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## *Stop the world, I want to get off (Argentina)*

They make you want to believe in God, says playwright Roberto Cossa, in his *¡Ay, Patria!* Is there a homeland? Yes, there is a homeland: we were reminded of it by some footballers (most of them live outside the country) who managed to unite the Argentines by becoming world champions. Is that what the concept boils down to? Let's say they stop the world and I get off Argentina. There are 46 million suffering waiting to see what can happen. But if I leave... where do I go?



In these days of presidential campaign, all kinds of diatribes are heard from the right (politicians and businessmen, media through) against a political leadership that they accuse of corruption and demagogic, blaming it for all the causes that led Argentina to its decline, along with invocations to recover the "economic greatness" that the country lost. according to the far right, in the early twentieth century.

Local liberals say – and they are right – that in the 1890s and until 1914 Argentina was considered one of the richest countries in the world in terms of Gross Domestic Product per capita.

But they tend to ignore that the governments of Juan Domingo Perón promoted industrialization, the expansion of the internal market, the unionization of workers and the expansion of political, labor, cultural and social rights. The women's suffrage law that established universal suffrage in Argentina was passed. Some dare to claim that the best record of GDP per capita from 1900 to date corresponded to 2011, during the heyday of Kirchnerism.



Perón and Evita

The truth is that Argentina has become reactionary: each government makes so many disasters that the next one is voted to react against it, disarm it, and dedicate itself to producing its own disasters. If you are not from around here you may wonder why this resource-rich, well-endowed, well-populated country is as it is. And if you watched the first presidential debate, you'll already have the answer.

You walk through downtown Buenos Aires and bump into hundreds of tourists? Uruguayans, Chileans, Brazilians, more interested in buying clothes and food much cheaper than in their countries, but must also avoid the number of homeless or jobless people who survive in the squares or in the nooks and crannies of the great avenues of Buenos Aires, trying to get some food to help them get through the day.

The official figures are terrifying: poverty reaches more than 40 percent of the country and indigence scratches 10 percent of Argentines. The unofficial figures are even more dramatic: poverty, destitution, hunger are constantly growing. The projection for the future

is worse: among those who (survive) live in the world's former breadbasket, 56.2 percent of children up to age 14 are poor. Is it the funeral of the future?



Inequality grows and the fortunes of the super-rich increase. Argentines with at least a billion dollars increased their wealth by 40% at the same time that poverty is on track to reach half the population. While 10% of the world's gross product is in tax havens, the proportion rises to 40% in countries such as Argentina.

Transparency International published in January the world ranking of corruption, where it placed Argentina at the same level as other countries in the region such as Brazil, but a few steps below Chile and Uruguay, the best scored in the region. The management of Alberto Fernández only achieved 38 points out of 100 possible and was ranked 94th among the 180 countries evaluated.

One hundred companies or individuals escaped 24,679 million dollars during the neoliberal government of Mauricio Macri. Among the large serial leakers are Telefónica Argentina with 1,248.2 million dollars and Pampa Energía SA with 903.9 million dollars; Monsanto Argentina SA; Grupo Clarín with Directv Argentina S.A. and Telecom Argentina SA; the Techint group with Siderar SA; Hidrovía Paraná SA ; Aceitera General Deheza, Arcor SA of the Pagani family; the Galicia Group of Braun, Ayerza and Escasanny; HSBC Bank; and Eduardo Elsztain's IRSA Group.



I try to imagine the changes that a Milei triumph would imply in economic matters (dollarization, end of the Central Bank), institutional (plebiscites if he fails to gather legislative majorities), educational, foreign policy (leaving Mercosur and cooling the relationship with China "for communist"). If he wins and does a tenth of what he shouts, Argentina would become a very different country. And the destabilization of the region is what Washington and the European Union fear.

Sergio Massa, Minister of Economy, launched, late, very late, a series of measures that will benefit those below -after consulting with the International Monetary Fund-, and is maintained thanks to the pulmotor of Cristina Kirchner, who continues to be the main computer of the official Union for the Fatherland, although her figure is today as devalued as the Argentine peso.

What if the winner is Patricia Bullrich, the third in discord, Minister of Security of the neoliberal government of Mauricio Macri? With increasing doses of conceptual violence, it concentrates on promising the liquidation of Kirchnerism, and setting up digital surveillance platforms for all citizens (behind which there will undoubtedly be a big business of American and Israeli companies).

There are those who say that the country has become, in recent decades, an unstable confederation of very stable fiefdoms, where each provincial chief retains command for decades and imposes conditions on the national chief, such as separating his elections so as not to compromise his power in the search for a common option. This confusion also shows the mood of these chiefs, only save themselves.



### Argentina debate

A reactionary country is a merry-go-round country, which goes round and round without advancing a step. And that's why someone like Javier Milei wins support, who claims to be a libertarian, shouts biblical quotes and declares that he is in favor of the dollarization of the economy, the sale of organs and everything public, "because the free market has to be free." But it manages to fascinate many young people – and not so much – fed up with accustomed politicians.

His is a personalist leadership – he did not face anyone in the primary elections – vertical and centralist, which shouts its refrain that "politicians are not the solution, they are the problem. They don't want anything to change because it goes against their privileges. If they don't want to change, let's take them out for good!" Could it be that Milei is not a politician?

### *Stop the world*

Different publications circulate on social networks that show an alleged cartoon of the cartoon "Mafalda", created by Joaquín "Quino" Lavado in which he says "Stop the world, I want to get off!". "I would never have put that phrase in Mafalda's mouth, because Mafalda does not want the world to stop and she to get off, she wants the world to improve. Then that could never have occurred to him," Quino said.



But Mafalda, a comic that was present in Argentina from 1964 to 1973 and then toured the world and all languages, was downloaded 50 years ago. Daniel Divinsky, editor of Quino, added that "more than half (of the phrases found on the internet about Mafalda) are false" and associated the phrase of marras to a Broadway musical comedy, "*Stop the world, I want to get off*", whose film version, directed by Philip Saville, was released in 1966 (without Mafalda, sure).

In those years of dictatorships and soft dictatorships, Mafalda would have reason to get off. Of course, there was no poverty "for all" of today, with outrageous figures of child poverty. With some humor, the Tucuman economist Horacio Rovelli recalls that these figures predate the August devaluation.

"The only thing the current government can say is that the others are worse, but this does not solve the situation of the poor," he adds, facing the presidential elections, where the far-right Javier Milei appears to lead the polls, surpassing the official candidate Sergio Massa, also Minister of Economy.

"I don't think Massa can contain this situation because the post-devaluation August numbers are still missing. On top of that, they are now strongly devaluing the dollar... And when the dollar rises, prices rise. The big price-forming companies continue to rise and another inflationary jump is expected," he says.



For Rovelli, this complicated situation is compounded by the lack of support from the large economic groups for Massa: Milei has the support of vulture funds, the funds of large international capital, the neoliberal Patricia Bullrich plays with Clarín and the hegemonic press, in addition to the big vernacular businessmen.

The one who is orphaned and only has the support of who was twice president (and current vice president) Cristina Fernández de Kirchner is Sergio Massa, he says. It is not that transnational capital has abandoned them: it bets and even finances the candidates with possibilities to safeguard the great profits in the exploitation of natural resources, such as mining, oil, gas... and now lithium.

This election could be won by Massa if he managed to show (prove is something else) that the others are worse, but it costs him because of the poverty and the economic situation in which the country finds itself, despite the new package of measures imposed by him, which favor, among others, informal workers. And he did not know how to do it in the pathetic televised debate between presidential candidates held on Sunday, October 1 in St. Louis.

There, the most forceful was Myriam Bregman, candidate of the Left and Workers Front: "Milei is an employee of the big businessmen, who have earned millions in these years, some living off the State, and with him they hope to earn much more (...) It's not a lion, it's a cuddly kitten of economic power," he said.



The right, with the bombardment of its media, won one of the battles: the discrediting of Cristina Fernández, who had won the 2011 elections with 54%. It was the enemy to be demolished in order to advance.

But the reality is that the big price-forming companies and the serial commentators and opinion makers take advantage of the fragility of the government of the inconsequential Alberto Fernández – entertained in calling himself "progressive" and going to any meeting or summit outside borders – to mark prices. An effect of the devaluation of August 14 spreads every week with the increases in prices.

And millions of Argentines are not even able to meet their basic needs. Even the highest paid suffer from the rising cost of living. Not only because, as a famous saying of former President Juan Domingo Perón says, "while prices go up the elevator, salaries go up the ladder", that is: they always run behind.

And after seven and a half decades, it seems that misgovernment has managed to commit suicide to Peronism.

I think about youth without examples and what that would mean for the future. The mafia message of the extreme right remains in my retina when I see the photos of the assassination attempt of the still vice president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, of the gun pointed at her face, without shooting? The message was engraved in everyone's retinas: we can kill you whenever we want, you, your children, your grandchildren.





### Cristina Attack

While defining who will take the reins of the country on December 10, Argentines pray (believers pray) to be able to reach the end of the year without repeating the great debacles that marked the last decades, such as the hyperinflation of 1989/90 or the economic and social outbreak of 2001, whose memory still hurts today and that could well be repeated.

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*Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)*

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