

One month of the Milei presidency in Argentina

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January 10 marked one month since the fascistic TV personality Javier Milei was sworn in as Argentina's president, and his administration has already introduced massive attacks on the working class.

On December 14, four days into his rule, his Ministry of Economy imposed a devaluation of the Argentine currency from 400 pesos per dollar to over 800, dramatically increasing the rate of inflation in food and transportation for millions of workers overnight.

A few days later, on the 20th, as tens of thousands were commemorating in the streets the anniversary of the 2001 workers' uprising in Buenos Aires, when 100,000 surrounded Argentina's Government House, Milei announced a Decree of Necessity and Urgency (DNU). The act dismantles over 300 laws that regulate big business, shield working families and retirees from inflation and rent hikes and defend public education and health care. In response there have been scores of protests across the country.

The DNU has been followed by an omnibus bill named "Foundation and Starting Point for the Liberty of Argentiniens" that includes about 600 'reforms' that eliminate a half-century of social and economic regulations. The legislation is supported by big business and the International Monetary Fund, which manages the Argentine debt crisis and holds billions of dollars of Argentine debt. The Omnibus bill is currently being debated in Congress, with Milei expressing confidence that "we have the numbers" to have it approved.

The General Confederation of Workers (CGT), Argentina's largest labor federation, has called for a 12-hour national protest strike on January 24, a totally insufficient measure aimed at pressuring Milei and timed to take place once the Milei proposals have been approved.

Milei's anti-communist and anti-working-class party "Liberty Advances" rules in a coalition with former President Mauricio Macri's Republican Proposal (PRO) and sections of the right-wing bourgeois Radical Party. Milei and his Vice President Victoria Villaruel have repeatedly declared themselves in support of the military dictatorship that ruled the country between 1976 and 1983 and have justified its murder of 30,000 workers and youth.

Last week, the National Chamber for Labor Appeals (CNAT) suspended one of the measures in Milei's DNU. The decision was in response to an appeal from the CGT. At issue are increases in probation periods for new hires (from three to eight months), a

restriction on severance pay, restrictions on plant occupations and picket lines that block entrances to plants, and on the right to strike for jobs considered "essential," such as education, transit, and communications.

The Labor Board's toothless decision makes no mention of any of the other brutal attacks in the DNU. For instance, it introduces a near-total deregulation of housing and rents, making it possible to evict renters at will, to raise rents at will, and to demand payments in US dollars and other currencies.

Milei's spokesperson Manuel Adorni announced it would appeal the decision to the Supreme Court, insisting that the labor measures were meant to guarantee the "freedom" for workers to be hired and for owners to hire without fear.

With only token opposition from the national legislature, Milei's brutal austerity measures outlined in the DNU will likely be approved by at least one of the two houses of Congress (which is all that is needed according to Argentine law).

Both the DNU and omnibus bill are designed to benefit the parasitic ruling class while destroying the living standards of the working class and retirees, whose incomes will no longer be pegged to inflation. It will also hit small businesses, which are suffering from a drastic drop in demand, driven by inflation and sales tax increases. The bill also includes the elimination of environmental measures and the ending of mental health programs.

Throughout his campaign and now in office, Milei has peddled the message that all this economic and social pain is necessary to usher in a transformation of Argentine society, bringing in a new epoch of prosperity and freedom. But false electoral promises of a shared sacrifice have now given way to a savage assault on the lower 90 percent of society, while big business, agricultural monopolies and multinational corporations celebrate.

Milei is also further subordinating Argentina to US and British imperialisms, celebrating the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza and moving to break commercial ties with China. After Milei rejected the invitation to join the BRICS group, China decided to withhold a currency swap agreement that Argentina was relying on to service its debt payments.

The economic and political crisis in Argentina, which Milei and the legislature seek to resolve through police-state repression and economic shock therapy involving even worse inflation, austerity and unemployment, is the most intense since 2001-02.

At the time, the Fernando De La Rúa administration and the legislature implemented a "labor flexibility law" and massive cuts

to healthcare and education as part of an IMF structural program, but this failed to contain a massive flight of dollars and other hard currencies, and the closure of banks and factories. This provoked a social explosion that began on January 20, 2001, and included the occupation and appropriation of shutdown factories across the country. De La Rúa resigned and was forced to flee via helicopter as tens of thousands surrounded the government house and demonstrators battled the police. Over 30 demonstrators were killed that day.

But given this pre-revolutionary situation, what prevented the working class from taking over and securing its interests, abolishing capitalism and establishing a workers' state? It was the same forces that claimed to represent them: the Peronists, led by Nestor Kirchner, with their nostalgic message of populist bourgeois nationalism, and the trade unions, both supported by numerous Stalinist, Maoist, Castroite, pseudo-left, and other left-nationalist organizations. These tendencies already had a long record of steering the working class away from revolution and channeling unrest behind pressure tactics on the national bourgeoisie.

Today the pseudo-left parties in the Workers' Left Front (FIT-U) coalition are playing a key role in repeating a similar betrayal. These organizations, which falsely claim to be Trotskyist, include the Socialist Workers Party (PTS), The Workers Party (PO), the Socialist Workers Movement (MST) and the Socialist Left (IS).

In an article published in the WSWS on the Argentine elections in 2015, the WSWS explained the history of these formations (The MST joined the FIT in 2019 but shares the same Morenoite origins):

The organizations from which the current FIT members descended were complicit in politically disarming the Argentine working class over the latter half of the 20th century, fostering illusions in Perón, then in Fidel Castro, followed by the Sandinistas and Stalinism. Many of their young working-class followers were among the 30,000 tortured and murdered under the military junta.

The PTS and IS originated in the breakup of the Movement Towards Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS), in the aftermath of the death of its leader, Nahuel Moreno in 1987. Moreno, a one-time supporter of the Fourth International who broke with Trotskyism and internationalism in the 1960s, had been a proponent of subordinating the independent movement of the working class to the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces: Peronism in the 1950s, Castroism in the 1960s, Social Democracy in the 1970s and Stalinism in the 1980s.

The PO, also a nationalist tendency, had its origins in Silvio Frondizi's Movement of the Revolutionary Left (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*, MIR-Praxis), which emerged in the 1960s, then under the name of *Política Obrera*. Frondizi, a radical sociologist and brother of Argentina's Radical Party President Arturo Frondizi, was murdered by the "Triple A" death squads in 1974. He had been a strong supporter of the Cuban Revolution and a

proponent of "Guevarism" as an "Indoamerican" form of Marxism.

Under the influence of the Yugoslavian, Algerian and Cuban revolutions (particularly the latter in the 1960s) *Política Obrera*, though critical of Moreno, evolved along the same lines as MAS and the PTS, subordinating the interests of the working class to those of the radical petty bourgeoisie. PO's current leader, Jorge Altamira, is a master at using the language of revolutionary socialism to justify the PO's opportunist alliances with pseudo-left parties in France, Italy, Greece and elsewhere, as well as its membership in the FIT (which Altamira defends as a "united front").

The FIT maintains a nationalist and pro-capitalist outlook based on pressuring the trade union bureaucracy and the right-wing populist Peronist Party, combining this with the promotion of identity politics.

For the November 19 final presidential round between Peronist Sergio Massa and Milei, the FIT coalition parties were not able to agree on officially supporting the Peronist candidate of the Union for the Fatherland Peronist coalition or calling to abstain. However, the decision by the IS and MST to advocate voting for Massa was not seriously challenged by the other partners, which said they "understood" the sentiment.

The Americas, from Canada, the United States, and Mexico down to Chile and Argentina sit on a volcano of class tensions. In 2023, strike waves of teachers, healthcare workers, miners, transit workers, autoworkers and others shook the region, in addition to mass protests in Panama, Peru, and Haiti, as well as mass protests of workers and youth against inequality, imperialism, the genocide in Gaza and the danger of world war.

Victory for the working class requires a program that transcends international boundaries and unites all workers in a common struggle against the capitalist system and the construction of a socialist world. This struggle is only being advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International. We urge workers to build sections of the ICFI in Argentina, across Latin America and every country.



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