

In speech to Congress, Milei vows to send Argentina back 100 years, exposing role played by pseudo-left

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In his speech opening the current session of Argentina's legislature on March 1, President Javier Milei gloated over the passage of his reactionary labor counter-reform and declared his desire to take the country back 100 hundred years; paraphrasing US President Donald Trump's phrase, to Make Argentina Great Again.

Milei glorifies a period characterized by extreme social inequality, and major strike struggles by the working class, led by anarchists and socialists, combined with extreme repression, and attacks on immigrants and indigenous people, culminating in the Patagonian Massacre of 1921, when over 1,500 striking workers in the Patagonian region were killed by the Argentine Army. It was a period in which Argentina was great only for the oligarchy, in cahoots with British imperialism.

Now, Milei proposes to return to those times, this time, in alliance with U.S. President Trump and US imperialism, and the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy.

The reactionary anti-labor bill came out of the May Council (Consejo de Mayo), formed in June 2025. This committee included federal government officials, provincial delegates, a representative of the trade union bureaucracy (CGT-General Workers Confederation), and one from the Argentine Industrial Union (UIA).

The resulting "labor modernization" legislation, which was recently approved by both houses of the federal legislature, rolls back labor rights won over decades of workers' struggles. The new legislation allows employers to impose a 12-hour workday (in a 48-hour week) without overtime pay. It also wipes out contractual rights for rural workers (the 1074 law had, for the first time, granted rural workers the same rights as all other workers). At a time of massive layoffs across the country, the legislation reduces the cost for employers to fire even more workers; it reduces sick pay; eliminates industry-wide contracts; allows employers to manipulate vacation time; ends retroactive payments in case of layoffs, eliminates the 13th month paycheck (aguinaldo); it does not allow for the extension of expired contracts, while new ones are negotiated opening the door to massive abuses.

The Milei administration argues that as industrial jobs are cut, new jobs will eventually be created in mining and fossil fuel extraction.

The labor legislation is only one of eight reactionary legislative proposals that takes Argentina back in time. They also include the law of "penal responsibility" that lowers the age for children to be tried and sent to jail as adults, from 16 to 14. Milei had voiced his support for lowering it to 10.

History of Milei's anti-labor legislation

The struggles of the Argentine working class beginning in the late-1800s were linked with and inspired by the struggles of the European and US proletariat. At that time, a significant percentage of worker immigrants, from Spain, Italy and other European countries, introduced anarchist and socialist ideas into Argentina. Following the May 4, 1886 Haymarket massacre, of Chicago workers fighting for the 8-hour day, Argentine workers were among the first to heed the call for the establishment of May 1 as International Workers Day. The first May Day demonstration took place in Buenos Aires in 1890.

In 1904, following railroad and port strikes, Buenos Aires workers helped elect the first socialist legislator, Alfredo Palacios, for the port district, who led the campaign for pro-labor legislation, beginning with the establishment of Sundays as a day of rest for workers in 1905.

In 1907, child labor was prohibited and female labor was regulated, followed by a 1913 law on work accidents, providing compensation for injured workers—a first on the American continent. This legislation was substantially degraded by right-wing Peronist president Carlos Menem in 1990.

In 1925, legislation established that wages could only be paid in the national currency, instead of company promissory notes as was then common among agricultural and sugar mill workers. May First was declared a national workers holiday.

In 1926, men and women workers were given equal rights and equal pay. In 1932, the half-day on Saturdays was instituted.

In 1934, the Aguinaldo bonus (an extra month's bonus pay in Christmas) was mandated for all workers, as well as time off for maternity leave.

All the above were conquered by the working class in struggle.

None of them were granted to workers for free.

In 1945, Juan Domingo Peron, a member of a military government established in 1943, was elected with overwhelming working class support as president of Argentina.

In 1947, the Peron administration extended to rural workers, which represented a base of support for Peron, the same rights that had been approved for urban workers. In addition, the Peron administration called for the guarantee of jobs at decent pay, employer paid training, safe working conditions, health and social security benefits, with many advances implemented during a decade of national prosperity following WWII.

In 1974, under Peron's third presidency the government passed a Law of Contracts that renewed and expanded the 1947 legislation. This legislation was abolished during the murderous 1976-83 Videla dictatorship—the most brutal assault on the working class in Argentine history.

The division of labor between Peronism and the pseudo-left to impose Milei's attacks

Milei, in his speech opening the 2026 legislative session, engaged in constant insults against the Peronist opposition. The Peronist wing led by former president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner had rejected his labor modernization together with representatives of the pseudo-leftist Left and Workers Front Unity (FIT-U). Milei insulted with vulgar language the four legislators of the FIT-Unidad, telling their most prominent representative Myriam Bregman to “continue whining.”

The various factions of FIT-U are tendencies that broke with Trotskyism decades ago. Theirs is a nationalist outlook that serves to tie the working class to the so-called progressive elements in the trade union bureaucracies and Peronism.

Despite his insults, Milei's speech also laid bare the sordid division of labor between Peronism, the Peronist-led union bureaucracy and the pseudo-leftist FIT-U in suppressing the class struggle and enforcing his attacks against the working class.

Denouncing his predecessors for “selling favors to corrupt businesspeople” by shielding inefficient firms from the “free market,” he specifically targeted FATE's closure, railing: “Or do you think it's okay to pay three or four times more for tires, in exchange for the extortion of throwing 920 workers out on the street, while negotiating protection for the aluminum sector?”

Striking a nationalist pose, Milei extended mandatory reconciliation at FATE until at least March 11, postponing final layoffs while vilifying workers, the union leadership, unions and Peronists alike as extortionists fleecing consumers.

This is a grotesque fraud. Workers produce the tires' value through their labor power—stolen daily by capitalists like FATE owner Madanes Quintanilla—while market “adjustments” via tariffs or taxes hammer consumers with higher prices but also force even greater exploitation on the shop floor.

In exchange for seats at the bargaining table and legal privileges, the Peronist-led CGT and CTA, or those led by the FIT-U, enforce

this plunder, sabotaging strikes to preserve the system. The FIT-U's Workers Party, which controls the SUTNA union at the FATE plant plays its assigned role: one day preaching “class-based” militancy to sacked workers occupying the plant, the next confining struggle to protests outside Congress and the Ministry of Labor and lawsuits—now begging Peronist Buenos Aires Governor Axel Kicillof to nationalize FATE under state administration.

This “method” perfectly exemplifies the nationalist trap: isolate factory fights, subordinate them to the capitalist state and pro-capitalist bureaucracy, demanding “reasonable” concessions from employers, Peronists and even Milei himself.

SUTNA's direct meeting with Kicillof—despite Peronism granting Milei a quorum for the labor bill—reveals the pseudo-left's integration into this suppression scheme. Today, the entire pseudo-left hails SUTNA as a “beacon” for Argentina's workers, yet proposes no rupture with the wage slavery system, only nationalist appeals against imports and continuity plans serving the oligarchy.

Milei's “modernization,” gutting severance, enabling mass firings and banning strikes in “essential” sectors, accelerates deindustrialization—FATE, IBF, Pirelli/Bridgestone next—and a toward resource extraction and financialization for Wall Street and transnationals, backed by the Trump administration and the IMF. Meanwhile, Peronism and the FIT-U betray the workers to impose Milei's program while securing a greater market share and crumbs for local capitalists, the union bureaucracy and sections of the upper middle class.

What is required is a genuine struggle for workers' control over production, rejecting all nationalist appeals. Rank-and-file committees must unite FATE tire workers with auto, steel, mining and transport workers across Argentina and internationally—expropriating factories without compensation, linking workers with their US, Chinese and global counterparts against transnationals pillaging the planet.

This demands a break with Peronism, the FIT-U, the CGT/CTA and all bourgeois politics, by building a genuine revolutionary party on the program of Trotskyism as fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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