

Current situation in Argentina – a viewpoint from the Autonomous Central Federation of Argentine Workers (CTA A)

Only 5 and a half month ago, the 10th of december, a new government took over in Argentina. Since then, the president Mauricio Macri has continuously implemented policies in favour of the big local and foreign corporations. On the other and side, these policies which have had a negative effect on the purchasing power of the workers, have resulted in economic stagnation and consequently in mass dismissals.

Starting in decembre, one of the first presidential decrees was to abolish fiscal deductions on agricultural and industrial products, which represent one of the most important sources of influx of foreign currencies. The fiscal deductions on wheat, corn and meat today are 0%, while the fiscal deductions on soy beans have decreased from 30% to 35%. A direct consequence of these policies was an increase of the basic household provisions of 120% (flour, oil etc.), since most of the agricultural production is now destined to export. Just a few days after having adopted theses measures, the government also abolished all taxes on mining activities and deductions on the export of minerals, which is why today transnational corporations can exploit Argentina's resources, leaving nothing but depleted soil without having to share not even a little bit of the enormous financial gains in return.

To confront this policy and the unreasonable increase of basic food products, especially in the big supermarket chains, the CTA A, together with other organizations has organized the campaign “EmptySupers”, calling to boycott big supermarket chains.

Another irresponsible policy of the new government, was to heavily devaluate the argentine currency, the peso, measure which consequently had a strong impact on the income of people. Before devaluation, 9,5 peso were one dollar, with the liberalization of the currency, 14 pesos were one dollar, reaching a peak in march of 16 pesos per dollar. This represents a devaluation of 40% to 60%, having a huge impact on the prices of imported products.

All these policies were accompanied by dismissals in the public sector which caused 21.000 layoffs only in the first two month and led to the first mass mobilization of workers on the 24th of february, led by the Association of State Workers. At the same time, 15.000 workers of the private sector were also dismissed. The State responded to the increasing number of demonstrations against its neoliberal politics and policies with a protocol that allows the repression of social protest and limits the exercise of freedom of press. Furthermore, the government is seriously threatening the right

to strike. The minister of work, Jorge Triaca, in tune with the employers, proposed a debate concerning salary negotiations based on productivity levels and work absenteeism in the Committee of Salary, arguing that days of strike in a near future should be deduced from the salary of the workers. If this was not enough, he also pretends to establish limits for the renegotiation of salary. The debate of the Committee of Salary received many criticism from the CTA A, especially concerning the limits the government wishes to establish and which the employers and part of the labour unions accept, while the CTA A repudiates these measures and will confront them forcefully if necessary, since we are convinced that neither a dignified salary nor the right to strike are negotiable.

Despite the social unrest, the government of Mauricio Macri holds on to its programme, never failing the demands of the employers.

During this year, the price of gasoline already increased 3 times, 31% in total. Costs of electricity and gas increased 500%, water 350% and transport 120%. The social malaise is augmenting. These rapid and huge increases in prices led to a quasi stillstand of public construction and construction work in general, which is why the construction sector suffered greatly from dismissals. The financial situation of small and medium size enterprises, as well as cooperatives is also difficult. Many of them are on the edge of bankruptcy, considering that the policies implemented by the government which opened up the market caused a massive drop of sales of national products. And if this was not enough, the outrageous increase of costs also puts into risk the functioning of public universities, which will not be able to cover all their expenses. Therefore, more than 70.000 students, teachers and professors marched in defense of public universities on the 12 of May.

Furthermore, since the beginning of the year, the government, the employers and the workers are in farse negotiations concerning the increase of salary. In some provinces, the missing of satisfying answers, has led workers to mount camps which in some case are in place for over 80 days now and have suffered repressions and even the detention of union leaders. At the same time, the dismissals in the public and private sector go on, and already amount to 150.000. But also the demonstrations and mass movilizacions led by the labour unions and the federation of unions continue, with a peak of 350.000 workers in the streets of the capital city Buenos Aires, and half a million in the entire country, on abril 29th.

The last dramatic step taken against the workers by the president was his veto of the law against layoffs on the 20th of May, which was voted by a vast majority in the parliament. As a consequence,

the federations of unions are currently analyzing the possibility of a national strike in order to repudiate the dismissals, the politics of the government and the entrepreneurial impunity.

No need to explain that the neoliberal and anti-popular policies of the government of Mauricio Macri have caused an enormous drop of real wage and a worrying increase of poverty in Argentina. The Catholic University informs in its last report this month that the rate is already close to 40%.

The situation is getting even worse, when considering that the government is working to sign the free trade agreement between Mercosur and the European Union, approves of the liberalization of the market for foreign products and is reaching out to the Alliance of the Pacific, all of which will further weaken labour rights, the national industries, employment as well as the protection of consumers and the environment. To stop these plans, the CTA A takes part in the campaign “Argentina better without Free Trade Agreements”.

25 years ago, the CTA A was born as Federation of Workers Unions, aiming at substantially changing the way of how workers are represented and building up a federation of workers which goes beyond a simple federation of labour unions, being instead an instrument at hand for the organization of the people, ensuring union freedom and democracy, which still are to be realized. The current situation challenges us to unite with all workers and organize the fight against the repressive and destructive methods of the government united as class. Our America is threatened by an attack of the dominant classes and it is our task to lift up the historic banners of workers and strike back as peoples united for emancipation. Therefore, we call for the vastest unity of action possible, aiming at creating a critical subjectivity among the people in Argentina, in order to resist the attacks and dispute power for a juster, more equitable and politically as well as economically democratic society.

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Buenos Aires, 25 de Mayo de 2016