

Argentines Celebrate Atucha II Reactor

by Cynthia Rush

Feb. 22—Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner joined with thousands of nuclear sector scientists, engineers, and skilled workers on Feb. 18, to celebrate the inauguration of the Atucha II-Néstor Kirchner nuclear reactor, which reached 100% of its energy-generating potential on that date.

This was a fitting response to the march held the same day which, under the guise of paying homage to the late federal prosecutor Alberto Nisman, was organized by London- and Wall Street-directed forces as part of the “soft coup” attempt against President Fernández (see “Behind the Nisman ‘Scandal’: British Gunning for the Argentine President,” *EIR*, Feb. 13).

‘We Did It Ourselves’

The joyous celebration reflected the pride felt by those present at having painstakingly rebuilt the reactor, and the nuclear sector, which had been dismantled by the IMF-controlled governments of Carlos Menem in the 1990s, whose Finance Minister Domingo Cavallo famously told nuclear scientists to go out and find jobs “washing dishes.” A Spanish-language [video](#) of the celebration beautifully captures the pride felt at this accomplishment, in the words of one engineer who proclaimed, “We did it ourselves. That’s what is most important. We did it ourselves! This reactor, these installations, the complex nature of all this ... this is what moves me greatly.”

Construction on Atucha II began in 1982, but was paralyzed from 1994 until 2006, when then-President Néstor Kirchner announced the revival of the national nuclear energy program. Atucha II will provide 745 MW to the national grid, benefitting 3 million Argentines (total population: 42 million).

In her speech, Fernández reported on everything done since 2003 to rebuild the nuclear sector, of which Argentina had once been a continental leader, but, as she put it, had been forced to abandon that role “due to pressures from abroad.” She underscored that

since 2003, “we’ve not only introduced science, through highly qualified labor, but we’ve also introduced sovereignty,” because today, 45% of the national energy system is in the hands of the State, compared to 5% in 2003. Today, she said, “we have to put much more emphasis on the much cheaper, cleaner nuclear energy.”

Cooperation with the BRICS

The Argentine leader addressed the absurd London-directed claim that China’s participation in the building of Argentina’s next two reactors—Atucha III and IV—represents a new form of imperialism. She noted that the 700 MW Atucha III, based on heavy water, will be 100% financed by China, but with 70% participation of Argentine companies and skilled personnel. The 1,000 MW Atucha IV, based on light water, will be a 50-50 arrangement with China, due to the large degree of technology transfer that China will provide, she reported.

President Fernández asserted that those opposing Argentina’s nuclear plans are not just “ingenuous voices” expressing their political differences. “We live in a world marked by profound geopolitical and strategic interests, the same ones that shut down Argentina’s nuclear program in the 1990s.” Those same interests are at work today attacking Argentina, she added, because it challenges their attempts to “set the goalposts” for the country, and refuses to submit to their dictates. No one is going to set the goalposts for Argentina, she warned, or give it orders as to what it can or cannot do. One example: “Argentina will now return to that select 11-member club of nations that can produce enriched uranium, but with a difference—we have our own technology which allows us to enrich uranium with less intensity, and this bothers some people.”

Implicitly referencing the new paradigm forged by the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), she declared that “there is a new world, and new actors ... and this is very good for us, because it allows us to have partners,” rather than going it alone. “That’s why we make strategic alliances,” she said, referring to China, which she visited Feb. 3-5. “We are open to everyone, and if they want to come from other countries ... offering the same financing conditions, and the same possibilities, we’re open to the whole world, but without [accepting] impositions from anyone.”