

Argentina's ultra-right government declares war on working class

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22 December 2023

Argentina's ultra-right-wing President Javier Milei signed a Decree of Necessity and Urgency (DNU) Wednesday to downsize the government, scrap regulations and strip the working class of existing social, wage, retirement and welfare benefits. That evening, in a nationally televised speech, Milei introduced the DNU and described 30 of its 366 measures.

Decrees of Necessity and Urgency, a constitutional method of bypassing the national legislature in Argentina, are permissible only under conditions in which it is not possible, or there is no time, for Congress to act.

In this case, it is an undemocratic and dictatorial maneuver by the new right-wing government in its second week in office. Congress and the courts may invalidate the DNU. While technically the DNU's provisions only become effective nine days after its signing, Milei insisted on Thursday that they are already in effect.

The DNU has the backing of Wall Street, the International Monetary Fund, and moneyed elites in Argentina.

December 19 and 20 marked the 22nd anniversary of the mass demonstrations that shook the country in 2001, during a period of economic depression and mass unemployment, that left 40 dead at the hands of the police.

Marking the anniversary, thousands of workers and youth marched in Buenos Aires and cities across Argentina, protesting Milei's measures and the ongoing crisis, which combine inflation and mass underemployment—conditions that have driven nearly half the population into poverty.

Before the rallies began, early in the morning on Wednesday, the ministry of National Security had activated a gigantic force of Federal Police and Gendarmes, along with naval and airport police. Their assignment was to block 20 points of access into downtown Buenos Aires, and also in parts of the city

itself, allegedly to guarantee freedom of circulation for cars, trucks and buses in the area surrounding Argentina's Government House and Congress building. "If they step off the sidewalk, it [the repression], will begin," declared Patricia Bullrich, the right-wing security minister appointed by Milei. Protesters were also threatened with loss of their benefits and rights if caught breaking these anti-democratic rules, that also included no face masks, no children present and no sticks.

Ironically, it was the police that impeded circulation, blocking bridges and roads and disrupting mass transit linking working class areas with city centers, particularly in metropolitan Buenos Aires, the nation's capital and largest urban area. The protests were also watched over from above by drones. Access from Avellaneda and other workingclass suburbs was restricted by "combat groups" and "detention squads."

The Pueyrredon Bridge, where in 2002 two militant youth, Darío Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki, were brutally assassinated by police during a demonstration, was occupied by the militarized police forces. Transit terminals and rail stations were patrolled by police with dogs. Police also boarded city buses and took pictures of their occupants. As of yesterday, 8,000 bus riders who benefit from social welfare payments have been identified and may lose their benefits.

The whole operation took on the character of a military exercise, a preparation for future acts of organized terror and repression against the working class.

In his 15-minute speech, Milei blamed the current crisis on the "enormous number of regulations" that supposedly block economic progress. The measures that Milei announced are intended to fully subordinate the state and Argentine society to the "market"—the agricultural and energy plutocracies, and the vulture funds that profit off of Argentina's debt crisis. Public companies are to be privatized. Price and rent controls are to be dismantled,

together with measures that allow the government to “interfere with the decisions of Argentine businesses,” such as regulations against the scarcity of essential goods and guarantees that supermarkets will carry a minimum percentage of goods made by small businesses.

The DNU also includes the gutting of labor wage and hour regulations and the end of export controls. Currently, non-contingent workers who are laid off are owed one month’s wages for each year on the job; this is eliminated in Milei’s DNU, making it possible for employers to easily fire workers at their convenience. The right to strike is to be severely restricted for “essential workers,” as is the right to assemble and to stage factory occupations and slow-downs. Residential rents will also be decontrolled, giving landlords power over length of rentals, price indexes, currency denomination (US dollars, euros, etc.), deposits and maintenance charges.

In all, this is a direct attack on the working class. A week ago, an analysis of the new proposals by Argentina’s Center of Political Economics (CEPA) suggested that the working class would pay 43 percent of the cost of Milei’s austerity policies. Such an attack cannot be carried out peacefully, and is already being compared to the dictatorial policies of Argentine dictator Gen. Jorge Videla and Britain’s Margaret Thatcher.

Echoing language similar to Donald Trump, who vows to “make America great again,” Milei has promised to return Argentina to its wealthy past at the end of the 19th century, when the country’s per capita income was on a par with that of the US. Milei’s nostalgia has nothing to do with the real history of inequality and gross oppression of Argentine rural and immigrant workers, miners, dock workers, carpenters, and railroad laborers, who struggled against conditions imposed by British Imperialism and the native rural oligarchies.

Following the speech, hundreds of demonstrators rallied across from a heavily barricaded Congress building, seeking to pressure Congress with chants opposing the DNU measures and demanding Milei’s ouster.

Milei cynically reacted to Wednesday night’s demonstrations, suggesting that those who opposed his plan were either suffering from Stockholm Syndrome (hostages who identify with their captors), or “people who love and are nostalgic for communism.”

The socially corrupt Argentine trade union bureaucracies, which betrayed the mass workers struggles in 2001-2002, have announced that they will appeal Milei’s DNU in the courts. The Left Front (FIT) and other parties and alliances of the pseudo-left and left

nationalists are calling for these same trade unions to launch a national general strike, another recipe for betrayal.

A common banner in the marches and rallies that took place across Argentina on December 20 expressed solidarity with the Palestinian workers and a repudiation of the genocide in Gaza, an expression of the international nature of the struggles in this period.

The Argentine working class has no option but to take the road of revolutionary struggle. Workers must go beyond empty appeals to the trade union bureaucracy and protest strikes. The situation calls for the formation of independent rank-and-file workers’ committees to unite the struggles of Argentine workers and their counterparts internationally and prepare the struggle for power and the establishment of a socialist society.

This demands a complete and total break with Peronism, its pseudo-left satellites and their petty-bourgeois nationalist politics. The critical task facing workers in Argentina and internationally is the development of a revolutionary leadership. This means the building of Socialist Equality Parties as sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International to forge the political independence of the working class and arm its struggles with a socialist and internationalist program to put an end to capitalism, the source of oppression, fascism and war.



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