

General strike in Argentina over killing of left-wing youth

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The Argentina Workers Central (CTA), one of the country's major labor federations, organized a 24-hour strike Thursday over the murder of Mariano Ferreyra, a 23-year-old left-wing youth. Ferreyra was killed by thugs from the rail union, which works closely with the government.

A CTA press release called on workers to strike and march on the Plaza de Mayo square, across from Argentina's Government House. "Due to the actions of the rail workers union, who in collusion with the federal police, attacked a demonstration of outsourced workers with firearms and killed Mariano Ferreyra, the CTA has decided to call a nationwide strike and a march to the Plaza de Mayo."

The CTA represents 1.4 million workers, many of them public employees, and is generally considered more militant than the larger General Confederation of Labor (CGT).

The strike was widely observed and tens of thousands marched on the Plaza de Mayo. Subway workers opened the turnstiles and allowed protesters and other passengers to travel for free.

Workers from the Kraft Food factory in Pacheco, Buenos Aires blocked the Pan American Highway early in the morning, while suburban rapid transit service was paralyzed. Employees of the LAN domestic airline also stopped work.

The protest strike was a manifestation of class solidarity in opposition to the mafia-like killing. Protesting workers and students rightly saw, in the killing of Ferreyra, an attack on all workers.

Ferreyra was killed on noon Wednesday, as sacked railroad workers were setting up picket lines and blocking railroad tracks near the industrial city of Avellaneda, south of Buenos Aires. Thugs from the Rail Union (Unión Ferroviaria—UF) attacked the

pickets and shot the young militant dead.

According to reports, federal police stood by while the protesters were violently attacked, giving the rail union thugs free rein. The police also fired rubber bullets at the protesters.

Ferreyra was a member of the Workers Party (Partido Obrero, PO). Two other PO members, Elsa Rodriguez and Nelson (no last name given) and two other rail workers were also seriously injured by bullets and hospitalized. The PO web site reported that Rodriguez had to undergo a delicate brain surgery and is now in stable condition. Ferreyra, shot in the chest, was rushed to a hospital in an ambulance, but died on the way.

The pickets were demanding that a group of about 100 workers be reinstated in the suburban Roca passenger line, which connects Avellaneda with downtown Buenos Aires. Many of these workers are known in Argentina as *tercerizados*. They are former full-time workers whose jobs have been contracted out. Their jobs are extremely precarious and they earn very little money. Some of these workers, such as those that clean stations restrooms, work for tips. Others earn half of their former wages. The UF does not recognize or accept them as railroad workers.

This is not the first time that union squads have been used as proxies for federal police and security forces. A similar confrontation took place in September. In both cases, police officials were in the area, but did not intervene.

Right-wing layers of the Argentina trade union bureaucracy have a long tradition of collaboration with Argentine military and security forces in the kidnapping, disappearance and execution of union militants and socialists.

Argentine unions played a key role in the creation of *terceristas*, a policy begun under President Carlos

Menem in the 1990s and continued by every regime since. Today, 40 percent of the labor force is in this “informal” sector. The use of contract labor has gone beyond the private sector, to include government and university employees.

As rail services have been outsourced, UF bureaucrats have profited by employing, as subcontractors and at much lower pay, the very same workers that they supposedly represented before they were laid off.

On Saturday, Buenos Aires police arrested UF official Pablo Díaz, who is suspected of having organized the goon squad and being the intellectual author of the crime.

On Sunday, Ferreyra’s alleged shooter, Cristian Favale, turned himself in. A member of the UF, who appears to have been part of the UF contingent, provided police with the information that led to the arrests.

The Buenos Aires daily *Página 12* indicated that according to its sources, Favale, who was equipped with a 38-caliber gun, was the only shooter. Favale admits that he was there, but claims that he did not shoot anyone and that he is being set up. Federal officials, however, have said that they have iron clad proof that Favale killed Ferreyra.

No confidence can be placed in the federal investigation into the event, as the government has close ties with the rail union and a direct interest in the suppression of working class opposition.

Eyewitnesses report that there were several armed individuals among those who took aim and shot Ferreyra and the other pickets. Confirming their testimony, TV network video showed that a number of windshields of cars parked near the scene were shot out.

Favale, a member of the *Defensa y Justicia* soccer club, works at a meat packing plant and is close to the UF bureaucracy. Favale’s Facebook profile page contains photos of him and government officials, including Economics Minister Amado Bodou and Education Minister Alberto Sileoni.

While Favale denies that these photos connect him to the current government of Cristina Kirchner, their existence makes it difficult for the government to distance itself from the killing.

Government officials, instead, have linked Favale to

Alberto Trezza, who was provincial sub secretary of Rail Transport under former Argentine president and Buenos Aires Governor Eduardo Duhalde, a political rival of Kirchner. In 2002 two other left-wing militants, Maximiliano Costeki and Darío Santillán, were shot and killed in Avellaneda by security forces during Duhalde’s presidency. That shooting was also followed by a one-day general strike organized by the CTA.

Buenos Aires daily *La Nación* describing as “commercial” the relationship between Favale and Díaz, who, they claim, has hired Favale for past violent demonstrations. The same sources say that Díaz contracted Favale and 10 other violent individuals to form a 90-man squad to break up the group of *terceristas*, sacked workers and PO militants that were on the way to barricade the train tracks.

While the *World Socialist Web Site* has political differences with the PO, it unequivocally condemns the killing of Ferreyra, an action that demonstrates the utterly reactionary role of the trade union bureaucracy in Argentina.



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