

# Fascistic Milei government in Argentina raids Partido Obrero headquarters

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On Monday, Argentina’s Federal Police raided the headquarters of the Partido Obrero (PO; Workers Party) in Buenos Aires in an act of naked political repression by the government of fascistic President Javier Milei.

The measure follows 27 raids last month and a massive espionage operation against so-called “*piquetero*” or picketing organizations ostensibly to retrieve evidence of extortion and other fraudulent charges.

While our political differences with the PO are well documented, the *World Socialist Web Site* condemns these raids and calls on workers in Argentina and internationally to actively oppose the state persecution against the PO and the *piquetero* organizations.

The police attack against the PO headquarters and other organizations is objectively aimed at intimidating future protests and setting the legal and political precedent for a vast crackdown against all working class opposition with far-reaching, global implications.

Already on April 10, police and gendarmes violently attacked workers and youth demanding food for soup kitchens. The peaceful demonstration, which was organized by the *piqueteros*, faced mass arrests, beatings, tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon.

The headlong lurch toward establishing a fascistic dictatorship by the Argentine ruling class is seen as a prerequisite for the vastly unpopular policies of social austerity and mass impoverishment being introduced by Milei. These same policies have been hailed as a model by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Biden’s Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Elon Musk and other representatives of the capitalist oligarchy around the world.

These economic policies are seen as indispensable by the centers of financial and corporate power to extract from workers internationally the level of profits demanded by the unsustainable mountain of fictitious capital and debt accumulated over decades and to pay for the rapidly expanding third world war, as part of a renewed scramble for markets, resources and cheap labor between the major powers.

Milei himself has vindicated the economic shock therapy policies and mass repression against left-wing organizations under the fascist, US-backed dictatorships of Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla in Argentina and Gen. Augusto Pinochet in Chile.

The *piquetero* organizations targeted are *Polo Obrero* (Workers Pole)—a wing of the PO—, the Peronist *Barrios de Pie* (Neighborhoods Standing Up), and the Front of Organizations in Struggle (FOL).

After their emergence in the late 1990s in the sprawling marginalized suburbs of cities, the *piqueteros* have combined the administration of government welfare programs, soup kitchens and job training with frequent rallies and roadblocks to demand greater funds for unemployed, informal and precarious workers.

The raids are part of a case launched by Security Minister Patricia Bullrich in December, shortly after the inauguration of Milei and the signing of an Anti-picketing Law that outlaws roadblocks, strike picket lines and other forms of protest.

The government claims, without presenting any proof, that it received “thousands of calls” from beneficiaries of the main government allowance for unemployed and precarious workers, called “Promoting Work.” The callers allegedly reported that these “social organizations” threatened to withhold their benefits to compel participation in demonstrations. In fact, this is precisely the extortion the government is carrying out to keep them from protesting.

A federal court, nonetheless, allowed the government to carry out months-long phone tapping and agent surveillance of the leaders of the groups, as well as the raids against their offices.

The *Polo Obrero* has stressed that they are being targeted as a political reprisal for organizing the first demonstration last December challenging the blatantly anti-constitutional and dictatorial protocol against picketing instituted by Bullrich.

The PO legislator in Buenos Aires, Guillermo Kane, explained to *Somos Télam*: “There is a very poorly disguised

political persecution. They started talking about an unlawful collection of contributions in the framework of the organization of the *Polo Obrero* and other *piquetero* groups. Then they switched their focus to how the subsidy received by cooperatives in the previous government had been accounted for, and now they are raiding the headquarters of the *Partido Obrero*, a party with decades of history, known by all those who have an interest in the country's political life.”

The raid against the PO was preceded by a decision by the federal judge in charge of the case to open a preliminary investigation against Eduardo Belliboni, the leader of the *Polo Obrero*, claiming that his organization falsified receipts and used government funds assigned to the program Promoting Work for the expenses of the political party.

The PO announced that they will file a formal complaint of political persecution by the Milei administration before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the judicial arm of the Organization of American States.

The claim that the most impoverished sections of the working class would need to be bribed or extorted to join protests in the current context is ludicrous. The government is threatening to cut life-saving social programs in the context of an economic recession, hundreds of thousands of job cuts, nearly 300 percent inflation, and an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

With data until the end of January—and the situation has deteriorated sharply since—, the Catholic University of Argentina (UCA) estimated that the poverty rate nationally reached 57.4 percent, while that for welfare recipients was 85.5 percent. It also found 32 percent of children suffer from food insecurity.

Having dismantled the Ministry of Social Development that handled these programs, Milei eliminated the Promoting Work program, upon which 1.5 million people depended, and launched two skeleton programs that entirely exclude the *piquetero* social organizations. This has involved the exclusion of tens of thousands of beneficiaries and the freezing of the allowance to a miserable 78,000 pesos (US \$86) per month, which is not being adjusted for inflation.

The administration also ended the provision of food to more than 50,000 soup kitchens managed by different social organizations in the poorest neighborhoods and has withheld 5,000 tons of food in warehouses as millions go hungry.

The similarities with the blocking of aid to starving Palestinians in Gaza as part of the ongoing US-Israeli genocide have an objective significance. The ruling elites worldwide are normalizing mass death and hunger, including at genocidal proportions, and fascist forms of rule as methods of class warfare and to pursue geopolitical objectives.

While Milei, who traveled personally to Israel to support the genocide, is overseeing a vast acceleration of austerity and the turn toward dictatorship, his election last year was chiefly a repudiation of anti-working class policies under his Peronist predecessors. As such, any orientation toward capitalist institutions like the Peronist parties, including those leading the largest *piquetero* groups, as a means of safeguarding social and democratic rights is a recipe for politically disarming the working class.

The breakdown of democratic forms of rule in Argentina and internationally confirm the warnings and perspective advanced by the *World Socialist Web Site* in its 2024 New Year's statement. We wrote:

All talk about defending democracy and fighting fascism while ignoring the fundamental question of class and economic power—and, therefore, recognizing the necessity for the mobilization of the working class on a global scale for the overthrow of capitalism—is cynical and politically impotent demagogy. The wealth of the billionaires must be expropriated, and the gigantic corporations must be transformed, without compensation to the large shareholders, into publicly controlled utilities, run on the basis of social need, not private profit. The anti-democratic institutions and repressive organs of the capitalist state (the professional military, police and intelligence agencies) must be abolished and replaced by organizations of workers' control and power, to establish a democratic and planned economy on a world scale.



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