

Pseudo-leftist union leadership undermines Argentine tire plant occupation with appeals to nationalism

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This Friday, April 10, 2026, marks the critical judicial deadline for Fate, Argentina’s sole major producer of truck and bus tires, to begin paying workers’ salaries they are owed, following the shutdown of the factory.

A determined rank-and-file occupation of the Virreyes plant in Buenos Aires Province has persisted since the company’s illegal closure announcement in February 2026—resulting in over 900 layoffs. The tire corporation has brazenly declared it will refuse to comply with a court order and instead appeal the ruling.

Last week, the National Chamber of Appeals for Labor issued a binding order mandating Fate to immediately disburse all salaries owed to workers listed in a May 2025 deal. That sellout agreement imposed by the union had granted the firm massive tax exemptions and labor flexibilities in exchange for a commitment to avoid layoffs until July 2026.

Fate executives dismissively retorted: “The law is clear: you work, you get paid; you don’t work, you don’t get paid. The company closed in February.”

Rank-and-file workers initiated the occupation amid national outrage as soon as the shutdown was announced, but the National Tire Workers Union (SUTNA) at the plant, led by Alejandro Crespo of the pseudo-leftist Partido Obrero (PO) and integrated into the FIT-U coalition with congressional seats, has channeled the struggle into dead-end appeals to the government of Buenos Aires Province to take over operations.

The struggle at Fate, now over 50 days old, has seen escalating desperation among workers occupying the plant who have gone unpaid since mid-February.

Between February 18 and March 18, the Labor Secretariat of fascist President Javier Milei’s government imposed mandatory conciliation, but it then handed the process over to the Buenos Aires Province. The local government has extended the hearings until April 20, while Fate extensively argued its position—a move SUTNA interprets as tacit provincial endorsement of administrative delays.

Provincial Peronist Governor Axel Kicillof claims his administration cannot absorb the jobs. In response, the union has lobbied Buenos Aires legislators for provincial seizure of Fate’s board for one year, analogizing it to COVID-era hotel takeovers.

Crespo emphasizes tires’ “strategic” wartime role, referring to the disruptions caused by the US-Israeli war on Iran: “Truck and

bus tires are only produced at Fate... if international shipping stops, Argentina’s transport would be paralyzed.”

SUTNA held private meetings with a majority of blocs in the provincial legislature, including Peronists (UP) and the right-wing Radicals (UCR).

Most recently, SUTNA plans an April 14 demonstration in Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires, with Crespo boasting of the support he has received from the Peronist-led Truckers, Public Employees, and Oil workers. The Argentine Workers Central (CTA) has endorsed the protest, and the media reports that SUTNA is now focusing on courting the largest union apparatus, the Confederation of Argentine Workers (CGT)

These maneuvers are all presented within the framework of pressuring Kicillof and national officials to intervene and run the plant.

Nationalist Posturing of the PO

In statements to the media and workers, SUTNA, dominated by the Partido Obrero (PO), postures as defenders of “national industry.” The PO outlet *Prensa Obrera* announced this week a “new stage” in the struggle, which it called a “symbol of the Argentine workers’ movement.”

This new stage, the PO adds, will involve demanding an “urgent national strike and plan” from the main union centrals.

The PO defines the reopening of the plant “a national demand” and, attempting to cover up its appeals to the fascist Trump ally, it boasts that SUTNA has “hit Milei hard,” exposing his administration’s “industrial catastrophe” while sharpening “clashes within the bourgeoisie.” PO also charges that the shutdown makes Argentina “hostage to foreign tire production.”

While combined with militant phrases, the entire approach to the shutdown by the PO is aimed at using nationalist posturing to appeal not to workers but to rival factions within the ruling class.

The record of SUTNA exposes it as an apparatus used by the pseudo-left elements of the middle class to win favor from the ruling class. In early 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic raged, SUTNA hailed itself as a “model” for “safe” reopenings, imposing unscientific protocols that turned deadly. “In these complex times, all tire co-workers must keep acting with the greatest responsibility,” Crespo claimed at the time, placing the burden of containing the deadly virus on individual workers.

After two Fate workers died days apart, rank-and-file workers

denounced the apparatus for serving billionaire owner Javier Madanes Quintanilla at the expense of their health and lives.

Today, PO exploits Peronist rifts—protesting in front of Kicillof’s mansion and the Buenos Aires legislature, and pitting La Campora (Maximo Kirchner’s group within the Peronist camp) against the governor: “While La Campora and Frente Renovador lean toward board intervention, Kicillof’s wing stays silent.” Crespo warns: “The entire Argentine working people follow the Fate conflict closely, drawing conclusions about who stands with workers or lets factories close—even strategic ones.”

Crespo’s statement is correct in one sense: workers are drawing conclusions on the role played by his union and political allies betraying the resistance to the shutdown at Fate and the tens of thousands of jobs lost across industries under Milei.

This frantic lobbying of Peronist leaders and appeals to the CTA and CGT bureaucracies mirrors the role played by Nahuel Moreno’s Socialist Workers Party (PST) half a century ago in politically disarming workers before the 1976 coup. Behind the cover of opposing coup threats from fascist sectors of the military, the PST joined several meetings with the main bourgeois parties to defend the Peronist government, even as the latter organized death squads against militant workers. The PST also dissolved its industrial work into the Peronist unions, blocking independent action.

The PO and the Morenoite groups within the FIT-U are exploiting the shutdown of Fate to repeat a similar betrayal, courting the Kicillof, the Campora and the union bureaucracies. The question never raised by these forces is the effect of their actions on the consciousness of workers. The only outcome possible is feeding illusions that the capitalist state and its union apparatus can be pressured to defend the interests of the working class—a dead end that in turn can only result in political confusion and demoralization.

The Morenoite PTS (also in FIT-U) published a statement of support from Fate workers in solidarity with Tornel tire strikers in Mexico after four workers were shot by company thugs on the picket line. However, despite this sign of a broader interest in expanding the struggle internationally, the publication of this statement was a conscious attempt to conceal the orientation of the entire FIT-U and SUTNA leaderships to the capitalist state and Peronist union bureaucracy. This corresponds with the interests of upper middle-class layers represented by these parties, seeking better social positions at the service of capitalism.

The tires produced in Tornel or Fate are not ‘Mexican’ or ‘Argentine’ products, but the result of global chains of production. Only the international coordination of these struggles can defend wages, jobs, safe conditions, not to speak of opposing the emerging third world war disrupting every aspect of life globally. The shutdown of Fate is the result of global processes and harping on the poor quality of Chinese imports like the PO does undermines true internationalism and the ability of workers to fight back against global capital.

The historical background of the PO

PO originated in Silvio Frondizi’s 1960s MIR-Praxis (Polıtica Obrera) group. Frondizi was the brother of Radical President Arturo Frondizi and a Guevarist advocate of guerrilla action.

Absorbing Yugoslav/Algerian/Cuban influences, the PO worked alongside Nahuel Moreno and other petty-bourgeois nationalist tendencies to subordinate workers to the Peronist union bureaucracy.

A persistent quality shared by all revisionist tendencies that have broken with Trotskyism now in FITU is their portrayal of workers in the United States and the advanced economies more broadly as counter-revolutionary or bystanders at best, orienting instead the fate of workers in Argentina and other less developed and oppressed countries behind the national bourgeoisie. This goes against the entire foundations of Trotskyism.

In 2018, the PO hosted in Buenos Aires a conference calling to “refund” or “reconstruct” the Fourth International in alliance with a Stalinist party in Russia, disregarding the “river of blood” between Trotskyism and Stalinism. As the WSWS explained at the time:

What is actually meant by “reconstruction” is the amalgamation of politically heterogeneous organizations, without any agreement on essential questions of program and strategy. The only point on which they absolutely agree is the right of each organization to pursue whatever national policy that is deemed to be in its own best interests. This utterly unprincipled approach to politics has absolutely nothing in common with Trotskyism. Its attitude to the experiences and lessons accumulated by the Fourth International since 1938 is defined by a combination of political hostility, theoretical indifference, shortsighted national opportunism and the crudest ignorance.

During the initial stages of World War II, an Emergency Conference of the Fourth International explained in a statement:

If an imperialist “solution” of the present world conflict is imposed, a still greater rate of exploitation will be forced upon the colonies... The colonies shall be freed, politically, economically, and culturally, only when the workers of the advanced countries put an end to capitalist rule and set out together with the backward peoples to reorganize world economy on a new level, gearing it to social needs and not to monopolist profits. Only in this way will the colonial and semi-colonial countries be enabled to emerge from their varying stages of backwardness and take their places as integral sections of an advancing world socialist commonwealth.

Fate workers must urgently build rank-and-file committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to link their fight with the emerging struggles of autoworkers and other workers worldwide. In order to prevent another catastrophic betrayal that disarms workers politically as the ruling class turns to fascism, an Argentine section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—a genuinely orthodox Trotskyist party—must be formed to lead workers based upon this internationalist and socialist strategy for workers power.



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