled and politically unclarified split in June of 2019.

Just days before this split, Altamira wrote that the FIT-U had been formed with "an opportunist method" proposed by the PTS, which he had previously described as "Podemos in diapers," referring to the bourgeois party currently sharing power in Spain.

Altamira wrote, "The FIT whitewashes the MST's long record of class collaboration." The coalition's "programmatic statement," he added, represents a call for a "class-collaborationist popular front." He described as "capitalist" the platform's demands, including "preventing capital flight" and "offering cheap credits."

After making these charges, which effectively demonstrate that the Left Workers Front is neither left-wing nor a workers' organization, Altamira explained that the PO needed to remain within the coalition and campaign for it "to gain more parliamentary seats." So much for his hollow "leftism" and hypocritical polemics.

Significantly, Altamira acknowledged that the Socialist Left (IS) conceives of the FIT-U as a repetition of the People's Front (FREPU) formed in 1985 as an electoral coalition between the Stalinist Communist Party and the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) founded by Nahuel Moreno, the party from which the PTS, MST, IS, PSTU and a number of other groups emerged in the splits that followed Moreno's death in 1987.

It is not merely speculation to suggest that the pseudo-left's support for alliances with authoritarian and far-right forces in Ukraine could be replicated in Argentina itself. The Morenoites in the FIT-U openly defend their previous alliance with the Stalinists, who had supported the fascist Argentine junta as it killed tens of thousands of workers and youth. The dictatorship had ceded power just two years before the founding of FREPU.

"Refounding the Fourth International" in alliance with Stalinism

The same holds true for Altamira. In April 2018, just one year before imploding, the PO organized a conference to "refound the Fourth International" together with the Stalinist United Communist Party of Russia (OKP), which is aligned with fascistic forces in Russia and internationally and supports the Putin government.

The *World Socialist Web Site* conducted a systematic exposure of this reactionary event, which was organized by Altamira in collaboration with Savas Michael-Matsas of the Greek Workers Revolutionary Party (EEK) on the basis of right-wing nationalist politics and a repudiation of the entire history of the Fourth International.

At the event, Altamira himself justified the presence of Darya Mitina, the OKP's secretary for international affairs, as a leading speaker. He said: "You have had a comrade who speaks in the name of the tradition of communism in Russia, which for her would be Stalinism… We are holding political discussions with these comrades to learn if we can all work together to take a step forward toward the construction of an international…"

The WSWS warned that behind the PO's pact with the Russian Stalinists, "a deeply reactionary axis is being prepared involving an alliance with bourgeois nationalist and even right-wing currents", whose purpose is to "subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie precisely at a point where a resurgence of the class struggle is emerging on every continent."

The PTS recently raised this episode as proof that the Altamirists are "pro-Russian." However, the PTS took no issue with the event until after the PO split. The phony polemics between these tendencies can be summarized as, "Look, you are even more reactionary than we are."

Altamira's Workers Politics responded to the PTS with an article last week trying to defend its 2018 "refounding" conference by shamelessly lying to its readers. It was "interesting" to hold "a debate with a former Stalinist who belongs to a minority party of the opposition within Russia itself," they wrote. The "former Stalinist" Mitina writes proudly that she takes flowers to Stalin's grave twice a year. The attempt to cover up her politics can only be explained by their intention to maintain a political alliance with such forces.

In fact, as recently as June 2022, Osvaldo Coggiola, a historian who followed the Altamira faction in the break with the PO, participated in a misnamed "Emergency International Anti-War Conference" organized by the "Christian Rakovsky International Center" headed by EEK leader Savas Michael-Matsas and co-moderated by Darya Mitina. It also included prominently the participation of Mitina's husband Said Gafurov, a former Putin adviser.

Gafurov explained that the OKP's official position is that "Putin is our ally, nothing more nothing less" in the struggle against "global capital." It was "the pressure of the working class in Ukraine and Russia together on Putin" that forced him to carry out his military operation. This, he added, "is the independent role of the working class in Ukraine and Russia… We should use him [Putin] as a part of the internationalist class struggle."

Even before the conference, the Rakovsky Center had called on workers to "not remain neutral" and fight for the military victory of Russia in the war, presenting it as an "anti-imperialist struggle."

During the conference, Coggiola made no criticism of these positions and insisted to these same pro-Stalinist organizations that the task of

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refounding the Fourth International—evidently still in alliance with Russian Stalinism—"has not been set aside."

These attempts to portray the Russian invasion of Ukraine as an "anti-imperialist" struggle dovetail with the outlook of a not insignificant layer of petty-bourgeois nationalists in Latin America and elsewhere who base themselves on anti-Americanism and illusions in a new "multipolar" world order. They are united by their rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class as the only answer to imperialist war.

There is nothing whatsoever progressive, let alone anti-imperialist in Putin's "Special Military Operation" in Ukraine. It is the reactionary response of the capitalist state he leads to the growing military pressure of the United States and NATO. It is directed not at defeating imperialism, but at preserving the economic interests of a ruling class of Russian oligarchs who enriched themselves through the looting of the previously nationalized property of the Soviet Union. In this regard, the ruling classes of Russia and Ukraine share the same criminal roots.

"Real national self-determination for Europe"

Another historian who joined the Altamira faction, Daniel Gaido, has adopted the position that, "Only after the dismantling of the military and political institutions that turn European countries into vassal states of US imperialism will it become possible to talk about real national self-determination in Europe, including the possibility of creating a continent-wide federation to prevent the outbreak of future wars."

According to this position, which he published in the journal *International Critical Thought* in March, any independent struggle by workers to overthrow capitalism and its nation-state system, which are the true origins of wars, is off the agenda. Instead, Gaido implies that workers in France, Spain and the rest of Europe should support their respective bourgeoisies in establishing "real national self-determination".

In the current context, this means bowing to the demands of these ruling classes for social cuts and other attacks on living standards to finance military build-ups to challenge US power in Europe. This is explicitly the line taken by French President Emmanuel Macron, who recently insisted that Europe cannot be a "vassal" to Washington, even as he turns militarized riot police against masses in the streets opposing his austerity pension plan.

As exposed by David North in his 2018 Preface to *The Heritage We Defend*, Gaido had already advanced a similar argument in a 2014 essay co-written with Velia Luparello titled "Strategy and Tactics in a Revolutionary Period: U.S. Trotskyism and the European Revolution, 1943-1946." This essay insisted that the Fourth International should have followed the position advanced by the faction led by Felix Morrow and Albert Goldman within the US Socialist Workers Party after World War II: that no revolutionary situation existed in Europe even when workers across the continent were armed and radicalized by the barbaric crimes of capitalism, and that the Trotskyist movement should convert itself into a movement for bourgeois democratic reforms.

Gaido argued that this failure to transform the Fourth International into an appendage of bourgeois democracy was the real source of the post-World War II crises in the Fourth International, not the attempts a decade later by the revisionist tendency led by Michel Pablo to liquidate the Trotskyist movement into Stalinism, bourgeois democracy and petty-bourgeois nationalism.

"The gist of this argument is that the Trotskyist movement should have liquidated itself in the 1940s," North wrote. "Its ill-conceived efforts to uphold an unrealistic revolutionary program doomed it to 'political impotence,' and was the source of later crises in the Fourth International. The real aim of the new narrative proposed by Gaido and Luparello is to shift responsibility for the crises of the Fourth International away from those who sought to liquidate the Trotskyist movement and onto the shoulders of those who sought to defend it."

As explained by North, Gaido turned a blind eye to the class outlook evinced by Morrow and Goldman, who quickly rejected the fight for socialism and swung behind US imperialism during the Cold War. What their politics and those of Altamira, the FIT-U and every other tendency that has broken with Fourth International have in common is their class hostility to socialist revolution.

The "mistake" of a pro-imperialist policy

This was summed up in the single debate organized by the FIT-U in May 2022 to once and for all dismiss as inconsequential their conflicting positions on the Ukraine war. There, the representative of the PO, Pablo Giachello, criticized the "pro-imperialist policy" of the MST and IS, concluding: "Pay attention, because it turns out that they always make mistakes toward the same side. So it's evident that there are strong imperialist pressures that refract within the workers' movement, surely, and as a result they refract within the left."

If a party always chooses to back imperialism, it's not a "mistake." It is their class orientation as a pro-war tool of imperialism. And those parties which call these forces "comrades" and describe them as the "left", while running together with them for legislative and trade union posts, are themselves pro-war tools of imperialism.

The response by all these pseudo-left tendencies in Argentina and their partners internationally to the Ukraine war has demonstrated their unconditional commitment to defend capitalism, even as it threatens humanity with a nuclear war, by politically disarming the working class and dividing it on nationalist lines.

Stripped of their "socialist" verbiage, one is left with organizations and publications that speak for union bureaucrats, academics, NGO operatives and other elements of the affluent middle class who see in the growing working class struggles globally against war, inflation, and austerity a threat to their wealth and comfortable positions.

These are the reactionary social layers attracted to the politics rooted historically in the national opportunism of Nahuel Moreno, who broke from the International Committee in the early 1960s, rejecting the need for the building of a conscious revolutionary leadership in the working class and seeking substitutes in everything from bourgeois nationalist caudillos like Juan Domingo Perón, to petty-bourgeois Castroite guerrillaism and Popular Front-style coalitions with Stalinists, all with disastrous results.

The Morenoites and their Altamirist allies are not building organizations to fight for socialism, but rather working to chain the working class to the nationalist and pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies and sections of the bourgeoisie. Today, these pseudo-left tendencies represent the main barrier between workers in Latin America and Trotskyism—the only perspective that offers a way to fight war.

In 1939, Trotsky wrote in his essay "The Problem of the Ukraine," that the opportunists employing "left phrases" to back nationalists and "People's Fronts" in Ukraine "must not be allowed within artillery range of the labor movement." The same is true today in Ukraine, Russia, Argentina and everywhere.

The International Committee of the Fourth International is the only political tendency in the world fighting to build a mass political movement of the working class and youth against war on a socialist and internationalist basis. The most urgent task today is building sections of the ICFI throughout Latin America and the world as the necessary

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leadership for this struggle.

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