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UNIONS AND POLITICS IN ARGENTINA, 1955-1962

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ABSTRACT

Unions and Politics in Argentina,
1955-1962

Prevailing interpretations of post-1955 Argentine politics have argued that the regimes of the 1955-1973 period, despite their attempts to eliminate or to co-opt pre-existing social support for Peronism, failed to resolve the problems resulting from the Peronist legacy. In these interpretations, Peronism is treated as an "external" factor, a sort of insurmountable burden inherited from the past, haunting the fragile emerging political system. I would suggest an opposite interpretation. Post-1955 Peronism was an intrinsic feature of contemporary Argentine politics. The essential ingredients of contemporary Peronism--i.e., the presence/absence of Perón on the political scene, and the dual (corporative-political) role of Peronist unions--were generated and nurtured by its adversaries. These adversaries were the political and social forces which supported the downfall of the first Peronist government and attempted to implement semi-democratic or authoritarian formulae banning Peronism from elections. Therefore, contemporary Peronism (defined here as the movement which emerged from the 1955 collapse, and which gradually, and paradoxically, disintegrated itself with the unfolding of the second Peronist regime of 1973-1976) could only be understood as the antithesis both of the heterogeneous social and political front that coalesced in 1955 and of the several regimes which failed to consolidate themselves between 1955 and 1973. The mode of inception of Peronist unionism into Argentine politics became largely apparent during the 1956-1959 period.

UNIONS AND POLITICS IN ARGENTINA, 1955-1962

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Introduction

The post-1955 years in Argentina witnessed neither the consolidation of a bureaucratic-authoritarian military regime nor the establishment of relatively legitimized parliamentary practices based on the interplay of political parties. At a very abstract level, this situation could be convincingly characterized as one of "hegemonic crisis."[1] However, I think that more concrete propositions about the nature of contemporary Argentine politics have still to be made. In fact, my point is that the development of a new pattern of politics after Perón's downfall could be characterized by more than negative images of "unstable democracy" and "aborted bureaucratic-authoritarianism." One of the central ingredients of post-populist politics has been the political role played by unions, and I intend to show how the definition and implementation of a new role for unions has been one of the most important features of the new political patterns developed after 1955.

The formation of a trade-union movement incorporating a large portion of the working class--sindicalismo de masas--was completed in Argentina during the 1940s. The results of that process were usually pictured as affecting negatively the possibility of creating an autonomous union movement authentically representative of the working class, and capable of freely negotiating wages and working conditions with entrepreneurs. The unions' alleged subordination to the state during the Peronist regime was reputed to be the factor which largely explained their heteronomy and their lack of representativeness.[2] More recently, those authors dealing with the issue of corporatism have tended to consider Perón's first government (1946-1955) as a period defined by the predominance of corporative structures of labor relations.[3] While it would be a mistake to deny the existence of attempts at "corporatizing" organized labor during the Peronist decade, it seems to me that the attention paid to the corporativist syndrome has obscured the fact that the Argentine union movement enjoyed a certain, albeit varying, degree of autonomy. I would argue, nevertheless, that the capability of the union movement to develop autonomous orientations was greater during the post-Peronist period than in the preceding decade.[4] One of the most suggestive approaches to post-1955 developments stems from the notion that the union movement followed a "strategy of political pressure" in order to achieve its goals.[5]

According to this approach, one of the strongest weapons available to the unions has been their capability to de-stabilize regimes, or their threat to do so. Two central hypotheses have been associated with this strategy of political pressure. The first states that the union movement, either by itself or by becoming the core of an alliance of different social classes (excluding the large bourgeoisie), has been capable of stalemating Argentina's political system.[6] According to the second hypothesis, the exhaustion of the stage of easy import-substitution and the development of a new pattern of capitalist growth starting in the late 1950s signaled the beginning of a gradual deterioration in the conditions which further favored the implementation of the above-mentioned strategy.[7]

While the approach built upon the image of the "strategy of political pressure" warns against giving excessive weight to the impact of corporatist legislation and practices in Argentina, it nevertheless seems necessary to make some qualifications to the major hypotheses associated with that approach. First, the unions' capability to exert political pressure should not lead us to ignore their bargaining strength vis-a-vis the entrepreneurs within the "private" sphere.[8] Second, the unions were rather more effective--albeit with different degrees of success in each conjuncture--in maintaining the pattern of income distribution reached during the late 1940s than in influencing the style of post-1958 economic development. In turn, the new pattern of capitalist development structurally affected, in a negative fashion, the working class' share of national income. Hence, the image of a relative stalemate, within a context of gradual reenforcement of the structural disequilibrium of forces between workers and capitalists, would more appropriately describe the post-1958 situation than the simpler image of a complete stalemate. Third, it seems worthwhile to analyze more carefully the historical circumstances which surrounded the launching of the unions' "mixed" strategy of political pressure. More specifically, it should be noted that it was under Frondizi's regime (1958-1962) that the first and more profound steps in the direction of "restrictive industrialization" were taken,[9] while the main features of the model which was going to define the role of unions in politics were built up.

Let me comment in somewhat more detail on some of the above points. The downfall of the Peronist regime in 1955 did not change some of the most important features of the Argentine union movement. The Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) remained as the single union confederation, and both the CGT and the largest unions of industrial workers continued under the control of Peronist unionists. In addition, the prevailing pattern of state intervention was not significantly modified; an attempt at creating "free" unions in 1956-1957 never got off the ground and was promptly abandoned by the short-lived military regime installed in 1955. If anything, the degree and extent of state intervention were both increased after 1955. However, despite the fact that the style of state intervention was not altered after 1955, the mode of the union movement's participation in politics was largely defined and implemented during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The change of strategies of the union movement cannot be fully understood unless it is perceived as part of a process of creation of a new pattern of politics beginning in the late 1950s. The main transformations which define that pattern, from the perspective of the unions, were the following:

(1) The union movement remained "state oriented." As had been the case since the 1930s and more particularly during the 1940s, the dominant groupings--nucleamientos--perceived their influence on state policies as the main factor determining their chances of achieving desired goals. At the same time, their demands continued to be predominantly economic. However, the pattern of statist orientation underwent a major change: it was built around the creation of a discourse of political and ideological opposition to regimes which could not escape, even when they tried to, the Peronist/anti-Peronist dichotomy.

(2) The union movement became one of the most active political actors in a much more diversified political game. Its relationships, which before 1955 had been largely confined to the Peronist party, Perón, and the Ministry of Labor, expanded throughout the whole political spectrum to include other political parties and non-party institutions such as various enterpreneurial associations and the armed forces. Also, after 1955 the unions reached a greater degree of autonomy vis-a-vis the Peronist movement.

(3) A new pattern of capitalist growth emerged in the late 1950s. On the one hand, this pattern marked the exhaustion of the style of growth which had prevailed between 1943 and 1952, whereby both real wages and the relative prices of industrial goods had risen.[10] On the other hand, the new pattern of capitalist development resulted in a reorientation of the accumulation process in the direction of expanding the "structural space" occupied by the industrial units of the more oligopolistic and internationalized sectors of the economy. At the same time, there was a trend, subject to significant cyclical alterations, toward increasing subordination of economic circuits to the accumulation requirements of such units.[11] The pattern of politics inaugurated in the late 1950s reflected the changes in the nature of economic development. Political processes determining the profound structural transformations of the economy consistently excluded the popular sectors in general, and the union movement in particular. The correlation of forces became favorable to the sectors associated with the new pattern of development. The economic decisions made by the more oligopolistic and internationalized sectors, and, in some strategic conjunctures, by the top state officials dealing with economic policy-making--i.e., the President, the Minister of Economy, and their closest advisors--could not be counterbalanced by the social forces negatively affected by the new pattern of development: the less concentrated sectors of the bourgeoisie, the bulk of the working class, and the classes of the depressed regions.[12] Issues such as the new branches to be promoted and developed in industry and services, the capital-intensiveness of the technologies to be used, and the expansion of petty production dependent upon the more

oligopolized sectors, were not processed through a political system open to popular participation. Nevertheless, the working class and the other components of the "defensive alliance" maintained a significant, albeit gradually decreasing, capability to politically influence the patterns of income distribution. At various times the union movement was able to slow down the rhythm of expansion of the new mode of development; however, it was not capable of altering its direction. Regressive income-distribution policies gradually became one of the most conflictive cores of state policy, with the unions aiming at maintaining the level of real wages reached during the first half of the Peronist decade. This defense was partially implemented through their participation in collective-bargaining commissions--comisiones paritarias--where wages and working conditions were discussed with entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, influence upon state policies always remained the main instrument for achieving their goal of defending the working class' share of national income.

The "Revolución Libertadora" (1955-1958) and the Formation of a New Union Movement

During 1956 and 1957, the military regime's policies deliberately aimed at liquidating Peronism and barring the unions from politics. A striking paradox of contemporary Argentine politics is that one of its central actors, the Peronist union movement, emerged and consolidated its political position during precisely these years.

In the next two decades, the union movement was able both to withstand several attempts by the state to crush its power from above--particularly during the 1967-1969 period--and to neutralize those forces which challenged its hold over the workers. However, the unions' final collapse, which materialized after the military coup of March 1976, was directly related to their inability, during the second Peronist era (1973-1976), to use their power resources to consolidate the semi-Laborite regime which had emerged in mid-1975.[13]

The process of emergence of a radically different union movement under the 1955-1958 military provisional government has often been overlooked. This is due to several factors which made the pre- and post-1955 situations appear similar. The most obvious is that both before and after 1955 the union movement was predominantly Peronist, and that by 1958 the pattern of a subordinate relationship to the state, which had prevailed during the Peronist decade, was reestablished. This pattern was based upon a 1958 law, similar to Perón's decree of 1945, which gave the state the power to determine which union could represent workers in collective bargaining. It was also based upon the establishment of a system of parallel bargaining relationships--the union versus the state, and the state versus the entrepreneurs--rather than the traditional scheme of private bargaining between workers and employers. Hence, social scientists have rarely resisted the temptation to explain the resurgence of a Peronist and state-oriented union movement as a simple result of the failure of

the provisional government to achieve its goals. However, the "continuity" hypothesis overlooks several relevant facts. First, most pre-1955 Peronist union leaders were permanently removed from their positions by the military. Second, a new leadership emerged as a result of its ability to capitalize on a widespread and new process of working-class mobilization. In the midst of that process (1) the relationships between union officials and the working masses were radically redefined, with the former becoming more responsive to the pressures and demands of the rank-and-file; (2) Perón's role as the symbol of the collective working-class identity changed; and (3) the unionists became an autonomous political force.

The victory of the anti-Peronist coalition did not unleash the civil war predicted by Peronist left-wingers. That victory, however, was not followed by a comparable success in achieving the coalition's major goals. The provisional government's lack of success was largely the result of the almost unending series of contradictory policy measures which it adopted. The contradictions were particularly acute in the field of labor policies. On the one hand, the document which inspired the economic policies of the regime--the plan Prebisch--called for (a) an end to direct and indirect state subsidies to vital working-class consumption items such as food, rents, and urban public transportation; (b) a freeze on all wage increases except for a compensatory ten percent hike;[14] and (c) the elimination of all clauses in collective-bargaining agreements which limited employers' powers to raise levels of productivity. Announcement of these goals was correspondingly echoed by the hard-liners of the military regime--the more vocal being the members of the Navy--advocating that the workers should share in "paying the bill" that the Peronist regime had left unpaid.[15] On the other hand, the provisional government, yielding to the pressures of non-Peronist politicians from whose ranks most of the advisors on union matters came, sought to "win workers for the cause of democracy"[16] by removing, by decree, all Peronist union officials and banning them from future union activity, and by trying to encourage their replacement by "democratic" leaders. The contradiction between the regime's stabilization goals and its attempt to build a democratic working class immediately became apparent. The 1954 collective agreements had to be renegotiated in 1956; instead of following the recommendations of the leaders of the entrepeneurial associations,[17] who advised against granting any further wage increase and repressing work stoppages, the government chose to allow future wage levels to be set in the joint bargaining commissions. The government's hope was that it would be able to hold back demands for higher wages while legitimizing the "democratic" leadership. None of these objectives was achieved. During the following months there were innumerable stoppages and strikes--most of which were declared illegal. They were often led by Peronist activists who were able to force or induce many democráticos to assume tough bargaining positions. Settlements resulted in average wage increases of 30 percent and made the success of the economic stabilization program impossible. Furthermore, with few exceptions, pro-government democráticos failed to gain any significant support among the workers, who largely followed the new Peronist leadership. In fact, the

emergence of this leadership was effectively promoted by the ideological stance of the military government. Its attacks against the symbols and institutions around which the workers had coalesced during the previous ten years created a counter-image which provided the working-class movement with a powerful unifying force. The contradictory policies of the provisional government resulted in a peculiar combination of ideological hostility toward popular symbols and a relatively low level of repression of the opposition. The government, in fact, was ineffective in coercing and in generating social consensus around itself.

The government's defeat at the bargaining tables was a result of the mobilization of workers and activists within each union. This confinement of workers' actions within individual unions was a result of two factors. On the one hand, the takeover of the administration of workers' organizations by the state--the so-called intervenciones--was much more effective at the higher levels of federations and confederations. Both the federations and the Confederación General del Trabajo were farther removed from the grass-roots and thus less subject to their pressures and demands. On the other hand, one of the philosophical tenets of the military government and its civilian associates (the "democráticos") was that combined inter-union action was a main ingredient of the allegedly excessive politicization of union activities and, in turn, had resulted in Peronist supremacy. During 1956, Peronist activists, still affected by the shock of the state's anti-union blitzkrieg in late 1955 and early 1956, did not challenge the ban on inter-union activities.

The achievements of 1956 provided the emerging Peronist leadership with the basis to articulate broader demands of wider aggregations of workers. The next year witnessed the reemergence of a union movement whose stronger faction--nucleamiento--was the Peronist one. During 1956 there were no connections between the actions of the workers and unionists within each union--in which Peronists and many non-Peronists engaged in concerted action against governmental policies--and the discourse and postures of the incipient nucleamientos--in which the Peronist/anti-Peronist cleavage remained predominant. In the following year, this gulf was gradually bridged.

In fact, the success of Peronism at the union level during the crucial 1956-1958 period was achieved as a result of its capacity to weaken the internal cohesion of the anti-Peronist politico-ideological confluence within the realm of working-class politics. This process was rather complex; it consisted mainly of the gradual disaggregation of the ideological elements around which anti-Peronism had coalesced in 1955. In that year, the anti-Peronist stance in the sphere of working-class politics was categorized by four major principles:

(1) that democracy and pluralism within the labor movement could only be advanced by abolishing the rule which established that the state recognized only one union in each industrial or service branch;

(2) that the excessive politicization of the workers could only be avoided by banning multi-union actions which facilitated the articulation of cross-sectoral demands;

(3) that the existence of a single national confederation of unions brought about a dangerously high degree of interpenetration between the state and the organizations of the working class; and

(4) that appeals to the workers' Peronist identifications were an attribute of a basically evil regime which in reality had contributed to the deterioration of the workers' living conditions.

This set of ideological axioms, and the political prescriptions derived from them, was temporarily integrated in September 1955 into the political discourse of the four different protagonists of the anti-Peronist movement. These protagonists were (a) former unionists, including Communists and various brands of Socialists, displaced by the Peronists during the 1940s. Support for these non-Peronist leaders was negligible in most unions of industrial workers, but it was not insignificant in several unions of white-collar, service, and transportation workers; (b) the non-Peronist political parties, which had been excluded from most of the institutional domains of the state and from the possibility of appealing for the support of the popular sectors;[18] (c) the military, which was gradually alienated from Peronism as a consequence of the regime's attempts to reduce its autonomy; and (d) the bourgeoisie, which in general resented the undermining of social hierarchies--la pérdida de respeto--and in particular resented the level of power that union officials, shop stewards, and internal commissions had attained during the Peronist decade. This greater power had, to some extent, reduced the degree of control over the shop floor enjoyed by owners and managers.[19]

In 1956, the Peronist leadership began to challenge the axioms of anti-Peronism step by step. First, demands for higher salaries in both industrial and non-industrial unions were effectively articulated in the course of relatively unified actions undertaken by Peronist and non-Peronist workers and leaders within each union. As a consequence, the call for the establishment of multiple unions in each branch--a principle which the military regime had already enacted in legislation--was dropped. Rather than merely a Peronist tenet, the defense of the one-union/one-branch pattern came to be widely perceived as the best means for promoting the interests of the workers. Similarly, during 1957 inter-branch and inter-sectoral demands--for higher wages as well as for the end of government intervención of the CGT--successfully unified Peronist and non-Peronist workers and leaders, defeating the pro-government nucleamientos.[20]

During the last months of 1957, Peronist unionists challenged the foremost political axiom of the military regime: the prohibition against invoking the Peronist identity of the workers--viz., using Peronist symbols and slogans. The results, compared to the previous successes, were more ambiguous. On the one hand, the Peronists'

first attempt to make the non-Peronist unionists accept the use of Peronist symbols and adhere to the Peronist version of previous labor history resulted in a breakdown of the unity of the labor movement. This was associated with a temporary reemergence of the Peronist/anti-Peronist cleavage. However, this reemergence was not simply a result of the actions of the Peronist unionists; in fact it was largely precipitated by the "coalescent" effect of the first post-1955 presidential election, in which the Peronist/anti-Peronist dichotomy became (as in 1955) the "ordinating principle" of the political scene. On the other hand, although the Peronist party and its proxies were banned from elections, the Peronist/anti-Peronist cleavage sharply divided what had been a unified (anti-Peronist) party bloc in 1955. One of the internal factions of the Radical party, led by Frondizi, condemned the economic and labor policies of the military regime because they resulted in a serious deterioration of the real income and bargaining power of the workers and their organizations. Although Frondizi did not go so far as to demand the restoration of full citizenship to Peronists, he opposed the economic stabilization plans of the Revolución Libertadora and he adopted the mottos of Peronist unionism--i.e., the one-union/one-branch pattern of organization, the single CGT and the "winner-take-all" rule in union elections. This proved sufficient to win the support of Peronist workers for Frondizi's presidential candidacy, and, more importantly, to render Frondizi's regime inherently illegitimate in the view of Peronism's social opponents and of the most staunchly anti-Peronist military faction, the so-called gorilas.

The events of 1955-1958 strongly suggested what became the dominant trends of post-populist Argentine politics: (a) the emergence and subsequent protracted disintegration of democratic liberalism as the ideological synthesis of anti-Peronism; and (b) the transformation of the Peronist identity of the workers into a powerful negating myth which helped to fuse defensive social alliances. These defensive alliances blocked the attempts in 1959-1961 and 1967-1969 to increase the degree of dynamism of Argentine capitalism. The latter was attempted by means of programs which combined policies of capitalist deepening, restrictive industrialization, and economic stabilization. Let me examine these points in more detail.

Prevailing interpretations of post-1955 Argentine politics have argued that the regimes of the 1955-1973 period, despite their attempts to eliminate or co-opt pre-existing social support for Peronism, failed to resolve the problems resulting from the Peronist legacy.[21] In these interpretations, Peronism is treated as an "external" factor, a sort of insurmountable burden inherited from the past, haunting the fragile emerging political system. I would suggest an opposite interpretation. Post-1955 Peronism was an intrinsic feature of contemporary Argentine politics. The essential ingredients of contemporary Peronism--i.e., the presence/absence of Perón on the political scene, and the dual (corporative-political) role of Peronist unions--were generated and nurtured by its adversaries. These adversaries were the political and social forces which

supported the downfall of the first Peronist government and attempted to implement semi-democratic or authoritarian formulae banning Peronism from elections. Therefore, contemporary Peronism[22] could only be understood as the antithesis of both the heterogeneous social and political front that coalesced in 1955 and of the several regimes which failed to consolidate between 1955 and 1973. The mode of inception of Peronist unionism into Argentine politics became largely apparent during Frondizi's presidency.

Frondizi (1958-1962): The Consolidation of Vandorismo*

Argentine society experienced several major changes during Frondizi's regime. First, the industrial sector was profoundly changed following the rhythm of expansion in the production of durable consumer and capital goods. This expansion was based on the use of capital-intensive technologies and increased participation by foreign capital.[23] During the 1959-1962 period, new foreign investments in industries reached the highest levels of the post-1930 era. Second, Peronist unionism became a key actor within a substantially transformed political scene. Beginning in the first year of Frondizi's presidency, the political scene was largely shaped by the complex interplay of two processes: (a) conflicts over the integration of Peronism into parliamentary politics and over the recognition of the Peronist identity of the workers; and (b) the implementation of a program of economic stabilization and its effect upon political alignments. Third, the complete fragmentation of the political opposition to Peronism further weakened the bourgeoisie's claims of adherence to democratic values--held up against the allegedly anti-democratic essence of Peronism--and it strengthened bourgeois support for the putchist and anti-party stands adopted by the more recalcitrant factions of anti-Peronism.

The extremely contradictory policies adopted by Frondizi's regime reflected in part the need to yield to the frequent pressures exerted by the armed forces. However, those contradictions were mainly a result of the irreconcilable nature of the two cornerstones of Frondizi's program: the deepening of Argentina capitalism and the co-optation of the Peronist union leadership--the so-called integración. In pursuance of the goal of co-optation, Frondizi yielded to most of the corporative demands of Peronist unionism; the government enacted legislation establishing that the union movement should be re-organized in accordance with the criteria of one union/one branch, a single central confederation, and the winner-take-all in union elections. The government's adoption of positions supported by the Peronists--and the implicit rebuff of bourgeois demands that the power of the unions be crushed--conspired against Frondizi's second goal: to win the confidence of foreign and domestic capitalists. The associations and spokesmen of the large (urban

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*Vandor was the head of the Metalworkers' Union and the most powerful leader of the 62 Organizations.

and agrarian) bourgeoisie welcomed the stabilization measures announced by the government. They also claimed, however, that the "unsolved social question"--i.e., the government's refusal to launch a massive repression of the Peronist union movement--seriously undermined the long-term stability of the early achievements of the stabilization plan. In fact, the plan achieved a nearly 25 percent reduction in real wages, the liberalization of foreign trade, and a substantial reduction in the inflation rate.[24] In turn, the launching of the stabilization program, and the appointment of one of the long-time supporters of economic orthodoxy, Alvaro Alsogaray, as Minister of Economics, alienated whatever support Frondizi might have won within the ranks of the union movement.

The 1959-1962 period was defined by the achievement of an unstable political equilibrium based upon two precarious truces. The first truce was between the government and the corporative associations of the large bourgeoisie. The latter decided to support political measures which fell short of the "total solution" they had advocated since 1956, and their support was given in exchange for the government's commitment to firmly implement the economic stabilization plan launched in December 1958.[25] The second truce was "signed" between the government and the Peronist unions. The celebration of this truce, however, was preceded by a short but rather intense confrontation between those two actors. The year 1959 was inaugurated by a "hot summer" during which a general strike decreed by the Peronist unions (and initially supported by all unions) triggered a wave of severe governmental repression. Government actions ranged from the imprisonment of hundreds of leaders and activists, and the intervención of several unions, to widespread use of the police and military in breaking strikes. The hardening of governmental policies initially resulted in massive labor unrest--the number of work days lost in strikes peaked in 1959.[26] By the third quarter of the year, however, conflicts were subsiding and the workers' attempt to prevent a substantial decline in real wages had failed spectacularly.[27]

The 1959 confrontation resulted in a double defeat for the working class. On the one hand, the workers' share of national income dropped substantially due to the combined effects of wage and employment reductions. During the 1956-1958 interregnum, the unions and the workers had managed to block the attempts of both the military government and Frondizi's regime to implement stabilization plans which tried to prevent wages from increasing at a rate equal to inflation. As a consequence, real wages experienced a significant increase between 1955 and 1958 (Table 1).

As we have seen above, the barricades erected and successfully defended by the workers during the previous three years were demolished in 1959. On the other hand, the repression unleashed by the government during the first semester of 1959 signaled the failure of a union strategy which combined (a) an uncompromising stand in the negotiation of wages and working conditions, and (b) a "triumphalist" approach based on the premise that weak regimes such as the provisional government of 1955-1958 and Frondizi's would yield to the pressures of Peronist unionists in their search for a way to increase their fragile legitimacy.[28]

TABLE 1

AVERAGE ANNUAL REAL WAGES, 1950-1958

Year	1950 - 100	Annual variation
1950	100	
1951	90.2	-9.8
1952	81.9	-9.2
1953	85.8	4.7
1954	93.3	8.8
1955	88.8	-4.9
1956	99.5	12.1
1957	95.6	-3.9
1958	107.7	12.7

SOURCE: Based on information contained in Banco Central de la República Argentina, Sistema de cuentas del producto e ingreso de la Argentina (Buenos Aires: Banco Central, 1975).

Thus, the double defeat of the working class opened the way for a truce between the government and the unions. This truce remained in force during the rest of Frondizi's presidency, and its main features extended beyond the end of Frondizi's government, providing the basis for the predominant mode of integration of the unions and the working class in national politics throughout the remainder of the pre-1976 period. These features were:

(1) The union movement lost the capability it had acquired during 1956-1958 to abort anti-inflationary policies before they were even implemented. Consequently, it lost the political initiative it had maintained during those years. The Peronist 62 Organizations, however, developed an alternative (and eminently defensive) capability: that of "rebounding" by defeating anti-inflationary policies which had temporarily succeeded in reducing real wages. This "rebounding" capability of the unions was especially effective from 1963 to 1966 and from 1970 to 1972. During these interregna, the effects of the initially successful stabilization attempts of 1959-1962 and 1967-1969 were completely erased.

(2) The "hard-line" economic policies of the 1958-1976 period combined (a) recipes of stabilization and wage "lags," and (b) political strategies of acceptance of Peronist predominance within the union sphere. This acceptance was implemented by inducing and coercing Peronist union officials to behave "responsibly" by means of rewarding collaborative behavior and punishing contentious behavior.

(3) At the time of Perón's downfall in 1955, the union movement was monolithically controlled by a centralized leadership

which had been able to suppress all dissidence from within the Peronist camp and all opposition from outside. Both the centralized control and the ideological and political uniformity were justified by Peronist ideology. Peronism condemned pluralism and dissension as the expression of anti-national and anti-popular interests, and it claimed that "inorganic participation"--i.e., democracy at the grass-roots level--was the source of chaos. After 1958, however, unlike the 1946-1955 decade, Peronist predominance within the labor movement did not exclude the acceptance of a double heterogeneity; the 62 Organizations tolerated a significant level of internal dissension and external opposition.

A Final Remark

The most significant features of the mode of inception of the unions into contemporary Argentine politics were largely defined during the 1955-1962 period. In turn, the predominant patterns of contemporary Argentine politics were also defined during those "formative" years. The following decade and a half--culminating with the 1976 coup--witnessed several cycles during which those patterns were not significantly modified. The importance of the coup should not be underemphasized. It opened the possibility for the inauguration of a new long-term historic cycle in Argentine politics (and society). Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that one of the tasks that the new military government undertook with greater energy was the eradication of both the institutional and social bases of power of the (Peronist) labor movement.

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[1]Portantiero has argued that the crisis of hegemony that plagued Argentina's political system became more acute after 1955. See Juan Carlos Portantiero, "Clases dominantes y crisis política en la Argentina," in O. Braun (ed.), El capitalismo argentino en crisis (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1973). An argument on the zero-sum nature of Argentine politics that could be integrated into the Gramscian perspective presented by Portantiero was made by Guillermo O'Donnell in Modernización y autoritarismo (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1972).

[2]Some recent works have undermined two of the pillars on which this interpretation was based--the absolute novelty of the pattern of labor relations developed during the Peronist years and labor's total lack of independence from state institutions. Gaudio and Pilone have conclusively demonstrated how the Conservative regimes of the 1930s laid down the foundations of state intervention in labor relations, and Doyon has strongly shaken the image of unions as totally subservient to the Peronist government. See Ricardo Gaudio and Jorge Pilone, "Estado y relaciones obrero-patronales en los orígenes de la negociación colectiva en la Argentina," Estudios Sociales No. 5 (Buenos Aires: CEDES, 1977); Louise Doyon, "El crecimiento sindical bajo el peronismo," Desarrollo Económico 15 (April-June, 1975) and "Conflitos operarios durante o regime peronismo, 1946-1955," Estudos CEBRAP 13 (1975).

[3]See, for example, David Collier and Ruth Berins Collier, "Who Does What, to Whom and How: Toward a Comparative Analysis of Latin American Corporatism," in J. Malloy (ed.), Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).

[4]However, as I will discuss below, this fact was less a result of a rupture of the ties that dependently related the unions to the state, than an effect of the broadening of the range of potential tactical allies of the unions within the spectrum of parties and other political institutions.

[5]See, for example, Juan Carlos Torre, "Sindicalismo de masas y sistema político en los países del Cono Sur" (mimeo, 1977).

[6]Torcuato Di Tella, "Stalemate or Coexistence in Argentina," in J. Petras and M. Zeitlin (eds.), Latin America: Reform or Revolution? (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1968); and Guillermo O'Donnell, "Estado y alianzas en la Argentina," Documento de Trabajo No. 5 (Buenos Aires: CEDES, 1977).

[7]Torre, "Sindicalismo de masas y sistema político en los países del Cono Sur," p. 18.

[8]Although bargaining mechanisms were always subject to governmental intervention and control, there was room (which was not uniform during the post-1955 years) for unions and enterpreneurial associations to "privately" confront their respective strengths. The

REFERENCES

development of a private arena of conflict, alongside the political arena, was one of the distinctive features of Argentina's labor relations vis-a-vis countries which also shared a populist past, such as Brazil. In fact, in the case of Argentina, political-pressure actions were part of a strategy which combined them with confrontation at the bargaining table.

[9]The new pattern of capitalist development inaugurated by Latin America in the late 1950s was called "restrictive industrialization" by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Ideologías de la burguesía industrial en sociedades dependientes (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1971). Restrictive industrialization combined the development of sectors producing durable consumer goods, capitalist deepening, and the implementation of orthodox policies. See Guillermo O'Donnell, "Argentina, 1966-1973" (mimeo, 1979); Albert O. Hirschman, "The Turn to Authoritarianism," in David Collier (ed.), The New Authoritarianism in Latin America (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979); and José Serra, "Three Mistaken Theses," in Collier (ed.), op. cit. for alternative views on which of the three was the most important ingredient of developmental policies during the 1960s.

[10]This was possible because the urban sector as a whole received a large portion of the surplus expropriated by the state from the agrarian sector via differential exchange rates and price-control mechanisms.

[11]The distinction between "structural space" of the more oligopolistic and internationalized sectors, and the degree of subordination of the economy to their accumulation requirements is made by O'Donnell in his 1979 study of the 1966-1973 Argentine military regime.

[12]The social groups were the core of what O'Donnell has defined as the "defensive alliance." O'Donnell, "Estado y alianzas en la Argentina."

[13]In June 1975, the unions blocked the attempt of the Isabel Perón-López Rega faction of Peronism to launch an economic stabilization plan. Shortly thereafter, López Rega, who had become the power behind the throne, was forced out of the government, and Antonio Cafiero, the candidate of the unions, was appointed to the Ministry of Economy.

[14]The provisional government claimed that the March 1955-February 1956 cost-of-living increase would only be ten percent.

[15]La Nación, January 30, 1956.

[16]As Socialist unionists put it in March 1956. Declaración of COASI, the Socialist organization which dealt with union matters, March 15, 1956.

[17]Some of the more prominent members of the urban bourgeoisie, like Krieger Vasena and Méndez Delfino, were appointed to an ad hoc commission advising the Minister of Economy.

[18]The main opposition party was the Unión Cívica Radical; in 1954 the Radicals received around 35 percent of the total vote.

[19]In 1954 the president of the semi-official National Entrepreneurial Association--the CGE--argued that "excesses" such as ". . . the demagogy of shop stewards, the abuses of internal commissions, and labor's lack of discipline" were undermining productivity. Marcos Giménez Zapiola and Carlos Leguizamón, "El Congreso Nacional de la Productividad y la etapa final del régimen peronista," mimeo (Buenos Aires, 1979), p. 17. There is little doubt that the leaders of the Industrial Association--UIA--closed down by the Peronist government would have been much harsher in their condemnations of those practices.

[20]The peak of the joint Peronist/non-Peronist drive was reached when the government's attempt to turn control of the CGT over to a friendly nucleamiento was unexpectedly thwarted by the majority of the delegates to a national labor congress in August 1957.

[21]O'Donnell, Modernización y autoritarismo; Di Tella, "Stalemate or Coexistence in Argentina."

[22]I define contemporary Peronism as the movement that emerged from the 1955 collapse and that gradually, and paradoxically, disintegrated itself with the unfolding of the second Peronist regime of 1973-1976.

[23]Although the installed capacity for domestic production of new machinery and equipment expanded more than two-fold between 1958 and 1961, industrial employment experienced a slight decrease. Carlos Díaz-Alejandro, Ensayos sobre la historia económica de la Argentina (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 1975), pp. 390, 445.

[24]At that time, the president of ACIEL announced that the government and the private entrepreneurs, without making a specific agreement, had reached a "patriotic understanding." According to this understanding, businessmen were going ". . . to support the democratic system, and not only free enterprise." (La Nación, 12-19-58). The fact that this support had to be made explicit is quite revealing of the nature of previous commitments to democracy by entrepreneurs. The Industrial Association (UIA), the ranchers' association (SRA), and the Chamber of Commerce were the members of ACIEL.

[25]The position of the domestic sectors of the large bourgeoisie was best summarized by Eustaquio Méndez Delfino, a banker, who claimed that ". . . a solution cannot be achieved through economic measures alone. The economy and the social question are so intimately related that the former cannot be stabilized unless the pressures of social forces which interfere with the economic process are eliminated." (La Nación, July 8, 1958).

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[26]According to Juan Carlos Torre, "Sindicatos y trabajadores bajo el último gobierno peronista; Argentina 1973-1976," in Juan Carlos Torre and J. Corradi (eds.), The Return and Fall of Peronism (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1980), notes 11, 14, lost work days during the 1955-1962 period were as follows:

1955:	144,120	1959:	10,078,138
1956:	5,167,294	1960:	1,661,519
1957:	3,390,509	1961:	2,050,618
1958:	6,245,287	1962:	1,282,490

[27]The decline in real wages during 1959 was around 25 percent. Díaz-Alejandro, Ensayos sobre la historia económica de la Argentina, p. 447.

[28]Actually, the triumphalist approach proved to be much more successful in the case of the provisional government. The intransigent oppositionism of the unions was more effective when applied against a hostile government worried about minimizing the negative social impacts of its policies than when applied against a much more friendly one subjected to the pressures of "gorilas" who did not have anything else to lose electorally.

COMMENTARY

[A preliminary version of this paper was presented by the author at a colloquium held at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars on November 15, 1979. The presentation was followed by commentaries from Eldon Kenworthy, Cornell University, and Bolivar Lamounier, CEBRAP (Sao Paulo) and Wilson Center Guest Scholar. The following is a summary of the remarks of Cavarozzi, Kenworthy, and Lamounier.]

Labor unions and the working class, Cavarozzi noted, have played major roles in Argentine politics since 1955, contributing to the collapse of both military and civilian regimes. His own research covering 1955-1962 counters the widely accepted assumption that the union movement became more powerful only under friendly regimes and was significantly curtailed by hostile military governments. In fact, Cavarozzi argued, the contemporary Peronist movement was largely created by the mobilization of the workers precisely under the military regime from 1955 to 1957.

Several conditions in 1956-1957 favored the emergence of a strong union movement: (1) The Peronist party was outlawed, while a commitment to return to representative government opened major spaces to party and union activity. (2) The Argentine military was fragmented to an unparalleled degree from 1955 to 1963. (3) Social and political opponents of Perón followed divergent paths after the 1955 coup. The Peronist unions were able to take advantage of this situation and increase their power.

Contrary to the prevailing view, Cavarozzi argued, the Peronist union movement was not the same before and after 1955. The military government dismantled the mechanisms devised during the Peronist period, but it was unable to establish an anti-Peronist union movement as a replacement. The Peronist movement which emerged after 1955 was more autonomous (from Perón), was much more active and responsive to the workers, and had a changed relationship to the state. After 1955, a posture of opposition to the state became the major unifying force for the unions. The Peronist unions still retained a hierarchical view of society, however, attempting to fuse economic demands and political aspirations (the latter were largely blocked).

Between 1958 and 1962, according to Cavarozzi, the unions developed the principal elements of the strategy they would follow over the next decade. Four main elements of this strategy began to emerge in 1959: (1) the goal of union survival became the most important, overshadowing economic demands; (2) many Peronist union leaders, in response to the anti-Peronist orientation of the armed forces, began to search for ideological confluence with the military and for some type of political compromise; (3) the main (Vandor) sector of the Peronist unions began to abandon its objective of achieving a Peronist monopoly of the trade-union movement; and (4) union leaders recognized that elections and parliamentary politics were an important political arena.

COMMENTARY

In his commentary, Eldon Kenworthy suggested that Argentine history must be examined from the perspective of post-1976 developments--particularly the destruction of the trade-union movement and the moral bankruptcy of Argentine society. If one considers the structural analyses of Guillermo O'Donnell, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and others, Kenworthy said, it is easy to conclude that the script had already been written and that it included the demise of the trade unions. This structural analysis explains the move toward the right in various South American countries as the result of a new stage of capital accumulation taking place in dependent capitalist societies. This capital accumulation requires a reduction in labor's share of national income, and efforts by unions to stop this trend are ultimately suppressed.

Cavarozzi's analysis, Kenworthy pointed out, challenges this determinist interpretation by focusing on union autonomy, the plurality of potential union strategies, and the unions' significant impact on national politics. The unions must have foreseen the limits of import substitution and the decline of their traditional allies. Why did they not act to forestall their own marginalization and destruction?

Several possible explanations of this inaction--disunity, lack of militancy and organization, overwhelming repression--are eliminated by Cavarozzi's analysis. Kenworthy thought that the fundamental problem was that the unions adopted tactics but not a strategy to counter the developments which were bound to hurt them. There was a significant lack of theory, partially attributable to the unions' reliance on Perón. This prevented union leaders from going beyond the old formulas of populism and the caudillo. They were also limited by their "tunnel vision," which focused solely on wages and failed to consider the question of productivity and other broader economic issues. Finally, the unions depended on state support to eliminate challengers and to help with the collection of dues and other organizational tasks. This enabled the unions to preserve their vertical structure and ignore demands from below.

Bolivar Lamounier focused on Cavarozzi's assertion that union members became second-class citizens after 1955 because proscription of the Peronist party prevented them from participating fully in the political arena. According to Lamounier, the emphasis should not be on governmental discrimination against the unions after 1955 but on the fact that the unions had been given so many rights in the first place. In actuality, Lamounier said, the surprising event in Argentina, as elsewhere in Latin America, is that political rights were extended to labor even before labor itself demanded them. These rights were considered one of the basic components of citizenship. Once the unions were given space and became powerful, they burst out of the corporate set of restrictions and were crushed. The second Peronist collapse is similar to the 1964 coup in Brazil.

COMMENTARY

The elite opposed Peronism absolutely, and followed an industrialization strategy which progressively undermined labor's power. Labor rights were initially extended when there was no demand for them; later, when labor wanted these rights, they were denied. Marx's adage, Lamounier observed, has been turned on its head: in Latin America, events are played out first as farce, later as tragedy.

Lamounier emphasized the need for a comparative perspective. While it is true, he said, that despite their increased power in Argentina after 1955, unions were unable to influence the direction of investment, this is something unions have not been able to do anywhere except in the United States and Europe. This issue is at the core of the relationship between unions and democracy.

In response to the commentators, Cavarozzi pointed out certain distinctions characteristic of the capital-intensive industrialization process in Argentina. First, foreign economic involvement has been extensive only during one civilian government, while the military has been abysmal at attracting foreign capital, and there have been recurrent economic crises. Second, the elite or capitalist class has been fragmented, in terms both of its general economic policies and its specific attitudes toward the labor movement. Cavarozzi would also reverse Kenworthy's argument and contend that the 1976 defeat can only be understood in terms of the history of the previous years. Finally, the union movement did have important veto power, he believed, but it was unable to influence the course of events positively, as demonstrated several times during 1974 and 1975.

In response to a question from the audience concerning the new Argentine law governing labor unions, Cavarozzi pointed out that the government faces a major dilemma. If it chooses not to allow the functioning of a national CGT, it runs the risk that the resulting pluralism may be quite dangerous.

Finally, Lamounier argued that the Argentine case is extremely important in understanding the whole relationship between unions and politics. Is Brazil, he asked, heading toward the same problems in three years?

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