

Argentine President Milei defends fascist-military junta on anniversary of 1976 coup

Andrea Lobo
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This past Sunday, Javier Milei became the first Argentine President to mark the anniversary of the March 24, 1976 military coup by vindicating the regime of fascist terror that ensued and denying its bloody crimes.

Early in the morning, Milei published a documentary-style video justifying the US-backed military coup and the dictatorship as necessary means of waging a “war” against “monsters.” The 12-minute video also denies the numbers of those killed and “disappeared” under the military regime, and finishes with appeals to “bury” this history and let bygones be bygones.

Vice President Victoria Villarruel, the daughter of a senior Army officer who previously made a career defending convicted military officials and who repeatedly visited dictator Jorge Rafael Videla in prison, published a separate video calling for “Truth, Justice and Reparations for the victims of terrorism.” In it, she argued that supporters of the left-wing guerrillas during the 1970s must still be punished.

Even though the historical record completely belies their claims, the corporate media has begun adapting and giving different measures of credibility to the government’s claims that the military junta acted strictly or even chiefly against leftist guerrillas, or that it merely carried out “excesses” in its operations, and that the widely accepted estimate of 30,000 victims killed and disappeared by the junta is “exaggerated.”

On March 24, 1976, the military detained President Isabel Martínez de Perón and flew her out of the Casa Rosada in a helicopter. After the natural death of Gen. Juan Domingo Perón 21 months earlier, she had inherited a crisis-ridden government, which had already begun imposing brutal social cuts, attacks on living standards amid 335 percent inflation, and massive repression, including killings of hundreds of leftists by the Peronist Triple A death squad.

The Argentine military had begun coordinated actions with the military dictatorships in Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil “against subversive elements” in “early 1974,” according to the CIA, which was overseeing this cross-border collaboration in what became known as Operation Condor. The most important meetings were held at this time in the Campo de Mayo base in Buenos Aires, according to John Dinges’ *The Condor Years*, under the Peronists.

Immediately after the coup, with plans that had been meticulously prepared in advance, troops and tanks moved against trade union and left-wing party headquarters, as well as

workplaces, and began massive arrests of known militants. Then, Lieut. Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla, as Commander in Chief, took the oath of office at the Army headquarters, and set up a ruling junta with the Navy and Air Force commanders.

The repression of the few hundred guerrilla fighters in the country—politically misguided youth and intellectuals who carried out isolated attacks and never posed any major threat to state power—was exploited to justify crushing all working class opposition to the massive impoverishment demanded by global finance.

The US administration of President Gerald Ford, which was in active communication with the plotters for at least one month ahead of the coup, recognized the junta the same day and had a package of economic and military assistance ready. The State Department under Henry Kissinger, as indicated by official documents, planned for “military rule for an extended duration and of unprecedented severity.”

The military dictatorship would remain in power until December 1983, and oversee an orgy of detentions and torture of over 100,000 workers, youth and intellectuals. Militant workers, even those who had merely participated in strikes before the coup, were systematically kidnapped, tortured and thrown from airplanes into the Atlantic Ocean. Those murdered included dozens of Mercedes Benz and Ford autoworkers in Buenos Aires.

As early as 1978, according to a US declassified memo from Pinochet’s Intelligence Directorate (DINA) in Chile, the Argentine 601 Battalion had “documented 22,000 among dead and disappeared” since 1975. In a June 2002 interview, Manuel Contreras, the head of DINA, which coordinated its activities closely with the Argentine military and the CIA, estimated that the Argentine military had killed 30,000 during its dirty war.

A March 1978 State Department report estimated, until that moment, between 12,000 and 17,000 “disappeared.” The main category included between 3,750 and 5,000 rank-and-file workers and union activists, and in second place 3,000 family members of workers.

As noted in declassified US cables, an aide explained to Kissinger that one of the parallels with Nazi Germany was that “to recover economically, they must break the power of traditional structures, and especially of the labor movement...” The same calculations are being made today.

On Sunday, in response to Milei’s provocative falsifications, hundreds of thousands of workers and youth took to the streets to

commemorate the victims and protest the government, including about 400,000 people who filled the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. The turnout was much larger than in previous years.

This year, March 24 was characterized by a drastically changed objective situation in Argentina and globally, including the eruption of world war and the aggressive promotion by the ruling elites of apologists for fascist dictatorship across Latin America, Europe and South-East Asia.

The rallies on Sunday took place amid a wave of strikes and protests against Milei's attacks on jobs, wages, pensions and social assistance. In recent days, these struggles have focused on opposing Milei's plans to fire as many as 70,000 public-sector employees.

The Peronist-led trade union bureaucracy has so far successfully kept the strikes divided and limited, signing sellout deals accepting layoffs and wage increases far below inflation, which reached 276 percent annually last month.

Sixty percent of Argentines, including 70 percent of children, are now living in poverty.

Despite the explosive social and political crisis, the speeches and commentary by organizers, union officials and the pseudo-left have oozed complacency about the threat of a return to fascist forms of rule. Beyond threadbare and empty slogans of "justice" and "remembrance," there was no attempt to draw the historical lessons of the 1976 coup.

Instead, both the Peronists and their apologists in the so-called Left Workers Front (FIT-U) used the occasion to continue their efforts to channel mass social anger behind appeals to and illusions in the capitalist institutions, including the Peronist parties in Congress, the courts and the Milei administration itself.

During the years leading up to 1976, these same forces used similar methods to disarm the working class politically, blocking an independent struggle for power and setting the stage for the successful fascist-military coup.

Beyond the statements by Milei and Villarruel, the events leading up to the anniversary showed that the ruling class is moving headlong to suppress any criticism of the military's record.

It seeks to undermine the deeply ingrained democratic consciousness and popular opposition to the military in order to restore its role in national politics and repressive operations, mobilize the most reactionary layers in society against the working class, and prepare a return to dictatorial forms of rule. There is an element of desperation and recklessness in these efforts.

On March 20, CIA director William Burns arrived in Buenos Aires to meet with the leadership of the intelligence-security apparatus. The timing was extremely provocative and, given the extensive role of the CIA in the dictatorship's consolidation of power, the visit makes clear that US imperialism plans to use the same level of genocidal violence against any opposition to its interests.

Moreover, US imperialism clearly considers Argentina and the region more broadly a key front in the plans for the recolonization of the world, as a major source of natural gas, oil, lithium and other key minerals, as well as being one of the world's main agricultural producers and sources of fresh water.

In the days between this visit and Sunday's events, Minister of Defense Luis Petri sent officials to meet with ex-officials of the dictatorship detained at the Campo de Mayo military prison. They took pictures with activists and wives of the officials demanding their release.

Patricia Bullrich, Minister of Security, then made the statement that the convicted military and police officials are "unjustly imprisoned."

These provocations and rumors in the media about possible pardons led the UN and Inter-American Commissions on Human Rights to issue a joint statement on March 24 calling on "states not to grant pardons, humanitarian amnesties, or benefits" to those convicted of serious human rights violations. Alejandro Slokar, an Argentine federal judge, also made a statement warning that any pardon, amnesty or commutation would violate existing domestic and international laws.

On March 21, Petri and Bullrich held a press conference to announce a bill in Congress to lift the ban instituted after the dictatorship blocking the military from "intervening in and carrying out domestic security operations." The announcement followed the sending of troops to the city of Rosario as "logistical support" to ostensibly fight drug cartels.

Finally, also on March 21, the organization HIJOS, a national network of sons and daughters of victims killed under the military regime, denounced a fascist attack against one of its members. Later during the week, the victim, Sabrina Bölke, who is also a public-sector worker, revealed that on March 5 two armed attackers subjected her to torture, sexual abuse and death threats.

The attackers drew "VLLC" on her bedroom wall—the Spanish acronym for Milei's slogan "Long Live Liberty, Carajo." They then stole documents belonging to HIJOS.

This was the most significant attack by fascist bands since the murder attempt against the Peronist former President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner in 2022 by a member of a fascist group, Federal Revolution, which includes "Libertarian" pro-Milei fanatics.



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