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Argentina

"Out with the lot of them!"

- IV Online magazine - 2002 - IV344 - October 2002 -

Publication date: Friday 11 October 2002

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"Out with the lot of them - let not a single one remain." This is the slogan which today unites broad sectors of the Argentine social movement and left. It shows the degree of radicalisation amongst the people and the depth of the crisis facing the regime, its institutions and the traditional parties and politicians in South America's second largest country. Ever since last December's 'argentinazo', a civic insurrection that led to the collapse of the De la Rúa government (and to savage repression that left dozens dead), things have only got worse.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/28_Argentina_cartoon.jpg]

In its breadth and intensity, the economic crisis is unprecedented in Argentina's history. The GDP is set to fall 15% this year and the social consequences are terrible: unemployment is already above 25% and the drop in wages means that 50% of wage-earners receive less than 140 dollars a month, whilst the official poverty line is 180 dollars. The combination of these factors means that 18 million people (out of a population of 35 million) are now classified as poor, and of these 7.8 million are classified as destitute.

But popular resistance to this social crime perpetrated by the Washington Consensus and its corrupt local partners is growing and getting more radical. As Eduardo Lucita, the Editor of the journal Cuadernos Del Sur, puts it, "the combination of self-organization and self-management of basic necessities within the popular movement is producing a 'new subjectivity', with varied and complex characteristics, whose main feature is a powerful tendency towards democratisation and political independence - precisely the opposite of the crisis of governability and representation which is shaking the bourgeoisies and its institutions."

It is in this context that the Argentina Social Forum was held in Buenos Aires from August 22-25, 2002. It was the first big event of the current globalisation of the World Social Forum in Latin America, linking up with the European and Asian Social Forums. Under the title, 'The crisis of the neo-liberal model and the challenges for the global movement', it followed the model of Porto Alegre, with numerous workshops, seminars, debates and other activities. More than 600 social organizations and movements, collectives, trade unions and NGOs came together to sponsor the WSF in Argentina, and to help organize the event.

The Argentine Forum provided a space for solidarity with the struggles of the country's popular movement. It not only gave rise to a wide-ranging and plural discussion on the brutal failure of neo-liberalism, but also on the emergence of new forms of resistance and alternatives across the region and internationally.

The Argentina Social Forum began on 22 August with a big march of more than 10,000 people from the Plaza de Mayo to the Plaza Houssay, where the opening rally was held. The Forum's activities were concentrated in the buildings of University of Buenos Aires (UBA), close to the Plaza Houssay, and in the square itself, where in addition to big debates there was a self-managed, round-the-clock fair, providing a permanent meeting space and party atmosphere.

There was a strong presence throughout the Forum of militants from the popular assemblies, including those of the 'Barrios de Pie' movement, from the unemployed workers movements (the 'piqueteros') and, in huge numbers, of youth. Amongst the representatives from Latin America, the Bolivian delegation stood out, with peasant leader Evo Morales (from the Movement towards Socialism), at their head - he came a close second in his country's recent presidential elections. Also present were a variety of critical intellectuals, democratic personalities, social activists and political leaders like the Nobel Peace laureate Adolfo Perez Esquivel, the executive secretary of CLACSO (a Latin America-wide research institution), Atilio Boron, as well as Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, the Mexican

Ana Esther Cecena (Revista Chiapas), the French trade unionist Christophe Aguiton, the former Mayor of Porto Alegre, Raul Pont, to name just a few. There were also many activists of the Continental Social Alliance from a number of Latin American countries, as well as Argentina's two main opposition candidates, Elisa Carrio (ARI) and the left-wing socialist, Luis Zamora (Self-determination and Freedom).

On the evenings of August 23 and 24, thousands of people attended the main panel discussions held at the various faculties of the UBA and in the Forum's central marquee. They analysed the causes and consequences of the crisis in Argentina and the forms of resistance and alternatives put forward by activists from the Argentine social movements and by international delegates. The Saturday also saw the National Assembly against the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas), which took steps towards co-ordinating initiatives and pointed to the importance of the Continental Days of Resistance against the FTAA that will take place from October 27 to November 1 in Quito, Ecuador.

The Assembly of Social Movements which closed the debates of the WSF in Argentina on the Sunday, 25th, drew together the many discussions developed over the three days of activity and showed how important it is to strengthen spaces like this, where different struggles and different social movements can converge.

Latin America is perhaps the region of the world which, at the moment, has gone furthest in overcoming the fragmentation imposed on social struggles by the neo-liberal offensive, and in our case by the attempt to impose a new colonial pact in the form of the FTAA. The revolt in Argentina, the reversal of the coup in Venezuela, the electoral possibilities in Brazil, the mass mobilizations in Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia (including the blocking of privatisation) - all these in different ways show that a new period of class struggle is opening up.

And this in turn feeds into the growing movement against capitalist globalisation and the emergence of a new internationalism - of which the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre is at the moment the main expression. The Forum in Argentina was another exciting illustration of the process that is underway.