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THE MILITANT
Interview with
Nahuel Moreno

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(From the October 20, 1972 issue of *The Militant*, organ of the Socialist Workers Party.)

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The following interview with Nahuel Moreno was obtained by *The Militant*, last month in Buenos Aires. Moreno is a member of the executive committee of the Argentine Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Argentino — PSA). He is well known in the Argentine left as a leader of the Trotskyist movement since the 1940s.

The interview refers to the elections that have been promised by Argentine dictator Alejandro Lanusse for 1973. Through the elections Lanusse hopes to unite the various capitalist parties and draw the trade-union movement, led by followers of Perón, into collaboration with, and support of, a new “constitutional” government. As part of the election maneuver, Lanusse has invited Perón back to Argentina from his exile in Spain.

The Argentine Socialist Party has taken advantage of the government’s promise of elections to build the revolutionary movement by confronting the procapitalist candidates in the electoral arena. The party was able to register 33,000 persons to meet the requirements for ballot status. The PSA has offered use of its ballot status to other forces on the left who want to campaign against the capitalist parties and for a socialist Argentina.

It was in the context of the Lanusse’s regime’s promise of “democratization” that on August 22 guards at the Trelew naval base prison shot down 19 political prisoners. Of the 16 killed, 13 were members of the ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo — People’s Revolutionary Army, the most prominent guerrilla organization in Argentina), two were members of the Montoneros (a left-Peronist guerrilla group), and one belonged to the FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas — Peronist Armed Forces).

The three prisoners who were wounded but survived the massacre have reported that the guards opened fire on the prisoners in cold blood with no provocation. Lanusse had gone on nationwide radio and TV to claim that they were shot in an escape attempt. The survivors’ story has not gotten out to the Argentine public, however, because of strict government censorship of all news.

Militant: What were some of the forms of protest in the aftermath of the Trelew massacre?

Moreno: The entire working class and the majority of the country were indignant at the government slaughter and felt great sympathy for the martyrs. The organized mass protests, however, were not as great as they should have been, or could have been, had all the political tendencies worked together to build united protest actions. Still, there were many acts of repudiation of the government.

The CGT (Confederación General del Trabajo — General Confederation of Labor) in Córdoba offered their headquarters for a memorial service for the slain guerrillas from that city and also carried out a day-long general strike against the government.

The mood of repudiation of the government and sympathy with the martyrs was indicated in a meeting at Luna Park (similar to Madison Square Garden) that was scheduled as a musical festival with Theodorakis (a popular Greek musician). Because of the repressive laws banning

public meetings, Young Socialists from the PSA helped transform the festival into a public memorial for the martyrs, condemning the murderous government and also calling for the release of Hugo Blanco (the Peruvian revolutionary-socialist peasant leader presently being held in an Argentine prison).

They shouted slogans and raised a large banner with the names of the martyrs and a huge “Z,” which in Greek means “life,” or “live on!”

The PSA sought to mobilize protest against the government by attempting to build united-front actions with other left currents. We succeeded in various factories, schools, and offices. One of the most important of these was the minute of silence requested by our comrades at the Banco Nación in Buenos Aires. The Banco Nación represents the largest concentration of employees in the country, with more than 6,000 workers.

There were probably other public meetings and acts of repudiation that I don’t know of. There are hundreds of factories, offices, and schools where we don’t have contacts.

About 2,000 attended the memorial service held by the Peronists in Córdoba. As was to be expected, they used the service to sing the Peronist hymn and to hail Perón — although the majority of the slain comrades were not Peronists but members of the PRT.

The Peronists had police permission to mourn the dead until six in the evening and to make public statement previously agreed to by the military and the government in keeping with a Christian service and burial. Conspicuous for its absence was the five-star-pointed ERP banner, symbol of the organization of the majority of the fallen heroes.

Militant: What effect did the events surrounding the Trelew massacre have on the relationship between Lanusse and Perón?

Moreno: Their relationship has deteriorated but not broken in the last several months as a result of the radicalization and the economic crisis. These two things convinced Perón that if he continued his alliance with Lanusse he would soon lose authority among the workers.

Consequently, Perón pulled back and began to flirt with the guerrilla groups, while at the same time continuing to consolidate his bureaucracy in the trade unions. We think this is one of the reasons for the relative growth of the Montoneros, a Peronist urban guerrilla group; Perón and the official Peronist leaders insist that their guerrilla organizations are an important part of their movement.

Militant: Did the Trelew events bring a change in the government’s projections for “democratization” and elections in 1973?

Moreno: We don’t think so. There will very probably be elections. The Argentine capitalist class as a whole — as represented in the military and the various procapitalist parties (including Peronism) — are convinced that the working class and the masses of Argentina will not stand for a government like the Brazilian military dictatorship.

But there is still a contradiction the ruling class has not been to resolve. All the sectors of the ruling class agree that the election maneuver should be used to try to harness and co-opt the workers movement, but at the same time each of the antagonistic bourgeois sectors — mainly the rural and the industrial ones — wants to capitalize for itself on this attempt to tame the workers.

This is a difficult problem for them to solve because it encompasses Perón’s delicate situation — balancing between his role as a representative of a sector of the capitalist class who has to protect the general interests of the exploiters, and, on the other hand, his need to retain political control over the working class because this is the only way to guarantee stability of the capitalist system in Argentina.

Militant: What is your evaluation of the series of massive uprisings and political strikes that have occurred in Argentina in recent years? Do you believe Argentina is in a prerevolutionary situation?

Moreno: The uprisings have been among the most important in the history of Argentina. They were probably only surpassed by the “Tragic Week” of January 1919, when all of Buenos Aires was in the hands of the workers movement.

The semi-insurrections in Córdoba, Rosario, Mendoza, Tucumán, and Roca have shown a consistent line of development, with each new rising surpassing the preceding one. I say “semi-insurrection” because the masses in struggle were consciously moving against the government and its policies. In each case the working class and the populace won significant victories.

During the last uprising, called the “Rocazo,”¹ the masses were careful to avoid a confrontation with the army, and were able to neutralize the troops through mass pressure. An example of this was when everyone in the streets turned their backs on the army as it paraded through Roca.

Argentina has no doubt entered a prerevolutionary situation, as indicated by the confusion and crisis among the exploiting classes, the left turn by the middle classes, and the large mobilizations of the working class and populace.

Unfortunately, two factors are complicating the process. Because of a lack of leadership, the workers movement subsided somewhat at the beginning of the year. This appears to be about over. The lack of a revolutionary leadership in the Argentine labor movement is what blocks the prerevolutionary situation from becoming directly revolutionary. Without a mass revolutionary socialist party there is much less chance that a revolutionary situation will be attained, or, if one occurs, that it would be victorious.

Bolivia and Argentina today serve as lessons for other Latin American countries. Situations like the one in Bolivia under General Juan José Torres (from October 1970 to August 1971), and the one developing now in Argentina will continue to occur throughout Latin America. We can expect more and more Cordobazos and Rosariazos in Latin America. But for a victory we need to develop a revolutionary leadership of the masses and their organizations.

Militant: What kind of opportunities will the PSA have during the election campaign?

Moreno: We will be able to publicize and defend our revolutionary program, our denunciation of the reactionary dictatorship, the capitalist and semicolonial regime, from one end of Argentina to the other. In Buenos Aires we are thinking of going factory-to-factory and house-to-house to speak with working people. As a legal party, we are now also able to hold public meetings.

The electoral maneuver of the rulers creates contradictions for them that will help us in this effort. For example, the election laws say that because the PSA is a legal party, the government has to give us a whole series of “rights,” including free transportation for our organizers on public facilities, as well as some free telephone and postal services.

Militant: How many candidate will the PSA field, and for what offices?

Moreno: There are hundreds of posts to be contested — president and vicepresident, governors, senators and national deputies, mayors and town councilors. We will have to choose several key areas in which to run several hundred candidates. We will not be able to run for all the offices. This would only be possible if a real united front of all workers organizations were formed for the elections.

Militant: Will you receive radio and television coverage?

Moreno: Without a doubt. We have already received some in the interior of the country, but have yet to be granted some in the federal capital. Whatever form it takes, the coverage will be very limited, however, since the monopolies controlling the radio and TV and the government view of us

1 “Rocazo” is the popular term for an explosive rebellion in the city of General Roca in south-central Argentina. On July 4 of this year [1972] a 10-day general work and business stoppage was called at a mass meeting sponsored by local civic organizations to protest actions of the Provincial Court that were harmful to the local economy. Workers and students joined the protest and broadened the demands. City government was taken over by a “provisional government” chosen by the masses. The government declared itself independent of the provincial government. The army attempted to occupy the city but was unable to “restore order” for several days, and only after making several concessions to the popular demands. (*The Militant*.)

as the “extreme left” and until now have waged a national campaign of silence against us. But the regime has opened a crack that we are utilizing as much as possible, given the lack of experience we have in legal work. (The Trotskyist movement has been forced to operate underground since its founding prior to World War II.)

Militant: What has been the response from other workers and socialist organizations to the PSA’s call for a workers and socialist pole in the elections?

Moreno: Not very warm. With the exception of some diplomatic feelers, no left-wing party has yet accepted the platform of our campaign. The entire left is very confused. Some groups have a position against participating in the elections. Others would like to form a front along the lines of the Chilean Popular Unity or the Uruguayan Broad Front, so as to build “an election campaign that would have a chance to win.”

Militant: What has been the attitude of the Communist Party and the guerrilla organizations toward your campaign?

Moreno: The Communist Party has a policy that runs directly counter to a “workers and socialist pole” in the elections. They are the most fervent advocates of the perspective exemplified by the Uruguayan Broad Front — a union of workers parties with parties of the so-called progressive bourgeoisie. Thus the CP is the main supporter of the ENA (Encuentro Nacional de los Argentinos — National Encounter of Argentines), front of Peronist and liberal bourgeois leaders.

The PRT (Combatiente) (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores — Revolutionary Party of the Workers, which publishes the newspaper El Combatiente) has not answered our call for support. But in one of the latest issues of their newspaper, they raised the possibility that it will be necessary for the popular and “socialist” parties to intervene in and use the elections. As yet they have not made clear their position on the elections.

Militant: What is the circulation of your newspaper, Avanzada Socialista, and how many local branches does the PSA have?

Moreno: We print 10,000 copies, almost all of which are sold in the streets. In this way we are able to meet many contacts and sell to sympathizers.

We are expanding our circulation beyond Buenos Aires to almost every province. We have 20 branches in Buenos Aires, each with its own public headquarters, and 20 more offices in other cities of the country.

Militant: You have become known as a leader of the PRT (La Verdad) (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores — Revolutionary Party of the Workers, which publishes the newspaper La Verdad). What is the relationship between the PRT (La Verdad) and the PSA?

Moreno: The two organizations have fused, so the PRT no longer exists as a separate organization. The new leadership of the PSA includes a large number of former leaders of the PRT.

Militant: Is the PSA a Trotskyist party?

Moreno: There is no doubt that its program and theory are Trotskyist. Ninety-five percent of our members are convinced Trotskyists. At our next congress we plan to take up the question of our political solidarity with the international Trotskyist movement.

Militant: What is the situation with the defense campaign for Hugo Blanco?

Moreno: An intense campaign has been launched, which includes a broad petition campaign. We have only been able to organize a few scattered public protests because such actions demanding the restoration of democratic liberties are illegal.

We were also able to pressure the CGT into issuing an open letter to the government in support of Blanco’s right to remain in Argentina. So far the government has made no answer.

Militant: What is the situation with political prisoners in Argentina?

Moreno: Under military rule, political prisoners are at the mercy of the authorities. Arrests are made at random, and prisoners have no channel for legal defense. The guerrillas and other political

prisoners who are tried under the reactionary laws are subjected to a national tribunal, notorious for its hasty and severe sentences.

It is hard to estimate how many political prisoners there are. Some of the defense lawyers speak in terms of thousands. My estimate is that there is about 1000.

Militant: Is there an organization fighting to defend these prisoners?

Moreno: There are various organizations — of the families of prisoners, the lawyers' guild, and similar organizations. Unfortunately each of them is tied in with a political tendency and they fight among themselves. Attempts to unite all groups that defend the rights of political prisoners into a common front have met with very limited success up to now. In our newspaper and general work, the PSA has consistently pressed for the formation of such a united front. §