

AN ISLAND OF HOPE:



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ARGENTINA'S POPULAR REBELLION

SOLIDARITY WITH ARGENTINA'S POPULAR REBELLION

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As Argentina tumbles further into uncharted financial crisis an inspiring popular rebellion has been spreading across the country. An ongoing movement has developed that has become a living laboratory of struggle, a space where the popular politics of the future are being re-invented. The rising rebellion exploded on December 20th 2001, when over a million people took to the streets banging their pots and pans and ousting the government. This year on the 29th of December people in Argentina and across the globe are calling for a global day of action to demonstrate that those who are building alternatives to the dictatorship of the markets are not alone.

From the unemployed workers movement, “the piqueteros,” blockading roads and building community projects in their neighborhood— to the “assembleas,” the horizontally organized neighborhood meetings that have sprung up spontaneously in the cities. From the “ahorristas,” the angry savers who attack the banks daily to get their money back— to the “Trueque,” barter network which 7 million people are using instead of money. From the workers in numerous occupied factories who are self-managing their workplaces – to the High school students occupying their schools demanding cheaper bus fares; the spirit of autonomy, the celebration of diversity and the practice of direct democracy can be seen across Argentina.

Every social strata is united in the slogan “Que Se Vayan Todos,” they all must go, meaning that the entire political class leaves the stage, every politician from every party, the supreme court, the IMF, the multinational corporations, the banks—everyone out, so the people can decide the fate of their economically crippled country themselves. In the face of ever increasing poverty and total economic meltdown, the people of Argentina have found enough hope to continue resisting and have mustered sufficient creativity to start building practical alternative to the despair of capitalism. From Angola to Nepal, Bolivia to Turkey, the same cracks are appearing in the neo-liberal “logic” and people are resisting as their economies fall apart and their societies are further crippled by foreign debt. A dozen countries are poised to be the “next Argentina,” and some of them may be a lot closer to home than we ever imagined.

We need to be prepared, not only to resist but to find ways to rebuild our societies when the economic and ecological crisis hits. If the popular rebellion in Argentina succeeds, it could show the world that people are able to live through severe crisis and come out the other side, not merely having survived but stronger and happier for struggling for new ways of living.

For two days in December, when tens of thousands of Argentineans will take to the streets to celebrate last year's uprising, actions and events will take place across the world in solidarity with the people of Argentina.

What can you do on these days? Here are some ideas... Take pots and pans into the streets to celebrate the sound of Cacerolazo, start up a local neighborhood assembly, blockade roads in solidarity with the piqueteros, occupy your workplace or college and try out self management, expropriate goods while dancing tango, subvert the spirit of consumer Christmas by creating a barter market.... The options are endless...

The Aims of the Days of Social Disobedience include:

To show that capitalism can move beyond insurrection towards a real social revolution. A social revolution, made of thousands of revolutions, where people are beginning to build the life that they want and preparing to defend it rather than simply protesting against what they don't want. And that Argentina is an inspiring model of this.

To build a powerful global network of solidarity for Argentina. The movements in Argentina are in danger of isolation; without the security and the mutual inspiration of international solidarity, they will suffer further repression. Although many in the movement of movements worldwide have said, “Thank God for Argentina,” as we've had our hopes rekindled in the dark days, post September 11th, most of the people on the streets of Argentina have no idea that they've provided such widespread optimism. By seeing the world's social movements acting in concert and solidarity with their struggle, the people of Argentina will be inspired to continue their struggle.

To learn from the events in Argentina and apply these lessons to building our own autonomous spaces, neighborhood assemblies, alternative economic systems, self managed work places, etc.

To spread the stories and information about the movements in Argentina to social movements across the world.

Argentina Revolts: The Failures of Capitalism Revealed

Western leaders hailed the 1990s in Latin America as the decade of democracy, with "democratic" regimes taking power in many countries. The threat of Marxist revolution was past, and institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the United States government looked forward to promoting their brand of capitalist development. Unfettered by social resistance, vast profits could be expatriated north. A wave of privatizations initially met with resistance in many countries, but ultimately ended in success for banks and the private companies whose interests they represent. Economic liberalization brought a wealth of consumer goods to a small but eager class of people able to purchase them. For the great majority of the population, however, living conditions deteriorated as the costs of basic goods and services increased while unemployment and underemployment surged.

Argentina, traditionally one of the strongest economies in Latin America, proved to be a nagging thorn in the side of the neoliberals. For over five years, Argentina's economy has stagnated. Unemployment is around 20%. One third of the population lives in poverty. The external debt is \$132 billion. With a contracting economy and decreased tax income, the government has found itself unable to keep up on debt payments. The International Monetary Fund promised further loans if the government implemented austerity measures including decreased government spending, leading to cuts in the wages of public employees, in education, and in pension plans.

On December 1st, 2001 the govern-

ment announced that it was partially freezing bank accounts to prevent a massive run on banks. Popular anger boiled over December 18th with food riots in Buenos Aires. By the following day, almost half of the population of the city had taken to the streets demanding food and an end to the neoliberal policies that had impoverished so many. People took food from the stores, they attacked banks and ATM machines, and they demanded changes in the political trajectory of their country. On the 20th, President Fernando De La Rúa resigned and fled the presidential palace in a helicopter. In a matter of two weeks, three more presidents took office only to resign under public pressure.

The government reacted to the street protests with violence, killing at least 30 people and injuring hundreds. Argentineans have lived through many years of military dictatorship and are no stranger to government brutality. Military dictatorships in 1955, 1966, and again in 1976 used violence to repress popular discontent. Thirty thousand Argentineans were killed or disappeared during the people's resistance to dictatorship in the 1970s.

As the protests (called *cacerolazos*) continue, people have begun to form neighborhood assemblies, now numbering over 50 in Buenos Aires alone. The assemblies send delegates to a weekly group session where proposals for group action are made. The participants in the neighborhood assemblies reject the corruption and greed of career politicians and express a desire to create a more radically democratic system in Argentina. The assemblies are organizing themselves to help their neighbors and to provide the basic services that the government has failed to provide: healthcare and assistance to the unemployed. After years of dicta-

torship and repression, many people had shied away from politics. Now masses of ordinary people-retirees, teachers, workers, the unemployed, housewives, doctors, lawyers, and young people- are participating in an experiment: the dream of radical, direct democracy.

Much organizing work remains to be done before that dream can be realized. Powerful institutions, corporations, and foreign governments support neoliberalism in Argentina. And the people are not yet organized enough to protect their new movement from the inevitable backlash should they attempt radical change. We outside of Argentina need to lend support, by protesting against the Argentinean government, by providing resources to anti-capitalist libertarians in Argentina, and by protesting the involvement of the U.S. government and international financial institutions in Argentina.

Radical changes will not come from Argentina's leaders. Nationalization of the banks and protection for national industry is all they can offer. A real change in the capitalist system that forces people to sell their bodies for survival will not come from above. The rioters continue to revolt and to organize themselves more efficiently. The current moment provides an excellent opportunity for common people learn to help one and other and organize others to do what the government cannot do under the capitalist system; satisfy the people's basic needs without sacrificing liberty, peace, and human dignity.

The rebellious spirit in Argentina is bound to spill over and inspire the discontent in surrounding countries. People in the wealthier nations of Europe and N. America need to stop embracing their privilege and instead need to embrace the spirit of revolution.

ARGENTINE WORKERS TAKE OVER FACTORIES



From the wreckage of Neoliberalism Anarcho-Syndicalism merges with Council Communism

ALAI – As owners of factories and other companies abandon the crumbling Argentine economy, firing their employees and taking their capital to safer havens, workers are taking steps to avoid unemployment and keep the economy functioning.

Since the beginning of this year, thousands of workers throughout Argentina have occupied shut-down work sites and begun to run them themselves. In April, many of these democratically-controlled work sites founded the National Movement of Workers Controlled Companies (MNER) to cooperate in production, defend worker-controlled workplaces and to push for legislation that protects and promotes worker-controlled industry. “Our slogan is Occupy, Resist, and Produce,” says MNER spokesperson Jose Abelli.

Worksites that join the movement come from a wide range of economic sectors and include factories producing foods, textiles, glass, paper, clothes and even heavy industry such as the Zanella tractor factory. By September more than 100 worker-run companies employing 10,000 workers had joined the MNER.

While the neoliberal economy virtually destroyed Argentine industry pegging the pesos to the dollar, eliminating barriers to cheap imports and destroying the domestic market through layoffs and wage-reductions, the worker-controlled businesses are finding success. In the Zanella factory, production has increased and the number of employees has grown from 60 to 240 since it has passed into the worker’s hands. The

success of MNER linked businesses is partly due to the fact that they accept partial payment for their products in “trueque” locally developed trading systems that are often managed by neighborhood assemblies. Since most Argentines now have little access to pesos or dollars, they flock to companies that accept payment in locally developed currencies.

The neighborhood assemblies also play an important role in protecting worker-recovered industries. Once these businesses began showing a profit, many former owners have attempted to re-assert their ownership. But on many occasions the neighborhood assemblies have successfully mobilized their communities to defend the factories from riot police sent to clear them out.

The assemblies themselves have taken on the responsibility for running many aspects of local economies. In addition to local exchange systems, assemblies throughout the country have opened or taken control of: bakeries, brick and cement block factories for building local housing, paper and bottle recycling, training facilities, day-care centres and community kitchens. In some cases these are collective enterprises administered jointly by the workers and the neighborhood assemblies.

In mid-September the MNER won an important victory towards the legalization of worker’s control when the legislature of the city of Buenos Aires unanimously approved a law that legalized the expropriation of

two factories that had been occupied by workers. The law will serve as a precedent for the legalization of workers' ownership of other enterprises throughout the capital.

When Argentina's neoliberal economic and political system collapsed in December 2001, its puppet masters in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Washington opted to abandon the country to wallow in the wreckage of policies they themselves had imposed. This has had devastating consequences in terms of sky-

rocketing poverty, hunger, unemployment, and infant mortality rates, but it also left Argentines free to experiment with new self-generated solutions that are outside the "consensus" of capitalist globalization. In rising to the challenge Argentines are proving to peoples throughout the region that rejection of neoliberalism brings not the end of their country but a new beginning.

Taken from Latin America Connexions
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“WE ARE ALL PIQUETEROS”

BY TODD CHRETIEN

The killing of two demonstrators by police on June 26 has sent political shock waves through Argentina. The murders took place in an industrial suburb of Buenos Aires, where activists of the militant unemployed movement — known as the piqueteros (picketers) — were blocking a bridge into the capital.

Police fired several volleys into a demonstration of about 1000 piqueteros, injuring close to 100 people. The cops then chased a small group of activists into a train station and gunned down two in cold blood as a photographer stood by. The next day, eight photos documenting the murders, moment by moment, appeared on the front page of the country's main daily newspaper, El Clarin.

On July 3, a protest made up of 40,000 piqueteros, unionists, students, activists from neighbourhood organisations and left-wing political parties defiantly took over the Plaza de Maya in downtown Buenos Aires — the site of another police massacre last December during the uprising that toppled two presidents in a period of a week. “We are all piqueteros” was a main slogan of the demonstration.

The police repression — and the massive response against it — mark an important development in Argentina. President Eduardo Duhalde, who took over the presidency at the end of December after weeks of mass demonstrations forced out his predecessors, is under increasing pressure to call early elections.

He is trying to ram through ever more drastic austerity programs, which have already driven half the population beneath the poverty line. In a desperate attempt to divide the most militant activists from more moderate sections of the movement, Duhalde and his police began threatening to crack down on “violent” protesters while respecting “law-abiding” dissent.

By attacking the piqueteros as they blocked a bridge, Duhalde hoped to vilify them and set the stage for a wider attack on the far left of the movement. But his plan backfired. Mass anger at the police killings forced him to fire the Buenos Aires police chief, arrest the two cops who pulled the triggers and suspend more than 100 other police.

From Green Left Weekly, July 17, 2002.





SQUAT THE WORLD

Argentine neighborhood assemblies take over abandoned buildings to house community solidarity projects

By Evaristo de la Reta

Argentina's neighborhood assemblies began as meetings of angry citizens who initially gathered at street corners, squares, monuments, parks, and other public places. People felt compelled to take opposition to the economic catastrophe caused by years of privatization, unemployment, government corruption and impunity into their own hands. For most citizens it had become clear that Congress, major political parties, the judiciary and corporate media had simply turned into a slightly less repressive form of the same neo-liberal economic program that had begun to be implemented in the country by the military dictatorship in 1976.

During the first three months of this year, the momentum gained by social movements after the rebellion of December, combined with the general outrage at the worsening living conditions caused by the provisions of the provisional government of Eduardo Duhalde, made direct action to overthrow the new government the main focus of the neighborhood assemblies.

As months have passed however, assembly members have begun to combine the struggle against the visible icons of representative democracy with the need to guarantee the survival of the weakest in a society worn out by historic records of unemployment, poverty and starvation. This is expressed in the battle cry "all of them must go," with "them" referring to politicians, media pundits, and even unionist who support the status quo.

Argentina is a country of 37 million that annually produces enough food to feed 300 million while millions of children and mothers, poor and unemployed, even middle class people and

professionals barely have anything to eat. Although discussing strategies against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is important, assembly members say, making sure that everyone eats is the priority.

Several assemblies have decided to tackle this problem by creating community canteens and vegetable gardens. Many groups of organized neighbors were running soup kitchens on the street, but they soon realized that they needed to find a more adequate location for their project. Some managed to obtain buildings and unused lots from municipal governments. For others, the only option was to take over abandoned buildings and lots.

The first successful squat was carried out by the assembly that meets at Parque Avellaneda in Buenos Aires. They occupied an old neighborhood diner that had long been out of business. Neighbors with carpentry, electrical, and construction skills had little trouble in adapting the space which still had refrigerators, stoves, tables and chairs. Other assemblies followed suit and managed to take over other abandoned restaurants in different neighborhoods.

One morning in early June, the assembly of Villa Crespo took over a three-story building that had belonged to a branch of the Buenos Aires provincial bank and that had been closed in one of the many IMF-imposed restructuring programs. Just minutes after they had entered the building, assembly members posted a message on the Argentina Indymedia website requesting support from other assemblies in case the federal police showed up. When the officers eventually arrived, the presence of dozens of assembly members had

the desired effect. The police did not want to further damage their public image. Earlier in the week the murder of two piqueteros by members of the Buenos Aires provincial police had been witnessed by the whole country on television.

A week later, the assembly of Cid Campeador occupied the abandoned Mayo bank building, one of the many to go bankrupt in the last few years. Residents of Villa del Parque claimed yet another bank facility that had long remained abandoned. The twelve Buenos Aires assemblies that had successfully occupied buildings and empty lots had their first meeting, in August. They created a support network and exchanged information about their projects and the legal aspects of the occupations.

The hard work of cleaning and repairs done by the members of each assembly, have transformed these derelict spaces into places where at least a few of those excluded by neo-liberalism can have their nutrition needs met. The spaces also function as social and cultural centres, where a wide range of activities are organized, including puppets for children, popular education, and roundtables with progressive economists, human rights activists and writers. The food supplies needed for the canteens are obtained through donations from neighbors, meatpacking plants and grocery stores. In some cases, assemblies have managed to put pressure on municipal governments to provide them with foodstuffs. Assemblies that have occupied lots have constructed the typical adobe ovens of the Argentine countryside, which they use to bake bread. Bread is distributed along with the vegetables they grow on their piece of land.

To date (early September), there have not been many evictions. But the police have shown up several times at the squats with orders signed by judges authorizing inspections of the facilities to ensure that there has been no property damage. Assembly members see as threats that will not go any further as long as they can keep count-

ing on solidarity from organized neighbors and other opposition groups who run to the scene whenever police officers come. Assemblies also receive help from lawyers working with human rights groups in order to defend the squats.

There have been other experiences of squatting in Argentina prior to the current crisis. In both Buenos Aires and Rosario cultural centres have been occupying abandoned warehouses for more than ten years. What is new about the squats organized by the neighborhood assemblies is not only the pace at which the phenomenon has grown, but also the integration of these community centres into other autonomous social projects and initiatives in the grassroots economy.

This economy, organized from the bottom-up, has developed in Argentina as part of an effort of neighbors, students, employed and unemployed workers, all condemned to neo-liberal exclusion, to empower themselves. Assembly members are creating community canteens at the same time that workers at over ninety factories shut down by speculative capital have reopened the plants themselves and put them back into production. Similarly, millions of Argentines now depend for their daily survival on the barter network, Club del Trusque, which links a vast array of informal producers and traders. Jose, a member of an assembly that organized a garden on an abandoned piece of land, comments that it is pointless to think about a social revolution if society is not first reconstructed from below.

The neo-liberal values of savage capitalism must be opposed, in practice, by the values of a world built on solidarity. Squatting assemblies are transforming solidarity into an alternative kind of power, power in the hands of the community, by linking the recovery of spaces to direct democracy, autonomy, resistance and consciousness raising.

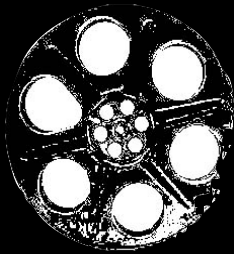


SOLIDARITY WITH ARGENTINA'S UPRISING



“¡Que Se Vayan Todos!” www.aljustico.com

Video Nights:



THURSDAY DECEMBER 19TH

Camosun College
Lansdowne Campus
Fischer Bldg. Auditorium
Admission By Donation

**DOORS
OPEN AT
7 PM**

FRIDAY DECEMBER 20TH

Fernwood Community Association
1923 Fernwood rd.
Doors At 7 Pm Videos at 7:30
Admission by Donation

December 20-21 marks the one year anniversary of the Popular Rebellion in Argentina. There will be solidarity actions around the world on these days.

Saturday Dec. 21st Rally and Cacerolazo

Centennial Square at High Noon
Bring your pots and pans, and other noisemakers and show your solidarity with the global struggle against Imperialism from Argentina to BC.