



Argentine

Labor:

UNDER THE GUN

In Argentina today the military government led by General Jorge Videla is flagrantly violating every principle of democratic trade unionism.

Since the coup of March 24, 1976, the military junta has attacked the rights and lives of workers and their union representatives. Union offices have been closed down or taken over, union leaders have been arrested, kidnapped or killed, and all regular union functions, including the right to strike, have been outlawed.

Workers in Argentina are carrying the burden of the worst economic crisis in that country's history. The annual inflation rate is 350% and the government's economic policies have resulted in a 56% decline in real wages. A skilled auto worker is earning an average of \$100 per month and the cost of living in Argentina is among the highest in the world.

UNIONS UNDER MILITARY CONTROL

The open and systematic attacks on Labor are of international concern to all trade unionists. Since the coup, the following measures have been taken to limit unions:

1. Military administrators have taken control over the 4 million member CGT (Argentine Federation of Labor).
2. All normal union activities are prohibited, including collective bargaining and election of union officers and union meetings.
3. All strikes are banned. Any striker faces 5 years of imprisonment.
4. All laws protecting workers from unjust discharge have been annulled. As a result, in October 1976, 300 leaders of the electrical workers, including the entire executive board, were fired from their jobs.
5. Factories are operating under military rule and disputes over work conditions are handled by military tribunals.
6. Escalator clauses have been abolished, although the cost of living went up 348% in 1976.
7. At some plants, workers are under military guard. The auto factories of General Motors and Ford were occupied by federal troops in September 1976.

In addition to these methods of oppression, the Argentine military government has encouraged para-military groups to kidnap, torture, and kill without restriction. Deaths and disappearances attributed to these semi-official groups run now at about 15 per day. More than a thousand workers and union delegates have been arrested, kidnapped or killed in the last six months.

On December 9, 1976, the following trade unionists were kidnapped by commando groups in Buenos Aires:

- Arturo Garin: union delegate of the U.O.M. (Metallurgical Workers Union), at the Propulsora Siderurgica plant.
- Oscar Chavez: union delegate for the U.O.M., at the Acindar plant in Villa Constitucion.
- Raul Barrionuevo: union delegate for the Auto Workers Union, at the IKA-Renault plant in Cordoba.

On January 7, 1977, three union leaders of the Mercedes Benz Auto plant in Cordoba, Jose Antonio Vizzini, Esteban Alfredo Reimer, and Victor Hugo Ventura, were kidnapped from their homes.

Late February, labor leader Oscar Smith, delegate from the Light and Power Union, was kidnapped after participating in negotiations with Argentine Minister of Labor General Horacio Tomas Liendo. His disappearance was carried out by sectors of the military regime which in several occasions have expressed their disagreement with any kind of government dialogue with Labor.

UNIONS RESIST

But Labor in Argentina, which has a long history of united action, has resisted these oppressions. In 1976, strikes and slow-downs erupted all over the country. In September, 20,000 auto workers went on strike demanding a 12% wage hike. In November, 36,000 electrical workers confronted the military with long lasting and determined series of job actions in protest for the dismissal of their union leaders. Most recently, 8000 workers from the State Telephone Company initiated a folded arms strike refusing to work longer hours.

The first week of January 1977, representatives of unions still legal made public a document addressed to the military government in the name of all organized labor. Their demands were:

1. A substantial wage increase above present government guidelines to compensate for cost of living increases since the military take over.
2. The right to collective bargaining through the workers' freely chosen trade union organizations.
3. Lifting of all restrictions to trade union activity imposed since March 24, 1976.
4. Release of all trade-unionists who have not been formally charged and publication of a list of all prisoners and their place of detention.
5. Annulment of law #21476 which voids protective legislation that in some cases has been in effect for 30 years.
6. Annulment of the law decree which allows for indiscriminate lay-offs, presently being used for ideological and political purges.
7. Implementation of substantial changes in the economic policies of the government and re-orientation of the economy to reduce the severe unemployment.

WHAT WE CAN DO

The Argentine junta has been buttressed and supported principally by the U.S. government. The Carter Administration has requested \$15 million in loans for military equipment and \$700,000 for military training for Argentina for the coming year. An additional \$49.3 million in military aid remains unspent from last year. This aid helps the military junta in its efforts to suppress the Argentine people.

In the U.S. we can do much to help our brothers and sisters in Argentina. Concern for the human rights violations in that country has become nationwide in this country, and unions such as the U.A.W. and A.F.S.C.M.E. have called for an end to U.S. support of the inhumane Argentine regime. In early April the House Subcommittee on International Organizations will hold hearings on the violation of human rights in Argentina. The outcome of these hearings may determine whether U.S. military aid to the junta will continue.

Please express your concern about the repression of Argentine workers and unionists. Write to the following two members of Congress who will play an important role in deciding whether U.S. aid will continue, and urge them to VOTE FOR A TOTAL CUT OFF OF MILITARY AID TO ARGENTINA.

Rep. Gus Yatron
Chairman, Inter American
Affairs Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Senator Hubert Humphrey
Chairman, Foreign Assistance
Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Send a copy of your letters (and write for further information):

Argentine Commission for Human Rights
1912 N St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 296-8340