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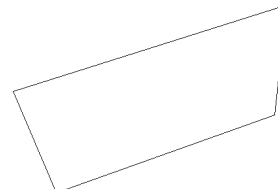
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DIRECTORATE OF
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Intelligence Memorandum

Failure or Foothold?

Uruguay's Left Assesses the Elections

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
17 February 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Failure or Foothold?
Uruguay's Left Assesses the Elections

Summary

The deluge of publicity and propaganda accompanying Uruguay's general elections last November focused on the threat posed by a leftist front, the Frente Amplio. The country was viewed as the testing ground for the Chilean formula for Marxist success. When the Frente went down to defeat with less than 20 percent of the vote in a three-way race, its loss was again the center of attention.

Concentrating on the drubbing has been partly an exercise in self-deception. The Frente had little prospect of gaining the presidency, but its ability to create the first three-way race in more than a century was in itself a substantial achievement.

Since the elections, the left has overcome its initial disappointment and seems ready to convert the Frente into an ongoing political mechanism instead of letting it lapse, as coalitions so often do in Latin America. Most of the leadership probably profited from last year's mistakes and seems intent on maintaining unity. Nevertheless, stresses and strains are already evident, and some splintering could take place during the long dry spell between elections. Most factions, however, realize

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they have found a viable strategy and will pursue it in an attempt to wrest control from the major parties. Indeed, political and economic conditions in Uruguay point to the probability that the Frente in one form or another will be back, and stronger, in 1976.

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PRELIMINARY ELECTION RESULTS									
(Some figures remain tentative pending the official recount)									
Countrywide Results					Breakdown Within the Fronte				
<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>		<u>%</u>		<u>Faction</u>	<u>Votes</u>		<u>%</u>	
Colorados	595,570		40.8		FIDEL (Communist)	83,291		6.1	
Blancos	585,974		40.1		Patria Grande (Enrique Erro)	64,106		4.4	
Frete Amplio	271,510		18.6		Christian Democrats	53,949		3.7	
Others	7,925		-0.5		Socialists	32,306		2.2	
TOTAL	1,460,456		100.0		Michelini (Colorado Dissident)	27,585		1.8	
					Others	4,273		.4	
					TOTAL	271,510		18.6	
Congressional Representation					Breakdown Between Montevideo and Interior Among Major Parties				
<u>Party</u>	<u>Senate</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>Chamber of Deputies *</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Montevideo*</u>		<u>Interior*</u>	
Colorados	13	16	41	50	Colorados	<u>Votes</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>%</u>
Blancos	12	13	40	41	Blancos	253,587	38.90	341,903	42.27
Frete Amplio	5	1	18	6	Frete Amplio	194,598	29.85	391,376	48.37
TOTAL	30	30	99	99		199,760	30.64	71,876	8.87

**Exact Results Await Final Count*

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The Election Contenders

1. The newly formed Frente Amplio--a coalition of Communists, other leftists, and breakaway dissidents from the major parties--was viewed by friend and foe alike as the plausible political heir to the "leftist unity" formula fashioned by Salvador Allende in Chile in 1970. In many respects, the Frente provided the election with its overriding issue.

2. The incumbent Colorados staked their campaign on the President's law-and-order image and his defiance of the leftist Tupamaro guerrillas. The Colorados linked the Frente with terrorism and charged that it was only a Communist tool. The Frente countered by portraying itself as the new leftist hope for voters tired of the same old politics, inefficiency, and corruption. The other major party, the Blancos, chose a middle ground designed to win votes from those not attracted to either pole.

3. The preliminary election results (many absentee and challenged ballots were not counted for weeks) were read by Uruguayans less as a victory for Colorado candidate Juan Bordaberry than as a massive defeat of the left by the democratic parties. The Blancos and Colorados together gained almost 81 percent of the vote. Exultation was the order of the day. On 29 November, the day following the elections, Colorados and Blancos paraded arm in arm through Montevideo, celebrating that the country had been saved from the Communist menace. No matter that this was the closest presidential race of the century between the Blancos and Colorados; no matter that the man in the street would not know the name of the next president for two months as an excruciatingly slow official recount was undertaken--the Frente had lost.

4. The democratic victory was in many respects an impressive triumph for the major parties. More Uruguayans voted than ever before, and almost 90 percent of the eligible voters turned out. Although

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the government had been bedeviled for months by the activities of Uruguay's formidable terrorist group, the Tupamaros, the administration presided over elections that were notably fair and that found the public calm and confident. Despite these pluses, the pervasive optimism has been overextended.

5. Part of the reason the euphoria has not yet dissipated is that the election campaign ended just as the beaches opened for the Uruguayan summer. After long months of campaigning--and now comforted by the election results--politician, patron, and peon deserted the city for the beckoning seashore. Politics, for the moment, has been abandoned.

6. In the aftermath of the election, the international press has helped to give the results a one-dimensional appearance. Foreign media especially portrayed the outcome as a massive repudiation of the left and proof that radical Marxism would find few converts in Uruguay. Since November, political news in Uruguay has centered on the continuing vote count and speculation over the next administration.

Where Did the Frente Go Wrong?

7. The Frente's prospects for a stunning success were never very good. Its hopes were based on the premise that the Chilean experience could be transferred to Uruguay when conditions, in fact, were very different. In the decades prior to Allende's win in 1970, the entire Chilean political spectrum had moved leftward, easing the transition to a Marxist-led coalition. Preceding Allende in the presidency was a Christian Democrat whose program was quite leftist. Further, the radical and leftist voice in Chilean politics has been a traditional force.

8. In Uruguay, the Frente was an embryonic coalition that owed its existence in part to the Chilean experience. It faced a conservative president whose objective was to defeat the Frente so

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that his rightist policies could be affirmed. Further, the Uruguayan people, especially those living in the interior, had repeatedly demonstrated their strong ties to the traditional parties. Even in Montevideo, the Communists could not convert their union muscle into voter strength. In past efforts, the Communist fronts had hovered at between five and six percent of the total vote.

9. Some members of the Frente fell prey to their own propaganda. Their campaign, early starting and well financed, sought to inundate the capital with propaganda leaflets, press releases, and broadcasts. In the closing days of the campaign, especially when the Frente turned out impressive crowds in the capital, its optimism soared. Its political adrenalin was flowing so strongly just prior to the vote that the showing of 18.6 percent was a rude disappointment.

10. Nevertheless, most political realists within the Frente (and especially within the Communist Party) had probably recognized the constraints on its aspirations. The conservative interior areas were so hostile to the Frente--some of its caravans were stoned--that the executive committee decided not to campaign in certain rural districts. With almost half the population voting in the interior, there could be no realistic hope for the presidency or for a strong country-wide performance. Instead, the Frente concentrated on Montevideo--an attractive prize in a country with a single major city that houses fully half the population. Even here, the Frente had only an outside chance. In 1966 its constituent parties, running as separate entities, had gained 23 percent of the vote, but some factions--especially dissidents from the major parties--had lost popularity in the intervening five years.

11. It was in Montevideo too that the administration concentrated its counter propaganda, drumming on the "Red Menace" that the Frente was said to represent. Anti-Communism became the Colorados' chief political theme. As the campaign wore on, the propaganda shifted, from mild insinuation to outright accusation. By election day, the

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Colorado advertisements were asking--"Do you want to live as a human being or as a Red Slave?" Manacled hands and shadowy scenes of Moscow's Red Square were featured. The Frente's propaganda was equally shrill but not nearly as effective.

12. With the bursting of the Frente balloon, there was some casting about for scapegoats in the days immediately following the election. Bickering was strongest within the Uruguayan Communist Party (PCU), which had reason to be doubly disappointed by the results. Not only were the elections being read as a general rebuff to the Frente, but the Communist Party was the only component that had not dramatically improved its record over 1966. The Leftist Liberation Front, the PCU's front, had been the coalition's leading vote-getter, as expected, but by less than an impressive margin. The Communists garnered 89,000 votes, but the Patria Grande coalition headed by Blanco renegade Enrique Erro totaled 64,000 and the Christian Democrats 53,000--raising the prospect of a stiffer struggle for internal leadership. Even the Socialists attracted 32,000 votes.

13. The disappointment was sufficient to raise murmurings about the leadership of the PCU's long-time and respected chieftain, Rodney Arismendi. Several of his colleagues said that the Frente formula ought to be junked, since it had apparently worked to their party's relative disadvantage. Most of these misgivings began to fade, however, as the election date receded.

The Frente Regroups

14. During its Consultative Congress in December, the Frente leadership evaluated its position, taking stock of its electoral performance and factors that hampered its effort. Some of the self-criticism was specious; there was some ballyhoo about election irregularities, but no specific charges. The congress complained of a lack of funds and limited time for organization. Despite

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these laments, the Frente was not really damaged by financial considerations--its outlay in the capital rivaled and perhaps surpassed that of the major parties and its campaign began earlier. Almost all politicians agreed that money was being funneled from the Soviet Embassy through the Communist Party. Although the Frente effort was not coordinated, it probably suffered no more backbiting than did the major parties. In addition, despite its recent beginnings, it had a ready-made political apparatus in the form of the Communist party's experienced, well-oiled machine. The final campaign rally in Montevideo, which attracted about 70,000 people, a larger turnout than achieved by the major parties, was testimony to the Communists' organizational skills.

15. It was when the Frente turned to criticism of its own strategy that it uncovered some serious flaws. The leadership noted that "we directed ourselves in no small way to those who were already convinced." Frente propaganda had concentrated on Montevideo and particularly on students, small groups of professionals, and young people--some of them even below the voting age.

16. Probably more important, the leadership recognized that it had been blitzed not so much by the amount but by the theme of its opponents' propaganda. The major parties had cast the election as a contest of democracy versus totalitarianism, rather than the Frente's concept of a "fat-cat" oligarchy versus the people. Not until the fading days of the campaign did presidential candidate Liber Seregni take full note of the charges of Communism made against the Frente and attempt to refute them. But by then it was far too late.

17. The machinations behind the scenes at the party congress were also significant. There was no challenge to Arismendi's leadership nor any movement to depose the losing presidential candidate as titular chief. The Communist leadership gave no signs of having seriously considered withdrawing from the Frente and instead worked hard

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both to ensure its own continued dominance and to prevent public airing of any disagreements. More than 1,500 national delegates, 70 percent of them Communists, attended the congress, and the mood was one of determination and optimism. The leadership, organization, and program all were unchallenged. It appeared to be a working congress. The nuclei of the Frente, the Base Committees, presented some 500 written reports, discussing future strategy and tactics as well as possible structural changes. In sum, no disillusionment was evident.

Behind the Public Performance

18. Maneuvering for political advantage continues. Colorado dissident Zelmar Michelini has been the most prominent in attempting to form an anti-Communist bloc within the Frente. In spite of his own relatively poor performance and low vote total in the election, he hopes that he can use his position as one of the leaders of a faction stronger than the PCU to regain his political clout. Michelini and others boasted before the elections that the democratic forces would prevent the Communists from dominating the coalition. The relatively low share of the vote received by the PCU has given these forces a lift, but bickering among themselves may not be ended by their common antagonism toward the PCU.

19. Even if the "democratic forces" merge in an informal bloc, the odds are small that they will be able to match strength with the PCU in the long run, despite the vote totals. With elections past, the PCU will presumably retain and possibly improve its financial advantage over the other members, given its ability to draw upon Soviet financing. If the congress was any indication, the PCU retain control of the Base Committee mechanism. From the moment the Base Committees were formed, only the PCU and the 26th of March Movement (the Tupamaro terrorist-allied political arm) made a major effort to control them. The more democratically oriented factions probably still lack the manpower for any challenge. Thus, the December congress was largely

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a contest for control between the PCU and the 26th of March, with the Communists the easy victors on the basis of delegate strength. The role of the Base Committees in the Frente structure is still being debated and may be a source of considerable friction if the democratic bloc continues to be outmaneuvered and outvoted at lower levels.

The Frente's Future

20. Despite disputes, the Frente is not ready to call it quits and, in one form or another, seems likely to be a major contender in the 1976 elections. The left improved its over-all electoral standing in part because it adapted itself to the rules of the Uruguayan political game. The Blancos and Colorados, running candidates from several factions at once through a system designed to maintain these parties' electoral cohesion, have been playing the game for the last century. Like the major parties, the Frente brought together sometimes hostile bed-fellows, and attained nearly one-fifth of the vote. This was the near term objective of Frente strategists and is a reasonable political foothold after only one year of existence.

21. Although the elections pointed up certain weaknesses in the Frente appeal--such as its lack of attractiveness in the interior areas, the Frente received 30 percent of the vote in Montevideo and trailed the Colorado Party by less than ten percent. A Gallup poll conducted in December and January indicated that 17 percent of the voters had gone to the polls for the first time. Of these new voters, those indicating a party preference voted for the Frente by a more than 2 to 1 margin over either of the traditional parties. Economic conditions also helped the Frente in the capital. Montevideo is the manifestation of much that is wrong with the country; the long downturn is evidenced in shabbiness, potholed streets, and lack of new construction. If the country continues in the doldrums for another five years, the Frente bid will be even stronger in Montevideo.

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22. The anti-Communist propaganda of the Colorado Party had a telling effect on the vote last year, but the results--with the Christian Democrats, Erro, and others polling sizable portions of the vote--may somewhat reduce the Frente's Red tinge. Moreover, five years from now a leftist coalition will probably be well established, and it will therefore be more difficult to vilify as a political miscreant, seeking to rob the people of their liberty.

23. Within the Frente, disputes are inevitable. The year of maneuvering and sometimes ill will that preceded the elections was instructive. The PCU sometimes papered over the propaganda posters of other Frente factions, and several of the poorer groups were incensed by the Communists' control of the finances. Without the near-term goal of elections as a rallying cry for unity and with some of the factions perhaps anxious to test their political muscle, divisive forces may grow.

24. The major party dissidents, however, have tied what future they have to the tail of the Frente. Their prospects within the coalition may not be particularly bright, but the alternatives of an independent existence or reconciliation with their parent parties offer scant hope of political fortune. Others on the left, such as the Socialists, who increased their vote 16-fold in the 1971 elections, will be reluctant to desert the Frente camp. If breakaways do occur over the next few years, it is quite possible that the left will again amalgamate for the next elections.

25. The presumed goal of the Frente in 1976--to make a strong showing and at least capture Montevideo--practically dictates that the factions maintain at the very minimum a loose alliance. For 15 years, the Communists and other leftist parties provided irrefutable evidence that separately they could not challenge the Blanco-Colorado hegemony. The PCU, even in the first two months following the elections, has given evidence that it recognizes the overriding need for unity and will use its resources to ensure continued cohesion.

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External Influences

29. Significantly, the Frente was less a creature of its own making than it was the creation of outside forces. The Communists had been pushing a front strategy since the mid-1950s but had failed to fire either the public or political imagination. Marxist Salvador Allende's win in Chile helped the formula along the road to political maturity, and internal circumstances in Uruguay gave it a further boost. A rightist administration purposely polarized the political spectrum and set the Frente in high relief. Economic conditions were also conducive to dissent. The cost of living index again began to rise in 1970-71 as the Pacheco administration eased its austerity programs. The official exchange rate bore no relation to real market prices. Uruguay's important beef industry chose to smuggle more of its produce across the border to Brazil for greater profit instead of shipping it through Montevideo.

30. These political and economic conditions do not appear to be transitory. Progress in solving the country's problems will require a major effort from the new administration and substantial outside assistance. Uruguay's most serious economic problem is structural. An overburdened agrarian sector is forced to support inefficient industry and a bloated welfare-oriented administration. The political situation at this time gives promise of little immediate change in policy. The next president will be Juan Maria Bordaberry, a politician cut from the same conservative cloth as his predecessor, whose political tactics he apparently holds in high regard.

31. Before the elections, Colorados and Blancos talked of forming a government coalition to avoid the political strife which had stifled progress. This campaign theme seems unlikely to become fact. Past political practice seems to

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weigh against it. In addition, with a resounding democratic victory under their belts, Colorado and Blanco politicians are not concerned over elections scheduled for five years in the future.

32. Although the elections in November illustrated that the major parties were capable of holding their own, five more years of terrorism, political sniping, and a return to economic stagnation would shift the odds somewhat. Guerrilla activities in the interior, which seem to be on the rise, may help to spread dissatisfaction. Given these circumstances the leftist coalition, despite its defeat, should be able to mount a more potent challenge to the traditional parties in 1976.

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