

Peron's Argentina

Reasons for Rise to Power

1. Growth of nationalism

- Roca Runciman treaty (UK to buy Arg. Beef in return for special privileges in Arg for UK companies.
- Background of right wing nationalism from 1910 onwards (esp 1919 tragic week) and antisemitism
- New type of Historians attack UK and other foreign interference, give intellectual basis to nationalism (Rosas)
- World War 2 increases nationalism further:
 - Imports of tech & fuel stop, export markets cut off = demands for self sufficiency
 - US isolation of Arg as Arg refuses to side unequivocally with Allies. Brazil threat. Army concerned

All this made nationalists unhappy

2. Dissatisfaction with govts of 1930's (post 1930 Coup Concordancia govts)

Electoral fraud common

Middle classes unhappy with growing strength of urban masses as industry develops. To save spending, bureaucracy was cut = fewer m class jobs

3. Army growing unhappy

- Social conflict reappearing again
- Govt seemed to be moving to pro Ally stance

4. Army Coup of 1943

Army coup, Peron a member of coup

Army oversees govt.

5. Peron uses a succession of political positions to build up a power base

Esp as Min of Labour 1943

Uses this to make organised labour dependant on him:

- Settles disputes in favour of labour
- Dec 1943: pay rise for railwaymen
- mid 1944 onwards: whole stream of reforms and welfare benefits to help labour
- helps only those unions who officially register with his office

- This puts organised labour behind him and by 1946 he is the most powerful member of the post coup govts.
- This is realised too late by his rival officers. An attempt to dismiss and imprison him backfires when the labour movement marches in his support.
- He then stands for President in 1946 elections. Obtains 54%

Peron's Argentina

Peron: Philosophy - *Justicialismo*

Not fully articulated at first. Main features:

- Anti foreign interests in economy
= wins nationalist support
- Anti-estancieros of export led economy and for self sufficiency
= wins industrialist support who want to protect Arg industry against foreign competition
- Anti communist. Saw control of labour and welfarism as the key to stopping communism
- Belief in the need for a corporate state like in Italy under Muss. (= organising the economy using groups - or corporations- of non elected but govt chosen influence groups like industrialists, unions to help organize Corporations to be guided through 5 Year plans, drawn up by Peron
- Ideas developed further as time progressed. By 1949 they were known as *Justicialismo* - the belief in a just society, but one decided upon by a benevolent authority figure: Peron.
Peron believed this would end internal struggle. (Similar to early National Socialism)

Peron's Argentina

Consolidation of Peron's power

1. Control of Labour

- Continues welfarism
- Removes those labour leaders opposed to him: eg Luis Gay CGT Gen Sec (accused of being pro US = Press campaign orchestrated to get him and supporters to resign. Succeeds)

2. Army

Officers neutralised by:

- More arms spending (1945 38% budget)
- Officer class enlarged

Emphasis on key characteristics of nationalism, justice, industrialisation wins over ranks.

3. The Church

- religious instruction made legal requirement in schools

4. Press

- Radio: stations bought up by economic groups linked to the regime
- Newspapers: *La Prensa* given to CGT to run

5. Education

- Universities: many dismissed for views that did not coincide with Peron
- Schools: schools organised by opposition political groups closed down

6. Political Institutions

- Supreme Court: dismissed & replaced 1947 (antagonised Peron by resisting his social reforms)
- Congress:
Lower House: Saenz Peña law gave 2/3 of Congress to majority party or grouping, 1/3 to leading minority party. Peron's coalition won by a small majority, but given overwhelming majority in lower house
Senate: 13 of 14 provincial govts went to peronistas = Senate also controlled

Old parties almost totally destroyed: no socialist or communists = no real opposition in Congress

7. Establishing control within his own supporters

Won 1946 elections (54%) as head of Peronista coalition of Junta Renovador (Labour Party) radicals & other political groups supported by trade unions. So as soon as possible had to stamp his authority. In post election arguments Peron told different groups to be united with him in a single group: Partido Peronista. If refused = marginalised. He then played the central role in controlling party membership, leadership, re election rules etc.

Peron's Argentina

8. The role of Eva Duarte

- Mistress then married 1945
- Poor background. From Provinces. Actress.
- No official political position, but exercises much influence because:

populist of genius:

- wins most support from descamisados (mass of urban workers)
- uses her position to give charitable support through Eva Peron Foundation (funded from industrialists & unions): schools, clinics, individual relief. This in return produces support
- represented what a poor girl could achieve
- pushes for female suffrage 1947

Charismatic

- charismatic presence (eg Unions, Europe, Vatican)

the above points made her almost a saint for many

No threat

- never threatens Juan Peron. Always works to support him. Presents herself as his wife, so to support her is to support him.
- focuses esp on unions to win over reluctant union leaders to Peron and to influence union elections at a personal level

Williamson: *"Evita personified the traditional political culture (in Argentina) of patronage and clientship, skilfully applied to modern conditions of mass politics"*

Peron's Argentina

Peronist Argentina:

1946-8 Prosperity and Development of Peronism

- *"Economic Independence:"*
 - Food exports to war torn Europe
 - = prosperity
 - = high tax revenues
 - = finances to nationalise railways, docks, central bank, telephones.
 - (= 1. increase state control
 - 2. stop foreign control)
 - national debt paid off

- *Control of landed economy*
 - IAPI govt state monopoly set up to control agric prices
 - = set low prices to purchase from producers
 - then sold at higher prices to export markets
 - Difference used to fund welfare projects and to protect industrialists from foreign competition

- *Winning mass support*
 - large wage rises given
 - = increased urban w c support
 - & stimulated industrial demand
 - = more industrialist support

Position of Peron seemed ever stronger

Peron's Argentina

1948- 1955 Collapse of Influence

Why:

1. Disintegration of economic position:

- Europe recovers = fall in demand
- Marshall Plan made Europe buy US agric = fall in demand
- Results:
 - a) less of a surplus to maintain Peronist social & economic policies
 - b) most imports to Argentina were from US = fewer dollars now to pay for them
 - c) Large wage rises led to greater demand for beef in Argentina too. Led to less beef for export to those markets still available
Low IAPI agric prices led farmers to growing less
Energy shortages as industry expanded more than available energy = oil imported
= even more dollars needed

1949 dollar crisis.

- Reserves gone
- factory closures= unemployment
- inflation rose 33% 1949 fueled by higher wages chasing fewer good

Results:

- Peron now borrows from US 1949 \$125m (Credit - not loan)
- wage freeze
- cuts in govt spending (welfare)
- international investors encouraged (eg 1954 Patagonia oil deal with Esso)

These alienated his main supporters: labour, nationalists & industrialists
= increased opposition

2. More control

- New laws to punish "contempt" *desacato* of govt
- Radical leaders imprisoned : Balbin
- La Prensa controlled, other papers rationed with paper
- govt control extended with the setting up of tighter corporations to control unions, employers organisations, schools, universities, prof organisations (doctors, lawyers etc) = to create *La Comunidad Organizado*

3. Death of Eva Peron 1952 July, aged 33

Mythic death & burial but removed her charismatic support

Peron's Argentina

4. Peronist frustration at collapse of policies

eg April 1953 Jockey Club, Radical & Socialist HQ's attacked by Peronist mobs

4. Army disquiet with Peron

Why:

- a) Growing unrest in country
- b) Dislike of personality cult (esp when Peronists demanded canonisation of Eva P)
- c) Peron's attacks on position of church in education, welfare, and legalisation for divorce
RC Church became focus for Peronist opposition
When military bombed the Pres palace during Peronist rally in failed coup June 1955 killing hundreds, Peronists replied by setting fire to churches

The End

- Church/Peronist violence grew
- street riots throughout 1955
- Aug 31 Peron asked supporters to kill 5 opponents for every Peronist killed
- Civil war seemed imminent
= army revolt toppling Peron. Allowed to escape to Paraguay

Legacy

1. Influence still present from eventual exile in Madrid
via CGT
Evita myth
belief in Peron's second coming (returns 1973, revives policies but dies 1974)
2. Left large state bureaucracy controlling society & economy
3. Extensive welfare programme
4. Economy out of alignment.
Peronism needed govt spending. This required exports.
Exports were now low, so borrowing was needed.
If no borrowing, money had to be printed.....inflation
5. Society now more divided than ever.
Peron had created new client groups, new antagonisms

Scene set for future decades of problems