

Altamira's "left" critique of the PTS offers no alternative to Argentina's working class

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In a June 24 polemic against the Socialist Workers Party (PTS) in Argentina and its expected presidential candidate Myriam Bregman, Jorge Altamira—expelled in 2019 from the Partido Obrero (PO) which he founded, and now leading the smaller current Política Obrera—made a series of observations that are, on their own terms, accurate.

He noted that Bregman's rising poll numbers point toward a possible electoral breakthrough, following a pattern in some countries where the pseudo-left has been elected:

Bregman has been gaining ground in public opinion polls, a trend that should translate into electoral results. The possibility of her reaching the runoff—or even winning the election—while currently highly unlikely, does have precedents: the case of Chile's Gabriel Boric, whose candidacy under the then-obscure Broad Front saw him first defeat the Communist Party in the primaries and subsequently win the presidency; or that of Peru's Pedro Castillo...

This characterization of Bregman as filling the same political space as Boric and Castillo is correct, and it echoes Altamira's own witty description of the PTS in 2017 as "Podemos in diapers." Like Podemos in Spain, Boric and Castillo were left-populist bourgeois politicians elected atop mass protests against inequality—and, like Podemos, once in office they implemented policies that in some respects surpassed the traditional right. Boric's government has presided over the consolidation of a police state and xenophobic assaults on immigrants; Castillo's brief tenure accommodated constantly to the right and paved the way for the restoration of Fujimorism.

But the WSWWS noted at the time that Altamira's "Podemos in diapers" line, however apt, was also a self-indictment. He offered no explanation for why his own party remained allied, in the very same electoral front, with the party he had just likened to a future Podemos. What he concealed entirely was his own record: in 2012 Altamira gave the PO's open backing to Syriza's bid to form a "radical left government" in Greece—the same Syriza that, elected in 2015 on a mandate to end austerity, capitulated within months to the demands of the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund and imposed savage social cuts to pay back creditors.

Altamira's June 24 polemic is similarly accurate on the content of Bregman's candidacy. He writes:

In various statements, Myriam Bregman has defined herself as a candidate of "progressivism." The electoral strategy document presents this as "a government of the new working class." ...it proposes no action to dismantle the capitalist state in the event of

an electoral victory; it postpones its key measures—such as the "sovereign" non-payment of the foreign debt—until a "sovereign" Constituent Assembly convenes.

In late May, the Spanish corporate daily *El País* published a fawning profile of Bregman that confirmed this diagnosis in her own words. Argentina's far-right President Javier Milei, she told the paper, "... is submissive to the International Monetary Fund, he lets himself be governed by Donald Trump and by [Treasury Secretary Scott] Bessent, and we truly fight for the dream of San Martín and Bolívar: to integrate Latin America, to confront imperialism, to fight for a federation of Latin American states—essentially the opposite of being a Yankee colony."

There, in a sentence, is the core of the PTS's program, and it has nothing to do with Marxism.

The invocation of Bolívar is not an incidental flourish. Karl Marx wrote the definitive verdict on Bolívar in his 1858 entry for the *New American Cyclopaedia*, describing him in the most severe terms as a corrupt *caudillo* or strongman. He charged him with having fled his post at Puerto Cabello, arrested Gen. Francisco de Miranda in La Guaira after the latter had signed a peace treaty with the Spanish following the 1812 earthquake and handed him over to the Spanish authorities. Bolívar repeatedly deserted his own troops in defeat and crowned his self-declared "liberation" of Bogotá with 48 hours of looting by his own officers. Bolívar was no liberator. He was, in Marx's words, a "cowardly, mean and wretched scoundrel."

For Bregman to present this figure as the alternative to Milei's subservience to Washington is to substitute open subservience with bourgeois nationalism. The "federation of Latin American states" she proposes is the same failed "regional integration" advanced by Peronism and Hugo Chávez's Bolivarianism on a capitalist basis. Bregman dilutes her program until it is indistinguishable from the pink tide and bourgeois nationalism—precisely as Altamira charges.

The fracture in the FIT-U continues

Altamira is not alone in exposing the PTS's opportunism, though the exposures from within the Left and Workers Front (FIT-U) coalition that includes the PTS, the PO and two other Morenoite groups are no less self-serving. The PO's own complaint, voiced by Gabriel Solano, was that "by refusing a unified campaign, the PTS deprived the FIT-U list of Bregman's sponsorship"—a lament over lost votes. Every wing of this milieu of upper-middle-class careerists is maneuvering within the same electoral framework.

The PTS justified its holding a separate May Day event this year in an

open letter, accusing its coalition partners of diluting “the demarcation from Peronism and the union bureaucracy” by pursuing an “anti-Milei front with no class demarcation whatsoever from the treacherous union leadership.” This is a remarkable admission of the character of the FIT-U as a whole. Yet today, the PTS insists the FIT-U “plays a very important role in maintaining a pole of the left and of class independence in national politics.”

This apparent contradiction exposes that “class independence” are, for all wings of this milieu, words without content, deployed or shelved as factional and electoral convenience dictates.

The polls and the revolutionary situation

Altamira’s polemic rests on the claim, echoed across the pseudo-left, that the situation is not revolutionary and that the working class is in “reflux.” The polling numbers and state of the class struggle say otherwise. Bregman’s approval ratings—among the highest of any Argentine politician—are bound up with her public conflict with Milei, whose social cuts and deregulation have produced hundreds of thousands of layoffs and closed thousands of businesses. Inflation, though slower, remains above 30 percent annually, and economist Martín González-Rozada has found the poverty rate has bounced back to 31.8 percent for April–May.

Combined with four general strikes against Milei and growing militant workers’ struggles, Bregman’s elevated profile is a distorted confirmation of what David North described in his opening address to the ICFI’s May Day rally: “The period of relative social equilibrium has ended... working class resistance has emerged as a global force, on a scale that places directly on the historical agenda the fundamental questions of the epoch—war or peace, dictatorship or democracy, socialism or barbarism.”

The seven-week Bolivian general strike and the mass anger convulsing Venezuela after the earthquake and the “interim” government’s criminal negligence confirm the same thing. The political situation is on a knife’s edge as the turn by imperialism and the local ruling elites to the far-right is immediately met with massive resistance by the working class, and the capacity of the existing political apparatuses and union bureaucracies to contain it is faltering.

A recent San Andrés University poll places Bregman third in positive rating, tied with Milei at 33 percent, while only 4 percent say they would vote FIT-U in 2027, against 25 percent for Peronism and 24 percent for Milei’s party. Bregman’s popularity reflects a genuine mass desire for an alternative to shock therapy—but the pseudo-left coalition is not itself seen broadly as that alternative.

From this precarious political position, the PTS and its coalition partners are being called upon by the ruling class to fulfill their key role: to channel the growing political radicalization behind an electoral vehicle whose explicit function is to prevent a break with the hated framework of bourgeois politics altogether.

The function of centrism

This confirms the WSW’s assessment of the PTS’s May Day rally, where Bregman first launched her “new workers’ party”:

The rhetorical militancy of the FIT-U and the practical

integration into the bourgeois political apparatus are not contradictory—they are two sides of the same political coin. This is the contradiction the Marxist concept of centrism captures with precision. Centrism adopts the phraseology of socialist revolution while its concrete political practice serves to contain the revolution’s development. It is distinct from avowed reformism, which openly defends class collaboration, and from right-wing opportunism, which abandons all reference to socialism. Centrism is more dangerous because, draped in revolutionary banners, it occupies the political space where genuine revolutionary leadership should emerge and blocks its development.

The “Bregman phenomenon,” as the WSW wrote, “is not primarily a popular working-class phenomenon, but a political-media phenomenon”—sections of the bourgeoisie promoting a “left-wing” instrument to contain the radicalization of the masses.

Altamira’s own call for a “left government”

Altamira’s polemic correctly highlights Bregman’s manifesto as aiming to “put an end to national decline”—the same slogan differently packaged as “MAGA” by Milei and Trump. To end “national decline,” he notes, means preparing Argentina to compete on the world market through greater exploitation of the working class: “a reactionary historical perspective in an era of imperialist wars and popular rebellions...”

Correct. But Altamira’s own “internationalism” collapses into the same nationalism. He goes on to claim that “only a socialist revolution would bring about a national rebirth” merely dressing the same framework with radical phrases, without ever posing the objective international unity of the working class produced by globalized production and the necessity to make this conscious through the building of a world revolutionary party.

In practice, the Altamira group’s record confirms this. At the FATE tire factory, where 920 workers were thrown into the street and occupied the plant, Política Obrera has admitted its “policy at FATE... differs neither from the one pursued by the union leadership nor from that of the Partido Obrero apparatus” that leads the SUTNA union. The group adds that it does not oppose the bills SUTNA and FIT-U sent to the provincial legislature demanding state intervention; it insists, in fact, that “the reopening of the factory requires state intervention.”

The struggle, by its own account, is confined to “pressure on the state through the extreme measure of occupying and restarting the factory.” The occupation, chained from the start to appeals to Peronist Governor Axel Kicillof, ended not in reopening the plant but in the demoralization of the workforce, almost all of whom signed voluntary dismissal agreements.

This is the standard against which Altamira’s central alternative to Bregman’s “new workers’ party” must be measured. He proposes a “government of the left, in transition to a workers’ government,” won through elections and “growing support from the working class,” which would then “seek to become a workers’ government through mass actions.” This is not a revolutionary program. It is the Menshevik theory of stages long advanced by Stalinism in modern dress—an undefined “left” stage, managed through parliament, to be followed someday by an unspecified transition to workers’ power.

It is the same logic that produced Syriza’s 2015 capitulation, the disarming of workers in Chile under Salvador Allende and so many other “left” governments promising to set the stage for workers’ power.

This is all a classic centrist straddle. The PTS, PO, Altamira, and the

other pseudo-left groups all call for “united fronts” and issue calls for “committees,” “popular assemblies,” or “*coordinadoras*.” But at no point in their decades of work in the trade unions or in Congress have they ever sought to introduce Marxism and revolutionary politics into the working class. Workers have no reason to expect them to start now in any other type of organization. These bodies, as the pseudo-left conceives them, are aimed not at building independent working class power but at applying pressure on the union bureaucracies and capitalist politicians.

Altamira’s “left government” is not an alternative to the PTS’s opportunism; it is the same trap, built by a rival contractor. Both formulas stand in diametric opposition to the critical task confronting the Argentine working class: building, independently of every faction of the capitalist establishment and union bureaucracy, a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, armed with the program of world socialist revolution and committed to the destruction of the capitalist state.



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