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Pension reform, neoliberalism and street fighting

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In recent weeks, the Argentine political climate has seemed to experience convulsions like never before. A pension reform project proposed by the neoliberal government of Mauricio Macri has been approved with difficulty by parliament. This measure is part of a set of adjustment policies pushed since the government of Cambiemos [Macri's right-wing political coalition] came to power. They include a sharp rise in taxes, rising inflation and reform proposals that directly attack the historic rights of workers. While this plan was supposed to be introduced progressively, the measures accelerated towards the end of 2017, so as to start the new year with a favourable budget balance.

Argentina:

Gabriela Mitidieri / Democracia Socialista

The pension reform law in question is fundamentally a change in the way pensions are calculated which also affects non-contributory pensions, and also social benefits such as universal child allowance. "The project proposes to change the way pension amounts are regulated. They will be defined at 70% in relation to inflation for the two previous quarters and at 30% according to the recorded growth of wages".

"This change in the calculation of pensions will result in a loss of income for retirees, because their purchasing power will stagnate, and they can no longer improve their condition. The net loss of purchasing power will be 21%" [1]. To get an idea of what this represents: 1 Argentine dollar is worth 21 euros.

From a feminist point of view, it is important to highlight some elements that make it possible to measure how the right wing turn in the south of the American continent and the attacks on the social rights of individuals particularly affects women and exacerbates the feminization of poverty. As indicated in a recently published [note](#), until 2014, it was estimated 62% of retirees were women. In turn, 86% of those who reached the last pension moratorium were women. Indeed, because of the structurally precarious nature of the female labour market, many women are not able to contribute enough for their pensions, either because they were not employed in formal work, or because they were unpaid domestic workers. By contributing a maximum of 10 years, a retiree receives an average monthly salary of \$5,700 (â,-271), while access to basic goods and services, taking into account inflation, exceeds \$16,000 (â,-761).

Argentine feminist economists, such as Patricia Laterra and Corina RodrÃ-guez EnrÃ-quez, along with the sociologist Flora Partenio, have rightly pointed out [that "the precariousness of life is being supported by an increase in unpaid care work by women"](#). 99% of the beneficiaries of the universal allowance per child are women, and they also receive 64% of non-contributory retirement pensions (for example, for disability), which again demonstrates how care tasks are feminized in the domestic space.

So, these are the "raw data". The government of Cambiemos was emboldened. Its legitimacy was consolidated, it seems obvious, after the parliamentary elections in mid-term in October, following which the list of the outgoing Kirchnerist government (named after Cristina Kirchner, president of the country from 2007 to 2015) failed to position itself well, while the traditional left was mildly successful in electing two MPs to Congress. At the same time, the repressive climate and the criminalization of social protest have increased.

This situation reached a point of extreme violence with the disappearance, following a police operation, of Santiago Maldonado, an activist in the cause of the Mapuche people, who was later found dead. Last month, in November, Rafael Nahuel, a Mapuche boy who resisted the privatization of his ancestral communal territories in Patagonia, was

also murdered. Social movements have become accustomed these last two years to go onto the streets once, twice and sometimes even three times a week.

Since March 8, in Buenos Aires, raids have become the mode of operation of the police at the end of each demonstration. This led us to relearn anti-repressive methods, demanding the release of each violent arbitrary detention carried out by one of the three police forces authorized to do so. However, the apparent social hegemony that Cambiemos was building did not allow it to see that every December is a new baptism of fire.

The approach of the end of the year, the difficulty of reaching the minimum subsistence level, the still fresh memory of 2001, the year when popular mobilization managed to open a breach in the normal functioning of neoliberalism, are so many elements that seem to have resurfaced. The attack on pensions was seen as a step too far, according to the feeling of large sectors of society.

Thus, professional union sectors that took a stand against the passivity of the General Confederation of Workers, leftist and Kirchnerist organizations, women's and youth movements met on the plaza in front of the Congress the day the discussion of the law was planned. The week before, the government had not obtained the quorum to do so, while the popular mobilization that challenged the regressive nature of the reform was taking shape.

On Monday, December 18, everything seemed in place for the ruling coalition to pass the law. Since the quorum was not reached, the coalition negotiated with the provincial governors to pressure their MPs to pass the measure.

This time, following the violations committed by the repressive violence of the police, the preferred body of the Minister of Security, it was decided that only the police of the city would act in the event of any disturbances. In the morning, unions, social organizations and left-wing parties gathered in front of the Congress. We have learned quickly from the Macrist ferocity and we coordinated protective measures, devices specific to feminist comrades in our organizations, who have learned how to react to the police because of the attacks they have suffered in recent years during the closing march of the National Women's Meetings.

Many of us rediscovered the memory of organizing against neoliberalism, during the days of December 2001, in the resistance of the occupations of companies like those of Brukman and Zanón, among others. That Monday, we failed to break the arrogance of a government of entrepreneurs and marketers and financiers. The law has been approved, it is a fact that Macrism has now more than 50 billion pesos thanks to this brutal cut in the pensions of Argentines.

But something happened: an afternoon of open confrontation with the police, a resistance to abandoning the public space and our right to protest, gestures of class solidarity between strangers who, faced with each new attack of gas tear gas and rubber bullets, intensified the songs of "Unity of the workers and whoever does not like to be screwed over!" Or "If it's not the people, where is it?". A night of spontaneous mobilizations in every neighbourhood of the city of Buenos Aires, in cities across the country that have recovered this old national custom, of hitting pots in the streets to make popular discontent heard. We are still in the process of recovering all this.

But, we will try to ensure things do not go off the boil while we sketch provisional analyses that allow us to continue the struggle and the organization of those who do not want this state of affairs to continue. We call for solidarity and internationalist comradeship for this beginning of resistance to be better known, in the face of the neoliberal advance that affects us all.

[1] <https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/C...>