

Uruguay with an eye on popular consultation

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By María Josefina Arce

Uruguay will enter 2022 with its eyes set on the plebiscite on the Urgent Consideration Law, whose lightning approval in July last year, in the midst of restrictions due to COVID 19, provoked numerous criticisms from society.

Several sectors questioned the absence of a deep debate and the lack of knowledge by the citizens of the legislation, which substantially modifies public policies in important areas of the country's life.

Political, social, union and student organizations joined in the collection of signatures to submit 135 articles for consultation, a requirement established by Uruguayan law.

Successfully over 25 % of the electoral roll was achieved. Nearly 800,000 signatures were submitted to the Electoral Court, 127,000 more than the required number.

The popular mobilization was broad, despite the limitations imposed by the sanitary emergency and the fact that the government denied the possibility of using radio and television to promote the campaign, in an attempt to silence it.

The also called LUC embodies a program of neoliberal conservative restoration and attacks the achievements of the 15 years of government of the leftist Frente Amplio.

During more than a decade in power, the Frente Amplio boosted the economy, reduced the digital divide and school connectivity, created training centers for young people between 14 and 20 years of age, expanded health coverage and passed several laws such as the Comprehensive Law against gender violence.

Now the LUC puts these and many other advances at risk. In the area of education, it highlights its privatizing nature and the reduction of the role of the state, with a notable decrease in the budget allocated to this branch.

Another questioned issue refers to the limitation of the right to peaceful assembly and demonstration, aspects that have even been criticized by UN Special Rapporteurs.

Extremely controversial are the relaxation of the use of police force and the power granted to law enforcement and military agents to search people and cars in supposed "routine preventive" procedures. These chapters revive in the memory of Uruguayans the sad years of the military dictatorship, from 1973 to 1985.

The Law of Urgent Consideration, according to various sectors of society, goes against norms and institutions, democratic and social conquests, fundamental for social inclusion, equal opportunities and the protection of the most vulnerable sectors.

In March, Uruguayans will be able to vote on 135 articles of the Urgent Consideration Law, which strengthens a neoliberal model that has caused the increase of hunger and poverty in Latin America.

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