

Argentine teachers facing massive pay cuts strike for 48 hours

By Andrea Lobo
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On Monday and Tuesday, teachers in Argentina's Buenos Aires province carried out a 48-hour strike to demand wage increases and greater spending for school infrastructure, materials and training. This comes after the provincial governor María Eugenia Vidal, one of the leading figures of president Mauricio Macri's right-wing *Cambiamos* coalition, decreed an insulting 19 percent wage increase, in the face of an official forecast of a 42 percent inflation rate for 2018.

While the Vidal administration responded to the strike by continuing the negotiations or *paritarias* on Thursday after a month of stalled talks, currently teachers would lose almost a quarter of their real buying power this year, on top of significant cuts in real salaries for the last three consecutive years.

Simultaneously with the teachers' strike, some 10,000 health care workers in Buenos Aires walked out after receiving an offer from the government of a 15 percent pay hike..

The 282,000 teachers in Buenos Aires have seen one of the longest *paritarias* in history, while mounting social opposition to the government's intended cuts has been reflected in a record number of individual walkouts this year in the province, adding up to 24 days of strike. The trade unions, however, have used these limited actions to let off steam and isolate teachers from workers in other sectors and regions of the country, let alone internationally.

This comes only two weeks after the fourth general strike against Macri. The most recent one protested the \$57 billion loan and austerity package signed by the president with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). One week earlier, the government presented its proposed 2019 budget, which is chiefly aimed at implementing the no-deficit clause dictated by the IMF to pay back creditors. The Congress is set to vote on this bill on October 24, and it will generate a new round of demonstrations and strikes.

Argentina is facing at least two years of economic recession after a massive capital outflow earlier this year, largely in response to higher interest rates in the US and fears over the local impact of the US trade war against

China. Initially ineffective measures like increasing interest rates to 60 percent and signing on to the largest rescue package in IMF history have resulted in two weeks of relative stability for the Argentine peso and financial markets.

Nonetheless, world finance capital is demanding far greater attacks on the Argentine working class. As indicated last Friday by the *Financial Times*: "In the longer term the credibility of the [IMF] programme relies on President Mauricio Macri and his ability to manage the public mood... Austerity drives are always unpopular, especially in election years—and Macri has said he wants to make a re-election bid next year."

As his approval ratings plummet and militancy grows among workers and youth, including student occupations and strikes in schools and universities, Argentina is approaching major social upheavals that could threaten the ability of Macri to even finish his term.

The deficit-zero bill incorporates massive tax exemptions for the rich and corporations and lowers employer contributions for social security. The cost is placed fully on the backs of workers and the poor.

The Scalabrini Ortiz research center (CESO) cites some of the sharpest cuts in real terms, assuming an optimistic inflation of 17 percent next year: 22 percent in Social Assistance to Individuals, 91 percent in the National Food and Infant Formula Plan, 50 percent in federal money for provinces—eliminating entire food, health, and education plans and cutting 92 percent of the fund for teachers' salaries, 41 percent in transport subsidies, 17 percent in hospital care and 19 percent in public health insurance; and it goes on and on. Other economists estimate up to a 40 percent cut in real terms to public education.

Macri plans to eliminate at least five ministries and thousands of public-sector jobs, while forcing entire new layers of the population into conditions of unemployment, hunger, cold, and deprivation, willing to work for little to nothing and thereby creating ripe conditions to further intensify the exploitation of the entire working class.

Workers have demonstrated their willingness to defeat this ruthless offensive, with the United Teachers Front of Buenos Aires (FUDB), which incorporates all trade unions in the sector, announcing that 90 percent of teachers participated in the strike this week.

This is occurring against the backdrop of strikes and overwhelming strike-authorization votes by hundreds of thousands of teachers, UPS workers, steelworkers, and other sectors across the United States, a one-month strike in the public sector in Costa Rica, international strikes by Ryanair workers in Europe, and growing class struggles in every continent.

Whether compelled to call for strikes, or postponing them indefinitely, the trade unions are without exception working to subordinate workers behind one or another sector of the local capitalist class and its bankrupt national-reformist promises, which in turn conceal further attacks against social and democratic rights to make workers pay for the capitalist crisis.

The de facto leader of the FUDB, Roberto Baradel, along with other figures in the Confederation of Argentine Workers (CTA) have joined the new Trade-Union Front for a National Model being organized by the Trucker's Union leader, Hugo Moyano. The front's main objective is to channel opposition behind efforts to consolidate and bring to power a new Peronist political coalition led by ex-president and current Senator Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, whose administration (2007–2015) began the current austerity drive.

Earlier this month, the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) was left tottering after Juan Carlos Schmid and his Confederation of Transportation Workers left the CGT triumvirate (now duumvirate), in support of Moyano. Ultimately, Moyano is pressuring the CGT into convoking elections to gain full control of the main trade-union confederation.

After participating in the demobilizing alliance between the CGT and Macri since 2015, Moyano suddenly began criticizing the government and CGT around August 2017, while calling for more frequent, symbolic one- or two-day strikes. Beyond corruption charges and government sanctions against the Truckers Union and his side businesses; Moyano's record at the service of the Argentine ruling class demonstrates that his maneuvers and those of his coterie are aimed against growing militancy and social opposition.

In 1971, the 27-year-old Moyano joined the leading body of the CGT and became the head of the Peronist Trade-Unionist Youth (JSP), which played a key role, in collaboration with the Triple-A death squads and the military itself, in the "disappearance," torture and murder of

left-wing workers and youth under the Peron administration (1973–1976). A US-backed coup in 1976 imposed a fascist-military dictatorship that sharply escalated this repression, including against the CGT. However, Moyano was brought onto the CGT directorate again in 1980 as soon as the dictatorship permitted its collaborationist activities.

Since the return to civilian rule, Moyano has responded to growing opposition against austerity and privatizations by distancing himself from the CGT leadership and the government in place only to channel social anger behind a new bourgeois government and allied trade-union front. In 1993, he founded the Argentine Workers Movement (MTA) in opposition to the CGT and Menem administration only to channel it behind illusions in de la Rúa and the right-wing CGT leader Rodolfo Daer; then in 2001 against the de la Rúa administration and behind the Duhalde administration and finally behind Kirchnerism during the convulsive political crisis of 2001–2003. In 2004, he became general secretary of the CGT in close partnership with Kirchnerism, only to break in 2012 with Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as opposition grew against her government, creating a Dissident CGT that year and eventually forming an alliance with the conservative Macri government in 2015.

Now, Moyano seeks to politically resurrect the discredited Kirchner, while making broader appeals to pseudo-left parties and trade-union currents under his demagogic Trade-Union Front. The only purpose these schemes can have is to prepare a new betrayal against the working class, in correspondence with the turn by the ruling elites in Argentina and internationally to dictatorship and police-state repression.

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