

Argentine pseudo-left coalition FIT-U joins section of Peronist government in a “united front”

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On May 18, the misnamed Left and Workers Front-Unity (FIT-U) in Argentina co-hosted a “Federal March” in downtown Buenos Aires with several organizations that directly belong to the government of President Alberto Fernandez. Ostensibly organized to protest social austerity, several FIT-U outlets and officials presented this event as a “united front” with the Peronists.

The march included large contingents of the “piquetero” movements led by the Workers Party (PO) and the Socialist Workers Movement (MTS), as well as representatives of the Socialist Workers Party (PTS)—all leading partners of the FIT-U.

The “piqueteros” arose spontaneously amid the economic crises of the 1990s in the form of marches and roadblocks by thousands of workers thrown into unemployment or precarious and largely informal labor conditions, where they demanded jobs, training, social assistance and other social rights. Peronist and pseudo-left organizers then formed organizations to bring their protests under control.

The Federal March was led by the Peronist “piquetero” organizations, including most prominently the Unidad Piquetera coalition and the Trade Union of Popular Economy Workers (UTEP) founded and co-led by Juan Grabois, who is also a Vatican official and a presidential candidate for the ruling Peronist coalition “Frente de Todos.” The UTEP is currently led by Esteban “Gringo” Castro, a close friend and “favorite” organizer of President Fernandez.

While these forces had already organized joint demonstrations against the IMF, the Federal March and the press conference to announce it a week earlier had the character of joint political rallies.

The march helps set the stage for an electoral bloc between the main pseudo-left coalition in Argentina, which received 1.2 million votes nationally in 2021, and a section of the country’s main bourgeois party.

But even if the Peronists decide against such a coalition for now, the FIT-U has already provided a major service to the electoral calculations of a section of the “Frente de Todos.”

The Federal March was widely covered by the corporate media. Several thousand participants marched to the iconic Plaza de Mayo and then to the Ministry of Social Development, where they picketed for a few hours blocking streets until officials agreed to meet with them. It was a staged affair they have carried out numerous times.

The main slogan of the protests was “Drive out Tolosa Paz and the IMF,” referring to the hated minister of Social Development, Victoria Tolosa Paz, and the austerity program agreed between the Fernandez administration and the IMF.

The FIT-U representatives also used the event to channel growing

opposition behind the union bureaucracy more generally. For instance, the PTS called for the so-called “recovered unions” led by pseudo-left officials to join their unity with the Peronists, while appealing to the Peronist CGT and CTA union confederations to organize a “general strike.”

During the march, Eduardo Belliboni, the leader of the PO’s “piquetero” movement, called Polo Obrero, declared: “Hundreds of thousands will participate across the country in this action, which doesn’t erase our differences with the UTEP, because they contribute to an austerity-driven government, and we are fighting it. But we are going to be united for our demands, which is always what really matters.”

Gabriel Solano, the PO leader and potential presidential candidate, said: “We are demanding from here that the unions break with the government, that they fulfill their responsibility. It’s not right that the CGT carries out electoral rallies in support of [Economy Minister] Massa, when he should be defending the workers.”

The claim that their Peronist allies merely “contribute” to the government and the demand that they break with it only serve to hide the character of these forces, which openly belong to the capitalist government in power as it implements a historic attack on living standards at the behest of global finance capital.

The leader of Movimiento Evita, Emilio Pérsico is the Secretary for Social Economy within the Ministry of Social Development. Pérsico has declared, “We will support this government until its last day,” and his symbolic criticisms are no indication that this will change. Several “piquetero” officials also belong to government advisory councils.

Moreover, these organizations manage massive funds from the Ministry of Social Development, while the UTEP and other unions manage multi-million cash cows named “social works” to hire private health care providers (in many cases owned by their own families and partners) for their members. Camouflaged as protest organizations, these are in reality branches of the state bureaucracy, independent of which party is in power.

The march has quickly confirmed the warnings made for years by the *World Socialist Web Site* about such a betrayal. Only three weeks before the march, the WSWS wrote, “The record of the Argentine pseudo-left shows that the calls for ‘unity’ are nothing but shameless efforts to form a coalition like Syriza”—the “Coalition of the Radical Left” that was voted into power in Greece in 2015 promising to oppose the austerity diktats of the IMF only to impose even more draconian measures than its predecessors.

This has nothing to do with a “united front” as understood by the

Marxists: a set of immediate, practical and concrete measures by parties and organizations of the working class to defend workers and their organizations from the repressive onslaught of its class enemy.

The pseudo-left claims that the participants at the march and all trade unions are “workers organizations” based on the claim that they enjoy a mass adherence of workers. Based on this standard, the Vatican, where their friend Grabois is an official, as much as the Peronist parties and the Peronist trade union bureaucracy are all “workers organizations.”

Along with all other nationally based labor and reformist organizations, the Peronist bureaucracy responded to the globalization of production and finance capital by abandoning all serious efforts to defend workers living standards and rights in order to extract concessions and attract capital. Like trade union apparatuses elsewhere, the Peronist unions are controlled by a petty-bourgeois, nationalist bureaucracy that is deeply hostile to the working class and integrated into the capitalist state.

The Federal March has provoked limited criticisms from Workers Politics, a substantial faction driven out of the PO in 2019 led by Jorge Altamira. The group marched separately on May 17 demanding that the Ministry of Social Development receive their list of economic demands and give them a hearing. It has maintained its own “piquetero” faction, named Polo Obrero “Tendency.”

No different from the official Federal March, the “Tendency” blocked the 9 de Julio Avenue until they received an appointment with the government.

Workers Politics condemned their former comrades for becoming “troops for the maneuvers of the UTEP and Grabois ... a prop of the state,” adding that, “We are witnessing a complete violation of the basic principles of class independence.”

However, the Polo Obrero “Official” and the “Tendency” both fulfill the role of props for the union bureaucracy and the Peronist government, making the most impoverished and casualized sections of working class believe that all they can hope for is holding talks with right-wing capitalist authorities while protesting to pressure them and their union backers.

In fact, this was always the purpose of Polo Obrero. In the 1999 statement calling for its formation, the Partido Obrero warned that struggles against social attacks were increasingly and “fundamentally taking place outside of the trade unions,” including the movements of “piqueteros” and the “self-organized.” In response, the PO proposed “another strategy and leadership” that would claim to be fighting to “drive out the bureaucracy and renew the trade unions as organs of the class struggle.”

Today, like the UTEP and other “piquetero” organizations, the Polo Obrero operates no differently from a trade union bureaucracy and is financed through dues that add up to hundreds of millions of pesos yearly.

The opportunism of the constellation of pseudo-left tendencies in Argentina was actually summarized by Workers Politics in an article trying to square its ongoing call for an electoral coalition of the entire left with its criticisms of the FIT-U. Its former legislator and leading member, Marcelo Ramal wrote on May 16:

“Every front, if you think about it seriously, is an opportunist formation because it groups different positions and strategies. Under certain circumstances, given everything, they may allow the ‘real movement’ to move forward. It’s considerably better to have a front between organizations with perfectly differentiated programs from each other than a dissolution into a common party.”

Such a formulation opens the door to “fronts” with any political force as long as it’s characterized as part of the “real movement.”

The origins of the MST, PTS and the Socialist Left in the FIT-U date back to the implosion of the Movement Toward Socialism after the death in 1987 of its leader Nahuel Moreno, who had broken with the International Committee of the Fourth International to join the Pabloite United Secretariat in 1963.

Along with the degenerated Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the United States, which had previously led the ICFI’s struggle against Pabloism, Moreno had used the 1959 Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara to openly abandon Trotskyism. Along with the Pabloites, Moreno held that a petty-bourgeois guerrilla movement had accomplished a socialist revolution and the establishment of a workers state in Cuba, proving that the development of a Marxist party in the working class was no longer required.

The PO was founded in 1964 by Jorge Altamira as a middle-class group radicalized by the Cuban Revolution that had belonged to the Guevaraist Movement of the Revolutionary Left (Praxis), founded by Silvio Frondizi. The PO aimed to “regroup” all the tendencies claiming to be Trotskyist and has since worked to provide a “revolutionary” cover to Pabloites, Morenoites, Lambertistes, and most recently, Russian Stalinists.

The pseudo-left milieu in Argentina and internationally speaks for layers of the middle class that find in their political accommodation to the existing bureaucracies that defend capitalism a tool to politically disarm the working class and advance their careers within politics, the trade unions, academia and other realms.

These forces have not only adapted to sections of the Argentine ruling class, who ultimately do the bidding for US imperialism—for instance, Grabois’s Frente Patria Grande party joined a unanimous vote of the Peronists in Congress for welcoming US troops to Argentina. But the FIT-U has directly aligned itself with US imperialism, with several of its leading partners supporting and sending funds and volunteers for NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine.

As the pseudo-left accelerates its preparations for another historic betrayal of the working class, the urgency for the building of sections of the ICFI in Argentina and throughout Latin America as the genuine Trotskyist leadership of the international working class cannot be overstressed.



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