

What led Argentina's Left Workers Front (FIT) to vote for banning criticism of Israel under the guise of combatting anti-Semitism?

By Andrea Lobo
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Buenos Aires Province legislators Myriam Bregman and Alejandrina Barry of the Socialist Workers Party (PTS) and Gabriel Solano of the Workers Party (PO) voted on June 18 for the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) “definition of anti-Semitism,” which is aimed at criminalizing opposition to and criticism of Zionism and Israel’s oppression of the Palestinian people.

The bill was introduced by Sandra Paris of the right-wing Together for Change (JxC) coalition, led nationally by former president Mauricio Macri. It called for “adopting Resolution 114/2020 decreed by the Foreign Relations Ministry” under Peronist President Alberto Fernández, embracing the IHRA definition.

The bill provided a brief excerpt of this definition, which states: “Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish and non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

Argentina is the only Latin American member nation of the IHRA, which includes 34 countries, some of them headed by governments that have openly promoted anti-Semitism, such as Poland and Hungary.

The Fernández government, having adopted the IHRA definition, has sought to gain its acceptance by legislative and judicial bodies in order to give it the force of law.

The source of the bill raised no suspicions among the leading politicians of the PTS and PO, which belong to the so-called Left Workers Front (FIT) electoral alliance.

A quick search online would have produced in Spanish the full IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, which has been the subject of heated controversies in a number of countries. It indicts as anti-Semitic acts, “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination,” “claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavor,” and “drawing comparison of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.”

It states that criticism of Israeli policy is legitimate only so long as it is “similar to that leveled against any other country.” Given that no other country is pursuing the settlement and annexation of territories conquered in war, while imposing a de facto apartheid policy against Palestinians, who make up nearly half of the total population of Israel and the occupied territories, criticism of these policies is, by this definition, anti-Semitic.

Once news broke of the June 18 vote, there were widespread expressions of outrage on social media, including from FIT supporters. Nine days after the vote, Bregman, Barry and Solano released a statement titled “Rectifying a mistake,” providing the unconvincing excuse that the bill was introduced and voted on overnight and “in-bloc” along with “almost 100 other issues.” They then requested the Buenos Aires legislature to change their records to a “No” vote.

The legislators explained their initial “Yes” vote as part of their “struggle to the death against anti-Semitism.”

This controversy has erupted under conditions of a deep and protracted economic crisis in Argentina that has been sharply exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of the population are living under the official poverty line, and there is widespread hunger. Throughout June and July, COVID-19 deaths and infections have been rising exponentially in the country. Social explosions are on the horizon, and the ruling class knows it.

In January, Fernández chose to make his first foreign visit as president to Israel, where he held warm talks with the far-right Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. He and his predecessor Macri have sought to curry favor with Israel as a means of reassuring Washington and Wall Street that they back US global geopolitical interests.

Since the vote on the IHRA resolution, the FIT and its associates have sought to carry out damage control. However, no statement has addressed the most essential fact evidenced by the vote: that the FIT parties take bourgeois

rule as given and attribute to the capitalist state and its main factions in Argentina—Macrismo and Peronism—potential democratic and progressive tendencies. Only such a stance could make them so susceptible to the pro-Israeli maneuver by the JxC and the Peronists under the pretext of combating anti-Semitism.

The Fernandez administration's resolution cited above paves the way to censoring and potentially prosecuting individuals and organizations that oppose Israel's policies. It presents the IHRA definition "as a tool to sanction and eliminate behaviors and attitudes based on hostility and prejudice. ..."

In an ominous development, the Argentine Zionist Organization (OSA) has since employed this resolution to threaten the FIT legislators with legal action for expressing opposition to "Israel and Zionism." The OSA equates this to "hatred against Jewish people."

The PTS and PO legislators have since held an uncritical, "cordial meeting" on June 30 with Ambassador Husni Abdel Wahed of the Palestinian Authority, which works as Israel's police force to suppress opposition among Palestinian workers and youth in the occupied territories.

While attempting to "rectify" its vote in Buenos Aires, the FIT only provided further evidence of its nationalist-opportunist approach to politics, which is hostile to the independent mobilization of the working class and genuine Trotskyism.

The IHRA definition has been most infamously employed within the UK Labour Party, which used claims of anti-Semitism to witch-hunt left-leaning members who joined the party in support of Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader in 2015.

In 2017, the PTS hailed Corbyn for making gains for Labour in parliamentary elections in June of that year, which caused the Tories to lose their parliamentary majority. They explained in an enthusiastic tone that Labour had adopted "a program of limited reforms, but reforms at least. Corbyn tuned in to the 'spirit of the epoch' of anti-austerity and anti-traditional-politics."

The PTS explained in its journal *Ideas de Izquierda*: "the coming to power of these formations, like Syriza demonstrated in Greece, can only lead to new frustrations. But there are no historic fatalisms." In other words, anything could happen; perhaps these parties will not betray the working class. Finally, they called on the "revolutionary left" to "accompany the experience" of Corbynism.

The PTS, however, remained silent during the witch-hunt against Corbyn's supporters as "anti-Semites," which involved the direct intervention of the Israeli state and the connivance of Corbyn himself. This was a result of the Morenoites' nationalist outlook, whereby its positions on

international events are based entirely on nationalist political calculations. Inevitably, such politics left them entirely unprepared to face the witch-hunting based on claims of anti-Semitism once it arrived in Argentina.

The promotion of illusions that a Labour Party involved in imperialist war crimes in the Iraq war and brutal austerity within Britain could turn into an instrument for workers was only the reflection of their politics at "home," based on backing one or another faction of the national bourgeoisie in Argentina. The PO, for its part, called for voting for Syriza, which imposed the austerity measures it claimed to oppose and brutally repressed refugees from across the Middle East.

The parties within FIT speak for upper middle-class elements that, in pursuit of parliamentary, union, academic and other positions with associated social privileges, seek to politically disarm working class opposition against the capitalist system by tying it to nationalism and bourgeois politics. They constitute a faction within the capitalist political establishment and union bureaucracy in Argentina.

The politics of the Morenoites and their coalition partners today repeats the opportunist endeavors of their predecessors, Nahuel Moreno and the PO itself, who worked during the late 1960s and early 1970s to subordinate the working class to the bourgeois Justicialist Party led by Juan Domingo Perón and the Peronist trade union bureaucracy. This happened during the global upsurge of workers' struggles that began with the 1968 French General Strike. Their intervention set the stage for the crushing of the Argentine working class and youth by a US-backed fascist military dictatorship installed during the 1976 coup.

Today, amid the deepest crisis of global capitalism since the Great Depression and with an even greater dependence of the Argentine bourgeoisie on global finance capital, the attack against free speech involved in the IHRA scandal is itself a warning that the ruling class will resort to authoritarian methods to protect capitalism. This makes all the more urgent the development of a leadership in the Argentine working class that is firmly based upon an assimilation of the lessons of the long history of struggle of the Fourth International, that is, a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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