Political parties all across the Latin American political spectrum find themselves in crisis. A lot has been written about corruption in the traditional parties, the syndrome of charismatic and anti-establishment, anti-candidates who have entered politics outside of the traditional parties, the fiscal crisis of the Latin American states, among other factors that have weakened the parties that once had a lock on political power in their respective countries. A critical perspective, however, requires that we postulate these and other similar kinds of observations not as causes but rather as effects of more systemic (and in some cases, counter-systemic) dynamics that have become prevalent in the region. If we wish to reaffirm the necessity of contextualising such phenomena in the framework of structural and conjunctural tendencies of the changing political economy in the Western hemisphere, it would seem inevitable that we move towards linking those dynamics to a more general, overarching tendency towards crisis in the model of neoliberal capitalism.

Following this line of reasoning, I had argued at the onset of the decade (Dello Buono, 2002a; 2002b)

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1 This chapter is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented at the International Scientific Seminar “La crisis del neoliberalismo y los futuros derroteros en América Latina” at the Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, Mexico in February, 2003.
that a macro-conceptualisation of the changing panorama of the Latin American political parties should be contemplated by taking into account the following conditioning factors:

- A party’s socio-historical construction and traditional base of support
- Structural changes in the regional economy associated with increasing globalisation
- U.S. hegemony and interventionism throughout the region
- Extra-constitutional involvement of national military forces in politics
- Regional networks of narcotics trafficking
- The paradigmatic crisis of the post-war left.

Five years later after making these arguments, it would seem apparent that many things have changed. Nevertheless, I will argue in the present essay that with little modification, the factors listed above continue in diverse combinations being principle factors that condition the development of national contexts. These factors delimit many of the principal dilemmas that states in practically all parts of the region of Latin America and the Caribbean continue to face, thus defining the political and ideological context in which political parties struggle to reproduce their self-definition and in some cases their very survival. This is especially relevant in so far as parties form their conceptions about the field of possible alternatives in the face of the neoliberal debacle. In the final analysis, what is changing in Latin America today is principally the magnitude of the accumulating crisis of neoliberalism and it is precisely that which I want to reflect upon in the present work.

The Socio-Historical Construction of Latin American Political Parties

To speak of political parties, it seems logical to take as ones starting point the particular history of each in a given country. Political parties always develop in a macro-context that is fundamentally national. Beginning here, it is possible to establish a set of social factors that delimit political party formation and their institutional development. As is well established in the field of critical sociology, the class struggle framework has offered the most convincing analytical approach for characterising the dynamics and constant movement of this social context. From a dialectical point of view, it is possible to analyse the basic contradictions that determine class conflicts as well