

Mass protests and strikes erupt in Argentina against Milei's steps toward dictatorial rule

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Some 20,000 people marched on Wednesday in Buenos Aires in the largest demonstration so far against Javier Milei, who has announced hundreds of measures slashing social and democratic rights in his first three weeks in power.

This follows almost daily rallies, including numerous spontaneous marches and *cacerolazos*—banging on pots and pans—across the country, including in cities like La Plata, Rosario, Córdoba and sections of Buenos Aires where millions voted for Milei.

The rapid eruption of mass rallies confirms the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site* of Milei's election: It “does not represent the approval of Argentine workers for his program of extreme, unfettered capitalist exploitation,” but was chiefly a mass repudiation of the entire political establishment, dominated by Peronism, and the capitalist order it represents.

The historic political and economic crisis in Argentina, which is only a particularly sharp expression of the deepening crisis of global capitalism, is reaching a fever pitch as Milei pursues a scorched earth agenda of class war and dictatorship.

In Buenos Aires on Wednesday, Gendarmes and city police cracked down on the peaceful demonstrators and journalists, arresting at least six people and leaving several injured from beatings and tear gas, while several busses with participants were prevented from entering the city.

Milei has imposed a protocol banning roadblocks and strike picket lines, instituted a shock devaluation, halved the number of ministries, imposed an executive decree with 366 measures eliminating regulations and labor rights, announced the firing of 7,000 public employees ahead of Christmas, among other reactionary measures.

The executive decree, which will remain in place unless both houses of Congress vote against it, essentially bans strikes by expanding the definition of “essential or transcendent sectors” to nearly all public, industrial and commercial activities. Participation in labor actions, moreover, will become a “just cause for dismissal.”

Provocatively on Wednesday, the government then

presented a separate omnibus bill to Congress with 664 articles, including a “state of public emergency” that would suspend Constitutional checks and grant his government dictatorial powers over economic and political matters, including elections, until December 31, 2025.

Among other major changes, the so-called “Act for the Foundations and Starting Points for the Liberty of Argentinians” would sanction an end to primaries, the restructuring of Congress favoring third parties like Milei's Liberty Advances coalition, the presidential approval of new foreign loans, the privatization of nearly 50 public firms, massive cuts to pensions, and further attacks on basic democratic liberties.

Any “intentional and temporary gathering of three people or more” would require official approval or face jail terms of up to six years if it blocked transit or the provision of public services, according to a proposed change to the Criminal Code. Organizers of demonstrations that block transit or damage private property will face terms of two to five years.

Moreover, Milei has asked for “reforms” to be drawn up to repeal the laws instituted shortly after the end of the 1976-1983 military dictatorship banning the use of the armed forces in “domestic security” operations. Defense Minister Luis Petri declared earlier this month: “It is absurd that in the face of an attack by a terrorist group, as happened in Israel with Hamas, the military cannot act.”

The reference to the October 7 attack in Israel, which was part of a broader popular uprising against decades of occupation, constitutes a threat to employ the type of genocidal violence seen in Gaza against the Argentine working class.

What is being prepared is a fascist dictatorship to allow Wall Street and the local financial and corporate oligarchy to freely ransack public enterprises, pensions and healthcare, lithium and natural gas deposits, fisheries and other natural resources.

A recession, layoffs, mass poverty and inflation—which is expected to surpass 200 percent this year and 400 percent in

2024—are being simultaneously used as a club to force the working class to submit to these policies.

However, no capitalist ruling elite has ever been able to crush the resistance of the working class merely through economic coercion and naked state repression. It has always relied on the false friends and false leaders of workers to betray their struggles, above all, by isolating them across national lines and blocking the development of socialist consciousness.

This is the role being played again by the Peronist union bureaucracies—the CGT, the two CTAs, UTEP and others—and its pseudo-left apologists in the so-called Left and Workers Front (FIT-U).

The bureaucracy and pseudo-left organized the demonstrations on Wednesday to appeal to the courts to declare Milei’s decrees unconstitutional. Despite the police repression, the Milei administration applauded the unions for requesting permission to demonstrate in Buenos Aires without blocking roads.

Later that day, the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) leadership decided to call for demonstrations and a 12-hour national strike on January 24 to “pressure” Congress “to act for the benefit of workers and society.” This announcement has been endorsed by the rest of the bureaucracy and the FIT-U parties.

With the union bureaucracy and the rest of the Peronist political establishment thoroughly discredited, the pseudo-left has become indispensable at this critical juncture of the crisis of bourgeois rule. The Morenoite Socialist Workers Party (PTS), Workers Party (PO) and other groups in the FIT-U called for the first demonstrations during the first weeks of Milei’s term, advancing the slogans of calling for the CGT and CTAs to call a national strike and present a “plan of struggle” against Milei.

These forces, which lead numerous unions and have previously received over a million votes in elections, have opposed organizing any struggle for workers to break with Peronism, which is the main political party of the bourgeoisie. They combine dishonest appeals for open-ended “unity” and “broad fronts,” while claiming to be “marching independently” from the Peronists. However, their orientation for decades has been to disarm workers politically by fomenting illusions in the union bureaucracy and the Peronist parties, whose role for nearly a century has been to defend capitalism.

Summarizing the *modus operandi* of this entire layer, PO leader Gabriel Solano insisted earlier this week that “the only way to stop him [Milei] is for the CGT to call a general strike.” Now, Solano is saying the Hollywood strike on January 24 will be a good “starting point.”

Both the Peronist bureaucrats and the petty bureaucrats

that belong to the FIT-U represent a privileged layer of the middle class concerned strictly with channeling the conflict with Milei behind backroom talks limited to their own bank accounts and petty interests.

In particular, they are negotiating Milei’s decree that allows private firms to compete directly with the medical insurance plans controlled by the unions, as well another decree eliminating automatic “solidarity dues” from non-members, which were instituted in the 1990s by the government to compensate unions for the loss of membership.

During the demonstration on Wednesday, Armando Cavalieri, head of the service-sector FAECYS union—part of the CGT and with 1.2 million dues-paying members—met with Milei’s ministers to beg them not to eliminate the “solidarity dues” since it would “bankrupt the entire union.” If that is true, then it demonstrates how the material interests of the union apparatus have become entirely aligned with the capitalist state and corporate management.

In exchange, Cavalieri pledged to support the cuts to severance pay, which Milei has classified as the most important part of his labor decrees.

The Peronists and pseudo-left have demonstrated repeatedly their indifference to the livelihoods and lives of the working class. The same union leaderships blocked all national strikes against the last government, while enforcing massive cuts to real wages, major social cuts to pay back the IMF, and the sacrifice of tens of thousands of workers’ lives to prioritize profits during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

While courageous defiance of the repressive edicts and mass strikes are crucial to fight Milei and the threat of fascism, the challenge today for workers is not establishing a false unity under a nationalist and pro-capitalist perspective that keeps them subordinated to the union bureaucracies and Peronism.

Instead, the fundamental question for workers in Argentina is establishing the unity of their struggles against Milei *and the Peronist apparatus* with the emerging struggles of workers internationally against imperialism, war and fascism. This requires a new revolutionary leadership based firmly upon the foundations of the history, theory and program of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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