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Perón: the Ascent and Decline to Power

By

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Abstract

Juan Perón was the democratically elected president of Argentina from 1946 until he was deposed by a military coup in 1955. He remained in exile for almost twenty years before being reelected in 1973. At different times the Argentine people considered him a crusader for social justice, a tyrant, or a savior. Today Peronism, the political ideology based on Perón's principles and policies, still fluctuates in popularity, and this project seeks to communicate a fuller understanding of how political ideologies and politicians themselves cycle in and out of popularity through study of Perón.

Introduction

Juan D. Perón was democratically elected as the president of Argentina in 1946, and served in this role until 1955 when he was deposed by a military coup. After nearly twenty years of exile, he was reelected in 1973. Historians and Argentines agree that Perón left a lasting mark on the country. Peronism, the political ideology based on Perón's policies continues to be an influential party in the country, and it has been argued that Perón's regime holds international importance as the model for popular resistance movements throughout Latin America (Hodges, 1976). Throughout his presidency, Perón emphasized nationalism in the form of economic independence, and developed Argentine industry and nationalized systems including education and transportation. Much has been written in favor and opposition of Perón and the legacy he left Argentina, and Argentines are still strongly divided in their opinions of him. However, it is unquestionable that the mark he left on Argentina—whether good or bad—is a lasting one.

During his lifetime Perón fluctuated in and out of popularity with the masses and with the military, and similarly fluctuated in and out of power. Many writers have focused on the effects of Perón's presidencies and policies, whether they believe them to be positive or negative, but there has been less examination of how and why Perón has continued to fluctuate in popularity. Many differing reasons have been proposed to explain Perón's ascents and descents from power, but as with the overreaching effect of Perón on Argentina, there is no consensus on this issue. While many researchers agree on the existence of some of the multiple factors involved, there is no precise consensus on which factors were the most important or meaningful in either his ascents, or descents, from power.

Review of the Literature

Perón's initial rise to power has been attributed to the cultural, historical and political context of Argentina, as well as to Perón's character and the intentional actions he took to ensure he would come into power. Falcoff and Dolkart assert that the previous government's failure to effectively respond to the economic crisis in the country following World War II discredited former leaders, and created a demand for a strong leader to fill their place (Falcoff and Dolkart, 1975) while Barager credits the illegitimacy of previous governments in their direct treatment of the Argentine people: "the answer to the question 'Why Perón' lies in the Argentine past and in the failure of previous governments to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the Argentine masses and of other groups dissatisfied with a *status quo* maintained by force and fraudulent elections (Barager, 1968)." Another proposition is that decreasing international immigration and increasing migration from rural areas in Buenos Aires significantly changed the electorate and the political motivation of voters (Alexander, 1951). This created increased desire for an "Argentinean" ideology as imported European ideologies became less valid, and changed the population of workers within the city, causing this group to hold a significant portion of the vote. This portion of voters was undoubtedly significant, and some supported the rural-born Perón, because they believed that he would look after their interests and protect them from the traditionally oligarchic distribution of power (Barager, 1968).

Perón himself was an important factor. He responded to the advantages given to him by his personal background, the history of Argentina, and the changing electorate and he acted intentionally to rise through the ranks of the military and to become a public face in order to be successfully elected. After the 1943 military coup, Perón became the

Secretary for Labor and Social Welfare, which allowed him to reach the increasingly-significant voter group of workers. Perón recognized the potential of this group, and intentionally reached out to them in order to gain their allegiance for his future political ambitions. (Vanden and Prevost, 2002). Perón intentionally involved himself in the 1943 military coup in order to become a part of the resultant government, and he took the roles he was given and used them to gain popular support.

A final proposed factor in Perón's ability to captivate the Argentine public was his marriage to Eva Duarte, also known as Evita. Evita's connection to the working-class increased support for Perón prior to his election and throughout his presidency. (Vanden and Prevost, 2002). The death of Evita is credited in the success of the 1955 coup against him, as it resulted in strengthening the disillusionment with Perón's regime following his failure to prevent the economic downturn, and the increase in authoritarian practices (Hodges, 1976).

Perón's fall from power is attributed to the strengthening of opposition forces in face of Perón's increasingly authoritarian practices. (Vanden and Prevost, 2002). Prior to Perón's ousting Argentine faced an economic downturn which Perón failed to respond to adequately in the eyes of the people (Hodges, 1976). The Catholic Church has also been identified as a major player in ousting Perón. Crassweller identifies a feud between Perón and the Church as a catalyst which allowed adversaries who had opposed Perón for years to finally overthrow him. "The battle with the Church accomplished what ten years of political opposition by Perón's enemies had singularly failed to do: it united them for a moment (Crassweller, 1987).

The failure of the governments that followed the ousting of Perón to generate legitimacy has been cited as the major drive behind Perón's eventual return to power

(Vanden and Prevost, 2002). It is proposed that disillusionment with these replacement governments led the people of Argentina to be willing once again allow Peronism as a party, and later Perón himself. Guido di Tella suggests that Perón's actions while in exile contributed to Argentina's willingness to accept him as a leader again (Tella, 1983).

Falcoff and Dolkart contend that the after-effects of Perón's earlier regime were more important than the actions of Perón or the governments that replaced him during his exile. They argue that Perón united Argentina in such a way that no other ruler could fill his place. Perón's effect on Argentina was to "unsettle permanently the foundations of Argentine politics by forging a new consensus... even after Perón's overthrow in 1955 it was apparent that no one could rule Argentina without reassembling it in one form or another (Falcoff and Dolkart, 1975).

Crassweller proposes that Perón's charismatic personality and the mythology that grew around him contributed to the public's desire to see him return (Crassweller, 1987). During Perón's first presidency, the people of Argentina created a mythology around him, and perceived him to be a savior for the country and it has been argued that Evita's public popularity contributed a great deal to the creation of these sentiments (Page, 1983), but even after Evita's death, Perón's ousting, and Perón's remarriage to Isabel, this mythology continued to move Argentines. Crassweller suggests that Perón's return to power was partially due to a revival of this mythology around Perón after the people became disillusioned with other regimes. Crassweller's theory suggests that Argentines set aside the beliefs that led to Perón's ousting, and instead returned to seeing him as a savior who could reunite the Argentine people.

Perón's regime and the effect it had on Argentina have been studied more than the factors leading to his fluctuations in and out of power and popularity, but a variety of

explanations for these issues have been advanced. There is agreement that Perón's movements in public opinion and power were caused by a combination of factors, but there is disagreement about which factors actually affected Perón rather than being unrelated events, and about which factors were the most important and meaningful.

Argentina Before Perón

Argentina lacked a powerful national government in the years directly subsequent to independence from Spain however, a centralized concept of national identity emerged which foreshadowed a centralization of governmental power. This geographic placement of power was cemented in 1880, when Buenos Aires was recognized as the official national capital. This view of political power and Argentine identity as belonging to a geographic region was reinforced as government schools were established, which taught a patriotic view of the country's history focusing on this central area. Although centralization helped Argentina to form a national identity and to establish order following independence, it also marginalized those persons on the outskirts for decades, later resulting in the popular opinions which helped to elect Perón.

The stabilization of a federal government created increased stability both politically and economically, and allowed Argentina to flourish at the end of the 19th century. The country modernized, and became an important player in international trade, although these changes continued to center on Buenos Aires (Vanden and Prevost, 2002). During the late 19th century, Argentina began to attract increased quantities of immigrants from Europe, further strengthening the conception of national identity as European (Dodds, 1993). Modernization and increased immigration also led to the creation of a working-class, and in 1892 the Radical Civic Union formed to advocate for the rights and political participation of these groups (Vanden and Prevost, 2002). The Europeanization of Buenos Aires further isolated rural citizens, later on encouraging them to vote for Perón, as a candidate originally from rural Argentina. Perón's ticket would also rely on the vote and campaign aid of the newly created working-class.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Argentine politics became decreasingly

elitist through the efforts of the emerging Radical party, and in 1912, suffrage became universal for males. After the 1916 democratic election of Radical Hipólito Yrigoyen wealth and power were redistributed to be more socially equitable. The upper-class tolerated this redistribution within reason, but remained wary of Yrigoyen's regime. Under Yrigoyen Argentina entered a period of political and economic stability that appeared would be long-lasting (Vanden and Prevost, 2002).

When the 1929 Great Depression struck, Argentina was affected through its trade ties with the rest of the world. As the world economy crashed, Argentina suffered equally. Despite Yrigoyen's efforts, he was unable to alleviate the effects of the economic downturn, allowing the upper-class elites to call his regime into question (MacLachlan, 2006). In September of 1930, Yrigoyen was removed from power in a military overthrow. Yrigoyen's overthrow was followed by over a decade of political instability and authoritarianism preceding the 1943 coup, during which Perón first arrived on political scene (Falcoff and Dolkart, 1975).

Although Yrigoyen was overthrown because of his failure to negate the after-effects of the Great Depression, the political instability of the following years improved public perception of Yrigoyen's regime, and led to a renewed desire for democracy. The illegitimacy of the governments following Yrigoyen created space for a new leader (Barager, 1968), while the nostalgia felt towards the Yrigoyen regime created a demand for a democratically elected leader, a demand that Perón later fulfilled.

Perón Before and During Office

Juan Domingo Perón was born on October 8, 1915 in the rural town of Lobos, and moved with his family to a ranch in Patagonia at a young age. The son of Juana Sosa

Toledo and Mario Tomás Perón, Perón came from humble beginnings. Ethnically of European descent, but born and raised outside of the political and economic hub of Buenos Aires, Perón's background would make him a relatable figure for many Argentines (Page, 1983). After World War II, decreased immigration from outside the country, and increased migration from rural Argentina to Buenos Aires changed the electorate (Alexander, 1951), and Perón's early background reflected that of many new voters.

In 1904, Perón's parents sent him to school in Buenos Aires. Perón later chose to enter the army's military academy, setting him on the path to his military career. During his early years in the military, Perón met and married his first wife Aurelia Tizón. The daughter of middle-class parents who supported Radicalism, Aurelia's marriage to Perón helped him show an established link to the middle-class even after her death in 1938 (Page, 1983). Perón's identity as a military man and the alliances he formed while in the military would earn him supporters within the ranks of the military and, although his rise to power would be opposed by some military men, the support of others would help him to gain the presidency. His connection to the middle-class, earned through birth and reaffirmed through his first marriage, would also factor in his ability to gain popular support from the working-class.

Despite the Radical views of Perón's family-in-law, he participated in the military overthrow of Yrigoyen orchestrated by his military associates. During the following regimes, his military career continued, and he was sent to Chile, and after Aurelia's death, to Italy. He spent two years in Europe before returning to Argentina where he was posted in Mendoza, and later again in Buenos Aires. During Perón's time in Europe, he witnessed Benito Mussolini's rise to power and the fallout of the Spanish Civil War

(Page, 1983).

After returning from his assignment in Europe, Perón became a member of the Grupo de Oficiales Unidos (the United Officers Group), also known as the GOU, a group made up of military officers who aimed to create social changes in Argentina by shifting governmental control. In 1943, the GOU orchestrated and led the military overthrow of President Ramón Castillo. Perón's involvement with the GOU aided him in developing allies within the military, and his participation in the overthrow of Castillo allowed him to gain important roles in the new regime, and to be recognized as an important political player. His appointment as Vice President and Minister of War further strengthened his relationship with the military as he worked to increase the prestige and power of the military (Schiff, 2008).

Shortly following the coup which deposed Castillo, Perón requested appointment as the leader to the newly created Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare. Through this position Perón was able to build ties with the working-class and meet labor leaders, especially within the Confederación General del Trabajo de la República Argentina (the General Confederation of Labor of the Argentine Republic, or CGT), the national labor federation. He created a perception of himself as a champion of the middle-class through actions like the establishment of a coalition for workers rights and the creation of new regulations to protect workers (Vanden and Prevost, 2002). Perón's personal history as a modest rural-born man allowed many middle-class voters to relate to his background, and he used his work in the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare to build ties with leaders and individuals of the labor movement, and to convince the working-class that despite his personal success, he had not forgotten them. Perón's actions in this role improved the status of workers without extremely challenging the status quo. Upper-class elites

remained wary of Perón, but as his actions did not upset the prior existing social order, most elites accepted his policies improving workers rights.

During this time period, Perón began his relationship with Eva Duarte, an actress originally from the rural town of Los Toldos. Evita, as Duarte was affectionately nicknamed, became a major supporter of Perón, and helped lead his following among the middle class during this period (Barnes, 1978). Evita's social class by birth and her time as an actress led many Argentines to perceive her as lower class. Upper-class elites and many military officers looked down on Evita and her background, and considered it shameful for Perón to associate himself with her. These people were especially appalled by the fact that Perón was publicly open about his relationship with Evita before their marriage, and often brought her as his escort to events. While Evita's background incensed members of the upper-class, it endeared her to the working-class. To workers Evita represented the possibility of success and upward social mobility in Argentina and, even after Perón gained the presidency and Evita began to display the couple's wealth through the ownership of homes and properties and through wearing expensive designer clothes, the working-class continued to see her as embracing her background rather than rejecting it. The middle-class believed that Evita related to them and would continue to guard their interests regardless of her own rising social status, and Perón's relationship with her lent him some of this rapport.

Perón became more strongly tied to the working-class through his role as the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare and through Evita's growing influence, culminating in his candidacy for President in the upcoming elections. Perón's growing influence disturbed some military elites, including contemporary President General Edelmiro Farrell, and early in October of 1945, Perón's military opponents under Farrell

pressured him to resign power, and, four days later, arrested him. These efforts to oust Perón from the political scene came too late, and in the end failed. The working-class with which Perón had already formed strong ties was willing to support him even in hard times, and held mass demonstrations supporting him. In the wake of these protests, Farrell and his associates realized that they could not so easily suppress Perón, and he was quickly released, and allowed to reengage in his presidential candidacy (Vanden and Prevost, 2002). Evita participated heavily in organizing and attending the public demonstrations calling for Perón's release and on October 22, 1945 she and Perón married (Page, 1983).

During Perón's campaign, his political goals began to be identified as a unique ideology, and Peronism was born. Peronism, also known as justicialismo, aimed for fairness and social justice throughout society. A social and political philosophy, Peronism aimed to create a system where all citizens contributed what they could and were given what they needed without reaching full-fledged communism. Perón spoke of making a more independent Argentina, and of creating a more just class system which would support workers, and although he did not seek to entirely destroy the existing class-based system, he advocated for increased equality across all levels of society. Around this unique ideology developed the Peronist Party, which many working-class people identified with. Extreme supporters of Peronism were those lower-class workers who believed Perón's policies would drastically improve their quality of life, while a less intense group of supporters emerged from the middle-class, who believed Peronism would improve their social station. During this period, Perón himself, as the founder and main proponent of the ideology, was inseparable from Peronism and from the Peronist Party.

Perón's candidacy faced opposition from multiple directions. Within Argentina competing political parties, upper-class elites and fellow military leaders opposed him, while outside of the country the United States government resisted his rise to power. Spruille Braden, who served as the U.S. ambassador to Argentina in 1945 distrusted both Farrell and Perón, and personally worked to discredit Perón before the election. He encouraged the United States to take an official position against Peronism and published essays criticizing Perón. Perón used this antagonism to his favor by posing the conflict for the Argentine people as a choice between Perón or Braden and the United States. In spite of the opposition Perón's campaign faced, Peronist support successfully elected Perón, and on June 4, 1946, he took office (Falcoff and Dolkart, 1975).

The 1946 election was categorized by strong military involvement. The years of political turmoil following the overthrow of Yrigoyen had left the military largely in control of the country, and many important political offices were held by military men. Although some military leaders favored controlling the election, others wished to move to a more democratic system of government, and in the end the elections were democratic, although the military continued to be heavily involved. After Perón's election, he paid homage to his personal background as a military man and to the government's past of military control as he filled many of his appointed political offices with military officers (Potash, 1969). He increased the purchase of military armaments, further ingratiating the army to him (Schiff, 2008).

Perón worked to incorporate social justice across classes by recruiting citizens of the lower-class into the military. Although this increased the devotion to Perón of the working-class, it alienated some upper-class elites within the military, who were offended by the entry of the lower class into high-status positions. Later in his presidency, ongoing

political and economic problems would further decrease his support from some parts of the military (Schiff, 2008).

Perón demonstrated continuing loyalty to the military, but he balanced this with continued support for the goals he had championed during his campaign. At his inaugural address, he promised to seek social justice across economic classes, and stated his intention to reunify the nation. In the early months of his presidency, Perón revealed the First Five-Year Plan, an initiative to industrialize the country while creating a stable and fair class system (Healey, 2011). He implemented policies to protect workers, including the creation of paid vacations, and limitations on the hours in a working day. Under Perón, workers had more regulations to protect them than ever before, and also began to receive significantly higher wages. Under Perón the CGT became progressively more influential, while simultaneously becoming a dominant portion of the Peronist Party (Rock, 1987).

The start of Perón's presidency saw an economic upturn due to postwar surpluses and the initial successes of his Five-Year Plan. Perón's administration significantly reduced Argentina's foreign debt, increasing economic autonomy (Rock, 1987). Political stability increased as the Peronist party attained higher popularity simultaneous with growing unionization in the labor movement. The use of propaganda successfully promoted Perón himself and the Peronist party during this period of national achievement (Healey, 2011). Although there remained critics of Perón, the beginning of his first term was characterized by a strengthening of support from the groups that had helped to elect him.

Evita became an increasingly important part of Perón's regime as his presidency continued, in 1947 even engaging in a diplomatic tour of Europe on Perón's behalf.

Evita's "Rainbow Tour" was meant to show the goodwill of Perón's administration towards all of Europe, and Evita met with diplomats and heads of states throughout Europe. The elites who had scorned Evita's humble background before Perón's election continued to resent her, especially as she took on roles within the Peronist Party and within the government itself. However, Evita continued to enchant many of Perón's supporters, especially women and the working-class. Evita played a role in Perón's decision to give suffrage to women, and she became the leader of the female branch of the Peronist party. She also headed the Eva Perón Foundation, which offered social welfare services, and was known to personally read letters sent to her by citizens. In 1952, she published *La Razón de mi Vida* (literally translated as "the Reason for my Life"), an autobiographical work in which she shared her perspectives on social justice, the rights of women and the working-class, and Peronism.

Following a slight economic downturn which included inflation and the stalling of exportation demands, Evita and her Foundation helped retain popular support for Perón, preventing his regime from receiving the blame for the downturn. Although the Peróns had reached a high political, economic, and social status, the working-class continued to see Evita as relatable, and believed her to sincerely have the best interests of the middle-class at heart. Evita earned the support of much of the Argentine public for herself, and passed on some of this adoration to her husband. Some popularity was passed on to Juan Perón merely for his connection to Evita, but she strengthened this connection through her actions; during speeches she often turned attention away from herself in order to speak admiringly of Perón, and promote the values of the Peronist party. She credited her husband for inspiring all of her actions, and took the love the people showed her and encouraged it to pass it on to her husband by showing her love for him (Barnes, 1978).

In 1949, Perón proposed a new convention which would allow presidents of the country to be reelected, a practice that had been forbidden by the 1853 constitution. Although opponents of Perón contested the new convention, Perón succeeded in paving the way for his inclusion in the coming election (Vanden and Prevost, 2002). Popular demand from the middle-class suggested that Perón run with Evita as his vice president, an idea that Perón initially rejected. Upper-class elites and military officers who had long looked down on Evita for her background and who resented her growing popularity with the populace frowned on this idea, but the great number of Peronists who approved of Evita's candidacy were revealed to be a powerful force. Even after Evita's public announcement that she would not seek office, support for Evita as a vice presidential candidate continued so strongly that Perón decided to run beside her after all. Evita was, however, forced to decline the nomination due to increasingly poor health. She later passed away in July of 1952 (Page, 1983).

Despite the lack of Evita as a running mate and a failed military attempt to oust Perón, he was reelected, and began his second term as president in 1952. From the beginning, this presidency lacked the success of his first term; the economic downturn created dissent, and Evita's limited participation in politics due to her ill health prevented her from aiding Perón in maintaining his popularity. Evita's death that July further exacerbated the discontent of the populace (Healey, 2011). Contrarily to Perón's first term in office, dissatisfaction with the economic status of the country was increasingly blamed on Perón and his administration's failure to counteract the economic downturn (Hodges, 1976).

In efforts to devocalize dissent, Perón's administration became progressively more authoritarian. Use of pro-Peronist propaganda had allowed Perón to improve the

popular image of his party, and he attempted to apply this previously successful method to the oppression of anti-Peronist voices. Perón used censorship of the media and free speech to prevent the expression of dissatisfaction with the country's position, and established mandatory participation in the Peronist party in an attempt to tie Peronism to patriotism. These actions made Perón's past authoritarian tactics such as the use of propaganda more visible, and alarmed the populace. Popular dissent grew not only against these specific authoritarian practices, but against Perón's entire regime (Alexander, 1951). While devoted Peronists continued to support Perón, these authoritarian practices turned less faithful supporters away from Peronism, and allowed long-term critics the opportunity to act against Perón and his administration.

In 1953, Perón's relationship with the Catholic Church began to deteriorate. The Catholic Church had supported Perón's candidacy prior to his first election, and he had further gained the Church's support once in office by including religious education in public schools, however, as Perón's second term progressed, he began to split from the Church. His efforts to separate Church and State and his attempt to get Evita canonized after her death caused the Church to examine their already-existing grievances against him. Even after Evita's death, the Church resented the Eva Perón Foundation, which competed with the Church for funding and provided social services that the Church considered their own domain (Schiff, 2008). Perón further isolated the Church by proposing legislation to legalize divorce and prostitution, and in July of 1954, a Christian Democratic party was formed to combat Perón's perceived anti-Christian policies (Page, 1983). Perón responded with an animosity towards the Church that isolated some Christians who had formerly supporters from the Peronist party. In addition, his new anti-Church stance unified long-standing opponents of Perón (Crassweller, 1987).

The economic downturn and Perón's failure to negate it, the death of Evita, increasingly authoritarian practices, and Perón's falling out with the Catholic Church weakened his regime. Although many Argentines continued to be extreme supporters, these events allowed elites, particularly those within the military, who had prior desired to see Perón out of power the opportunity to act against him. On June 16, 1955, a military-led coup ousted Perón from power. The coup lasted four days, after which Perón reached out to the Paraguayan embassy in Buenos Aires and fled to Paraguay (Page, 1983).

Exile and Return

Perón spent some time in Paraguay before relocating to Panamá, where he met Argentine native María Estela Martínez, known as Isabel, whom he married in 1961. The pair eventually moved to Spain, where Perón would stay until 1973. Throughout his time in exile, Perón retained visibility for the Argentine people. He frequently participated in interviews with international news sources, during which he claimed that he had been ousted unfairly and against the will of the Argentine people. He expressed constant concern for the well-being of his home country, and although he spoke of returning one day, his interest in Argentina appeared to be primarily based in his selfless concern for his country, rather than his own interests (Tella, 1983).

While Perón worked to maintain a positive image from abroad, the regimes directly following Perón's overthrow worked to vilify him. Perón and the late Evita were maligned by the new administrations, and were criticized for their personal wealth in the midst of economic crisis. Evita's cadaver was even removed from its former resting place to prevent continued supporters from visiting her final resting place (Barnes, 1978). The

Peronist party was illegalized immediately after Perón's departure, and later administrations excluded Peronism from participation in elections (Vanden and Prevost, 2002).

Although Perón's popularity had declined sufficiently to allow his overthrow by the military, some civilians vehemently supported him during the coup and during his resulting exile. These devoted supporters never lost faith in Perón's presented vision of social justice and equality, and hoped for his eventual return throughout his exile. Even when the Peronist Party was illegalized or excluded from elections, these committed followers continued to remain true to Peronist ideals, and voted as Perón directed. Leaders of the labor party continued to consult Perón, sometimes even flying to Spain to meet with him.

During his initial presidency, Perón dominated the political scene. While he was loved by some yet hated by others, he was an unquestionably tangible figure of authority. His ouster created a void which was left unfilled in the following years as multiple administrations moved in and out of power. Perón's time away from Argentina added to the mythology that had been created around him during his initial rise to power (Crassweller, 1987). Just as Argentines had nostalgically reminisced over the era of Hipólito Yrigoyen after the regime which overthrew him was unable to create stability, Perón's regime became more attractive in retrospect.

Attempts of subsequent administrations to discredit Perón were ultimately unsuccessful, as those regimes failed to establish their own legitimacy. These regimes also employed authoritarian practices, and failed to solve the economic downturn that had contributed to Perón's downfall (Vanden and Prevost, 2002). The administrations in power during Perón's exile not only displayed the same faults that characterized Perón's

second presidency, but also failed to maintain the political stability that Perón had presented to the country.

Perón's continued interest in Argentina while in exile and his efforts to promote a positive image combined with the illegitimacy of the following administrations resulted in healing the sentiments of many Argentines towards Perón. While there remained a group of Argentines who supported Perón throughout the entire duration of his ouster and exile, the number of citizens who favored Perón's return grew during his time in exile. In Perón's absence Argentines wanted a strong figurehead to unite the nation, and the failure to fill this role allowed Perón to reclaim it.

From the beginning of his exile, Perón intended to eventually regain some level of power in Argentina. In several newspaper interviews he spoke of one day reclaiming power to reorganize and unite the nation, and stated his beliefs that the regime which had ousted him would fail to hold control of the country. Toward the end of 1964, Perón first attempted to return to Argentina, although this plan failed (Page 1983). Although Perón's return to Argentina and to power presumably took longer than he had originally planned, from the beginning of his exile, he acted with intention in order to regain power.

Perón remained as involved as possible in Argentine politics during his exile. Although Peronism was illegalized for a time, Perón remained in contact with supporters, and endorsed candidates from afar. In 1965, Isabel Perón visited Argentina on Perón's behalf. This era also saw the emergence of Peronism as an ideology outside of the control of Perón himself, which was advocated for by CGT member and former Perón supporter Augusto Vandor. Vandor led the CGT to begin to advocate for Peronism with Perón, resulting in a division in the CGT; while the official branch, under the control of Vandor, split from Perón while continuing to advocate for Peronist policies, a second branch

developed which continued to support and be advised by Perón. Eventually Vandor reconciled with Perón, and after meeting with him in Spain, the official branch of the CGT regressed to its original pro-Perón position. Although the division between supporters of Peronism without Perón and followers of the man himself largely dissolved after this reconciliation and following Vandor's assassination in 1969, this was the first clearly verbalized conceptualization that Peronism could exist beyond the involvement of the man himself (Hodges, 1976).

While the CGT continued to advocate for Peronism during the post-Perón regimes, other groups emerged which affected Perón's eventual return. Many groups proposed an Argentine Revolution which would change the existing political control. The Montoneros were one such revolutionary group which aimed to overthrow the contemporary government, while remaining proponents of Perón's ideology. Other groups, such as the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (the People's Revolutionary Army, or the ERP) intended to disrupt the existing governmental structure while still rejecting Perón as an alternative (Page, 1983). These revolutionary groups—both those that supported or opposed Perón—further destabilized the contemporary political situation contributing to the eventual opportunity for Perón to return. The Peronist Party was granted renewed rights to political participation in an attempt to placate pro-Peronist revolutionary groups and to stabilize the political situation.

Perón's continued involvement in Argentine politics not only allowed him to influence the contemporary political situation, but also kept him in contact with devoted followers and prepared Argentines who had been less enthusiastically supportive to accept him as president again in the future. As an exile, Perón first held the role of a concerned expatriate and later that of a political advisor to voters. He gradually expanded

this influence to affect candidates as well, and to regain control of the Peronist party. In 1973 elections occurred which allowed participation of Peronists, although Perón himself was barred from running. Héctor José Cámpora ran on the Peronist ticket with Perón's endorsement and advisement, and took office in May of 1973 (Tella, 1983).

Under Cámpora, Perón was finally allowed to return to Argentina. In July of that year, just months after Cámpora's inauguration, he resigned in order to hold new elections in which Perón was able to participate. Perón ran with Isabel as his vice presidential candidate, in a move evocative of his campaign for his second term, which so many citizens had hoped would include Evita. Isabel was not associated with any political party, and her inclusion made Perón's ticket appear less strictly partied (Tella, 1983). On October 12, 1973 Perón entered his third term as President of Argentina (Page, 1983). After eighteen years of exile, he had finally succeeded in returning to his homeland and to the Casa Rosada.

Long-term Peronists were thrilled to see Perón returned to Argentina, while some citizens who had not always hoped for his return from exile were convinced to vote for him as a result of his actions while in exile, the illegitimacy and failures of the regimes following his overthrow, and the political turmoil caused by groups attempting revolution. Elites and military men who had contributed to or supported the coup against Perón permitted Peronism to reenter the political arena in an attempt to stabilize the nation, which allowed his eventual return to the presidency.

Although following Perón's inauguration Argentina saw an economic upswing, his third term in office was characterized by conflict between the leftist and far right Peronist groups, which at times led to armed conflict. Perón was unable to alleviate these tensions, and in current times, divisions still exist within Peronism (Hodges, 1976).

Perón's inability to prevent rifts in the Peronist party was exacerbated by his failing health, and on July 1, 1974, less than a year into his third term, Perón passed away (Page, 1983).

Perón's Lasting Legacy

Isabel Perón inherited her husband's presidency following his death, but her regime's authoritarian practices increased strife in the country, and led to her overthrow in 1976. The following decade was characterized by political turmoil, totalitarianism, and human rights violations including the disappearance of over 10,000 citizens at the hands of the government. Argentina would return to democracy in the 1980s, but would continue to be haunted by the era immediately following Perón's death (Vanden and Prevost, 2002).

Peronism continues to exist as a dominant, but controversy-laden, ideology in Argentina. Peronism encompasses not only political ideology, but also social philosophy, and as such is adaptable across multiple historic contexts (Hodges, 1976). Over time it has been reinterpreted to suit the needs of different groups, and today multiple opposing groups claim to follow the tenets of the ideology. Followers of Peronism champion it as a pro-working class movement promoting social justice, while opponents believe it to promote authoritarianism.

Since Perón's death, the Argentine presidency has been filled by three different Peronists: Carlos Menem from 1989 to 1999, Néstor Kirchner from 2003 to 2007, and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner from 2007 to the present. Following the authoritarian regime of the 1970s, the working-class once again mobilized for Peronism, electing Menem. Although Menem campaigned under traditional Peronist views, once in office

his economic policies were revealed to be less traditional. He worked for the Peronist goal of supporting the middle-class, but did this based on the economic belief that free market economy would best benefit Argentine society and the working-class. He privatized enterprises that had formerly been controlled by the state, including the railroad, which Perón himself had nationalized. Menem also decreased regulations on industry. Néstor Kirchner and his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner during their respective presidencies did not undo Menem's privatization. Néstor Kirchner aimed to move away from the sometimes authoritarian principles of Peronism, and increased transparency in government. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has made strides in social equality, including the minimization of child poverty, however, she has been often accused of corruption.

Peronism continues to be an important political ideology within Argentina which produces powerful leaders, although it has shown many faces. Like Perón himself, it has been viewed many ways, and has served many purposes for the country. Whether good or bad, it is unquestionable that Peronism is a powerful and permanent force in Argentina.

Conclusion

Perón's fluctuations in power in Argentina were affected by many factors. He was able to initially rise to power due to his personal background, and how his identity suited the leadership demands caused by the political and social history of Argentina. Perón's personal identity appealed to the changing electorate, while his history in the military and his involvement with the GOU caused a sufficient number of military men to support him.

Perón was often able to successfully manipulate circumstances to his benefit and took advantage of opportunities to gain allies. His marriage to Evita earned him devoted support from the working-class, although it marginalized upper-class military officials. His relationships with allies and rivals, including the military, the Catholic Church, the CGT and other labor groups, fluctuated throughout his life greatly affecting his grasp on political power.

Perón's status was also affected by current events in Argentina, including economic recessions or upturns. The abilities of opposing groups and the successes and failures of administrations prior to and following Perón's own determined how Perón was perceived, and allowed or denied him opportunities. The actions of other political, religious, or social groups within the country and the foreign policy of other nations created the circumstances with which Perón interacted.

Finally, Perón's position in or out of power often depended on his own actions, and how he responded to the opportunities given to him. His initial rise to power and his return to the presidency after over a decade of exile show that his interactions with contemporary circumstances were important factors in his fluctuations in and out of power. His fall from power indicates that he did not always manipulate circumstances ideally, but reinforces the point that Perón's own actions were a major piece of his history. Perón's time in and out the presidency were influenced by a variety of factors, but it is unquestionable that key among these was his own behaviors and tactics.

Perón was a unique and dynamic leader, who left a permanent mark on Argentina and on the rest of the world. He reunited the country after the failures of previous administrations, and led Argentina in diplomatic relations after World War II. Although his methods sometimes reached authoritarian practices, he contributed to social equality

in Argentina. He advocated for nationalization of industry and created unprecedented regulations to protect workers. He made the rights of the lower classes the interest of national politics, and most of all founded a long-lasting political party, which in contemporary times continues to represent the interests of the middle-class.

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