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Uruguay: Not Even a Hint of the “Wonder”

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You do not need to be too old to remember that Uruguay was known as “Switzerland of the Americas,” which proved that this small South American nation enjoyed the highest living standards.

This way, up to 2018 —just three years ago—, this country was a positive role model in bringing health care to the people, along with Costa Rica and Cuba, in addition to boasting eminent figures in politics and literature.

But it was enough that the right-wing rose to power there and neoliberal policies were imposed. The neglect while facing the Covid-19 pandemic and the submission to the U.S. economic and political interests have resulted in the U.N. making an urgent call to assist a population engulfed in a food crisis.

President Luis Lacalle Pou has even tried to take advantage of the soup kitchens the population has had to resort, an embarrassment to his administration.

On-third of Uruguayans have resorted to soup kitchens to get at least one meal in a day, something unbelievable in a land proud of having boasted the best jerky in the world.

Inequality is growing across the entire population, except for the ruling class attached to the government, which

paves the way to a significant rise of the number of people living in poverty.

## **HARMFUL NEOLIBERALISM**

The debate fueled after a recent fuel price increase, denounced by several lawmakers from Frente Amplio (FA), the biggest opposition party to a government that hopes to establish itself by taking harmful measure against the people.

Gerardo Nuñez, congressman for FA, denounced that such measure is a new blow to the wallet of Uruguayans amid a dramatic emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which stresses the already existing wage gap.

Ivonne Pasada, former congresswoman who served as the FA Vice President, said a few days ago that *“everything goes up, but the salary,”* while the also congressman Eduardo Antonini pointed out that *“the people is being robbed once again.”*

Let’s not forget that during the span of 15 years heading the government in Uruguay, the *Frente Amplio* party lifted 60,746 people out of poverty every year. However, neoliberalism had already brought to poverty 304,000 people, not to mention that just in 2021, there are other 100,000 people living under poverty.

In this context, a report from the Economic Commission for Latin America details that the structural issues limiting the regional growth before the pandemic, now deepened and will negatively affect the economic revival and the labor market beyond the growth upturn in 2021 and 2022.

## **SOUP KITCHENS**

Since last year, soup kitchens have multiplied in Uruguay. The government went from completely ignoring them to hire a NGO to delegate their management and see it as a business. Official aid to the growing number of people in need is far from being dignified.

Soup kitchens, symbols of solidarity in the workers’ struggles, are the inheritance of the 2002 social-economic crisis. After the economic recovery, the number of soup kitchens decreased substantially, although they never disappeared, as a result of an unjust and unequal system of public policies that never reached, for real, the core of poverty.

The pandemic, plus the budget-reduction plan promoted by the multicolor coalition of the government led by Lacalle, resulted in a devastating concoction to Uruguayan workers, pensioners, and unemployed.

And, to make matters worse, Lacalle ignored the advises of people of sciences on the pandemic, as well as the proposals of the opposition for a unique, universal rent and some made by his own allies within his own right-wing party.

**Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff**

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