

# Weekly Asado



Wilson Center

Argentina Project

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On February 21, an [estimated](#) 90,000-140,000 demonstrators occupied the Avenida 9 de Julio in Buenos Aires. Organizers said the protest was in opposition to the government’s rigid stance on wage negotiations, and its proposed labor reforms. The sense of grievance was real. Since the October midterms, there has been a [ten-percentage point increase](#) in the number of Argentines saying the economy is getting worse. Meanwhile, high inflation is eroding real wages; the average salary [is below](#) 2015 levels. Going forward, the government wants to keep raises to 15 percent, though inflation is expected to reach 20 percent this year.

However, government officials had reasons to question the motives of the union bosses. They portrayed the march as a defense of Hugo Moyano—the powerful, though [unpopular](#), truckers union boss—from his mounting legal troubles. As Interior Minister Rogelio Frigerio [argued](#), “This is a march that has as its motive a personal issue of a union leader that does not feel that he should be treated equally under the law.” Indeed, thanks to President Mauricio Macri’s campaign against “[union mafias](#),” prosecutors feel liberated to pursue the once untouchable Mr. Moyano, who has

found himself entangled in a range of [criminal investigations](#). The investigations into Mr. Moyano's empire strike at the heart of the country's most powerful union.

If Mr. Moyano hoped the demonstration would ease his legal troubles, it might have backfired. Mr. Macri has [argued](#) that, "There isn't a persecution against union bosses; what there is in Argentina today is a judiciary that is awake and acts independently." Meanwhile, most of Mr. Moyano's fellow union bosses in the CGT were unconvinced by his strategy, and distanced themselves from the march (see graphic below). Lacking the CGT's support, Mr. Moyano was forced to build bridges to left-leaning unions, social movements and the *Kirchneristas*, though backing from the *Kirchneristas* scared off more traditional union allies. (The alliance with the *Kirchneristas* demonstrated Mr. Moyano's isolation. After all, he and former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner had been bitter enemies, after a public falling out in 2011. During her second term, Mr. Moyano [led five general strikes](#).)

At the march, Mr. Moyano did not even pretend to separate his personal troubles from the broader union cause. Though most demonstrators were presumably more interested in pocketbook worries, in his [speech](#), Mr. Moyano focused on what he considers his political persecution. "I am not afraid to go to jail. I am prepared to go to jail, if the courts decide. I'm not afraid that they'll kill me. I am prepared to give my life for the workers."

That approach, and the alliance with the *Kirchneristas*, weakened Mr. Moyano. Downplaying the significance of the massive protest, Mr. Macri's chief of staff, Marcos Peña, linked Mr. Moyano to Ms. Fernández de Kirchner, a similarly divisive and unpopular figure. "The only person missing on the stage was Cristina Kirchner," he said. Still, Mr. Moyano's coalition does threaten to complicate labor reforms. Even before the march, the government had [decided](#) to split up, and delay, labor reform legislation, after pension reforms in December sparked violent protests. Now, the president's hardline opponents appear more organized, and the government risks violent street clashes if it moves too quickly or pushes too hard on its labor agenda.



# ARGENTINE UNIONS



A **Strong**, but **Fractured** Labor Movement

## The Facts

38 percent of all workers are in a union (2008)

67 percent of formal workers (2016) are covered by a union contract

33 percent of workers are in the informal sector (2016)

Unions are regulated by the Ley de Asociaciones Sindicales (1988), which gives the state the ability to grant monopoly representation to hand-picked unions



The CGT is an umbrella organization encompassing all officially recognized unions. It is considered the spine (*columna vertebral*) of Peronism, with an estimated membership of 2.8 million. Since August 2016, a triumvirate representing its main factions has ruled the CGT.



### ACUÑA

Carlos Acuña is Luis Barrionuevo's representative in the CGT triumvirate, leading a small, anti-Kirchner faction that vacillates between combativeness and negotiation with the government.

### DAER

Héctor Daer represents the largest unions in the CGT, 'los Gordos,' including service and public sector workers whose union leaders are consistently considered 'dialogistas.'

### SCHMID

Juan Carlos Schmid represents influential union boss Hugo Moyano in the triumvirate, speaks for transportation workers and is combative & anti-reform.





The CTA is an umbrella labor organization lacking official recognition and backed by unofficial unions for teachers (CTERA) and public employees (ATE). It is divided into pro- and anti- Kirchner factions, though the pro-Kirchner faction is the largest.



Since 2001, the far-left has gained a foothold among firm-level delegates (*comisiones internas*). It has made inroads in certain sectors (subways, tires) and is highly combative (*sindicalismo combativo*), anti-capitalist and anti-CGT.



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