

ELITES AND MASSES IN THE FORMATION OF PERONIST POWER

THE POLITICAL ELITE IN ARGENTINA. By JULIO A. FERNÁNDEZ. (New York: New York University Press, 1970. Pp. 133. \$7.95.)

LEADER AND VANGUARD IN MASS SOCIETY: A STUDY OF PERONIST ARGENTINA. By JEANE KIRKPATRICK. (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1971. Pp. 262. \$12.50.)

These have been heady times for politically active Argentines and for observers of Argentine affairs. For a while, it looked as if that unhappy country was about to break out of the *callejón sin salida*, the frustrating cycle of economic stagnation and unstable democracy that has bedeviled leaders and populace alike for twenty years. What was the basis for such optimism? Simply that "el viejo" had returned. In fact, he came back twice, in November 1972 and June 1973; the second time, to stay.

The general consensus among observers was that his visit in November 1972 was a disappointment—to them and to his followers. In one sense, the disappointment was inevitable. The anticipation built up over the months and years of half-secret negotiations punctuated by announcements from Madrid was excruciating. His loyal supporters expected him to take over the government—almost as if by magic—and revindicate their suffering in his name. Many who were not his supporters and never had been, hoped vaguely he would send the military back to their barracks and lead the nation out of the wilderness to its rightful place among the world's leaders. Newspapers around the world sensed this anticipation and their correspondents flooded into Buenos Aires in November. The world's interest undoubtedly heightened the tension in Argentina. Mass meetings were held to exhort his followers. The leader of the far left youth wing of his movement asked students to arm for revolution to mark his return. Troops were mobilized. For a brief moment at the beginning of November, stories circulated that the military had split over the visit and that the government's control was deteriorating. Gradually, however, President Alejandro Lanusse reasserted himself. Clear and severe restrictions on public demonstrations were imposed—and enforced. As the old man left Madrid he declared that he was returning to make peace and called on his followers to respect the law. Thirty thousand troops were on duty at the airport and the approaches to the city when, shortly after 11:00 a.m. on November 17, 1972, Juan D. Perón returned to Argentina after seventeen long years of exile.

At first he and his party were confined to the airport hotel, but by the end of the day the military was satisfied as to his intentions, and he was allowed to go to a comfortable house in the suburbs which had been prepared for his stay. In the days following his dramatic, long awaited arrival, Perón left his suburban villa only five times. He devoted himself entirely to closing the ranks of his supporters in preparation for the March elections and to exploring possible alliances with other political parties. Then, almost without warning, Perón declined his

movement's nomination for president on December 14 and left the country. In his stead, he had his party nominate a colorless politician with a long record of personal loyalty to him. The nomination of Dr. Héctor J. Cámpora was the final cruel blow to those who had expected great things to come of Perón's visit. The man could not match his myth. "He was," said one embittered supporter, "just another old politician."

Dr. Cámpora conducted a vigorous campaign in which he employed the slogan "*¡Cámpora al gobierno; Perón al poder!*" Back in Madrid, Perón devoted his energies to the problem of holding his renascent movement together and denying the fragmented opposition any opportunity to unite against him. This he accomplished by restricting his statements to generalizations and criticisms of imperialism. The government's strategy—or hope—was to go into a runoff election in which all non-Peronists would unite against the threat of peronism in power. Confounding this strategy, and most observers, FREJULI, the peronist front, won nearly 50 percent of the popular vote in the first round and General Lanusse wisely declared Cámpora the winner.

Although sceptics doubted until the last minute that the military would retire from the field, Cámpora assumed office on May 25, 1973, and immediately began to plan an official hero's welcome for Perón. The triumphal return—declared a national holiday by the government—was marred by a shoot-out near the reviewing stand between warring factions of Perón's supporters in which several hundred people were killed. This outburst was a blood augury of things to come. Within a month of Perón's return, Cámpora and his vice-president resigned to pave the way for new elections which would restore the ex-president to the post from which he had been ousted eighteen years earlier.

What made Perón come back to Argentina after seventeen years, only to leave after a brief and inconclusive stay? Then, what made him bid for office at a time when he enjoyed all the fruits of power without any of the risks and responsibility attendant upon holding office? Apart from sheer sentimentality, the fact that one-third of the Argentine electorate still claimed allegiance to him so many years after he was deposed by the military must have influenced his decision to return in November, just as it had influenced the military to swallow its pride and distrust to invite him back. The two books under review help to explain Perón's continuing influence in Argentine politics, and why the military was willing to include him in their *salida política*. Apparently, the military leaders came to accept the argument that political stability was impossible as long as the peronists were excluded from the political process. They wanted to end the *juego imposible* in which political parties bid for power in elections from which peronist candidates were excluded but which could not be won without peronist votes. The results of this game since 1955 had been a series of ineffectual civilian governments and military interventions which had eroded the prestige of the military, fragmented Argentine society, and left the economy in a shambles. As one Argentine scholar has observed:

En situaciones de alta modernización las rigideces estructurales y los estrangulamientos de desarrollo tienden a crear una composición de demanda política que los gobiernos difícilmente pueden satisfacer. Como un aspecto de ello, las demandas por participación en el consumo económico y en el poder político, formuladas por el sector popular, son altas y son sostenidas con continuidad y con importante apoyo organizacional. Esas demandas, dadas las rigideces y estrangulamientos, tienden a ser percibidas como "excesivas" por los restantes sectores sociales.

Por lo tanto, dados altos niveles de activación popular concomitantes de una elevada modernización, una abierta competencia entre partidos y un abierto acceso al poder político son condiciones necesarias para la supervivencia y consolidación de la democracia política. Pero la paradoja fundamental es que es ese mismo nivel de activación popular, unido a un pobre crecimiento y a un legado histórico marcado por numerosas rigideces, el que con mayor probabilidad lleva a los sectores más establecidos a concordar en momentos cruciales, sintiendo que sus propios intereses no pueden permitirse los “riesgos” implicados por una competencia política más abierta. En la medida en que son estos últimos los que controlan la mayor parte de los recursos no electorales, pueden fácilmente resultar sucesiones de autoritarismos y de “democracias” severamente restringidas. (Guillermo A. O’Donnell, *Modernización y autoritarismo* [Buenos Aires, 1972], pp. 208, 213).

The moral we might have drawn from this before the March elections is that stable, democratic politics was impossible in Argentina until one of two things occurred: (1) Anti-peronists allowed peronists to participate freely in the political process; or (2) ruling groups satisfied the basic economic and social demands of peronists and thereby absorbed them into other existing political groups. General Lanusse opted to try for the first. He hoped to beat the peronists in an open contest and then coopt them by meeting some or all of their demands. His effort was complicated by the fact that this “best of both worlds” strategy required greater economic resources to distribute among the sectors of society. Lanusse believed that economic expansion would follow quickly upon the achievement of political stability. His predecessor, General Juan C. Onganía, learned that this was not always so. In 1973, the military decided to let Perón try to balance stability and growth, and to heal the wounds in the Argentine body politic.

The key to Perón’s strategy—and to that of his widow and successor, Isabelita—lies in grasping the nature of peronism and of the support for Perón. It is precisely in this area that Jeane Kirkpatrick’s study is most valuable. The bulk of her data comes from over 2,000 interviews conducted with a stratified national sample of the Argentine population during October, November, and December 1965. Before dipping into her survey data, she summarizes the characteristics of Argentine politics, emphasizing its competitiveness, noting the ubiquity of violence, the legitimacy gap between rulers and ruled, and the pervasive institutional weakness that has frustrated Argentines for so many years. It is important, she tells us, to understand how peronism functions within this system.

As soon as she begins the summary of her research findings, Kirkpatrick makes two important points. First, she insists on a distinction between “core peronists,” those who expressly support Perón; and “pro peronists,” those who support the movement. The former might be only 18.1 percent of the population whereas as many as 36.6 percent would support peronist-backed candidates (p. 88). Second, she notes that the movement has neither definite nor stable boundaries (p. 92) and that it was more heterogeneous than its image indicated (pp. 113-15).

Kirkpatrick offers a generous sample from her rich store of survey data and the tables derived from that data. She is cautious in interpretation and never forces conclusions from her data. The questions in her survey focus on political attitudes, reference group orientation, subjective perception of objective events, and political demands. In her conclusions, Kirkpatrick emphasizes the similarities of peronist and other Argentine political groups, insisting that observed differences represent only tendencies. Thus, she finds no pre-emptive, Marxist class

model distinguishing peronists from other Argentines. Nevertheless, peronist workers had a higher degree of class consciousness than non-peronist workers. "Add to this a pro-labor ideological commitment and an almost equally strong tendency to see labor as unfairly treated, and there exists the psychosocial base of a combative ideology" (p. 153). The message is clear: The grounds for social cleavage exist if the peronists are not allowed to participate in the political process or given a slice of the pie.

In both their political demands and attitudes, peronists were concerned with bread and butter issues. They were less concerned with the organization of power and more interested in its uses; more concerned with the distribution of goods than with the distribution of power. Moreover, it is precisely in the area of demands that pro-peronists come closest to core peronists. Again the message is clear; to the extent that basic economic demands are not met, the peronist base is expanded—politically and socially—and there is an increased disposition of the movement to accept non-democratic political solutions as means of satisfying those demands. Kirkpatrick ventures the guess that the demand aggregate—and the failure of governments to satisfy those demands—will hold the movement together. On the other hand, leadership problems and factionalism reduce the impact of the demand aggregate on Argentine politics and endanger the existence of the movement after Perón's retirement or death. This prediction, certainly, has been borne out.

Kirkpatrick's study reveals that institutional instability derives from interpersonal conflicts rather than from deep cleavages at the base and that there is a poor fit between mass demands and institutional performance (p. 230). She concludes by offering two hypotheses: (1) The disposition to reject compromise may be acquired during political socialization; and (2) "The tendency of Argentina to gravitate repeatedly toward and acquiesce in autocracy might be explained by the relatively low requirements of autocracy for compromise, conciliation, and cooperation" (pp. 231-33).

There are a number of superficial similarities between the Kirkpatrick and Fernández books. Both are based on survey data, begin with summaries of Argentine history, are concerned with the functioning of the political system, and both are set in the 1960s. There the similarities end. Fernández sets out to study recruitment into what he defines as the political elite—officeholders in the national executive, state governors and members of congress, from 1958 to 1966. He amasses biographical data on his sample and finds all regions proportionately represented, that higher education is important, that prior political experience is more important in elective office than in appointive office, and that the primary goal of the elite is to lift Argentina out of its underdeveloped status. Later on, we are told the process of political selection "takes place in a modernizing culture wherein the party is the main agent," that recruitment is characterized by formality and personalism, and that the pattern "is indicative of a condition best described as something less than accelerative development" (pp. 105-106). Poor Argentina, it doesn't behave the way good, mature, developed, multi-party democracies behave and, worse, doesn't seem to be tailoring its politics to achieve such behavior! Here is a perfect example of the researcher's bias preventing him from understanding his material. The research is so skewed that it is remarkable anything came out of it. How sad in this day and age to come upon a political scientist who conceives of political development in linear terms with

liberal democracy at the top of some divinely ordained ladder, going hand in hand with economic growth. In such a conception, peronism is a nasty aberration and military government nothing but personalistic adventurism. Worse, Fernández' treatment of Argentine history reads like a bad school text, rife with gross generalities and plain errors of fact. For example, Supreme Director Pueyrredón is said to have been a royalist, yet the people of the interior disliked him for being a liberal, and he was overthrown in 1820 because "the people demanded a strong leader" (p. 10). Discussing the "business sector," he says, "No matter what ideological framework is adopted, it can be safely assumed that the role of the empresario sector will be an energetic and progressive one" (p. 27). He mentions Mario Moreno when, presumably, he means Mariano Moreno (p. 33). He equates the politics of Américo Ghioldi and Alicia Moreau de Justo (p. 55). And he confuses the Alsogaray brothers, Julio and Álvaro (p. 100).

In concluding, Fernández hypothesizes "that from the standpoint of political development and stability, a workable system of interaction can be developed among the dissident groups of the politically articulate strata only to the extent that a basis of confidence between political and military leaders is established" (p. 110). But, where does this lead? Why is there a lack of confidence between the military and political leaders? Unhappily, Fernández' study does not help to explain the Argentine political dilemma or even answer the questions he posed for himself. Part of the reason for his failure lies in the blinders with which he approached his material and asked his questions. From every standpoint, Kirkpatrick's book is more useful. We shall have a better understanding of Argentine politics when we have more studies like hers. The best that can be said for Fernández' book is that the selection of peronist candidates for congress in the March elections was carried out in a "personalistic" manner, as he predicted.

The Kirkpatrick book, by contrast, offers a framework for prediction which was consistent with Perón's behavior in power, and which, sadly, is consistent with the violent internecine struggle since his death. Basically, Perón embarked on a campaign to secure a broad coalition of center-left and center-right nationalist forces based on two pillars of support. The first was the trade unions which had remained loyal to him for the reasons set forth by Kirkpatrick. The second was the sector of the business community least compromised by links to the traditional sources of economic power. The representative of this sector was José Gelbard, President of the CGE, who served Perón as Minister of the Economy. The objective of this strategy, referred to as a social coalition or the CGT-CGE axis, was to establish the basis for expanded economic activity, including the participation of foreign capital, in order to fulfill the campaign promises of immediate increases in blue collar wages, and to maintain economic stability while the government set about redistributing national income in a more equitable fashion.

The point to emphasize is that Perón adopted a moderate stance at the expense of the left wing of his movement. He undercut the revolutionaries within peronism and outside the movement by declaring his determination to maintain law and order. It would appear that Perón accepted Kirkpatrick's description of his supporters—they are concerned with bread and butter issues, not ideology. He neutralized the revolutionary left, held his movement together, and retained the support of pro-peronists so long as he satisfied the basic demand aggregate of the middle and lower classes. Even in the last months of his life, his success in these areas was called into question.

Perón's appeal to revolutionary nationalism was confined to rhetorical pronouncements against Yankee Imperialism and in favor of Third World unity. Even the United States refused to take these statements seriously and the State Department's policy was that Perón was Argentina's best hope. Of greater concern to moderates and democrats was the cavalier treatment of the universities which reminded many Argentines of the most unsavory features of Perón's first regime. Kirkpatrick's conclusion, that failure to satisfy the demand aggregate makes Argentines less concerned with the niceties of democracy, suggests that Perón believed that the political risks of these steps was negligible. This was true so long as his basic strategy worked. The danger facing Perón—again, following Kirkpatrick—was that he would not be able to satisfy the demand aggregate which he himself had labelled legitimate. Sympathetic members of the CGE expressed concern that Perón would repeat the economic disasters of his first regime by stifling agriculture, the principal source of foreign exchange. Isabelita faces the same problems compounded by factionalism and the struggle for control within the movement. If she cannot satisfy the CGT-CGE axis, the left wing of the movement will exert excruciating pressure on her to abandon her moderate stance and foster class conflict. Already, she has swung over to support the most conservative elements within peronism. Ultimately, she may be confronted with the same situation that enabled Perón to preserve his power from 1955 to 1973: A politically fragmented citizenry increasingly disposed to accept non-democratic solutions to satisfy their demands, this time *against* La Presidenta Perón.

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