The Argentine general elections and the Workers' Left Front

Rafael Azul
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Argentines will vote for president and the legislature this Sunday, October 25. The election takes place in the context of a collapsing social safety net; political, economic, and inflationary crises; increasing unemployment and a looming attack on basic medical and welfare institutions.

In an article published last Sunday, the *Financial Times* argued that the Argentine economy is at a turning point. A slump in commodity prices is pummeling Brazil and is beginning to affect Argentina. In addition, US vulture funds suing for payment of $1.3 billion left over from the 2001-2002 Argentine debt crisis have locked Argentina out of Wall Street financial markets.

The leading contenders to succeed president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (restricted under Argentine law to two consecutive four-year terms) are Daniel Scioli (of the ruling Peronist faction "Front for Victory," FPV), Buenos Aires Mayor Mauricio Macri (Republican Proposal), and Sergio Massa (Renewal Front, Peronist). All are running on pro-business programs to attract foreign investment, settle with the vulture funds at the expense of workers and gut energy subsidies and other social programs.

The three main candidates represent factions of the bourgeois establishment. In the byzantine structure of Argentine politics, there have been eight decades of alternating governments between corporatist Peronism, the traditional bourgeois Radical Party, and the military, with each change in regime assisted by the Peronist trade union bureaucracy, Stalinism and various pseudo-left organizations, which have worked to block an independent movement of the working class.

The ruling "Kirchnerista" wing of the Peronist movement, the FPV, is spent, discredited and moving to the right. Scioli represents the FPV's most neo-liberal wing. He is banking on increasing oil and gas production in an effort to resolve Argentina's economic stagnation and increase government resources. To do that, he must settle with Wall Street and, with the aid of the Peronist union bureaucracy, discipline the working class to accept austerity measures.

Under these conditions, the Argentine pseudo-left is seeking to lend its services to the ruling class.

Among the political parties competing in this Sunday's vote is the Workers' Left Front (Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores, FIT), which is running over 1,500 candidates in provincial and national elections. The FIT is an electoral coalition formed in 2011 by various pseudo-left organizations that claim to be Trotskyist. Its main components are the Socialist Workers Party (Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo, PTS), the Workers Party (Partido Obrero, PO), and the Socialist Left (Izquierda Socialista, IS). Its presidential candidates, Nicolás del Caño and Myriam Bregman, were chosen in national state-run primaries held on August 9. Both are PTS members.

Its left rhetoric notwithstanding, the FIT does not represent a revolutionary socialist alternative for the working class. It has come forward to fill the political space left by the lurch to the right of the ruling Peronist party. As has been the case with such parties so many times throughout Latin American history, it seeks to subordinate the interests of the working class to the requirements of the national bourgeoisie.

The organizations from which the current FIT members descended were complicit in politically disarming the Argentine working class over the latter half of the 20th century, fostering illusions in Perón, then in Fidel Castro, followed by the Sandinistas and Stalinism. Many of their young working class followers were among the 30,000 tortured and murdered under the military junta.

The PTS and IS originated in the breakup of the Movement Towards Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS), in the aftermath of the death of its leader, Nahuel Moreno in 1987. Moreno, a one-time supporter of the Fourth International who broke with Trotskyism and internationalism in the 1960s, had been a proponent of subordinating the independent movement of the working class to the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces: Peronism in the 1950s, Castroism in the 1960s, Social Democracy in the 1970s and Stalinism in the 1980s.

The PO, also a nationalist tendency, had its origins in Silvio Frondizi's Movement of the Revolutionary Left (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, MIR-Praxis), which emerged in the 1960s, then under the name of Política Obrera. Frondizi, a radical sociologist and brother of Argentina's Radical Party President Arturo Frondizi, was murdered by the "Triple A" death squads in 1974. He had been a strong supporter of the Cuban Revolution and a proponent of "Guevaraism" as an

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"Indoamerican" form of Marxism.

Under the influence of the Yugoslavian, Algerian and Cuban revolutions (particularly the latter in the 1960s) Politica Obrera, though critical of Moreno, evolved along the same lines as MAS and the PTS, subordinating the interests of the working class to those of the radical petty bourgeoisie. PO's current leader, Jorge Altamira, is a master at using the language of revolutionary socialism to justify the PO's opportunist alliances with pseudo-left parties in France, Italy, Greece and elsewhere, as well as its membership in the FIT (which Altamira defends as a "united front").

The PO is formally allied to the Greek EEK (Workers Revolutionary Party) of Savas Michael-Matsas. When the British Workers Revolutionary Party split with the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1985, the EEK was the only section that supported WRP leader Gerry Healy. Michael-Matsas refused any discussion with the other sections of the ICFI, declaring that a "New era for the Fourth International" had dawned, which quickly found expression in support for Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* as the beginning of the "political revolution" in the Soviet Union. Since then, Michael-Matsas has maneuvered between Pasok, Syriza and the Stalinist KKE.

Relations between the PO and the EEK have been largely frozen since 2012, when the PO's Altamira called for a "government of the left" in Greece based on Syriza. This was contrary to the EEK's own policy, which was to provide Syriza with a "left" cover while seeking to unite with the collection of Maoists and various pseudo-left groups in the Antarsya coalition.

The PO's attitude towards the events in Greece provides the clearest insight into the intended role of the FIT in Argentina itself, which is to seek a similar "government of the left," i.e., a "left" government of the Argentine bourgeoisie with the task of imposing the dictates of international finance capital against the working class.

The FIT currently has three representatives in Argentina's federal House of Deputies, as well as representatives in some of the Argentine Provinces.

Its stated goal in the October ballot is to increase the number of representatives in national and provincial legislatures. On Thursday, at an event in Buenos Aires closing the campaign, del Caño called for a vote for the FIT to "elect new legislators that will be the pivot of every fight [of workers, women and youth]." Every pseudo-left grouping around the world would agree with such an empty formula.

The FIT is part of an international phenomenon: parties and coalitions that promote the interests of middle class layers whose privileges derive from capitalism and financial parasitism.

FIT places particular emphasis on the demographics of its candidates: youth, women and workers from the various struggles for which the PTS, IS and PO have been cheerleaders (in auto, oil, the food industry, among public employees, part-time workers, etc.). This is consistent with its concentration on politics of sexual and other forms of identity politics, the hallmark of pseudo-left parties the world over. Underlying it is a perspective that rejects the essential and revolutionary role of the working class in society and reduces the working class to just one more identity group.

The FIT program is a lowest common denominator of reformist demands. While calling for the independence of the trade unions, union democracy and the expulsion of the bureaucracy, it provides no indication of a revolutionary strategy for the conquest of power by the working class.

Lacking that, its demand for a workers government provides a big enough umbrella to accommodate regimes led by the likes of Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, and many others, to manage the crisis for the banks, regulate the class struggle and in the process subordinate the working class to the interests of better off sections of the middle class.

Like Syriza, Podemos, the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France, the German Left Party, the Italian Workers Communist Party and the Greek EEK, the FIT functions as an instrument of the capitalist class. Their role is to throw up political obstacles to the resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership, advancing the illusion that the insoluble crisis of world capitalism can be answered with a program of national reforms.

Such politics pose a deadly danger under conditions in which imperialism and the Argentine bourgeoisie are once again confronting an insoluble economic crisis for which their ultimate answer is the return of a brutal dictatorship to atomize the working class and destroy living standards and democratic rights.

The building of revolutionary internationalist working class political parties in Latin America involves an intransigent struggle against formations such as the FIT and their pseudo-left components. The decisive question in Argentina and internationally is the building of a new independent revolutionary party of the working class based upon a socialist and internationalist program. This requires the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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