

# Fascistic candidate places first in Argentine presidential primaries

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In Sunday's primaries in Argentina, fascistic presidential candidate Javier Milei placed first with 30 percent of the vote, exposing the profound crisis gripping the South American country's entire political setup.

Forty years after the US-backed military dictatorship that unleashed a wave of fascist terror that involved the torture and killing of tens of thousands of left-wing workers, peasants, and intellectuals, Milei's Liberty Advances, a far-right party that has whitewashed and defended the crimes of the dictatorship, threatens to come to power. Milei has also expressed sympathies for the fascistic former presidents Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil and Donald Trump of the United States.

The results, however, don't signify the emergence of a mass base of support for fascism. Not only was the abstention rate historically high—over 35 percent abstained or casted blank or null ballots—but most media reports acknowledge that Milei's actual proposals for the dollarization of the economy, abolishing the Central Bank, a “shock therapy” of even more aggressive social austerity and privatizations, radical anti-abortion legislation, among others, are overwhelmingly unpopular.

Instead, the Milei victory reflects above all the enormous popular anger and lack of a genuine left-wing alternative to those responsible for the intensified destruction of the living standards of workers. This has intensified sharply with the end of the commodities boom in 2014-15, the murderous policy of mass COVID-19 infections and deaths, and the growing repression against workers' struggles.

At the same time, the rise of the far right in Argentina is part of a global process where the ruling elites are employing the media and parliamentary politics to elevate fascist forces in preparation for a brutal

crackdown against the escalating class struggle.

The leading Peronist wing under former president and current Vice-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, their coalition partners and the Peronist trade union bureaucracies, have enforced these attacks.

The coalition of the ruling Peronist parties, which have represented the preferred form of bourgeois rule by the Argentine ruling class and imperialism since the dictatorship, saw their vote plummet from 47.65 percent in 2019 to 27.27 percent today. Their presidential candidate will be the hated Economy Minister Sergio Massa, who has been the face of the International Monetary Fund's austerity program under the incumbent President Alberto Fernández.

The right-wing coalition Together for Change received 28.7 percent of the vote and its presidential candidate will be Patricia Bullrich, who represents the most conservative, law-and-order wing of the coalition. As security minister under President Mauricio Macri, she oversaw repeated operations to repress mass strikes and protests, including illegal spying on public employees.

Two other tickets qualified for the General Elections that will take place on October 22. Juan Schiaretti will represent On our Country's Behalf, an amalgam of dissident Peronists, the Socialist Party, and Christian Democrats.

Finally, Myriam Bregman of the Morenoite Socialist Workers Party (PTS) won the presidential nomination for the so-called Left Workers Front-Unity (FIT-U). Despite the massive increase in poverty—affecting over 40 percent of the population and 60 percent of children—and the ongoing wave of strikes and protests largely in opposition to the Peronist union bureaucracy and in opposition to the traditional ruling parties, the pseudo-left saw its share of the vote drop from 2.86

percent in 2019 to 2.65 percent.

In a recap of the PASO election, Bregman attributed Milei's frontrunner status entirely to the Fernández government. "It is the Peronists who must explain," she said. In reality, the FIT-U's inability to capitalize on mass social opposition reflects the fact that masses of workers and youth see through its radical populist phraseology and see it as just a satellite of the Peronist parties and union bureaucracies.

By blocking the way for a left-wing alternative in the form of a genuine Trotskyist leadership in the working class, the FIT-U is mainly to blame politically for the electoral emergence of Milei. And in response, to the far-right threat, the FIT-U is only doubling down on their efforts to channel opposition behind Peronism and the trade union bureaucracy by promoting nationalist sentiments and identity politics, which will only facilitate the growth of the far-right.

Facing the prospect of a major escalation of the attacks against living standards and social services, Bregman declared on Sunday, "We women have a special challenge facing so much patriarchal reaction, facing so many candidates that have erased us."

In Argentina today, with negative reserves in its Central Bank, accelerating inflation, now estimated at 116 percent per year, and with its finances effectively controlled by the International Monetary Fund, the working class is increasingly taking to the streets. So far this year there have been mass strikes and protests by teachers, health workers, transit workers, dockworkers, steel and tire workers.

Just the week before the primaries, dockworkers in Buenos Aires Terminal 5 protested and denounced their union for making a deal with Maersk for allowing the use of temps and other contingency workers.

And the national and provincial governments of every stripe have demonstrated time and time again that their only response will be police state measures and further social austerity. Thousands marched and rallied last Friday in downtown Buenos Aires against the death of Facundo Molares. Molares, a 47-year-old political activist, journalist and former guerrilla fighter in Colombia, was suffocated similarly to George Floyd by the Buenos Aires police at a peaceful political rally last week.

Even while the vote counting was taking place, in Jujuy Province a gang of police attacked a campground

of protesters campaigning against lithium contracts being negotiated by the government. The police took their possessions and destroyed much of their equipment. The day after the balloting, a wildcat strike by baggage handlers paralyzed airports in Buenos Aires, Cordoba, and Mendoza.

The election took place in the midst of the imposition by the International Monetary Fund of a new conditional agreement backed by the Biden administration but yet to be fully vetted. Argentina is to receive 7.5 billion US dollars after the primaries, which will in part be used to pay a 3.5 billion debt that is overdue.

The agreement obligates the Fernandez administration to cut government deficits to 1.9 percent of yearly GDP (down from 2.6 percent), which will require a 'hardening' of fiscal policies in the remaining months of this year. To achieve this goal, the IMF 'recommends' raising electric and gas bills and controls on social spending, with cuts to provinces and to government enterprises.

Milei, Bullrich, and Massa, whatever their tactical differences, agree on the main strategy demanded by the IMF: to make the working class pay for the terminal crisis of Argentine capitalism.

What is required to defeat this consensus policy within the Argentine ruling class is a revolutionary leadership with a program that will unite the increasingly explosive struggles among Argentine workers with those of their class brothers and sisters throughout the Americas and internationally for world socialist revolution.



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