Society, Public Policies and Education: Alternative Approaches in Uruguay

Ivonaldo Leite

Federal University of Paraíba, Joao Pessoa, Paraiba, Brazil

Abstract

This paper aims to present a general perspective of the actions developed by the Uruguayan Broad Front, which has been defined as an example of the reformed left in Latin America. The Broad Front governed Uruguay between 2005 and 2020. It implemented several alternative and innovative policies. Methodologically, the paper is empirically supported by data and information derived from interviews conducted in Montevideo, as well of the analysis of official documents. Among the results found, it can be highlighting the following samples: 1) innovative programmes focused on most disadvantaged young children and their families like Uruguay Crece Contigo [Uruguay grows with you] have been successfully put in place and scaled up; 2) the institution of the Salary Councils (tripartite councils made up of government representatives, businesses and workers) stimulated the formalization of work and the rise in salaries, as well as the strengthening of unions; 3) the creation of the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) as a new centralized social authority, which shares jurisdiction with the Social Security Bank (BPS) and the Ministry of Health; 4) in the face of the failure of the so-called drug war, the regulation of the cannabis market was approved during the term of President José Mujica. Conclusively, it's affirmed, for instance, the Broad Front perspectives and policies it has implemented in Uruguay have instituted a new conception of the left in Latin America.

Keywords: *Uruguay, public policies, education, Broad Front, reformed left.*

1. Introduction

In 1940 Walter Benjamin wrote his *Theses on the Concept of History* provoked by the idea that society lived at that time in a moment of danger in countries like Germany and Italy (Benjamin, 2006). Today, it is probable that we are also living in a moment of danger, but it is a moment that is not produced only in the sphere of the State. In Benjamin's time, the danger was the rise of fascism as a political regime commanded by explicitly assumed dictators like Hitler and Mussolini. In our time, the danger is the rise of fascism as a societal regime in several countries.

In such a way, we can remember the case of Galdino Jesus, a Pataxó from Northeast Brazil. Some years ago, he went to Brasilia to take part in a march of the landless. The night was warm, and he decided to sleep on a bench at the bus stop. In the early morning hours, he was killed by three middle-class youths. As the youngsters confessed later on to the police, they killed him for the fun of it.

Societal fascism can be defined as a set of social processes by which large bodies of populations are irreversibly kept out or thrown out of any kind of social contract (Santos, 2001). They are rejected, excluded and thrown into a kind of Hobbesian state of nature, either because they have never been part of any social contract and probably never will; or because they have been excluded or thrown out of whatever social contract they had been part of.

In Europe, United States and Latin America, far-right populist political positions have defended ideas identified with societal fascism, racist ideas for example. On the other hand, neoliberal agendas around the world generate social exclusion. Far-right populists and neo-liberals are two sides of the same coin. The coin of

conservative modernization. Both attack workers' rights and institutions such as public schooling.

In addition to far-right populists and neo-liberals, the alliance that supports the conservative modernization is still constituted by two other groups: neo-conservatives and a particular fraction of the upwardly mobile middle class. However, neoliberalism is the most powerful ideological element within conservative modernization. As a rule, according to neoliberals, what is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad. Therefore, public institutions such as schools are presented by neoliberalism as 'black holes' into which money is poured - and then seemingly disappears -, but which do not provide anywhere near adequate results (Apple, 2001).

The conservative modernization, under leadership of far-right populists and neo-liberals, has won the battle over common sense. They have skillfully stitched together different perspectives and commitments and have organized them under its own headship in matters dealing with social welfare, culture, economy and education. Brazilian government is today the most evident example of the alliance between far-right populists and neo-liberals.

By conservative modernization, economic rationality is more powerful than any other. In the educational field, such a position conceives of students only as human capital. This means that the world is extremely competitive economically, and the students as future worker must receive requisite skills and dispositions to compete efficiently and effectively. Other crucial ideas here are of the consumer (Apple, 2001). This is, the world as a big supermarket, and "consumer choice" is the guarantor of democracy. Consequently, education is seen as merely one more product like rice, cakes and cell phones. In this way, in the last instance, democracy is turned into consumption practices. The ideological effects of such

point of view are momentous. Rather than democracy being a political concept, it is transformed into an entirely economic concept (ibid).

However, in this paper, I develop an approach that is opposite to conservative modernization. I'll focus on the case of the Uruguayan reformed left governments and their perspectives about public policies, which can be defined as counterhegemonic perspectives, as we will see. Methodologically, this work is the result of postdoctoral research carried out in Montevideo, Uruguay. Empirically, it is supported by data and information derived from interviews and documentary analysis.

2. The Uruguayan reformed left

The political left is a concept that encompasses a wide variety of political currents, from communism to socialism, and from social democracy to progressive liberalism. In Uruguay, such a reality is perceptible. The Broad Front (*Frente Amplio*, in Spanish), as a left coalition party, brings together communists, socialists, popular-nationalists, social democrats and left Christians. The Broad Front was founded in 1971, and it was declared illegal during the 1973 military *coup d'état*. It arose again in 1985 when democracy was restored in Uruguay.

Except during the period of military rule, Uruguay had been governed since independence, in 1828, until 2004 by two parties – the Colorado and National Party. Historically, both are heterogeneous political forces, with the Colorado Party affiliated with urban groups and the National Party representing rural areas (Hudson & Meditz, 1992). However, in 2004, the Broad Front won the presidential and congressional elections. Tabaré Vázquez, a doctor specializing in oncology, was elected President of the Republic and ended 170 years of political domination of the traditional parties.

In the preceding period the arrival of the Board Front to power, a devastating crisis exploded in Uruguay. In July 2002. It was a triple crisis - economic, political, and social - that has been brewing for years in a society that didn't want to pay attention to facts that pointed to an imminent financial disaster (Zibechi, 2007). The government had to close banks for four days to prevent depositors from emptying them, since the climate of uncertainty was increasing. But the bank closings paralyzed an economy that had already deteriorated and the poorest Uruguayans, who live off the formal economy's leftovers (street vendors, those who watch parked cars, cleaning people) suffered hunger and anguish. Raids on supermarkets were the only way out for them, since state and municipal soup kitchens were overwhelmed. The government's only response was to surround the poor neighborhoods with an enormous deployment of police, with helicopters patrolling day and night to prevent residents from leaving their ghettos (ibid).

On August 4, in the midst of a climate of intimidation, Parliament approved a law to "strengthen the financial system" that was to the detriment of the state banks - even though they hold 75% of deposits - and favored the four private foreign banks that will from now on dominate the financial system. As soon as the parliamentary session ended, the IMF approved a loan in the extraordinary amount of $1.5 billion and the U.S. ambassador to Uruguay, Martin Silverstein, celebrated the decision. But the crisis is not over and the image of hundreds of very poor people raiding supermarkets for food destroyed the myth of a socially integrated, peaceful and educated country known as the "Switzerland of Latin America." Although the government and the IMF held that the crisis was due to "contagion" from the Argentine crisis, its roots lied in structural adjustment policies applied in Uruguay since 1990.[1]

President Vázquez was inaugurated to a five-year term in March 2005, and Uruguay was just beginning to recover from the crisis. He adopted a political perspective that has been defined as reformed left (Swagerman, 2014). Such

perspective seems to conceive the left as a "current of thought, politics, and policy that stresses social improvements over macroeconomic orthodoxy, egalitarian distribution of wealth over its creation, sovereignty over international cooperation, democracy [at least when in opposition, if not necessarily once in power] over governmental effectiveness" (Castañeda, 2006, p. 32).

Therefore, President Vázquez opened the door to a new, bold political direction. He worked at stabilizing the economy, signed a three-year $1.1 billion stand-by arrangement with the IMF that committed Uruguay to a substantial primary fiscal surplus, low inflation and a reduction in foreign debt. On the other hand, this agreement, combined with a mix of pro-investment policies and social programs, contributed to revitalize the Uruguayan economy in a short period of time. "His $240 million National Plan to Address Social Emergency contributed to reduce poverty. He established wage councils made up of representatives from unions, business and government to negotiate wages for 100,000 firms and 600,000 workers. Hundreds of jobs were created under the Work for Uruguay Program, pushing unemployment down from 12.3 per cent to 7.3 per cent, its lowest level in decades" (Yoldi, 2010, p. 6). In addition to it, he reduced value added tax on basic food items, and created a personal income tax that exempts the poorest 60 per cent. President Vázquez also made efforts to decentralize government and encourage greater popular participation in politics.

The Vázquez Administration was widely approved by the population, and this contributed to a second victory of the Broad Front in the 2009 elections. But the candidate had his own merits. It was José Mujica, and his suffering at the hands of the military that gave him great credibility among voters, since he is a man who paid a high price for his ideas. Mujica was imprisoned for 14 years as a result of his activities as one of the leaders of the Tupamaro National Liberation Movement, a leftist urban guerilla group that operated in Uruguay during the

1960s and 1970s. Following the return to democracy, Mujica helped to create the Popular Participation Movement (MPP), which is the largest group within the Broad Front coalition. He was elected to Uruguay's lower house in 1994 and to the Senate in 1999, before serving as minister of livestock, agriculture, and fisheries during the Vázquez Administration. José Mujica was inaugurated to a five-year term in 2010.

Although the former guerrilla is politically different from his predecessor, he is also a consensus-builder, much as Vázquez. Moreover, Mujica has made it clear that there is no contradiction between embracing revolutionary ideals and seeking conciliation, as well as assuming more moderate positions. He and Vázquez are the most representative faces of the reformed Uruguayan left.

President Mujica became known for his modest lifestyle, as well as for his reflections on the human being and contemporary world. Hence, he is also known as the philosopher president. During his administration, he donated 90 per cent of his salary to charities for the poor and entrepreneurial start-ups, preferring to live on the farm owned by his wife just outside Montevideo rather than the president's official residence, and eschewing state limousines for his battered Volkswagen Beetle. He has not taken to the trappings of power.

He continued the actions of his predecessor and developed bold policies that, for example, reduced the number of Uruguayans living below the poverty line and was responsible for a new approach to drugs, which regulated the cannabis market. Mujica concluded his term as a popular President, with a 65 percent approval rating. As a leader of the Uruguayan reformed left and as consequence of the public polices of his administration, he was described as the mentor of a calm revolution (Rabuffetti, 2014).

In Uruguay, consecutive reelection is not allowed. Thus, in the 2014 elections, the Broad Front presented as candidate the former President Tabaré Vázquez. The success of the Broad Front's public policies, Mujica's calm revolution, and Vazquez's popularity ensured his victory in the second round. He defeated Luis Lacalle Pou, a leader of the conservative National Party. Therefore, the Uruguayan reformed left won its third consecutive term.

President Vázquez was inaugurated to a five-year term in 2015. Overall, he has maintained the Broad Front's public policy guidelines. One of the facts that have marked his second administration is the victory in the so-called Philip Morris case. In 2010, the multinational tobacco company Philip Morris filed a complaint against Uruguay, claiming that the Uruguayan smoking legislation devalued its cigarette and trademarks and investments in that country, hence they demanded compensation under the bilateral investment treaty between Switzerland and Uruguay. A fight between the world's largest cigarette manufacturer and a small South American country is a 'true David and Goliath story'. Such a treaty provides that disputes are settled by binding arbitration before the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

On 8 July 2016, the ICSID ruled in favor of Uruguay, and Philip Morris not only lost the case but was ordered by the court to pay the South American country about $7 million in legal fees. It has been seen as a Vázquez's political victory and as an important moment for public health in the fight against the deregulation of the activities of the tobacco industry.

However, on the other hand, the conservative opposite intensified its criticisms and actions against the Vázquez administration and the Broad Front. Sometimes it proceeded like some Brazilian groups that deposed the former president Dilma Rousseff and made feasible the arrival of Jair Bolsonoro to the Presidency of the

Republic. This was the case, for instance, of some segments of the so-called One Movement Only Uruguay. The movement presented itself as an organization whose aim to raise awareness to avoid 'complex situations' that were experienced in recent history and, at the same time, stated that it was need to warn before it is to late (Un Solo Uruguay, 2018). This was the same far right-wing and populist rhetoric used in Brazil. The election of the successor of President Tabaré Vázquez, at the end of 2019, took place in this atmosphere of ideological dispute.

The first round left the incumbent Broad Front with 39 per cent of the vote, the National Party in second with 29 per cent, the Colorado Party in third on 12 per cent, and the recently founded Cabildo Abierto (Open Forum), a right-wing military party, close behind on 11 per cent. Immediately after the first-round results were announced, all of the opposition parties declared support for the National Party candidate Luis Lacalle Pou.

In the second round, the electoral dispute was intense, and the right-wing coalition defeated the Broad Front candidate Daniel Martínez (a former Montevideo mayor). But the difference of votes between the two candidates was just over 1%. This result caught the right-wing coalition by surprise. The vote, which according to pollsters was an easy win for conservative challenger Luis Lacalle Pou, quickly became too close to call.

A wide vote margin strengthens incoming presidents, while a close one reflects division over the election. Lacalle Pou's triumph by less than 40,000 votes embodies the latter. On the other hand, the Broad Front remains a powerful political grouping with strong popular support and an energetic militant base.

3. The Uruguayan reality and the reformed left: public policies

The total population in Uruguay is estimated in 3.5 million. There is a significant mining sector in the country. The industry mainly revolves around basalt, dolomite, limestone, quartz, granite and marble. The country is a major producer of cement and semi-precious stones, particularly agate and amethyst. Even though only around 10% of the land is arable, agriculture is the largest export sector in Uruguay. It accounts for 5.2% of the GDP and employs 7.9% of the active population (Lloyds Bank, 2020). Uruguay has rich agricultural land and almost 90% of it is devoted to livestock breeding (cattle, sheep, horses and pigs). Rice is the main crop, followed by wheat, maize, sugar cane, soybeans, and tobacco. Vegetable and fruit farming are also present throughout the country, as well as a prominent wine industry along the coast of the Rio de la Plata.

The industrial sector contributes to 24.5% of the country's GDP and employs 19.7% of the active population. Agriculture and animal food processing account for half of the industrial activity. Other manufacturing activities include beverages, textiles, construction materials, chemicals, oil and coal. Services contributes to 61.2% of the GDP and employs 71.7% of the active population, mainly in finance and tourism (ibid). The total labor force in Uruguay is estimated in 1,800,00 workers.

Taking into account the difficult economic and social situation in Uruguay in 2005, as well as the diversity of political positions within the Broad Front, the beginning of the left reformed administrations was marked by hard work and attempts to reach political consensus. Therefore, left reformed administrations are a case of social democracy in contrast to other contemporary left experiences (Lanzaro, 2011). Such administrations are formed by an institutional left and conducted by left parties with a solid trajectory, within the framework of a plural and competitive party system. However, to a large degree Broad Front continues

to hold ideologically left positions. In its bids for the Presidential elections, it launches a two-pronged strategy (ibid): it incorporates the programmatic changes demanded by competition, but it keeps up an unyielding opposition towards the parties of the establishment and the neoliberal prospects. Hence, the ideological moderation, typical of any catch-all party, is in this case limited, passing through an incessant intraparty dispute, with sectors that exhibit different degrees of assimilation or resistance to liberal perspectives.

The Broad Front administrations developed a significant number of innovative public policies, for instance, in the area of human rights and with respect to economic and social context, cultivating a moderate reformism, but, at the same time, it is an audacious reformism that composed a counter-hegemonic social democratic agenda.

The public policies carried out by the Broad Front administrations are an outcome of the political framework that has been emphasized above. I will present from following a sample of them, constituted of educational policy, social policy, labor policy and human rights policy. I will place more emphasis on education, because there are dimensions about it that must be taken into account more broadly.

3.1 Public school and educational policy in Uruguay

As Bentacur affirms (2007), in the period between Uruguayan independence in 1825 and the last quarter of the 19th century, in a context of great political and social instability, public education was barely able to make a few isolated and discontinuous attempts to promote primary schooling. Despite the creation of the Instituto de Instrucción Pública in 1847, these efforts never became widespread. But the situation changed after 1877 with the approval of the *Ley de Educación Común* promoted by José Pedro Varela, which is the essence of the Uruguayan educational system. Its main objectives were citizen formation and workforce

training, as a response to the demands generated by immigration and the incipient economic modernization. Some of its main characteristics were compulsory and free primary education and - partially, in principle - laicism, which led to opposition from conservative sectors and from the Catholic Church which until then had been the most important provider of this service.

The system was created with a very strong centralized directorship in the hands of a Dirección General de Instrucción Pública with nation-wide authority and under the leadership of a national inspector. Varela himself was appointed to this post. However, the lawmakers discarded other measures for decentralization, such as the establishment of school districts, which Varela had suggested Enrolment in primary education increased substantially in the years immediately after the act, partly due to these policies and also as a consequence of increased social mobility and popular demand for education. “This process continued over the following decades, so that by the 1960s Uruguay was close to achieving universal primary education. The core of the system was the early creation — at the beginning of the 19th Century — of a highly recognized normal school for teachers, combined with a system of competitive examinations for positions and an institutional career ladder” (Bentacur, 2007, p. 2). On the other hand, secondary education was conceived as the preparation of the offspring of wealthy families for university entrance.

Presently the public education system — not counting the university — consists of four levels: preprimary education (preschool, for children ages 4 to 5), primary education (ages 6 to 11), lower secondary education (“basic common cycle”, ages 12 to 14), and upper secondary education (“baccalaureate”, ages 15 to 17). The secondary education requirements may also be met by attending technical schools. School attendance is compulsory from preschool age 5 to the completion of the lower secondary cycle, which makes a total of 10 years of compulsory

schooling. Teacher training continues to be centred in normal schools and is provided in specialized institutions. Between 80 and 90% of students of all ages attend public education. Private education represents no more than about 15% – a rate that has varied little historically (Marrero and Pereira, 2014). University education is open-access, without exclusionary exams or quotas, so any high-school graduate may enroll.

In Uruguay, the Ministry of Education and Culture has a general regulation and coordination role but not exclusive over the processes which define programmatic aspects of public education (INEEd, 2015, 2014). In this sense it differs from other systems where ministries of education are directly in charge of the design and execution of educational policies. The National Public Education System comprises the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) and the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP in its acronym in Spanish) which is an autonomous body with the aim of administering and managing non-university public education. Most decisions about administrative and pedagogical aspects that provide the framework for the operation and organization of schools are taken at the central level by ANEP. The Ministry of Education and Culture develops the general principles of education and facilitates the articulation between national educational policies and those for human, cultural, social, technological, and economic development; it is responsible for the survey, design, and dissemination of education statistics under the National Statistics System. In addition, Uruguay's educational system boasts a significant and varied offer of non-formal education, both at public and private levels. Most of it targets youths and adults and runs independently and parallel to the conventional offer.

More than half of the public primary education schools are located in rural areas: out of the 2145 public primary education schools disseminated across the country (78 of which are devoted to special education and are located in urban areas), 1131 are placed in rural areas, i.e. 54.7% (UNESCO, 2015). But only 18,500

children attend these schools, less than 18% of the total enrollment of students in primary school. Around 600 of them have only 10 students or less.

There are many studies about educational policy in Uruguay. Several of them focus on the relationship between education and work, having as object the so-called "economic returns to schooling" (Sanroman, 2006; Bucheli, 2000; Bucheli and Furtado, 2000; Miles and Rossi, 1999; Casacuberta, 2005; Arin and Zopollo, 2000; Bucheli and Casacuberta, 2001).

Usually, the basic question of such studies corresponds to a simple Mincer (1974) equation; i.e. log hourly wage rates is the dependent variable, and regressors include education level, years of work experience and its square, and other controls such as gender, tenure and industry. For instance, estimates by Bucheli and Furtado (2000) indicate that in the 1990s an additional year of schooling increased wage rates by an average of 9.6 percent. They also found that returns to schooling decreased from 1986 to 1989 and then rose until 1995. As a result the education premium was higher in the 1990s than in the 1980s. An additional aspect of the situation that was addressed by Bucheli and Furtado (2000) is whether that premium is constant for all education levels. They included a quadratic term in years of schooling and found that the respective coefficient is not significantly different than zero before 1994 but is positive and increases after that year.

Miles and Rossi (1999) estimated quantile regressions so as to analyze how the returns to schooling vary among different socioeconomic groups. They estimated the premium to an additional year of schooling measured for each of the five quintiles of empirical wage distribution. These authors found a U-shaped relationship between education premium and 3 quintiles. That is, the return to an additional year of schooling is higher in initial and tertiary education than in

secondary education. Finally, they concluded that the returns to schooling in the highest quintile increased significantly in the 1990s.

Bucheli and Casacuberta (2001), Torello and Casacuberta (1997) and Bucheli (1992) suggest that the returns to schooling vary for different numbers of years of schooling. In particular, they argue that there is a "degree premium" associated with completing an education cycle, so they proposed to estimate the returns to schooling using dummy variables for each education level. Arim and Zopollo (2000) used the same approach and concluded that the premium to the highest education level as against primary education decreased from 1986 to 1991 and then increased until 1996. The evidence they analyzed also showed that the premium of the secondary cycle was almost constant over that period.

However, my perspective in this paper is different of such approaches. I am not interested in developing an approach to education during the Broad Front administrations according to the human capital theory.

On the educational policy of the Broad Front, first of all, it is important to underline how the ‘philosopher president’ conceives education, because José Mujica has presented reflections in this sense, and thus he has exercised some influence in the development of educational actions. At least during the period in which he was President. Some of his ideas about education are as follows (Mujica, 2009; McQuillan, 2015):

> 1. As we are going, knowledge repositories are not going to be inside our heads anymore, but outside of us, available to be searched for in the internet. It will be there all the information, all the data, everything that is already known. In short, it will be there all answers. What will not be are all the questions. The ability to ask questions is what will be important. The ability to ask deep questions that trigger new research and learning efforts.

2. “The intelligence that contributes most to a country is the distributed intelligence. It is the one that is not only kept in the laboratories or in the universities, but the one that walks through the streets. The intelligence that is used to plant, to program a computer or to cook, it is the same intelligence. Some have climbed more steps than others, but it's the same ladder. The steps below are the same for both nuclear physics and field management. It’s necessary a curious and nonconformist look, as well as an active position interested in new knowledge” (ibid, p. 2).

3. “I have a dream in which parents show the grass to their children and ask them: do you know what is this? And they answer: it is an energy processing plant of the sun and minerals of the earth. Or yet that parents show to their children the starry sky, and make them think about the celestial bodies, the speed of light and the transmission of waves” (Mujica, 2009, p. 3).

4. Education has the transformative power to contribute to greater justice and less inequality in society. However, educational policy is not neutral, and so it needs to be guided towards a purpose by a political agenda.

5. Education, and especially the university, can be an instrument of division that serves the interests of elites, preserving or increasing inequality. Therefore, education cannot be separated from democracy, as a tool that must assist the most people to improve their condition in life.

6. Universities must create another culture; a universal humanistic culture, above nations, that must create common values for the human beings.

7. The universities are the place where we charge our batteries to create new ideas in society.

8. In the modern world the abandonment of philosophy is the main cause for the loss of values beyond market economics.

9. The modern world gives us so much to see, but we do not really see it without philosophy.

10. Philosophy is not just something to be learned in a university, but it must be a permanent questioning.

11. We can get to the point where studying, researching and learning is no longer an effort, it is pure pleasure.

12. Humankind possesses the knowledge and technological innovation to solve its problems, but what is missing is a political mentality to do it.

Overall, Broad Front administrations have been in agreement with Mujica's approach to education. So, as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, CEPAL in Spanish) recognizes, education has also been one of the priorities of its governments (CEPAL, 2009). This is reflected in the significant increase that has occurred in public spending, which went up as a proportion of overall social spending and as a percentage of GDP.

Between 2005 and 2013, total expenditure on education in Uruguay grew from 5.0% to 6.6% of GDP. This reflects, in part, considerable growth in public spending in education. During this period, public expenditure on education rose from 3.2% to 4.6% of GDP (Santiago et. al, 2016). This growth was sustained over time. While in 2004 public expenditure on education as a percentage of central government expenditure was 18.6%, by 2013 it had grown to 28.2%. All educational levels contributed to this growth. In real terms, public spending on education grew at an annual rate of 10% between 2004 and 2013. Public spending on early childhood and pre-primary education had the greatest increase during this period (average annual growth rate of 12%), followed by secondary education (9.7%), primary education (8.5%) and tertiary education (8.5%) (ibid). In terms of public expenditure per student relative to GDP per capita, technical-professional programmes and general programmes in lower secondary education received the greatest level of resources, followed by early childhood and pre-primary education, and primary education.

For the different education levels and types, growth in staff compensation was considerably more significant than that for capital expenditure and operating expenses. Considering all pre-tertiary education levels together, in 2013, 81% of the expenditure executed went to staff compensation, while 10% went to operating expenses (e.g. materials, supplies) and 9% went to capital expenditure (infrastructure and educational equipment) (INEEd, 2015). Between 2004 and

2013, real expenditure on staff compensation grew about 125%, while such growth stood at about 75% for capital expenditure and about 50% for operating expenses. Public expenditure on staff compensation as a proportion of current public expenditure was particularly high in general programmes in lower secondary education (about 95%) while it was slightly above 90% in technical-professional programmes and in general programmes in upper secondary education. In primary education, such proportion grew from about 78% in 2005 to about 85% in 2013.

There have were important measures aimed at the development of science and technology, as the creation of the National Agency of Research and the consolidation of the National System of Researchers. Moreover, other important measures were, for instance, as follows: the program of "community teachers", supporting primary school students in vulnerable areas; the Program for the Universalization of Secondary Education, which seeks to overcome alarming education failures at the secondary level; and the Ceibal Plan (named after the Uruguay´s national flower), inspired by the international One Laptop per Child initiative, which seeks to generalize an early introduction to computing. "Uruguay has been a pioneer in carrying out this democratizing initiative on a national scale, which was imposed widely and with great connectivity" (Lanzaro, 2011, p. 33).

In a 2015 report, UNICEF highlighted the progress of the Uruguayan educational policies. It affirmed that in recent times an important progress was made regarding development and strengthening of public policies devoted to early childhood and to education in Uruguay. According to UNICEF (2015), innovative programmes focused on most disadvantaged young children and their families like Uruguay Crece Contigo have been successfully put in place and scaled up. At the same time, UNICEF emphasized (ibid, p. 7) that the "school

programmes aimed at improving learning achievements like ‘Maestros Comunitarios’ and the programme ‘Aprender’ were carried out in many schools throughout the country reaching an increasing number of children. At secondary schools, programmes developed to reduce dropout rates have provided a valuable new approach to this issue.”

3.2 Labor market in Uruguay and labor policies

Labor market conditions have undergone different stages in Uruguay. A mild but sustained increasing trend in the unemployment rate arose during the 1990s and in 2002, with the severe economic crisis that affected the country, the unemployment rate reached its highest rate (21 percent in annual terms). Two years later, a sustained decreasing trend began, and in 2009 unemployment fell to a historical low of 7.7 percent (Amarante et. al., 2011). Labor income, whose evolution was highly correlated to that of GDP during the nineties, presented an impressive decrease during the economic crisis in the early 2000s. The evolution of the unemployment rate was similar in Montevideo and the rest of the country. As in other Latin America countries, unemployment mainly affected women, young people and Afro-descendants.

Under the first administration of Broad Front, there was the decrease in the unemployment rate, as well as the creation of new jobs. This positive evolution in labor market indicators took place jointly with a process of economic growth and poverty reduction, and it implied an important change in labor market. In this way, President Vázquez’s labor reforms significantly increased the power of unions, playing a substantial role in the percentage of unionized workers more than doubling between 2005 and 2007 to approximately 24% of the labor force. President Vázquez and the Broad Front also overhauled the tax system to make it more progressive, reducing the value-added tax and replacing the tax on wages with a personal income tax that exempted the poorest 60%.

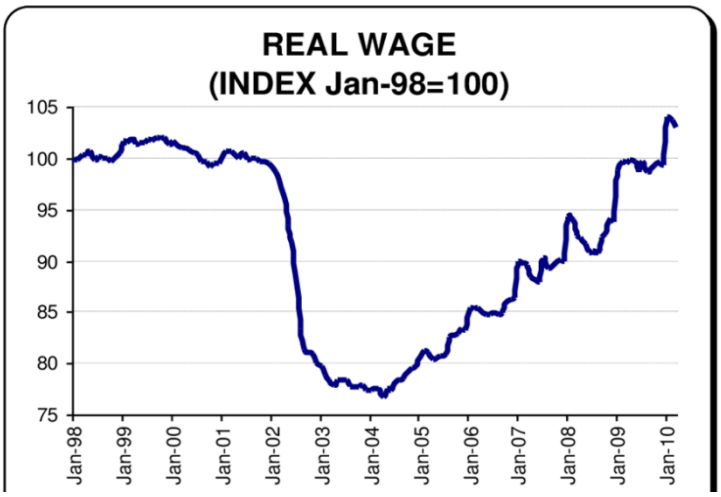
Public policies for labor relations may be one of the spheres where the historical identity of the Broad Front has been reaffirmed more significantly. The Uruguayan left has historically maintained a close relationship with labor unions. "This kinship was a decisive factor in the 1960s political events, which led firstly to the unification of the national labor federation (1964) and afterward to the foundation of the Frente Amplio [Broad Front] (1971). In a typical social democratic path, a fundamental connection was forged between the unions and the left party, though each part also managed to maintain significant and shifting margins of autonomy" (Lanzaro, 2011, p. 34). Such a relationship has strongly reflected in the Broad Front administrations. For instance, in the first term of Tabaré Vázquez, almost thirty members of the initial team were of union extraction.

Therefore, the policy adopted by the first Vázquez administration with respect to labor relations had the clear stamp of the left and reinforced the relationship between the Broad Front and the unions. Perhaps, the most noteworthy measure in this area was the reinstatement of the Salary Councils[2]. These are tripartite councils made up of government representatives, businesses and workers, which institutionalize collective negotiations by branch of activity, in order to determine salaries and regulate labor relations.

The institution of the Salary Councils stimulated the formalization of work. They include, in addition to the traditional workforce, public employees, rural laborers and domestic workers. The good results of the economy and the actions taken by the government have increased the value of the salaries. The Broad Front administrations sought to reverse the fall in real private salaries, which amounted to a reduction of 25% between1998 and 2004. However, under the governments of the Uruguayan reformed left, salaries have been recovering year after year. For

example, by the end of the period 2005-2010, they reached almost five points above the 1998 level, as can be seen in the below figure.

Figure 1 – Real Wage Evaluation (1998-2010)



Source: República Oriental del Uruguay (2010)

3.3 Social policy

In the context of social policy, the governments of the Uruguayan reformed left have developed several actions that reinforce the presence of the political dimension in the approach to social welfare, as well as reinforce the intervention of the State in this context. Some of such actions are as follows:

1. Development of a strategy that combines universal benefits and policies targeted at the most vulnerable sectors (children, young people and female heads of household). This included the launch of conditional transfer programs (CTPs).
2. The creation of the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) as a new centralized social authority, which shares jurisdiction with the Social Security Bank (BPS) and the Ministry of Health.
3. The Equity Plan, a permanent program of social protection, which prioritizes young people and their parents, but it also covers other vulnerable groups, such as the elderly. It centers on cash transfers, making new contributions to old-age pensions and especially to family allowances.

4. The "Work for Uruguay" program, which offers temporary employment and training courses, attempting to construct routes out of poverty.
5. Institutionalization of social policy programs such as State programs, allowing social provisions to reach beneficiaries on the basis of rights and via bureaucratic channels rather than through clientele linkages.

The priority given to social policy is reflected in the increase in social spending. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, between 2004 and 2008, overall public spending increased each year by 30% in absolute terms, and public social spending per capita, in turn, went up, both in absolute and relative terms, having an accumulated increase of 41% in real terms during this period, putting public social spending above the average percentage of GDP spent in Latin America (CEPAL, 2009).

3.4 Human rights policy

In the area of human rights, the policies of the Broad Front administrations have achieved a great expansion. Such policies have positioned Uruguay on the leading edge of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQI+) rights in Latin America by allowing LGBTQI+ individuals to serve openly in the military, legalizing adoption by same-sex couples, allowing individuals to change official documents to reflect their gender identities, and legalizing same-sex marriage. Moreover, the Uruguayan reformed left has approved the decriminalization of abortion and the regulation of the Cannabis market, from production to consumption.

The regulation of the cannabis market is one of the boldest policies of the Broad Front administrations. It was a decision of President José Mujica taking into account two aims: on the one hand, to reduce the potential risks and harmful effects of smoking marijuana for recreational purposes, and on the other hand to

take the cannabis market out of the hands of criminal networks and to separate the licit cannabis market from the illicit market of more harmful substances. The Uruguayan regulation instituted three ways of access to cannabis: home grow, commercial purchase and cannabis clubs. Law 19.172 established, for instance, the following rules for regulation:

1. Cultivation of hemp for industrial purposes (containing less than 1 per cent THC) falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries.
2. Cultivation of psychoactive cannabis (containing more than 1 per cent THC) for medical purposes, scientific research or "for other purposes" requires prior authorization from the Institute for the Regulation and Control of Cannabis (IRCCA).
3. Cultivation of cannabis for personal consumption or shared use at home is permitted up to six plants with a maximum harvest of 480 grams per year.
4. Membership clubs with a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 45 members, operating under control of the IRCCA, are allowed to cultivate up to 99 cannabis plants with an annual harvest proportional to the number of members and conforming to the established quantity for non-medical use.
5. IRCCA licenses pharmacies to sell psychoactive cannabis for therapeutic purposes on the basis of medical prescription, and for non-medical use up to a maximum of 40 grams per registered adult per month.
6. Any plantation operating without prior authorization shall be destroyed upon the order of a judge.

Conclusion

Broad Front perspectives and the policies it has implemented in Uruguay have instituted a new conception of the left in Latin America; a reformed left. Its public policies focus on institutional social democratic capacity-building with counter-hegemonic approaches and initiatives. In this way, both regulation of the cannabis

market and the valorization of the State's role in economic activity and social policies are evidence of such.

The political success of the Broad Front can be explained, according to what Lanzaro (2011) states, as a result of three factors: i) its development as a catch-all and electoral party, maintaining nevertheless a relatively robust organization as well as its kinship with trade unions and social movements; ii) its structure as a coalition-party, unifying all left groups and having at the same time a wide electoral dragnet; and iii) its two-pronged strategy, combining opposition against neoliberal reforms and privatizations, in defense of the statist tradition, with trends toward ideological moderation.

The large ideological spectrum of the Broad Front (including socialists, communists, popular-nationalists, ex Tupamaro guerrillas converted to electoral politics, Christian left, and even sectors split from the traditional parties) constitutes a structure that casts a wide electoral dragnet, making it a strong and competitive political force. On the other hand, the Uruguayan reformed left administration is a case of majority presidentialism, which includes strong presidential leadership and operates at the same time as a sort of cabinet government due to the FA's nature as a coalition-party.

In short, the transformations of the Broad Front governments involve, for example, advances in human rights and education, tax reform in favor of a progressive income, reinstatement of the salary councils, social policies that target cash transfers, universal family allowances and improvements in health, as well as labor policies that favor the working class.

However, as we have seen, the victory of the right National Party, in 2019, represented the end of 15 years of Board Front rule in Uruguay. But unlike other

progressive governments from the pink tide era, the Broad Front leaves government with poverty and inequality at historic lows. Its defeat can be explained by the political exhaustion of 'first generation' reforms, like reducing poverty and inequality, failing to convince voters it could tackle complex 'second generation' problems, such as crime. Indeed, the statistics are as clear as they are paradoxical: Uruguayans live in a more egalitarian country with rising levels of crime.

On tackling first generation problems, the Broad Front was among the most successful governments in Latin American history. Uruguay eradicated extreme poverty by the mid-2010s and overall poverty currently stands at eight percent. Income inequality - measured by the GINI index - stood at 0.380 in 2017, closer to European levels than that reported for its regional neighbors (Saldias, 2019). As of 2019, Uruguay also has the highest per capita income in the region.

The Broad Front's political, economic and social legacy is strong. The empowerment of social organizations, especially the unions, helped to raise the voices of workers that aim to improve the quality of democracy and increase meaningful pluralism. The tree of the reformed left has already flourished in Latin America.

References

Apple, M. (2001): *Educating the "right" way*, New York: Routledge Falmer.

Amarante, V.; Arim, R.; Dean, Andrés (2011): *Protecting workers against unemployment in Uruguay*. Montevideo: UDELAR/IDB.

Arim, R. and Zoppolo, G (2000): *Distribución y estructura de las remuneraciones: Uruguay 1986/2000*, Presentation at the IV Seminar of the Red de Economía Social, Panama, 17 to 20 July, 2000.

Benjamin, W. (2006): *Selected writings: volume 4, 1938-1940*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Bentacur, N. (2006): Education reform and school performance. Some thoughts on the experiences of Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, in *Cuaernos del CLAECH*, 93, p. 9-25.

Bucheli, M. (2000): *El empleo de los trabajadores con estudios universitarios y su prima salarial*, DT 08/00, Economics Department, Social Sciences Faculty, University of the Republic, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Bucheli, M. (1992): *Los logros educativos y los niveles de ingreso*, DT 03/92, Economics Department, Social Sciences Faculty, University of the Republic, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Bucheli, M. and C. Casacuberta (2001): *Sobreeducación y prima salarial de los trabajadores con estudios universitarios en el Uruguay*, DT 06/01, Economics Department, Social Sciences Faculty, University of the Republic, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Bucheli, M. and M. Furtado (2000): *La evolución de la participación de las fuentes de ingreso en Uruguay (1986/1997)*, presentation at the social economy seminar organized by the Red de Economía Social and the Uruguayan chapter of LACEA/BID/BM.

Casacuberta, C. (2005): *Education and labor market outcomes in Uruguay*, Background Paper - Policy Notes – Uruguay.

Castañeda, J. G. (2006): 'Latin America's left turn', in *Foreign Affairs*, 85(3), p. 28-43.

CEPAL (2009): *Panorama social de América Latina*, Santiago do Chile: Naciones Unidas/CEPAL.

Hudson, R. A.; Meditz, S. W. (1992): *Uruguay: a country study*, 2nd, Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

INEEd (2015): *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools: Country Background Report for Uruguay*. Montevideo: Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (INEEd).

INEEd (2014): *Informe sobre el estado de la educación en Uruguay 2014.* Montevideo: Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (INEEd).

Lanzaro, J. (2011): Uruguay: A government social democratic in Latin America, in Steven Levitsky & Kenneth Roberts (eds.), *The resurgence of the Latin American left*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lloyds Bank (2020): *The economic context of Uruguay*, https://www.lloydsbanktrade.com/en/market-potential/uruguay/economical-context (accessed March 15, 2020)

Marrero, A.; Pereira, L. (2014): How public is Uruguay's publication education? in *Global Dialogue – Magazine of the International Sociological Association,* vol. 4, issue 1.

McQuillan, M. (2015): Inerview: the "philosopher president of Uruguay", in Times Higher Education, April 9, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/interview-the-philosopher-president-of-uruguay/2019472.article, (accessed March 19, 2020)

Meyer, P. J. (2010): Uruguay: Political and Economic Conditions and U.S. Relations, in *Congressional Research Service*, Washington, DC.

Miles, D. and Rossi, M. (1999): *Geographic concentration and structure of wages in developing countries: the case of Uruguay*. Montevideo: UDELAR.

Mincer, J. (1974): *Schooling experience an earnings*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Mujica, J. (2009): *Discurso de José Mujica a los intelectuales*. Montevideo: Frente Amplio.

Rabuffetti, M. (2014): *José Mujica – La revolución tranquila*, Montevideo: Aguilar.

República Oriental del Uruguay (2010): *Uruguay en cifras 2010*, Montevideo: INE.
Saldias, N. (2019): The Broad Front's legacy: Failure to reform Uruguay's educational system, in *Global Americans*, December 10, https://theglobalamericans.org/2019/12/the-broad-fronts-legacy-failure-to-reform-uruguays-educational-system/ (accessed March 15, 2020).
Santiago, P.; Ávalos, B.; Burns, T.; Moduchowicz, A.; Radinger, T. (2016). *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Uruguay*. Paris: OECD.
Santos, B. de. S. (2001): Nuestra America: Reinventing a subaltern paradigm of recognition and redistribution, in *Theory, Culture and Society*, London, vol. 18(2-3), p. 185-217.
Sanroman, Graciela (2006): *Returns to schooling in Uruguay*, Montevideo: UDELAR.
Swargeman, D-J. (2014): *Populism and New Left in Latin America*, in Political Science Department (Master Political Science), University of Amsterdam,
Torello, M. and Casacuberta, C. (1997): *La medición del capital humano en Uruguay*, Presentation at the Jornadas de Economía del Banco Central del Uruguay.
Un Solo Uruguay (2018): *Definición de la identidad de un Solo Uruguay*, http://unsolouruguay.uy/definicion-de-la-identidad-de-un-solo-uruguay/ (accessed March 21, 2020).
UNESCO (2015): *Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Uruguay*. Montevideo: UNESCO.
UNICEF (2015): *Annual report 2015 – Uruguay*, New York: UNICEF.
Yoldi, O. (2010): Uruguay: the quest for just society, in *Refugee Transitions*, Fairfield, 24, p. 2-7.
Zibechi, R. (2007): The crisis in Uruguay: the long view, in *Nacla*, September 25.

Notes

[1] During the crisis Uruguay's economy contracted by 11%, unemployment climbed to 21%, and over one-third of the country's 3.5 million citizens found themselves living below the poverty line (Meyer, 2010).

[2] In Uruguay, the Salary Councils were instituted by law for the first time in 1943. The aim was to deepen the inward-oriented model of development of the time, creating a "new world" of relations between capital and labor. The system was terminated in 1968.

Author Details

Ivonaldo Leite is a Professor at the Center for Applied Sciences and Education/Department of Education, Federal University of Paraíba.