

Workers Party in Argentina seeks to “refound” Fourth International in alliance with Stalinism

By Eric London and Bill Van Auken
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On April 2 and 3, 2018, the Partido Obrero (Workers Party) of Argentina hosted a conference in Buenos Aires in the name of the Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International (CRFI).

The slogan of “refounding” or “reconstructing” the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, is hardly a new one. The Partido Obrero, (PO) has been involved in such efforts for some 45 years, going back to its alliance with the French OCI (Internationalist Communist Organization) of Pierre Lambert in the 1970s in what was known as CORQI (Comité d’Organisation pour la Reconstruction de la Quatrième International). That venture fell apart as Lambert turned to the Socialist Party in France and to all manner of right-wing bourgeois nationalist movements in Latin America, while denouncing his erstwhile CORQI allies as police agents. The PO would later ally itself with the extreme Pabloite tendency in Argentina led by Nahuel Moreno in a similarly abortive—and even more short-lived—attempt at “refoundation.”

All of these ephemeral alliances are based upon a common agreement that the Fourth International does not exist, and even that it never existed. What is actually meant by “reconstruction” is the amalgamation of politically heterogeneous organizations, without any agreement on essential questions of program and strategy. The only point on which they absolutely agree is the right of each organization to pursue whatever national policy that is deemed to be in its own best interests. This utterly unprincipled approach to politics has absolutely nothing in common with Trotskyism. Its attitude to the experiences and lessons accumulated by the Fourth International since 1938 is defined by a combination of political hostility, theoretical indifference, shortsighted national opportunism and the crudest ignorance.

The history of the Fourth International, it is implied, is of no objective significance, and there is nothing to be studied and learned. All that Trotsky wrote in his struggle against Stalinism and myriad forms of centrism and opportunism belongs to the distant past and can be ignored. As for the political struggles waged by the Fourth International against revisionist anti-Trotskyist tendencies—principally Pabloism and Shachtmanism—these are viewed as politically meaningless. Thus, there is to be no examination or discussion of the role played by these anti-Trotskyist parties and tendencies in the political struggles of the past 80 years. The betrayals and crimes of the past can all be forgotten. A general amnesty is granted to one and all, and everyone is allowed to begin again with a clean slate.

The April gathering in Buenos Aires went far beyond any previous event in the foul political history of such exercises in “refounding” and “reconstructing” the Fourth International. Jorge Altamira, the leader of the Partido Obrero, and Savas Michael-Matsas, the head of the Greek EEK (Workers Revolutionary Party), declared that the reconstructed

Fourth International should include pro-Stalinist organizations in Russia. The crimes committed by the Stalinist regimes—including the murder of hundreds of thousands of communists and the assassination of Trotsky—are to be forgotten in the interests of “unity.” A bridge is to be built over the “river of blood” that, in Trotsky’s words, separated Trotskyism from Stalinism.

The proposed reconciliation of Stalinism and Trotskyism found concrete expression in the invitation extended by the CRFI to Darya Alexandrovna Mitina, a leader of the rabidly pro-Stalinist United Communist Party of Russia (OKP). She participated fully in the discussions of the CRFI and was invited to deliver one of the main addresses to the assembled membership of the PO at the close of the conference. Her invitation to the conference was arranged by Michael-Matsas, who has maintained a close political relationship with Mitina for more than a decade.

Mitina declared her agreement with the building of a “new international to better coordinate the class struggle in different countries” and organize “actions of international solidarity.” Her speech was warmly greeted by the audience, who, for the most part, knew nothing about Mitina’s political affiliations and activities, let alone the program and history of the OKP. We will review the facts that were concealed by Altamira and Michael-Matsas from the PO rank and file.

The United Communist Party of Russia emerged in 2014 as a split-off from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), led by Gennady Zyuganov. The OKP’s differences with Zyuganov’s national chauvinist organization, which is a political ally of the Putin regime, are of a tactical character. Like Zyuganov’s party, the OKP glorifies Stalin and justifies his crimes. An article recently posted on the OKP’s web site declared:

It was Stalin who continued the work of the great Lenin, rallying around himself a cohort of persistent and faithful Bolsheviks. It was under his leadership that socialist industrialization, collectivization of agriculture and the cultural revolution were realized. Stalin exposed and defeated supporters of a return to capitalism: the Trotskyites, Zinovievites, Bukharinites, various bourgeois nationalists and other capitulators.

The OKP calls for the “revival of the Soviet Union” and praises the Soviet Constitution of 1936, also known as the “Stalin constitution,” a reactionary document adopted on the eve of the Moscow Trials and the launching of the 1936-1940 Terror. The OKP’s main political objective is to push Zyuganov’s CPRF, which seeks the “re-Stalinization” of Russia in alliance with the Orthodox Church, to the left.

Darya Mitina is a long-time Stalinist political operative with deep ties to the Russian state. She is the granddaughter of Afghan Prime Minister Mohammed Yusuf, later appointed ambassador to the Soviet Union. According to her Wikipedia biography:

Since 2014 she has been a secretary responsible for international affairs of the party and member of the Political Commission of the United Communist Party (Russia).

She was a deputy of the State Duma for the second convocation (1995-1999). During the 2016 State Duma elections she was a candidate from the ‘Communists of Russia’ at the Cheremushkinskiy election district, but did not succeed.

She is the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Youth League (Komsomol), and she was one of its founders in 1993.

In May–August 2014, Mitina was the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Donetsk People’s Republic in Moscow.

As the OKP’s secretary of international affairs, Mitina has been assigned to cultivate international connections on behalf of the Russian state with a wide range of Stalinist, Pabloite, bourgeois nationalist and anti-immigrant organizations.

One recent trip took her to a meeting with representatives of Euro-Rus, a right-wing group that promotes the unity of Europe with Russia on the basis of “family values,” the “right to life,” “national protectionism,” “protection of European borders” and white nationalism. Her travels are extensive and indicate substantial financial backing. Since leaving Buenos Aires, she has gone to China, Vietnam and Nepal, meeting with state officials as well as Stalinist and Maoist parties.

On March 5, 2018—just one month before flying to Argentina to attend the PO’s Refoundation Conference—Mitina participated in a public tribute to Joseph Stalin on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the dictator’s death. She and other members of the OKP honored the memory of Stalin, alongside groups of Stalinists, Russian nationalists, anti-immigrant chauvinists and neo-fascists, by placing flowers beneath Stalin’s grave at the wall of the Kremlin. Mitina and her OKP associates also placed wreaths at the graves of Stalin’s successors, Leonid Brezhnev and Yuri Andropov.

Mitina proudly memorialized the celebration in a blog post, writing: “65 years ago, a man left to whom, up to this day, no one can stand on an equal footing. ... I stand with Josef Vissarionovich [Stalin]...and twice a year I take flowers to the monument.”

Someone who goes twice a year to place flowers at the tomb of Stalin can be described only as a wretched political reactionary, and anyone providing him or her with a platform is an accomplice.

The presence of Darya Alexandrovna Mitina at the PO’s conference was not an accident. An alliance with such forces is a critical component of the “Refoundation” planned by Altamira.

In his remarks to the conference, Altamira justified the presence of the OKP representative, declaring:

We are not building a “do it yourself” International; that is, an extension of a political sect from one country to other countries. In this political fight, at the platform today, you have had a comrade who speaks in the name of the tradition of communism in Russia, which for her would be Stalinism. ... We are holding political discussions with these comrades to learn if we can all work together to take a step forward toward the construction of an International so

that Russia can once again be, as it was for a long historical period, the territory of the October Revolution.

With these words, Altamira repudiates not only the historically rooted program and principles of the Fourth International, but the significance of history itself. What he is saying amounts to a declaration that what happened in the past is of no significance for the present. That the Stalinist regime murdered hundreds of thousands of communists, presided over countless betrayals and led ultimately to the destruction of the Soviet Union should not stand in the way of collaborating with present-day Stalinists in the reconstruction of the Fourth International.

In practice, this utterly pragmatic approach to politics opens the possibility of collaborating with virtually any political organization, tendency or person. Whatever they may have done in the past is to be treated as without any particular, let alone enduring, significance. The crimes of the past can be glossed over as unfortunate and even regrettable mistakes, but essentially unrelated to their present political identity. The only thing that really matters is finding points of agreement on particular practical tasks, however minimal and conjunctural, in the *here and now*.

And if this method of opportunist political horse-trading can be applied to Stalinist parties whose histories are steeped in betrayals and crimes, why can’t it be applied to all organizations—including those of the nationalistic, and even fascist, right? In fact, the real present-day purpose of Altamira’s efforts to forge relationships with Stalinist and neo-Stalinist organizations is to legitimize political collaboration with precisely such forces, not only in Russia, but internationally.

The principal characteristic of Stalinist organizations, especially in Russia, is their nationalist character. Whatever “communist” verbiage they occasionally employ is nothing but the thinnest veneer to cover over Russian chauvinism. The glorification of Stalin as a great national leader has far more in common with fascism than anything that could be legitimately described as socialist.

Savas Michael-Matsas, the general secretary of the Greek EEK and the Partido Obrero’s principal ally in Europe, has played the role of middle man, making the connection between the Argentine party and Darya Mitina, Putin’s roving ambassador to opportunist “left” organizations willing to play the nationalist card.

Political relations between Michael-Matsas and Mitina go back more than a decade. She was an invited speaker to an EEK meeting in Greece on the 90th anniversary of the October Revolution in 2007. Two years later, she reported on her blog that she and her husband, Said Gafurov, were picked up at the airport by Michael-Matsas in Athens as they arrived for a September 2009 meeting of the organizing committee of the European Social Forum, “where we represented Russia.”

Said Gafurov, like his wife, has close ties with the Russian state. He has worked in various state ministries and served as the deputy chief editor of a Russian monthly economic journal known for its strong support for Vladimir Putin. He does regular broadcasts in Arabic in support of Russian geo-strategic interests and is a commentator for the pro-Stalinist pravda.ru.

To “represent Russia” at the European Social Forum means defending the Kremlin’s interests within a medium that brings together NGOs, intelligence agencies and representatives of governments, along with various “left” organizations.

Mitina has helped Michael-Matsas make broad connections among Stalinist circles in Russia. In 2017, he was an invited guest at a congress in St. Petersburg dedicated to uniting the “Communist Parties” of Russia and the other former Soviet republics.

These efforts have apparently begun to bear fruit. The OKP recently announced that Working Russia has urged its members in Moscow to join the party. Working Russia, led until his recent death by Viktor Anpilov, is

known for its extreme nationalism and anti-Semitism. It participated in elections under the banner of the “Stalinist Bloc” in an alliance with Stalin’s grandson.

Who is Savas Michael-Matsas?

While Michael-Matsas has appeared at conferences organized by the PO over the course of two decades, the Argentine party has never given its membership a serious accounting of this individual’s political history. He was introduced to the audience as “a comrade who is a founder and constructor of the CRFI, a protagonist in the construction of the CRFI in Europe and the Middle East, and a comrade who is the leader of a party that has to its credit 50 years of intervention in the class struggle in Greece.”

Such a description is a deliberate act of deception of the PO membership.

Michael-Matsas is a dubious political figure whose entire history is one of unprincipled and duplicitous political maneuvering. In the late 1970s, he became the national secretary of the Workers International League, the Greek section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). His elevation to this position came after the removal of two previous leaders over political differences that were never clarified within the ICFI.

The only constant feature of Michael-Matsas’s politics was his nationalist orientation. The principles of socialist internationalism were continuously subordinated to the most vulgar national calculations. In 1983, behind the back of the ICFI, Michael-Matsas traveled to Iran as the Khomeini government was brutally repressing left-wing groups and activists. In the midst of this crackdown, Michael-Matsas wrote a series of articles extolling the Iranian government. He appeared on Iranian state television in an act of public support for the regime.

In 1985, Michael-Matsas carried out an unprincipled split with the ICFI as it was conducting a political fight against the nationalist and opportunist degeneration that led to the collapse of the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) led by Gerry Healy. He refused all discussion with other sections based on the absurd contention that they had no authority even to meet without the permission of Healy, whom he described as the ICFI’s “historic leader.”

In aligning with Healy and breaking with the International Committee, Michael-Matsas calculated that he would be free to pursue whatever alliances, within Greece and internationally, might best serve his pragmatic calculations. Within months of his split with the ICFI and his launching of the EEK, Michael-Matsas proclaimed “a new era for the Fourth International” that would mark a break from “abstract propagandism” and “the practices of the periods of defeats and isolation of Trotskyism.” This “new era” was in reality the implementation of Pabloite politics in its most extreme form.

Within Greece, freed from the constraints of the International Committee and Trotskyist principles, Michael-Matsas embroiled the EEK in a slew of unprincipled alliances with the bourgeois party Pasok, the Stalinist Communist Party and the trade union bureaucracy. On the international front, Michael-Matsas hailed Mikhail Gorbachev as the leader of the political revolution in the Soviet Union. While the membership of the EEK remained minuscule, Michael-Matsas became a fixture in the corrupt milieu of the petty-bourgeois left in Athens.

The relationship between Jorge Altamira and Savas Michael-Matsas is based on a contemptuous attitude held by both toward the history of the Fourth International.

The CRFI was founded on the “principle” that there was to be no discussion of past differences or the historical development of the various tendencies that adhered to it. The committee’s founding document stated this explicitly. Its last lines read:

In opposition to the method of the sects, which consists in conditioning the immediate re-founding of the IV International to a prior solution, purely literary at that, of the political differences that may exist, we raise the organization of an international revolutionary party, the IV, on the basis of an exact political delimitation regarding all divergences. To build the international party is the programmatic point that separates revolutionary Marxists from the sect.

Thus, the Fourth International was to be “refounded” on the basis of an “anti-sectarian” agreement not to discuss any of the historical lessons from the struggle against Pabloism and an agreement that each adherent of the CRFI would remain free to pursue its own national opportunist politics without criticism or interference.

For the EEK, this has consisted of working in the periphery of—and promoting illusions in—Syriza. Greeting Syriza’s January 2015 election victory as a triumph for the Greek working class, the EEK peddled the line that this bourgeois party could be pushed to the left and compelled to “break with the bourgeoisie.”

With its promotion of Syriza and its attacks on the ICFI as “sectarian” for warning that Syriza was a bourgeois party the Greek working class had to oppose, the EEK played an auxiliary role in an historic betrayal.

The Partido Obrero pursues its own narrow national opportunist policies, for which the CRFI is meant to provide an “internationalist” cover. Since shortly after its founding in 1964, the PO has combined formal criticisms of the right-wing Pabloite tendency known as Morenoism, founded by the Argentinian national opportunist Nahuel Moreno, with a political practice centered on the pursuit of alliances with the Morenoites themselves.

In 2017, PO leader Altamira criticized the Morenoite Socialist Workers Party (Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas—PTS), pointedly describing it as a “Podemos in diapers,” a reference to the bourgeois “left” party that has integrated itself into Spain’s ruling establishment. But that same year, the PO once again entered into an unprincipled electoral bloc with the PTS, the so-called Left Front (FIT), subordinating any criticisms to a program of the lowest common denominator of anti-Macri populism and the quest for more parliamentary posts. The PO’s opportunist maneuvers with the Morenoites and the Kirchner wing of Peronism are directed at preparing a Podemos- or Syriza-style trap for the Argentine working class.

In his address to the rally in Buenos Aires, Altamira laid special emphasis on the struggle in Argentina for the right to abortion, declaring, “If we can put the seal of the Partido Obrero and the Left Front on the victory of this struggle, we will be, in a short period, candidates for power.”

When the PO leader speaks of his own movement, as well as its opportunist electoral front with the Argentine Morenoites of the PTS, becoming “candidates for power” as a result of their role in protests in support of legislation to legalize abortion, it can mean only one thing. He is not talking about the independent mobilization of the working class in a revolutionary movement to take power and establish a workers’ government. On the contrary, he is contemplating the possibility that the Left Front (FIT) will be called upon, under conditions of intense crisis for Argentine capitalism, to form a bourgeois government, much as Syriza did in Greece.

As a party preparing for state power, the PO’s leadership is establishing state relationships. That is the real meaning of the cementing of ties with the OKP and Darya Mitina.

In its contribution to the CRFI conference, the PO put forward the position that “neither in Russia nor China has a bourgeoisie emerged as a class, since in both cases it is mediated by the state, which continues to hold on to a large part of its ‘pre-capitalist’ bureaucratic structure.” The

PO refers to both Putin and Xi Jinping as “special bonapartists,” balancing between the emerging capitalists and “the need to contain the disintegration of their states.”

Underlying this neo-Pabloite perspective is the conception that Putin has the potential to present some sort of anti-imperialist alternative, a counterweight to the domination of US imperialism. Under conditions in which both China and Russia have attempted to expand their influence within Latin America, this outlook has concrete implications in terms of state policy.

The international politics of a party like the Partido Obrero are always an extension of national politics. The turn toward an alliance with Russian Stalinism, a right-wing force, is in line with its opportunist electoral orientation within Argentina itself. As the PO’s contribution acknowledges, the FIT front in which it is united with the Morenoites is founded on an “electoral adaptation that justifies itself in the need to co-opt the left wing of Kirchnerism”—i.e., Peronism.

Under the cover of “refounding” the Fourth International, a deeply reactionary axis is being prepared involving an alliance with bourgeois nationalist and even right-wing currents.

The conference in Buenos Aires and the pretense of “refounding” the Fourth International in alliance with Stalinism must be taken as a warning to the working class. It represents a bid to forge new political instruments to subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie precisely at a point where a resurgence of the class struggle is emerging on every continent.

It is 80 years since the founding of the Fourth International and 65 years since the 1953 split in the FI and formation of the International Committee to defend Trotskyism against Pabloite revisionism. The attempt to create an international tendency based on suppressing the lessons of the history of the Fourth International can result only in the betrayal of the working class.

For all those in Argentina and throughout Latin America who want to defend Trotskyism, the assimilation of the lessons of these betrayals and of the protracted struggle of the International Committee to build the Fourth International through an implacable fight against Pabloism and all forms of opportunism is vital. We call upon the readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* in Argentina and throughout the Americas to take up a serious study of the documents of these struggles and begin the fight to build sections of the ICFI in every country.

The authors also recommend:

How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism
The Heritage We Defend

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>