

Hundreds of thousands demonstrate in Argentina on 50th anniversary of US-backed military coup

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Hundreds of thousands marched across Argentina on Tuesday to mark the 50th anniversary of the US-backed military coup of March 24, 1976. It was the largest demonstration so far under the administration of fascist President Javier Milei.

Under the slogan “Memory, Truth and Justice,” the demonstrations called by human rights organizations and relatives of the victims of the dictatorship brought massive crowds into the streets of Buenos Aires and dozens of other cities to denounce the dictatorship’s crimes and the Milei government’s attempts to rehabilitate the junta and intensify its attacks on social and democratic rights.

On March 24, 1976, the Armed Forces moved to consummate the long-prepared coup by seizing state institutions in a coordinated assault. In the early hours, troops surrounded the Casa Rosada, and detained President Isabel Martínez de Perón, flying her out of the presidential palace in a helicopter, as tanks and soldiers established control over Buenos Aires.

A US-backed junta headed by General Jorge Rafael Videla assumed power, dissolved Congress, banned political activity and trade union rights, and set in motion the machinery of state terror—clandestine detention centers, torture, disappearances and systematic economic “restructuring” in the interests of finance capital and the Argentine ruling class.

Media estimates place the crowd Tuesday in Buenos Aires at between 600,000 and 2 million, with tens of thousands more protesting in Córdoba, Rosario, La Plata and other urban centers. In the late afternoon, in a packed Plaza de Mayo, a joint statement adopted by human rights organizations was read out, highlighting decades of struggle against the impunity enjoyed by the military officials responsible for a political genocide and the terrorist operations of the Triple A death squads under the Peronist government that preceded the coup.

The size and combative mood of the marches reflected both a living identification with the tens of thousands murdered between 1976 and 1983 and a mounting anger over the Milei administration’s authoritarian measures.

Against this backdrop, the government launched a grotesque ideological counteroffensive. Under the reactionary slogan of the “Day of Memory for Complete Truth and Justice,” the Milei administration released a more than hour-long video titled “The Victims They Wanted to Hide.”

The video centers on two carefully selected cases to relativize state terror and justify the crimes of the dictatorship’s apparatus. The first is that of “grandchild 127,” the daughter of Montoneros guerrilla militants Carlos Poblete and Carmen Moyano, who were kidnapped in Mendoza. Their newborn daughter was handed over to intelligence agent and convicted torturer Armando Fernández of the D2 unit in Mendoza and his wife, portraying it as an act of charity. The second testimony is from the

son of Argentino del Valle Larrabure, an Army officer kidnapped by the ERP in 1974. Despite all available evidence pointing to suicide, the son insists he was executed. The video claims that the widely acknowledged death toll of 30,000 victims of the dictatorship is inflated and that the real “criminals” of the era were the guerrillas, while the dictatorship’s apparatus appears as legitimately waging a “war” against “terrorists.”

The pseudo-left organizations in and around the Left and Workers Front (FIT-U) that participated in Tuesday’s marches denounced the complicity of Peronism in paving the way for the coup and its current role in enabling Milei’s program, only to conceal their own responsibility in appealing to these forces.

In fact, their intervention was chiefly aimed at channeling the groundswell of opposition back behind the Peronist union bureaucracy and the parliamentary “opposition” through demands for a general strike and legislative maneuvers.

Central to their agitation was the campaign of the FIT-U leadership in the tire workers’ union SUTNA around the shutdown of the iconic FATE tire factory last month. Rather than fighting to independently mobilize workers, SUTNA and its pseudo-left leaders have subordinated the struggle to appeals to bourgeois parties. Their latest move is to lobby provincial legislators—including right-wing Peronists and Radicals (UCR)—to pass a bill calling on the Peronist Buenos Aires provincial government to take over the plant. The main effect of this orientation is to bolster illusions that Peronism can be pressured into defending jobs and rights.

The commemorations took place amid a deepening economic catastrophe and a historic liquidation of whole swathes of Argentine industry as the Milei government enforces the diktats of finance capital. Official data indicate that, counting both salaried and self-employed workers, some 540,872 formal jobs have been lost in Milei’s first two years in office, including nearly 90,000 in the public sector. The adjustment has sunk real incomes, further cutting demand for goods.

According to journalist Sergio Ferrari, labor’s share of national income represented around 45 percent in 1974; by 1982, near the end of the junta, it had fallen to 22 percent. Today it stands at roughly 36 percent.

The program being implemented by Milei with the backing of the IMF and the Trump administration is essentially the same as that pursued through the 1976 coup: to eradicate what remains of the social gains won by the working class in the 20th century, which can only be carried out through dictatorial forms of rule.

Among his most aggressive attacks on the limited democratic forms restored after 1983 is the de facto elimination of the right to strike across broad swathes of “essential” sectors, a strict “anti-picket” protocol that legitimizes police repression to clear roadblocks and strike pickets, and a January executive order granting intelligence agencies powers to detain,

arrest and search people without a court warrant—approaching the unchecked authority wielded in the junta’s “disappearances.”

Soaring prices are compounding the crisis. In Buenos Aires, the price of standard gasoline has jumped 63.6 percent in a year—far above overall inflation of roughly 33 percent for the same period. This acceleration, the Argentine media notes, has sped up in recent weeks due to the US-Israeli war on Iran.

The 1976 coup remains an open wound. Earlier this month, the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) announced the identification of 12 people who were detained and “disappeared” during the dictatorship, through painstaking analysis of bone remains recovered from the clandestine detention center La Perla, where an estimated 2,200 to 2,500 people were held, tortured and disappeared.

These discoveries underscore that what occurred was not a “counter-terrorist operation,” as Milei claims, but the use of military dictatorship and fascist methods to crush a powerful upsurge of the working class that posed a revolutionary challenge from below.

To arm the working class with the lessons of this history, it is necessary to examine the role of the left tendencies at the time. In a 1987 statement, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) summed up the role of the Pabloite United Secretariat which sought to liquidate the Trotskyist movement:

In Argentina, where the most favorable conditions for the proletarian revolution were rapidly maturing, the forces of the United Secretariat were not only divided, they actually found themselves on the opposite sides of the barricades. [Ernest]Mandel’s faction was liquidated into a futile guerrilla war and isolated from the working class. At the same time, [Joseph] Hansen’s faction—led by [Nahuel] Moreno—defended the very state that was carrying out the physical liquidation of those who were aligned with Mandel.

Having concluded that “the dogma that the only class which can accomplish the democratic tasks is the working class is false,” Argentine revisionist Moreno and his Socialist Workers Party (PST) pledged allegiance to “constitutional stability,” joining the Stalinists and Peronists.

On March 28, 1974, amid mounting polarization, President Juan Domingo Perón convened eight parties including the PST, which then editorialized: “The participants have confirmed their fundamental commitment to spare no effort to maintain and consolidate the process of institutionalization in our country within the context of the democratic system and through the practice of coexistence and constructive dialogue.”

On April 5, Juan Carlos Coral of the PST met again with Perón and opposition forces, describing participation as “obligatory in all the stages of this laborious process involving constitutional democracy.” Lenin wrote that such pious appeals to democracy before the bourgeoisie amount to “preaching morality to the keepers of a brothel.”

As the ICFI explained, “In such a situation, the ‘left’ party which appeals to the bourgeois state to protect the workers—rather than calling upon the workers to arm themselves and crush the fascists and the state which sponsors them—is itself part of the whole reactionary bourgeois order.”

After Perón’s death, the PST joined an October 8, 1974 “multisectoral” meeting with his widow and successor, Isabel Perón, writing: “Let us say that our party considers this form of dialogue, which is unprecedented in the country, to be useful... The PST will continue struggling against all those factors that create the putschist climate and will struggle for the continuity of this government because it was elected by the majority of the

Argentine workers and because it permits the exercise of some democratic rights that, in turn, are conquests of the workers’ and people’s mobilizations that have shaken the country since the Cordobazo.”

Meanwhile, the Peronist regime was organizing the Triple A death squads against militant workers and guerrillas.

This wholesale capitulation to Peronism, on the one hand, and the suicidal guerrillism, on the other, led to the political disarming of the working class before the 1976 coup. Hundreds of militants in both camps were later murdered, but, as the ICFI noted, “The leaders who had betrayed them fared better. Moreno escaped to Colombia. As for Mandel, he continued to eat croissants in Belgium.”

The ICFI statement concluded: “The politics of the PST disarmed the Argentine working class, demoralized its advanced elements, and paved the way for the coup of 1976. Moreno was politically responsible for the deaths of thousands.”

Today, the successors of Moreno continue to claim the mantle of the Fourth International and Trotsky as they prepare a similar betrayal. The Morenoites around La *Izquierda Diario* have renamed themselves the “Permanent Revolution Current” in order to better appropriate Trotsky’s prestige, only to explicitly renounce his Theory of Permanent Revolution, which states the need for workers’ power as part of a socialist revolution extending to the advanced capitalist countries as the only basis to defeat imperialism and complete other democratic tasks.

These tendencies are again leading the working class along a treacherous path, chaining it to Peronism and the union bureaucracy just as Argentine and international capital, backed by US imperialism, move headlong toward fascism.

The immense outpouring on March 24 shows the potential social force for a genuine reckoning with the crimes of 1976⁸³ and for a struggle against the drive to “abolish” the achievements of the twentieth century. But this potential can only be realized through a break with all bourgeois parties, including those in the FIT-U, and the construction of a revolutionary leadership based on the program of the International Committee of the Fourth International, to lead the working class in Argentina and internationally in a socialist offensive against war, dictatorship and capitalism.



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