In run-up to 2023 elections, Argentina's pseudo-left prepares Syriza-style betrayal

Andrea Lobo
25 April 2023

A historic collapse of living standards in Argentina is rapidly discrediting the entire political establishment in the run-up to the general elections in October. According to a poll released this month by Universidad de San Andrés, only about one in 10 Argentines are satisfied with either the government of Peronist president Alberto Fernandez or Parliament.

On Friday, Fernandez announced that he will not run for re-election, following similar decisions by his vice president Cristina Kirchner and their predecessor Mauricio Macri, who leads the right-wing JxC coalition.

All the leading parties are seen as responsible for making deals with the IMF and other financial vultures to bleed the country dry, leading to rampant poverty and hunger, a recession, three-digit inflation, the draining of foreign reserves, and a likely tenth default on the government's debt.

With its massive urban working class, its semi-advanced industry and the semi-colonial subordination to US and European imperialism, Argentina's crisis is a particularly advanced expression of the breakdown of bourgeois rule and heralds similar developments in other countries. Everywhere, the ruling elites are trying to force workers to pay for the cost and repercussions of the escalating economic and military US-NATO war drive against Russia and China, the pandemic, and the endless rounds of bailouts for the rich.

As a distorted expression of anti-establishment sentiment, the fascistic libertarian Javier Milei—a media commentator and supporter of Trump and Bolsonaro—is leading the polls for president. However, his pro-rich politics of social cuts and repression not only pose serious limits to his popularity, but his presidency would trigger a massive eruption of the class struggle at a time when all official institutions, including the trade union bureaucracy, are heavily discredited.

With the ruling class in dire straits, the pseudo-left parties, whose politics reflect the interests of the affluent middle class, are scrambling to provide an electoral formula to help prop up capitalist rule. As demonstrated by several recent articles in the corporate press, the ruling class is paying particular attention to the electoral coalition Left and Workers Front-Unity (FIT-U) and the appeals by its co-founder Jorge Altamira for the "entire left" to have primaries and run together.

An April 17 piece in the right-wing daily *La Nación* sends a clear directive for the FIT-U to end all "divisionism" over candidacies. This infighting has included various groups going to the corporate media to call their partners pro-bourgeois and opportunist. The coalition received over 1.2 million votes and four seats in the Chamber of Deputies in 2021 and is polling similarly this year.

Altamira was kicked out of the FIT-U in 2019 after his faction was expelled from the Partido Obrero, which he had led for decades. He had played a key role in providing the pseudo-left milieu in Argentina a "revolutionary" and even "Trotskyist" veneer throughout this period, which makes his appeal for unity especially sinister, further exposing the betrayals being prepared by these organizations.

The "electoral program" adopted by his organization Workers Politics in a congress this month provides no way forward against the global causes of all the major issues workers face in Argentina, including the war, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, the threat of capital flight, or the overhaul of globalized supply chains. No significant social issue or even contract battle in Argentina can be approached with the purely nationalist politics of this entire milieu.

A Constituent Assembly to negotiate the debt

The two main electoral proposals of Altamira's group are strictly aimed at subordinating opposition to the dead end of national capitalist politics and the trade union bureaucracy. Firstly, the documents stress that, "if it wins the elections Workers Politics will convoke a Constituent Assembly" or even if it "gains the necessary majority."

The group's candidate for governor in Tucuman, Raquel Grassino, said in a recent interview that this would be their "first measure" and would involve "the participation of all citizens where we will all make the decisions together." The candidate for governor in Jujuy, Iñaki Aldasoro said that it would be "a real Constituent Assembly that deals with the issue of how far to in-debt the province, what type of debts are necessary and how to guarantee an effective division of powers…"

This formulation, which is a staple of the entire Argentine pseudo-left, offers a last resort to save bourgeois rule and implement its austerity measures, while serving to foment illusions in bourgeois democracy. This demand has recently been used by Pabloite groups across the region to channel mass protests behind the regimes of bourgeois nationalists like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and most recently Gabriel Boric in Chile and Gustavo Petro in Colombia.

Significantly, the main demand being employed by the capitalist politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France to suppress the ongoing mass strike movement in France is to form a "Constituent Assembly." He wrote that he learned its value in a trip to Latin America: "The explanation was given to me once I arrived on the scene. It was the precondition for the authorities to be legitimate again."

The character of Altamira's formula is demonstrated by his long record of finding convenient formulations to back bourgeois parties. In exile in Brazil during the 1980s, Altamira played a key role along with Lambertistes, Morenoites and Pabloites in building the Workers Party (PT), promoting it as a parliamentary road to socialism. Altamira called for voting for Evo Morales in 2005 and Brazil's president Lula in 1989, citing "the historic tradition of socialism of hitting 'the enemies of one's enemy.'" As recently as 2018, Altamira called for voting for the PT in Brazil, even after acknowledging that it's the "preferred instrument of the bourgeoisie". His pretext was that of supporting the #EleNao

© World Socialist Web Site

demonstrations that sought to use identity politics to channel opposition to Bolsonaro behind right-wing bourgeois politicians.

An Argentine version of Syriza

The second key proposal in Altamira's electoral program is to convene "primaries involving the entirety of the political space of the left. The aim is to organize an electoral pole of confrontation against the parties of capital." Effectively, this means an expansion of FIT-U. The only precondition set by Altamira is having "clarity on each other's positions," not political agreement.

In an interview with *Jacobin* last year, the purpose for "clarity" on having open political differences within the coalition was explained concisely by Myriam Bregman, a national legislator from the Morenoite Socialist Workers Party (Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas, PTS), who will most likely be the presidential candidate for FIT-U. She said that uniting with forces that are openly sending money and volunteers for the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine served to "reach broader sectors with different positions." This means that FIT-U is appealing to pro-imperialist layers within the Argentine bourgeoisie and to Washington directly.

Altamira's Workers Politics, including in its electoral documents, admits that most of the "left" groups that it is summoning to join a coalition "support NATO's war." Moreover, last year, the group wrote that FIT-U has "the aim of establishing a popular front with Peronism," that is, the bourgeois party that controls the current government as well as the trade union bureaucracy. The Altamirists specifically cite appeals by FIT-U to the Peronist legislator and potential presidential candidate Juan Grabois and the Peronist union leadership to "break with the government" and form a common front in the struggle against the IMF loans.

Altamira's calls for "unity" are an attempt to establish a platform modeled after the Greek bourgeois party Syriza, the "Coalition of the Radical Left." Brought to power in the midst of a mass protest movement, Syriza betrayed its promises of opposing the IMF's austerity diktats as soon as it was elected to power in 2015. Only the *World Socialist Web Site* consistently exposed the bourgeois class character of the party and warned that it would betray its promises.

At the time, Altamira's closest allies abroad—in an alliance based on purely nationalist calculations—Savas Michael-Matsas and his Workers Revolutionary Party (EEK) in Greece were systematically fomenting illusions in Syriza from outside the coalition and calling for "their leadership to break with the bourgeoisie", similarly to calls of the FIT-U today.

Almost exactly as Altamira today, the EEK made a call a few months before the 2015 election, for a "powerful United Front of all workers' and popular organizations… from KKE, Syriza, Antarsya to EEK, the other left organizations, anarchist and anti-authoritarian movements."

It is worth noting that Altamira provided "critical" support for Syriza. In 2012, he unsuccessfully pushed the EEK to call for a vote for Syriza and then portrayed Syriza's 2015 victory as "the people of Greece crushing the right and dealing a crippling blow to the EU and the IMF."

Michael-Matsas had followed Gerry Healy in the 1985 split with the International Committee of the Fourth International, refusing to even discuss the protracted political degeneration of the leadership of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) under Healy, including an orientation to the Labour Party and bourgeois nationalist movements internationally. Michael-Matsas used the split to openly support the Stalinist KKE and the bourgeois PASOK parties in Greece, as well as Gorbachev's pro-capitalist Perestroika reforms in the Soviet Union.

As a clear signal to the bourgeoisie, the FIT-U has established an ongoing close relationship with Belgian Pabloite Éric Toussaint and the Argentine economist Claudio Katz, both of whom have advocated an orientation to the Peronist "left" and the union bureaucracy. Last year, FIT-U invited them as the main speakers in a meeting at the Argentine Congress to talk about the debt.

Seen as an expert in debt audits, Toussaint has advised the capitalist governments of Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Fernando Lugo in Paraguay, and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and the Brazilian and Argentine parliaments. He also played an active role in covering up Syriza's betrayal. As one of the leaders of the "Truth Committee on the Greek Public Debt" launched with Syriza, he promoted illusions that the Greek government would fight the Troika—the IMF, EU and European Central Bank—and become a leading example globally. Even after Syriza capitulated to the austerity schedule, Toussaint wrote that the Greek government could "empower popular mobilizations and encourage the mobilized people to have confidence in their own strength."

Now, Toussaint commends the FIT-U for joining the Peronists in organizing anti-IMF protests, "taking the struggle to the Congress" and "having a strong presence in the unions."

The Morenoite Movement of Socialist Workers (MST) in Argentina, which has since joined the FIT-U, sent its leader Alejandro Bodart personally to Athens in 2015 "to accompany Syriza and [its leader] Alexis Tsipras on the day of the elections because they are a sister force." After returning to Argentina, he "toured the country to propagandize in support of the example of Syriza."

At the time, the MST applauded Altamira for celebrating Syriza's victory but inquired regarding his criticisms: "If the Syriza government defends the capitalist order, belongs to the existing order and strengthens the right, then a coherent PO [the Workers Party then led by Altamira] would have to call for the Greek people to fight against it." The same could be said today about Altamira's hypocritical polemics against the pseudo-left.

The record of the Argentine pseudo-left shows that the calls for "unity" are nothing but shameless efforts to form a coalition like Syriza. It is a "unity" demanded by the national bourgeoisie and sections of the upper middle class and directed against the emergence of a genuine revolutionary leadership in the working class.

The International Committee of the Fourth International is the only political movement that has consistently opposed all the betrayals against workers in Latin America, Greece and internationally in which the pseudo-left has participated. Its political program and cadre are rooted in the entire history and lessons of the struggles waged by the Fourth International against Stalinism, bourgeois nationalism and their Pabloite apologists. Only a party that uncompromisingly upholds this heritage can provide a revolutionary and internationalist orientation for the working class in struggle against the capitalist ruling elites and imperialism.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site