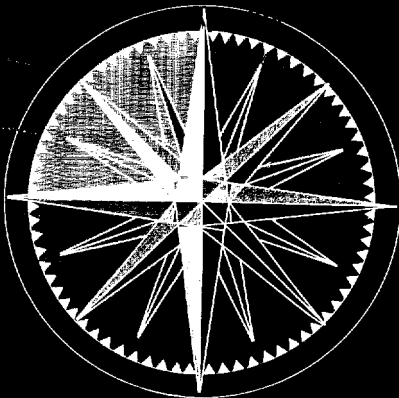


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PERONISM IN ARGENTINA: A CONTINUING STRUGGLE

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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PERONISM IN ARGENTINA: A CONTINUING STRUGGLE

The Peronism movement in Argentina, which grew up around the charismatic personality of "el Lider" Juan Peron during his ten-year dictatorship (1946-55), has remained, since his overthrow, a major unsettling factor in Argentine political life. Largely because of the continuing disapproval of the military, who remember the excesses under Peron, the movement has only occasionally been able to participate openly in Argentine political affairs. Today, however, it stands a good chance of becoming integrated into the mainstream of national politics. A moderate "neo-Peronist" faction that believes in Peronism without Peron and is trying to overcome the movement's unsavory past is growing in strength and influence--although still subject to strong challenge by the orthodox faction, as shown by a recent provincial election. Conversations between the neo-Peronists and military leaders indicate that the generals may be ready to accept the movement as represented by the moderates.

Origins and Ideology

The Peronist movement, about a third of the body politic, has its base in the working class--the "shirtless ones" who were awakened by Peron and who provided him with solid electoral majorities. It also has its adherents in the middle class. Its philosophy has been clouded in the mysticism of Peron's ambiguous terms, such as "social justice" and "third force," but the emerging new leaders of the movement, strong trade unionists, are probably more inclined to support free enterprise with some government control than any kind of socialism. They also favor the unlimited participation of organized labor in politics. The movement harbors fringe elements ranging

from ultraleftists and Castroites to the extreme orthodox sycophants of Peron's pro-Nazi days, but the leadership and overwhelming majority of the rank and file are nationalistic and opposed to internal Communism.

The movement has a well-deserved reputation for violence and subversion. Deprived of a legal political voice after Peron's overthrow by the military, the Peronists have emulated their leader's frequent resort to violent tactics while he was in power, and often have used strikes and mob violence to make their point to the nation. The movement's labor base and its history of alliance when necessary with leftist elements have kept away the middle and upper classes first

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alienated during Peron's tenure. Peronism's traditional enemy has been the military, whose leaders first put Peron in power and later removed him. Hard-line military opponents of Peronism see any form of it as a threat to the state which must be outlawed, but the "legalist" military leaders now in control may be seeking a more moderate approach.

Peron and Today's Peronists

Since Peron's abortive effort to return to Argentina in December 1964, on which occasion he was detained at the airport in Rio de Janeiro and returned to his exile in Spain, there has been no serious threat that the ex-dictator will relocate either in his former homeland or in the neighboring area. Even President Stroessner of Paraguay, who once gave Peron refuge after his overthrow, would no longer welcome him. Peron lives in comfort in Madrid and transmits orders to his Argentine lieutenants through letters, couriers, and frequent meetings with subordinates who travel to Madrid for audiences with him.

The outlook for finding an acceptable role for Peronism in Argentine politics is brightened by the fact that, for the first time since the rise of Peron, a moderate leadership is developing in the movement which may lead it to become fully integrated into the national life. The aging (71) ex-dictator, whose return was anticipated for so many years, has been unable from his exile to maintain complete control of the movement. His serious tactical blunder in ordering his followers to cast blank ballots in the 1963 presidential elections alienated many Peronists, and the efforts of his attractive third wife, Isabelita, to reunite the movement have failed. It is not yet clear, however, whether a majority of the rank-and-file Peronists will finally give their support to the moderates, or to the orthodox Peronist leadership. There are some who fear that Peron will soon die and there are some who fear that he won't, but his passing from the scene will probably have only a transitory effect on the struggle.

Organization and Leadership

One of the most serious obstacles to the integration of the Peronists into normal political activity has been their lack of unity and organization. Ambiguous and contradictory orders from their exiled leader in past years kept them disorganized. Peron maintained his grip on the movement, despite arbitrary actions, cavalier

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treatment of lieutenants, and near total disregard for his followers. Peron was careful to avoid giving independent power to any single leader within Argentina and often played off one group against another. He gave the movement the character of a "class" in opposition to constitutionality and legality rather than a political force in opposition to the government in power.

Peron tried to unite all Peronist groups under one secretariat in the fall of 1965, thus reducing the individual powers of some of the less obedient leaders, but this effort failed. In April 1966, Peron's wife and emissary, who was to have carried out the reorganization, admitted that she had had no success.

At present, therefore, there is no unified council that commands the total movement within the country. Technically, the Superior Peronist Command which grew up in the early years of Peron's exile still exists, but it is only a sounding board for the orthodoxy. In both major sectors of the movement's activities, labor and political, a polarization has taken place dividing the leadership between those who still take their orders from Madrid--the orthodox--and those who seek a more moderate approach, directed by Peronist leaders in Argentina--the neo-Peronists. The rank and file are awaiting the outcome of the struggle, and local leaders at all levels still command their individual followings.

The Labor Sector

Labor remains the foundation of the Peronist movement. Almost half of Argentina's working force is unionized, a situation unusual in Latin America, and the unions are, generally speaking, controlled by Peronists. The union's central organization, the General Confederation of Workers (CGT), became one of the focal points for the movement under Peron, and it was "intervened" (taken over) by the military government that succeeded the dictator. In 1959, under President Frondizi, the Peronists were allowed to return to the CGT, which they have dominated ever since.

In February 1966 the CGT witnessed a struggle for power between its orthodox Peronist secretary general, Jose Alonso, and Augusto Vandor, head of the powerful Metallurgical Workers Union and perhaps the most powerful neo-Peronist in the nation. The neo-Peronists, also now labeled Vandorists by some, won the fight, and Alonso and his supporters decided to form their own group, amounting to only 18 unions of the total 62. Vandor is now trying to consolidate his hold on the CGT and it seems likely that he will be able to do so. Vandor also commands the allegiance of some non-Peronists and his strength and prestige appear to be growing.

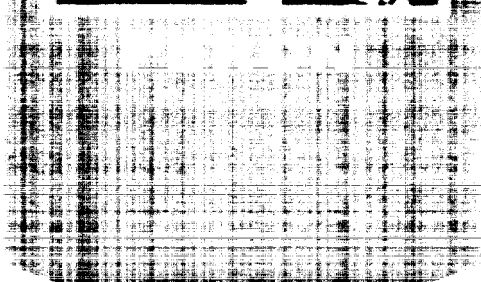
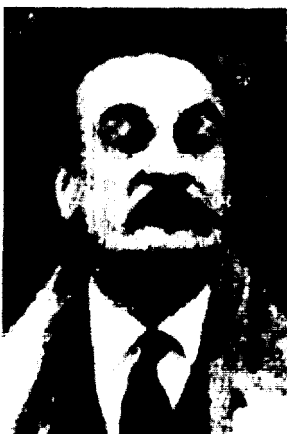
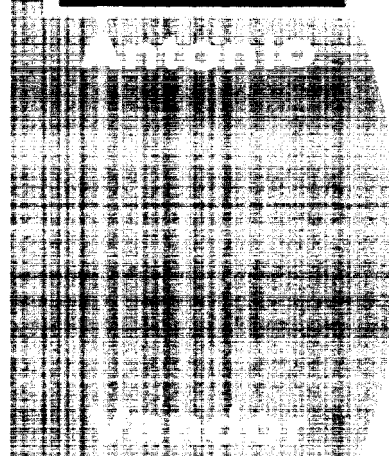
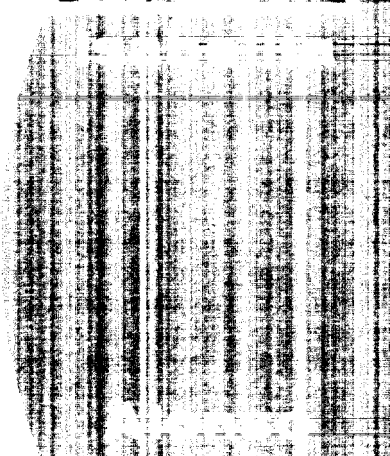
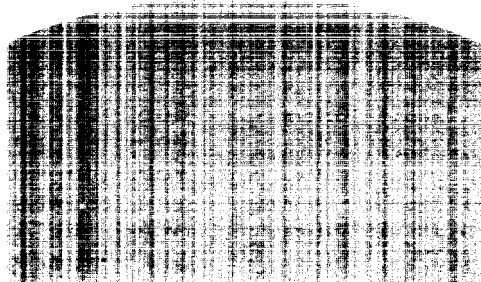
The Political Sector

Since the days of Peron, when Peronist electoral strength

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amounted to over 50 percent of the total vote, there has been no sure way to measure the voting strength of the movement. The Peronists have never been able to form a united front when they were permitted to participate in elections. Estimates based on the results of provincial elections and interpolations of national returns give them from one fourth to one third of the electorate.

In both provincial and national elections, Peron has prescribed a common party line but in no case was there absolute obedience, nor was the movement able to unite behind a single party banner. His orders to vote "in blank" in the 1963 presidential election turned out to be a disastrous defeat for Peron. Only about half the movement, or 15 percent of the electorate, followed orders, while the rest, jealous of their right to participate positively in the election, cast their ballots for Arturo Illia and the Radicals or for ex-President Aramburu.

In March 1965, the government under the victorious Illia permitted the Peronists to participate in national elections to choose about one third of the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the legislature. Peronists, running under the banner of the Popular Union (UP), captured 44 seats of the 96 contested to give the movement a 52-seat bloc in the 192-man lower house, second in strength only to Illia's Radicals with their 70-seat bloc.

The Peronists in the legislature, calling themselves the Justicialists, decided to vote as a bloc and elected Paulino Niembro, a moderate and close associate of Vandor, as chairman. The bloc was united at first, but in March 1966 the split that infected the CGT spread to the legislature. Sixteen of the Peronist deputies formed their own bloc declaring their allegiance to the orthodox wing of Isabelita and Jose Alonso and condemning Vandor for ignoring Peron's orders. This political split has hampered Peronist efforts in local and provincial elections.

Political eyes in Argentina are focusing now on the national elections scheduled for March 1967. About a third of the lower house will be up for election and a victory on the scale of their 1965 triumph could give the Peronists undisputed control of the chamber. In addition, most of the major governorships are to be filled, most notably that of Buenos Aires Province. The election of a hard-line Peronist, Andres Framini, to that post in 1962 triggered the military overthrow of President Frondizi.

The Peronists in the legislature have generally followed a moderate political line in order to win for themselves the image of a loyal nonobstructionist opposition. They supported the government's 1965 budget bill and their general behavior was more responsible than many observers expected. They united with other opposition deputies to defeat the

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government's 1966 budget bill, but then helped pass a responsible opposition budget.

Subversion and Strong-Arm
Tactics

Juan Peron himself became the guiding hand behind the various Peronist subversive groups that grew up both inside and outside Argentina after the dictator's ouster. There were groups directed by the Superior Peronist Command and independent exile groups in Paraguay and Uruguay. After Peron's ouster, a subversive command called the Division of Operations was set up under John William Cooke, an avowed and violent extremist. The various groups supported both terrorist activity and a plan for insurrection and overthrow of the government with the goal of returning Peron to power.

The subversive groups drifted increasingly to the left as they found support from Trotskyite and Castroite elements. After the 1963 election defeat Hector Villalon became the head of the subversive effort, which meant even closer ties with the Communists. This move tended to isolate the extremists within Peronism, since the rank and file as well as the majority of the leadership was generally opposed to close ties with Communism. At present the Villalon-Cooke group, calling itself the Peronist Revolutionary Command, comprises only a small fraction of the total Peronist movement.

Within the main body of Peronism, the enthusiasm for terror and strong-arm tactics has diminished over the years. This may be due in part to the policy of trying to gain a respectable image for Peronism, but it also reflects the fact that the use of violence has brought little success and, even worse, the stern reaction of the military.

In 1964, the Peronists decided to implement the now-famous "plan de lucha," variously translated as "battle plan" or "struggle plan." The plan included the occupation of factories by workers and the taking of hostages in an effort to force wage increases and generally bring attention to Peronist demands. The plan was met by President Illia in a reasoned and firm way without the use of repressive measures, and it eventually died before its completion. The "struggle" had two important results. First, it strengthened the convictions of the moderate Peronists who believe in more responsible ways to power. Second, it reinforced the views of those who are convinced that no form of Peronism is acceptable and that Peronists, once in control, would help bring back some of the more repressive and terrible aspects of the Peron dictatorship.

Subversion as a Peronist policy is on the way out, but the strike, the slowdown, and the

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street demonstrations are still very much a part of the Peronist bag of tools. Both of the main Peronist factions could be expected to revert to the use of violent tactics if the more moderate policies do not bear fruit and repressive steps are taken to prevent Peronist participation in the 1967 elections or to prevent labor's efforts to gain higher wages and benefits for the workers.

Outlook

The future of Peronism is clouded by the struggle between the two major factions. Significantly, in the April 1966 Mendoza Provincial election the orthodox Peronists polled almost twice as many votes as the more moderate neo-Peronists. This was a very surprising and unexpected show of strength for the Alonso-Isabelita wing. The effects of this defeat on the neo-Peronists are not yet clear, but it appears that they will have to reappraise their strategy as the 1967 elections draw closer.

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