

Argentina: the new government and denialism

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Dear Editor-in-Chief:

On 10 December, a new government took office in Argentina, the product of democratic elections.

The human rights movement has dealt a blow with the victory of the representatives of the fascist extreme right, Javier Milei and Victoria Villarruel. They refer to Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu, Jair Bolsonaro and some European sectors, represented by the Spanish Vox, or the Prime Minister of Italy, Giorgia Meloni among others. All of them with an agenda that backlashed human rights achievements and anti-torture work.

In their proposals, Milei and Villarruel openly vindicate the genocidaires of the military dictatorship. Days before the elections, the new vice-president held an act in the Legislature of the city of Buenos Aires, the content of which was the justification of the genocidal actions of the military dictatorship (1976-1984). Denialism of the State terrorism that took place during those years is more than an exercise of manipulation of memory; it is a political interpretation of the present that aims to influence the construction of the future.

The manifestations of the current government in relation to the dictatorship have traumatic effects on people who have suffered different forms of torture and political perse-

cution. Our experience in providing psychological assistance to people who have suffered human rights violations shows us that the mourning process has a private and intimate aspect and another collective aspect linked to the social processing of the facts. In this sense, justice has had and continues to have a truly restorative effect.

On the other hand, beyond the direct victims, the social body as a whole has been affected by the crimes committed by the dictatorship. Today, the fear of the reproduction of repressive mechanisms is present in many, and the threats that circulate in the media and networks function as psychological torture.

The winning formula also explicitly disavows our sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands, perpetuating colonialist models and is determined to proceed with the privatisation of our oil, lithium, national flight company, the liquidation of public works in charge of the state, and against all the rights won by our people: the right to protest, workers' rights, the right to free health and free education, women's rights, the rights of the LGBT+ movement including equal marriage, the rights of indigenous peoples, etc.

Moreover, some of their proposals, which go against the order of our culture, are surprising. They have advocated, for example, the free sale of organs. Extrapolating, this novelty reminds us of the mechanisms of perversion,

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as it violates the necessary limits that support and frame the psychosocial organisers of a society.

On the other hand, on the assumption of guaranteeing control of the "streets", they have already stated that they will not hesitate to repress demonstrations in the public arena.

The dramatic thing is that this programme was made explicit in the electoral platform, and Milei was designated in democratic elections and not anointed through a coup d'état. Even with the emotional impact of this defeat, we are forced to reflect on its causes.

Undoubtedly, large popular sectors, especially the youth, were and are deeply dissatisfied with the government of Alberto Fernández (of the Alianza Frente de Todos, with Peronist hegemony and the participation of different sectors of the centre-left), since it did not resolve the most urgent economic needs of the great majorities, with inflation (more than 120% annually) that is devastating the economy of the population. Suffice it to say that 50% of children live now below the poverty line in Argentina.

The pandemic, the drought and the war in Ukraine, used by the government as an excuse, are not enough to justify these data. The disenchantment of the population with a government from which solutions to problems arising from the policies of the neoliberal government of Mauricio Macri (from 2015 to 2019) were expected was profound. This disillusionment facilitated the increase in the hegemonic discourses of so-called neoliberalism, which value individualism, consumerism, "every man for himself" and meritocracy, to the detriment of collective interest and the construction of shared projects.

The production of subjectivity is a disputed terrain. The ideas of neo-fascistic groups - as we have to call them- have momentarily managed to capture the capacity to be indig-

nant in the face of reality and to propose ways of transforming it. Two slogans have been especially successful: "Change" and "Out with the Caste" (using the term Caste as a synonym for political elites, questioned especially for corruption and favouritism). These slogans found an echo in the feelings of broad sectors of society. They managed to obscure that their concrete proposals on the socio-economic level are not new and have already been practised in times of other governments, resulting in enormous hardship for our people and a huge negative impact on human rights.

In this dispute over the production of subjectivity, they succeeded in terms of the contents of the so-called "common sense" reasoning. They penetrated ideas which already realised with previous neoliberal governments and appeared to generate expectations of improvement in living conditions, thus cultivating feelings of hope. In psychosocial terms, common sense is linked to the feeling of social belonging and has a fundamental aspect of a conservative, traditional character, which favours the incidence of the dominant elite discourses. "Common sense" is the set of spontaneous reasoning applied to the interpretation of everyday life and the social context, which helps to decide on a person's actions. On this common sense, social alienation occurs, whereby people identify with the discourses of the neo-fascist forces and take them as their own, becoming their spokespersons.

The pandemic, with the catastrophic experiences and the necessary imposition of social isolation, also constituted an enabling factor of discourses that uphold individualism and individual survival in an adverse environment as fundamental value.

Communication through social networks played a necessary role in sustaining social links and exchange. However, networks and mass media management are not neutral and

were used very effectively by the dominant sectors and economic elites. The irruption on the social scene of this right-wing, which calls itself "anarcho-libertarian" (in a clear usurpation of historical slogans of the traditional left), is not unique to Argentina.

It aligns with phenomena present in other countries in America and Europe. This space of a new extreme right is heterogeneous and has not yet stabilised ideologically. It is a differential manifestation with respect to the era of globalisation, with American hegemony, of Reagan and Thatcher. This new phenomenon deserves the careful attention of the anti-torture sector.

Shocked by the positions of the current vice-president, some assume a process of social dememory ("This people has no memory"). For our side, we are convinced that the struggle against repression and for Memory, Truth and Justice is a permanent dispute. These words are indelibly inscribed in the hearts of our people. They are inscribed because the occupation of the public square by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo during the dictatorship, the search for the kidnapped grandchildren by the Grandmothers, and the sustained presence of the human rights organisations found an echo in our people and were taken up by our people. The sustained presence of Human Rights organisations, found an echo in Argentinian society and were taken up in a sustained struggle for justice and against State repression.

During these 40 years of democratic life, in which we have reached unprecedented achievements in the world, such as the trial of more than 1500 genocides, previous denialist attempts have been present. We have had turning points, such as the attempt to impose

the so-called "two for one" (a decision of the Supreme Court of Justice that allowed the release of genocides and which was revoked due to the massive repudiation of the social scene), the pardons granted by the government of Carlos Menem to the leadership of the dictatorship that had been prosecuted and condemned during the government of Raúl Alfonsín (a government that emerged from elections called at the end of the military dictatorship, thanks to the deterioration of that dictatorship also due to the actions of the civilian population), the questioning of the number of disappeared people (which reminds us of the questioning of the number of victims of the Holocaust). Also, the police's impunity in the practice of torture and in what is known as an "easy trigger" (a procedure of real shooting in the street of young people "suspected" of committing some crime) etc. As we pointed out, all these attempts were met with a massive response from society.

In Argentina, then, there are social antibodies to the "Never Again", built up in the social practices of the struggle against impunity. Still, it is also shown that this "Never Again" is a cause for permanent struggle and is not guaranteed once and for all.

From this perspective, we understand that Milei's electoral triumph is despite his denialist and repressive statements and not because of his support for them. At the same time, it is a warning signal to reinforce the struggle against torture, repression and impunity for Memory, Truth and Justice, and an interpellation to assume, as professionals committed to social processes, the essential cultural battle in the dispute for the production of subjectivity.

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