

The election of Milei and the breakdown of Peronism and bourgeois democracy in Argentina

Andrea Lobo, Tomas Castanheira
24 November 2023

Last Sunday's election of the fascistic TV personality Javier Milei as president of Argentina by a shockingly wide margin of 11 percent against Peronist candidate Sergio Massa, minister of the economy in the incumbent government, has major political and global implications for the working class.

Every major city, except for a few sections of Buenos Aires, and 20 out of 23 provinces voted for Milei, who entered official politics only two years ago. Milei is known for his Hitlerian outbursts against government spending and the poor, his adoration for US imperialism and Israel, and his obscurantist beliefs, including claims that he receives advice from his dead dog.

The leading sections of the Argentine ruling class and imperialism have by-and-large lined up behind Milei and egged on his planned "shock therapy" of social austerity and privatizations, as well as the buildup of military and paramilitary repressive forces.

Bloomberg cites an Argentine tycoon, for instance, who said, "Only a madman can do what's needed to take the country forward." Former President Mauricio Macri, who is offering his party to help Milei rule, called on national television for Milei's "revolutionary nucleus of youth" to crack down on the "orcs" who protest his policies, in a blatant appeal for the formation of fascist gangs.

The incumbent vice president and de facto leader of Peronism, Cristina Kirchner, cancelled a trip to Italy and invited her fascist successor, Victoria Villarruel, to meet and discuss the transition on Wednesday, with the latter describing the meeting as "historic for all Argentines."

The accession of Milei and Villarruel to power on December 10 is indeed historic, as it should put to rest any belief that Argentine society gained immunity against fascism after the brutal US-backed military dictatorship that ruled only four decades ago.

As summarized by journalist Emilio Gullo: "Like a Trojan horse but with flashing neon signs, the Military Party... has just entered a government in a democratic manner. In addition to denying the symbolic figure of the 30,000 disappeared and constantly denigrating the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Villarruel is the daughter and niece of convicted soldiers, and has the support of the torturers who are imprisoned for crimes against humanity."

The danger of fascism is a global phenomenon that can't be underestimated, as demonstrated by the promotion by ruling

circles of figures like Milei, Trump in the US and Bolsonaro in Brazil, Meloni in Italy and the newly-elected Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, among others.

Undoubtedly, Milei and the Argentine ruling class see the support of the Biden administration and European powers for Israel's slaughter in Gaza as an inspiration and sign of future support for unleashing genocidal violence against the impoverished working class at home.

However, fascism is not merely the use of brutal repression and ultra-nationalist or bigoted rhetoric. It is a method of capitalist rule that seeks to annihilate all workers' organizations and leaders that can only be implemented as a result of the historic and demoralizing defeat of a revolutionary wave of struggles of the working class.

Such a defeat has not taken place in Argentina. In fact, as part of an emerging upsurge of workers against capitalism and war globally, the two years preceding Milei's election victory in Argentina were characterized by record numbers of street protests in 2022 and a wave of wildcat strikes against IMF austerity diktats and the cost-of-living crisis.

The epicenters of these struggles, like Santa Cruz, Salta, Jujuy, Misiones and Chubut, as well as the layers of particularly impoverished and younger workers dependent on the informal sector and social assistance who led numerous mass demonstrations in Buenos Aires, voted by wide margins for Milei.

Such a contradictory socio-political phenomenon can be explained only by the fact that the highly progressive objective movement of the Argentine working class cannot find political expression in any of the existing parties of the so-called "left." On the contrary, workers are increasingly in conflict with all these parties and the capitalist order they represent.

Any illusions that may exist among workers in the ludicrous "anarcho-capitalist" economic solutions proposed by Milei will be dissipated in the heat of the mass struggles against the draconian attacks that are being prepared by the incoming administration.

Political confusion notwithstanding, the mass vote for the fascistic candidate does not represent the approval of Argentine workers for his program of extreme, unfettered capitalist exploitation. It was, above all, a vote of protest against the rotten bourgeois establishment, primarily associated with Peronism.

Milei is no mere "aberration," as claimed by the pseudo-left.

They said the same about Trump and Bolsonaro, who remain the chief political opposition in the US and Brazil after having led fascist coup attempts in 2021 and 2023, respectively. Like his counterparts, Milei emerges from very definite historical and material conditions.

First of all, nothing is left of the mass allegiance to Peronism, which was the flagship of bourgeois nationalist movements in Latin America. From his rise to power first in 1946, the political movement headed by Juan Domingo Perón cultivated its association with labor rights, the universalization of healthcare and education, and later the Evita phenomenon and its pretension that the interests of the poor and oppressed were the object of government policy. Today, as far as workers are concerned, the Peronist apparatus is composed of a mob of corrupt officials and union bureaucrat thugs who conspire to enforce the diktats of the corporations and banks.

What is fundamentally driving these tumultuous political developments is the descent of the third largest economy in the region into one of its worst crises in history. Near hyperinflation which is decimating the living standards of millions of Argentines is the product of the deepening crisis of capitalism marked by war, the COVID-19 pandemic, higher interest rates and other shocks to world markets that affect every country.

The ongoing shift in the global objective situation is not leaving “one stone upon another” of all the bourgeois nationalist, social-democratic and other national-reformist movements that imperialism has relied upon to smooth over class antagonisms. This is likewise the inevitable fate of all of the so-called “pink tide” governments and parties that emerged in Latin America over the past quarter-century.

With its political collapse, Peronism drags along with it all the organizations of the Argentine pseudo-left. Without their nefarious services, Peronism could not have continued to dominate political life in Argentina after effectively abandoning any substantial social reforms since the early 1970s and repeatedly betraying workers.

Numerous forces claiming to be socialist have played the leading role in providing a left cover for the Peronist apparatus. After the Stalinist Communist Party, the most prominent of these tendencies was established by the late Nahuel Moreno, who led the dissolution of several Trotskyist organizations in Latin America as he broke with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1963.

From the 1950s, the Morenoite tendency manifested a reactionary orientation towards national opportunism that took the form of undisguised subordination to Peronism in the trade unions and in governments right up to the 1976 military coup. After acting to block a revolutionary struggle of the working class against the Peronist bourgeois regime, Moreno passively accepted the CIA-backed dictatorship, which he called “the most democratic in Latin America.” As he fled abroad, Moreno told the members of his Socialist Workers Party (PST) not to worry and to continue open work. About 100 PST militants were “disappeared” and hundreds of others arrested and tortured.

Today, Moreno’s successors and their coalition partners in the so-called Left and Workers Front (FIT-U) are walking the same

path.

The explosion of the capitalist crisis and the collapse of Peronism open the way to realize the historical task of building a genuine revolutionary leadership in the working class. This process requires the establishment of rank-and-file action and defense committees independent of and opposed to the Peronist trade union and political apparatus to counter Milei’s attacks and prepare a struggle for power in political coordination with rank-and-file workers across Latin America, in the imperialist centers and beyond.

This historic task can be developed only in irreconcilable opposition to the Morenoite and Pabloite enemies of Trotskyism, which are joining ever more openly in a counterrevolutionary alliance with the national bourgeoisie and imperialism.

Similarly to how they have supported the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the FIT-U groups aligned themselves behind the Peronist candidate Sergio Massa, who was described by the Morenoites themselves as the “candidate of the US embassy” and who is a staunch backer of the Zionist genocide in Gaza.

Now the parties in the FIT-U attempt to lull the working class by minimizing the danger of dictatorship, while reassuring themselves that the outcome will be no different than previous governments and placing their hopes on the stinking corpse of the Peronist trade union bureaucracy.

Trotskyism is anathema to this perspective. The Theory of Permanent Revolution developed by Leon Trotsky and which animated the Russian Revolution in 1917 has been fully vindicated by the bankruptcy of Peronism and all other bourgeois nationalist movements. This perspective, defended by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) against the Pabloite revisionist attempts to liquidate the Trotskyist movement into Stalinism, Castroism and other forms of bourgeois nationalism, established that in a country with a belated capitalist development, the struggle for emancipation from imperialism and other democratic tasks can only be carried out under the leadership of the proletariat as part of the world socialist revolution.

It is only through a careful assimilation and study of the history, traditions and program of the ICFI, as a foremost step toward the establishment of sections of this world party of socialist revolution in Argentina and internationally, that a revolutionary vanguard in the working class will emerge. There is no time to waste.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact