

Right-wing presidential candidate Mauricio Macri elected in Argentina

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Last Sunday's elections in Argentina paint a portrait of an immensely polarized nation on the verge of a social explosion.

In a tight race, Mauricio Macri, of the right wing Cambiemos alliance, defeated Daniel Scioli, of the bourgeois nationalist (Peronist) Front for Victory (Frente Para la Victoria, FPV) in the second round of the Argentine presidential elections. Macri will be sworn in on December 10.

With nearly all the votes counted, Macri received 51.4 percent to Scioli's 48.6 percent, a difference of less than 600,000 votes out of the 26 million that were cast. Blank and spoiled ballots added up to a little over 623,000. As in the first round, held on October 25, some 80 percent of voters went to the polls, normal by Argentine standards.

A more complete picture emerges when one analyzes the result geographically. Buenos Aires governor Daniel Scioli narrowly won his own province (which had gone for Macri in the first round) plus 14 others, including the provinces in the oil-rich Patagonian region.

Macri, who is the mayor of the City of Buenos Aires, won the central and most populated provinces, the industrial heartland of the nation including Mendoza, Entre Ríos, Buenos Aires, Santa Fé and Córdoba. In the province of Córdoba, a center of auto and agricultural machinery manufacture (the most industrialized region in South America outside of Southern Brazil), Macri won more than 70 percent of the vote. In Santa Fé, second to Córdoba in industrial concentration, Macri won more than 55 percent of the vote.

Though he lost in Buenos Aires, Macri also handily defeated Scioli in the working class suburbs that envelop Buenos Aires and extend north along the Paraná River into Santa Fé.

Far from being an endorsement of Macri by workers, these results amount to a mass repudiation of the Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner administration and of Peronism by the working class and lower-middle class.

Popular anger is fed by the ongoing collapse of living conditions, as a result of entrenched economic stagnation. Argentina's central bank is fast running out of dollar reserves and cut off from international credit markets. A devaluation of the peso is all but certain, effectively slashing the purchasing power of Argentines, 40 percent of whom now labor as part of a giant "contingent" labor force.

Last July, the Argentine government denied as "untrue" the results of a study by the Argentine Catholic University that the country's poverty index, now at 28.7 percent (up from 27.3 percent last year) is on the rise. It was unable to produce its own figures, claiming that the government "is redefining its way of measuring poverty."

As a consequence of an accelerating housing crisis, land occupations have begun to take place, with workers demanding decent housing and living conditions.

In short, all the elements are lining up for an explosion of popular anger.

That the results reflect both the rejection of 12 years of FPV governments under the Kirchnerist wing of the Peronist movement, as well as the increasing alienation of the Argentine working class from the political establishment, is made all the more evident when one considers the candidates themselves. Both wealthy bourgeois politicians, they are very distant from the working class and defend the interests of the bourgeoisie, agribusiness and international finance.

Macri is the eldest son an Italian immigrant who became a multi-millionaire entrepreneur. Mauricio

Macri, who administered the family businesses, is also the former president of the Boca Juniors football (soccer) team, one of Argentina's most popular. For that and his reactionary politics he is often compared to Italy's Berlusconi.

In 2005, Macri created the Propuesta Republicana Party (Republican Proposal, PRO), a so-called "no politics" technocratic party. It was promoted as an alternative to the discredited and hated established parties—both the Peronist party and its traditional capitalist rival the Radical Civic Union (UCR)—whose policies had led to the Argentine payment crisis and economic depression of 2001-2002.

In 2007, Macri was elected mayor of the City of Buenos Aires. For the current election, PRO allied itself nationally with the UCR and with several other regional parties.

While not as wealthy as Macri, the well-to-do Daniel Scioli made his mark as a speedboat racer who won several international titles. Scioli was invited into politics by the right-wing Peronist Carlos Menem, who pursued a policy of wholesale privatizations (known at the time in Argentina as "El Modelo") in the 1990s. Menem ushered in the end of what remained of the economic model of state-owned industries and import substitution associated with Juan Domingo Peron's first government (1946-55).

Menem's policies, applauded by US President Bill Clinton and the International Monetary Fund, exacerbated social inequality and fed into an economic decline that was to culminate in the 2001-2002 financial implosion.

In 2007, after a stint as vice president in the Nestor Kirchner administration, Scioli was elected governor of Buenos Aires Province. A right-wing political opponent of president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, Scioli was selected to head the Front for Victory ticket by default, when it became clear that an increasingly angry electorate would have rejected any candidate associated with her government.

The polarization reflected in these results is magnified in the national Congress. The various parties that compose the FPV coalition—Peronist, Stalinist, Social Democratic and other bourgeois forces—have a majority in the Senate and control the most seats in the Chamber of Deputies. In recent declarations Macri has raised the possibility of ruling by decree to overcome

being blocked by a divided Congress.

In an interview with the *Financial Times* last October, Macri had promised to end Argentina's isolation from Wall Street financial markets through negotiations with vulture funds that hold Argentine debt and to remove regulations that allegedly stand in the way of big business investments. The payment of that debt, even under favorable terms for Argentina, will undoubtedly require a huge transfer of resources and pensions from workers to Wall Street.

Macri has also promised to devalue the Argentine peso and remove transportation, energy and other subsidies to the poor and middle class. Devaluation, attacks on social programs, deregulation—each of these measures represent an assault on jobs and living standards.

In an ominous declaration to the Madrid daily, *El País*, Macri also threatened the right of workers to resist, protest, strike and picket. "I believe in dialogue," he declared. "Those that think that they can use the picket line as a form of extortion will have trouble, because we will enforce the law."



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