

## Film Review

- *Don't give up your voice!*, directed by Mark Dworkin and Melissa Young, Argentina/United States, 2019.<sup>1</sup>

*Don't give up your voice!* (2019) presents the multiple ways in which Argentinean cooperatives challenged the stifling government policies introduced by Mauricio Macri's cabinet from 2015 to 2019. During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries Argentina tried to grow its economy and shave off its large financial debt. These largely fruitless efforts provided the context for several documentaries about the South American country, many of which focused on the people's response to the nation's deteriorating economic and social conditions. The documentary extends this focus by addressing the people's resistance to the policies introduced by the centre-right leaning president Macri, who gained power in a narrow electoral win in 2015, after Argentina had experienced the more left-leaning government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner from 2007 to 2015.

The 41-minute film begins with images of Macri's celebration of his electoral win overlaid by voiceovers of leaders and other members of cooperatives interviewed for this documentary. The general idea presented in the introduction is that many Argentines underestimated the power of Macri's campaign and did not think that his right-leaning party could win the election. Early on, the film tries to draw parallels between Macri and Donald Trump, the forty-fifth President of the United States, by suggesting that both ran their campaigns on similar ideologies. According to the film, Macri, like Trump, initiated an immigrant reform, delegitimized the media, stigmatized political groups, workers, teachers, and others, legitimized violence against minority groups, and limited funding for social services. The idea that Macri's electoral win ignited fear and worry among many Argentines that the country could revert back to a past of repression and authoritarian rule, is the ominous underbelly of caution in this film. Though the documentary does not go deeper into the comparison between the United States and Argentina, this foreshadowing sets the tone and remains implicitly present in the remainder of the film.

After this introduction, *Don't give up your voice!* abruptly reverts to a critical analysis of the social resistance that cooperatives performed against the economic policies and stifling democracy of Macri's government. Macri's at-

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tempt to limit the economic growth of the Argentinean population through sanctions was met with a major pushback and an increase of service, media, and consumer cooperatives being self-managed by workers. The workers recuperated commercial companies such as Bauen Hotel, Textil Globito, and Cerámica Zanon, and were able to make them into social businesses and cooperatives that catered to the people's needs. There was also a growth in alternative newspaper cooperatives, such as *Tiempo Argentino*, founded and maintained by a group of independent journalists who sought to provide alternative voices to the media monopoly that Macri's government attempted to thrust upon the people. The film shows how these social corporations continued to operate successfully under the leadership of the workers without the need to privatize under one CEO, depend on government funds, or operate in a for-profit format.

The documentary submits that the structures woven into the capitalist industrial system and the government fabric under Macri worked against these types of companies. According to the film, Macri's right-leaning policies stifled the success of these cooperatives because the administration consisted, for the most part, of CEO's whose main interests were their own profit. Therefore, the government system was hostile to free production under workers' control, to the point where several of these enterprises were vetoed by Macri's government. Hence, small businesses, service organizations, and not-for-profits that did not fit into the business model of the government were in jeopardy of being banned or prohibited, as they were not seen as profitable by the government. And so, the cooperatives protested to ensure their survival.

Through archival footage and interviews with cooperatives' members, public interest advocates, university lecturers and ex-government officials, the documentary shows that alternative media, and art cooperatives in particular, were coming together to call for a more democratic society that would allow for their existence. Street rallies, public demonstrations, and performance art activism were some of the notable forms of protest. Regardless of these multiple forms of resistance, *Don't give up your voice!* shows that Macri's government persisted in its policies. Still, in spite of this, Argentinean cooperatives did not give up and continued to resist. In fact, the film introduces the idea that Argentinean culture is inherently one of resistance. According to public interest attorney Graciana Peñafort, social disobedience is woven into the fabric of the nation. Peñafort's statement is given credibility due to earlier narrations and throwback scenes illustrating Argentina's crude history of political repression and economic failure. This cultural memory disallows Argentineans to sit by in silence and accept what seems to be a slow reversion to earlier times.

*Don't give up your voice!* does a good job in framing Argentina's resistance culture during Macri's presidency. Notably, the idea that left-leaning governments have served Argentina better than right-leaning governments is a constant sub-argument in the film. If viewers, particularly those unfamiliar with Latin American political history, can look beyond what might seem like a con-

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stant projection in favour of left-leaning governmental styles, then much can be said of the people's power to direct government policies whether embroiled in left- or right-leaning governments. Maybe the film should have included, as part of its argument, the idea that true democracy should be aligned with public needs regardless of governmental styles. This vision for true democracy, and the public struggle to preserve it, could then be extended, not only to the United States, but to other Latin American countries where democracy is at times threatened as well. Regardless, this film provides a valid template for public resistance in support of democracy.

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## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> The documentary can be purchased for private use or community screenings at [www.bullfrogcommunities.com](http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com).