

## Ha Votado y Botado

By Ellen Tveit

January 17, 2013

Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner is the president of Argentina. A lawyer by training, she had a political career as a national senator while her husband, Nestor Kirchner, served as president from 2003 to 2007. When he decided not to seek reelection, Cristina, as she is called by her supporters, ran and won. She is now serving her second term and can only seek a third term if the Argentine constitution is changed, which is what her supporters are trying to do.

I have yet to meet anyone who is indifferent to Cristina. People either defend her with brio for what she has done to help the poor and working class, or they think she is driving the country into the ground as fast as she can fill her foreign bank accounts.

But active participation in corruption is something that Argentines seem to expect from politicians at all levels.

An Argentine joke:

President Barack Obama, Prime Minister David Cameron, and President Cristina Kirchner are on a junket visiting significant public works projects in their respective countries. In the United States, they visit a hydroelectric dam. Cameron and Kirchner *ooh* and *aah*. President Obama pats his pocket and says, "Five percent. In *here*." Next, they visit the United Kingdom, where they tour a wind farm. Obama and Kirchner sigh with envy, and Cameron pats his pocket and says, "Ten percent. In *here*." Lastly, they travel to Argentina, where Kirchner is eager to show the two men a bridge critical to expanding the national transportation network. She points, and Obama and Cameron squint. "I can't see it," says Cameron. Kirchner pats her pocket and says, "One hundred percent. In *here*."

## Stranger Than Fiction

In Bariloche, things have been interesting since December 20, when looting took place on the outskirts of town and businesses up and down main street preventatively boarded up their windows. The mayor has taken a lot of heat because of what was reported as an inadequate police response, and Cristina Kirchner wasted no time sending 400 gendarmes to Bariloche to discourage subsequent looting (it's not that big a town).

While citizens were dissatisfied with the mayor before the looting, afterward he started to face pressure to resign from within his own political party, which happens to be the same party as the provincial governor, an influential national senator, and Cristina Kirchner. Reportedly, there was a secret meeting—which the mayor denies—during which he was asked to resign, but refused. So now

the governor and the senator (and, we can assume, Cristina Kirchner) are pushing for a referendum to recall the mayor from office.

A few days ago, five individuals associated with a worker cooperative were arrested on suspicion of organizing the December looting in Bariloche. The worker cooperative is called First of May, and is one several cooperatives formed by participants in a national welfare program that hires the unemployed to complete small public works projects.

As part of the political jousting between the mayor of Bariloche and others in his party, the provincial governor has questioned a reported payment in December of approximately \$19,000 **by the city** to First of May for “building sidewalks.” If I understand it correctly, the city says that a payment of \$19,000 to First of May was made in error and that a return of funds was requested. (This is what was originally reported as motivation for the looting, anger over a promise of money that was rescinded.) In turn, the mayor says that a payment of \$8,000 was made **by the province** to First of May *after* the looting, and that this was payment by the governor for the cooperation of First of May in carrying out the looting.

What’s the truth? An Argentine would probably say that it’s typical political theater and that they’re all on the take anyway.