

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article516>



**Argentina**

# **A popular rebellion**

- IV Online magazine - 2002 - IV337 - January/February 2002 -

Publication date: Saturday 9 February 2002

---

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved**

---

**Thirty dead, more than 439 injured, 3273 arrested, has been the price of a popular rebellion by the traditionally unrecognised, ordinary people of Argentina. For the first time in our history, a democratically elected government was toppled, not by a military coup d'etat but by the direct action of the working and popular masses.**

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/argent2.jpg>]

This action was not a thunderbolt that fell from a peaceful sky. A multiplicity of struggles, popular actions and activity rejecting the existing order, paved the way.

This last year has been the year with the greatest number of social conflicts of the decade. Not just by unemployed workers, or by the "pickets" blocking the roads with their mass actions for subsistence payments, or to compel government action to improve their quality of life, but also by the employed workers for the payment of unpaid salaries and in defence of jobs and working conditions.

The legislative elections of October 14, 2001, were another expression of this protest. In a country where voting is compulsory, some 6,500,000 people (26% of the electoral roll) abstained from participating in the election, that is to say they refused to exercise their right to vote. Spoiled and challenged votes were more than 3,800,000 (21.1%). The left, represented by multiple candidates, gained the hitherto unheard of number of 1,500,000 (6%) votes. Thus the big parties lost more than 6,500,000 votes.

The crisis of representation that has been fermenting for many years finally matured and the regime lost its legitimacy as a result.

Outside of the framework of the institutions of the state, a popular referendum took place from December 14 to 17, 2001 which was organized by the Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA) trade union federation and some social and political organizations, who joined together in a National Front Against Poverty (FreNaPo), to campaign for a new program for unemployment insurance for unemployed family heads. Almost 3,000,000 people voted and expressed support for the Front's new programme.

Faced with an overwhelming economic crisis, fed up and mistrustful of the political parties and the institutions of the "representative democracy", the population's consciousness matured and understood it must take the resolution of its problems into its own hands.

## Social explosion

A combination of the following three elements was expressed in the social explosion of December 20-21, 2001. A government unable to face up to the crisis, unable to continue with payments to service the illegitimate foreign debt, resorted to freezing bank deposits, along with partial confiscation of the workers' salaries. With the co-operation of the banking system, it concluded all this by cutting the chain of the payments system by making money - the general equivalent of goods - disappear from the market, practically paralysing all commercial and financial activities.

The social answer was not slow in coming. In the districts and regions that have exhibited the highest indices of

unemployment and extreme poverty, thousands upon thousands of those who were excluded from production and consumption, surrounded the large supermarket chains, demanding food. Where they did not get it, they pushed back the fences surrounding the supermarkets and took the food for themselves. Large warehouse stores, that in their own way had been plundering the economy for decades, were also expropriated by the crowd. Actions of vandalism were carried out against small businesses, in a war of poor people against poor people that, one suspects, was incited by sectors of the more reactionary right.

The declaration of the state of emergency and a speech by the President of the Nation, as arrogant as it was devoid of content, precipitated a strong reaction in the federal capital of greater Buenos Aires. Banging their sauce pans angrily in the doors of their houses at first, then in the main thoroughfares and finally moving out onto the great avenues, a crowd of men and women, labourers, office workers, housewives, students, retirees, professionals and small business owners converged upon the most symbolic Mayo Square. In spite of the high price in human lives - and for that, those who were responsible must be judged and condemned - the citizenry thereby challenged a state that showed itself powerless to control a society on the move. First, in the early morning of the December 20-21 more than 40,000 people demanded the resignation of the minister of economics; then the resignation of the National President and finally they demanded that "they should all go away", clearly referring to the institutions of the state and those who form them.

In actions more symbolic than anything else, the headquarters of several banks, multi-national corporations, automatic cash machines, and the homes of several politicians, were on the receiving end of the anguish and fury of the crowd.

Because of the actions of these recent days, a clear limit has been established should there be any attempt to re-introduce the more extreme neo-liberal policies.

The downfall of the government was achieved by the self-initiated, direct action of the masses. The exploited, the oppressed, the excluded, acted to genuinely grasp hold of politics and recover their own power, their autonomy, when for decades it had been expropriated by the parties and institutions of the system. The results could not be more encouraging: it is the first time that the recall of leaders endorsed by the ballot box, has been seen in concrete practise.

The left actively participated in the mobilizations. Because of its small numbers or because it has not caught up with understanding the dialectic of non-delegation that is being built in real life, their participation was not decisive. The three workers' centrals, the CGT, the "rebel" CGT and the CTA, declared a formal stoppage, but did not call for a mobilization of their members and active participation in the mass actions, but simply put in an appearance and then quickly left. In the case of the CGT, it is the result of the compromises with the different factions of power in the state and in the case of the CTA, a combination of the absence of civic courage and political disorientation.

## Movement

The movement of the masses in action thus advanced with the knowledge of what it does not want, of what it will not accept and what it rejects, but still without the knowledge of what it really wants, leaving a space once more which can be filled by one of the existing political variants who traditionally express the interests of the ruling classes.

However, in spite of these limitations and deficiencies, a new political situation has opened up in Argentina. Debates and discussions are now taking place in the mass movement about the new forms of political representation; new relations between the representatives and represented, setting the stage for the collective capacity of thinking, of

## **A popular rebellion**

---

deciding and doing things on their own account.

The future is therefore very rich and full of potential, but not lacking in difficulties. A lot will depend on the intervention of the more aware sectors of society, to strengthen the confidence of these main players by enriching the consciousness of their own leadership and its transforming potential.