

People keep advancing towards Plaza de Mayo all afternoon. Some protesters on motorcycles wave Argentine flags. We don't know why, but when we hear them approach, we all advance. Organization improves, and we crouch down when the police open fire. There are barricades surrounding Congress, and we continue advancing. People applaud from their balconies. Celebrations multiply throughout the streets of the city. We've taken a historical step.

December the 19th was the turning point. It all began the day before when people, needing to feed their families, started to loot shops and supermarkets. The panicked president declared a state of emergency, all constitutional rights were suspended, and meetings of more than 3 people banned.

My friend described to me how on the 19th he had been on the phone with his brother who lives the other side of town. They were casually chatting, when his brother suddenly interrupted and said, "Hang on, can you hear that noise?" He strained to hear a kind of clanging sound coming through the receiver. "Yes I can hear something on your side of the city but nothing here." They continued chatting, then a few minutes later, he paused "Hang on ...now I can hear something in my neighborhood, the same sound..." He ran to the window.

People were standing on their balconies banging saucepans, the first cacerolazo had spread across the city. Before the president's televised announcement of the state of emergency was even finished, people were in the streets disobeying it. Over a million people took part, banging their pots and pans, demanding an end to neoliberal policies and corrupt government. Over the next two days of street protest, policemen would kill 7 demonstrators in the city, while 22 others were killed in the provinces, the much hated minister of finance resigned, as did the president, who had to be evacuated from his presidential "pink house" by helicopter.

Within a fortnight, four more governments fell. Argentina was now set on a major high-speed collision course, : with the needs and desires of its people, and the demands of the IMF, the inept government and global capitalism speeding towards one another.

The scene at the front of Diagonal Norte and Plaza de Mayo was truly incredible, inspiring, and unforgettable. Thousands upon thousands of people, men and women, of all social and economic backgrounds, young and old, thrusting themselves straight into the gas and the bullets, not knowing if the one they shot at you would be rubber or lead.

Like this we advanced in any way we could, carrying forward desks, chairs, fences, and anything that could serve as barricade and shield as we advanced. Step by step, meter by meter, block by block, we moved forward, retreating only to regroup, take respite from the gas, and advance again, growing stronger with the sight of the Presidential palace in the distance.

It cannot be stressed enough. This was not, as the newspapers are now trying to say, merely a few thousand activists and syndicalists. True, we were there. But this was the people. The old men with rocks in their hands urging youths forward, the over 50 motorcycle delivery boys doing all they could to stop the police (and who paid for their efforts with two deaths), the people in suits and ties breaking parts of pavement to send to the front lines, the store owners providing water and a place to sit to fighters who needed a rest before returning to the front. The many youths, with whom I spoke at length, that I, seeing hooded and fighting in the front lines, assumed were young revolutionaries like myself, who in fact were just youths who decided that the situation had reached an intolerable point and felt compelled to spring into action. Without parties and without leaders, only with conviction and courage.