

I Cry for You Argentina!

by Anónimo Argentino (March 2015)



The recent shocking revelation that the late chief Argentinian prosecutor Alberto Nisman, investigating the terrorist bombing of the Buenos Aires Jewish Community Center in July 1994 (85 killed) was found dead just days before he was slated to make accusations against the President, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, as responsible for a cover-up of the culprits – Iranian agents. What this did in effect was to send a message as terrible and depressing as that which emanated from the Jihadists in Paris against a free press and Jewish hostages. It put a seal of approval of the regime that Jews, no matter how fervent their patriotism and undeniable their contributions to the national culture, are EXPENDABLE! Weighed on the national scale against further threats by Islamist extremists or the value of Iranian oil – Jews could and will be sacrificed! Kirchner's subsequent statement that she believed Nisman was murdered in order to shift blame onto her making her appear as a victim rings hollow and is only further vindication of the regime's duplicity and search for scapegoats instead of finding the truth.

This crime and the response of the chief executive of the state is far worse than the trumped up charges against Captain Alfred Dreyfus in 1894 by rogue officers in the French High command – they acted to protect one of their own and cast the blame on the eternal scapegoat – the Jews. Evidence came to light as early as two years following his conviction through an investigation instigated by Georges Picquart, head of counter-espionage who correctly identified a French Army major, Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy, as the real culprit. High-ranking military officials suppressed the new evidence and a military court unanimously acquitted Esterhazy after a trial lasting only two days.

The French government was not directly involved. The Argentinian case hid the Iranian culprits of the bombings of the Israeli Embassy and Jewish community Center in Buenos Aires for more than twenty years! French honor was ultimately restored due to the unceasing efforts of famed writer Émile Zola. There is no Argentinian Zola.

For most Latin Americans today and their parents, General Juan Perón of Argentina was the precursor to Fidel Castro who represented the image of a proud crusading nationalist leader rejecting the overtures of the United States and devoted to raising the standard of living of those at the bottom of the social and economic scale, *i.e.* the most destitute and humble

citizens who had been exploited by a tiny privileged elite. The clear anti-American tone of the Peronist regime of the 1940s was demonstrated in the 1946 election won by Peron in which the most powerful slogan of the party in power was "Perón or Braden"! (Spruille Braden, the American ambassador and a top executive in the United Fruit Company who had criticized the Argentinian government for its neutral but pro-Axis stand during the early years of World War II).

Juan Perón and his wife Eva Duarte Perón were the source of the political movement in the country that has dominated Argentine affairs for most of the past seventy years. The movement known as *Justicialismo* (embracing the ideal of social justice), but recognized more familiarly abroad simply as Peronism, created an economic, political, and social ideology that exalts the state, and by its own description attempts to accommodate the interests first and foremost of THE POOR as well as labor, and industry. This form of government highly controls and subsidizes many labor unions, strongly supports the military, private industry, and public works. This model of a Latin American Populism was followed in Cuba by Fulgencio Batista, 'Papa Doc' Duvalier in Haiti and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela.

Argentina was pressured into declaring war on Germany and Japan in the closing weeks of the conflict. Both Juan and Eva Perón were instrumental in providing assistance to facilitate the escape of many Nazi war criminals and their establishment under hidden identities in Argentina. Nevertheless, the opportunistic Perón regime was on very good terms with elements within the Jewish community, and maintained friendly relations with the State of Israel even though it abstained on the issue of the partition of Palestine in the 1947 U.N. resolution. Even today, a strong supporter of President Kirchner and the impending deal with Iran (and a strong critic of Israel) is the Jewish Argentinian foreign minister Héctor Timerman.

Following World War II (which was economically extremely beneficial to Argentina), the Peronist regime's inefficiency led to the decline of the country's economy, the bankrupting of the civil services, profitless industries and the further strengthening control over labor unions. Subsequent military governments, however, that followed Perón's death, were guilty of much greater and widespread abuse of human rights and led the country into ever worse difficulties and the adventurist war over the Falklands.

Perón's policies and ideas were initially popular among a wide variety of different groups across the political spectrum and led to the paradox of Peronism being classified as a "populism" of both the Left and the Right. Juan Perón could speak to the masses in the most contemporary lower class "Lumfardo" dialect of the Buenos Aires slums and write in classical correct Spanish. He could identify his major target as the great American oil companies in

public speeches and yet sign unpublicized lucrative agreements with them. He nationalized **Argentina's** railroads and some of the largest corporations and at the same time protected and won the support of major labor unions that agreed to relinquish the right to strike.

About the only certainty regarding Peronism is the identity of those elements of the population that came to regard Perón with contempt. They were the old landed aristocracy, the Roman Catholic Church, a free press and intellectuals who regarded themselves as "liberals" in the old fashioned sense of supporting individual rights and who admired the United States and Great Britain as models for a democratic society.

Judging by the nature of these "enemies," most observers would brand Peronism as a form of a Leftwing fascism, however, Perón had served as a military attaché in Italy and expressed great admiration for the policies and personality of Benito Mussolini. It was there that he acquired a taste for the kind of authoritarian rule and a corporate economic system he believed would propel Argentina into the ranks of a great power. He supported the military coup of 1943 that placed a clique of generals in power with whom he shared the same political views but realized quickly that they lacked the ambition to become a truly popular national leadership and that they had failed to reach the broad sections of the lower classes, especially urban workers, women, and immigrants.

Perón became Minister of Labor in 1944 and supported legislation to raise wages and grant special privileges to favored unions. Suspicion of his policies led to an attempt by rivals to force him from power but loyal labor leaders rallied mass demonstrations to protest his imprisonment. This support engineered his release and success in national presidential elections in 1946. Perón's appeal was also linked to policies that typified what many lower class Argentines defined as virtues such as national pride, resentment of snobs, intellectuals and aristocrats, success in football, the tango, and a contempt of homosexuality.

Opposition came from the Communists, the press, "liberal" intellectuals and eventually of the Church and even the army.

During World War II, the Communist Party line from Moscow was to support the Allied cause after the German invasion of the USSR, a step that led to Perón posing as the benefactor of the working class. He intervened to support striking workers, including those working for British owned firms, a step criticized by the Communists as hurting the Allied war effort. Having come to power as a candidate of the Labor Movement, Perón proclaimed a new ideology of social justice that he argued was more in line with Argentine reality than the "class

struggle." In his ideology, all classes had to work in harmony for the common good.

The economic prosperity resulting from Argentina's status as a neutral country and the demand for its meat and grain exports were cleverly used to increase real wages, making it appear that Perón was the true friend of the working class. This isolated the previously strong influence that Communist and Socialist parties had exercised within the unions. Perón used his influence and charisma to replace union leaders with communist or socialist sympathies with his cronies and by appealing to the workers that real bread and butter issues would be given more sympathy by a government in his hands. At the same time, he explained to employers that his policies ultimately benefitted them by ensuring future labor peace. His policies granted collective bargaining to the unions that increasingly became dependent on his good will.

The Communist Party lost support and felt itself outmaneuvered by Perón's success. Reluctantly, they had to support him until they saw a chance that his fall from power would allow them to again take charge of the worker's movement. For many Argentine workers, the period 1943-53 was the "Golden Age" of Peronism. Argentina's most renowned author, Nobel prize laureate Jorge Luis Borges, became his country's most esteemed writer and philosopher but expressed an unremitting hatred of Perón and his two wives with political ambitions – Evita, and later Isabella who also became President of Argentina. His dislike began in the 1940s even before Perón became President for the first time. Borges favored the Spanish Republic and objected to Perón's admiration of the European Fascist dictators. When Perón became President, Borges was fired from his post as municipal librarian and offered the position of Poultry and Rabbit Inspector of the Buenos Aires Markets to humiliate him. Perón was not content with this but even imprisoned the writer's mother and sister. After Perón's fall in 1955, Borges became Director of the National Library almost simultaneously with the onset of full blindness, to which he remarked, "I speak of God's splendid irony in granting me at once 800,000 books and darkness."

He became professor of English literature at the University of Buenos Aires, and taught there from 1955 to 1970. Borges never ceased his opposition while Perón remained in office, or after the coup which deposed him, nor during all the intervening years. Shortly after the success of the Peronists in the 1973 elections, he gave an interview to a Brazilian newspaper and stated "When I think of the cases of torture, I have the impression that my country is disintegrating morally as well as economically."

Borges described himself as an adherent of Classical Liberalism and that his opposition to Marxism and Communism was absorbed in his childhood. "Well, I have been brought up to think that the individual should be strong and the State should be weak. I couldn't be enthusiastic

about theories where the State is more important than the individual." He roundly criticized the opportunistic Communist Party of Argentina and was a strong supporter of the Jewish community, Zionism and the state of Israel. He regarded criticism of being a "Gentile Philosemite" as a compliment.

Following his death, Perón was succeeded in the office of president by his third wife Isabella who, after being deposed and exiled herself, continued in the leadership position of the Justicialismo Party. When she was overthrown in March 1976, Borges wept with joy and upon meeting the engineer of the coup, Colonel Videla, he thanked him for "having liberated the country from the infamy which we bore." Borges spoke too soon however, and the Peronist influence has continued in one form or another to the present day.

Borges' hatred of Perón stemmed not simply from the principles of opposition to a demagogue and dictator whose regime practiced torture and suppressed civil liberties. It was also part of the old struggle in Argentina between a populist appeal to the masses that downgraded respect for education, erudition, high culture and art that Borges had grown up with and which he felt had been prostituted by Perón and his wives. It is no accident that "popular Argentinian culture" which has elevated Eva Peron, Che Guevara and football star Diego Maradona as its most representative figures (judged by the sale of their images on postcards and memorabilia of all kinds at every kiosk appealing to tourists). appeals to the same populist mind-set that Juan Perón helped cultivate during his years as the head of state.

If any further proof were needed of the diverse, often contradictory nature of General Juan Perón and his bases of support in the country, it has to be his fall from power under the joint attack of The Catholic Church and a Free Press headed by the great Buenos Aires liberal journal *La Prensa*. This was followed by eighteen years of exile in the Spain of General Franco only to return and then win the presidency by a landslide victory in what all observers agree were free and honest elections. Even more remarkable was the growth of his wife Eva's status as an adored icon of the masses symbolized so effectively in the musical *Evita*. Evita's image on the new Argentinian 100 peso note and the placement of her portrait in mammoth size at the headquarters of a major workers' union building in the center of Buenos Aires by the current president Christine Kirchner reinforced her image as the Peronist heir to the throne and idol of the "working classes."

Although Perón himself did not encourage anti-Semitism, the Peronist legacy in Argentina has taken on this dimension with the popularity of Fidel Castro in Cuba and his pro-Soviet and pro-Arab foreign policy and the growing demonization of Israel so common now in many third world countries hungry for the attention of the oil rich Arab world as well as in the eyes of

any in the Argentinian worker's class for whom the Jews, like the English or the Americans symbolized "privileged" economic or cultural power.

Following the overthrow of Peron, exiled newspaper editor Alberto Gainza Paz returned to Argentina in February 1956 to take over *La Prensa* again and the first issue to appear under his control was numbered 29,476 ignoring the years Perón had controlled the paper. In a short time, it once again became the leading newspaper in the country and regained its prestige.



Eva Perón's Growing Influence and Cult Status

As First Lady of Argentina from 1945 to 1952, Eva Perón was generally regarded as the most powerful woman in the world and referred to officially as the country's "Spiritual Leader." The "Cinderella from the Pampas," was another common nickname for her idealization by many of the country's poor who identified with her humble origins. She had grown up uneducated in a small rural town, been looked down on as an illegitimate daughter and an actress who had slept her way into fame but rapidly acquired a taste for elegance and glamorous style. When she met and married General Juan Perón, she added greatly to his support among the poor both in the slums of the big cities as well as in the countryside.

Perón's Fall

The growing dissatisfaction of the Catholic Church that had never fully endorsed Perón's worship of the state as the source of all authority led to increased tensions. This was followed by the setting up of a rival Catholic trade union to which Perón responded with verbal threats against priests "meddling in politics." Although frequently cast as a "rightwing dictator," that many observers immediately and automatically assume means support for the established church, but Perón was largely undone by the conflict. Several priests were arrested and imprisoned followed by Perón shutting down Catholic newspapers and banning religious processions. Followers in the street demonstrations he organized in his support chanted the slogan of "Priests NO, Perón YES! (very much like the old slogan of Perón Si – Braden No!)" Hoping for support from liberals, he had Congress legalize divorce and remove religious instruction from the schools. Going even farther, Perón granted legitimacy to children born out of wedlock, and legalized prostitution.

The Church then incited mass demonstrations and utilized the slogan of, "Is it Christ or Perón?" The Congress under his control expelled two Argentine priests and on June 16, 1955, the Vatican excommunicated those responsible for the expulsion, without naming anyone

specifically. On that same day, the Airforce and Navy launched a coup, and airplanes bombed Perón's home. He survived, but 350 civilians were killed in the assault. His strength had always rested in the support from the Army that remained loyal to him and opposed the takeover by the Navy and Airforce. They launched a counter-attack and suppressed the coup. Perón's supporters then rioted and looted the Buenos Aires Cathedral. They destroyed the headquarters of the archdiocese and burned several Catholic churches. Perón pretended to denounce these excesses and made changes in his cabinet. In September, 1955 to show popular support, a delegation from the government controlled unions offered to provide Perón with armed workers' militias, an idea that Evita had originally proposed during a previous crisis.

This, however proved to be the last straw. The Army's leaders did not want another rival military force. They were fed up with Perón and the armed forces fought each other again, for three days, a mini-civil war raged in which several thousand died. Perón took refuge in the Paraguayan embassy and then went into exile, first to Paraguay and then to Venezuela and Spain. Anti-Perón mobs then broke into Perón's several luxurious homes and ransacked them, an example of how fickle populism of any kind can be.

Perón's Long Shadow 1955-73

In spite of his humiliating fall from power, Argentina's inability to solve its major economic problems and notably the ruinous runaway inflation that had been accelerated by Perón's policies of generous welfare subsidies and protected national industries, contributed to a growing nostalgia for Peronism. Attempts to rein in these policies led to demonstrations and unstable governments with periodic military intervention. Because the government's policies had tried to reverse some of the popular measures taken by Perón, much of the opposition focused on recalling and restoring his heritage. Thus arose the phenomenon of what has been called "Leftwing Peronism" (ignoring many anti-intellectual cultural elements) and calls for his return from exile to lead the nation again. Although opposed by a broad coalition of forces that could be defined as both Left and Right, the strong street based neighborhood and union cadres of the Peronista movement had considerable organizational strength and staying power and won handily, bringing Juan Perón back in triumph.

After receiving an "invitation" from the military government, Perón returned to Argentina in 1973. He was elected president in free and fair elections and his third wife, the unstable Isabel de Perón, was elected as his vice-president. She succeeded him after his death on July 1, 1974. During his short term and that of his wife's, problems were exacerbated and the military found that it had no choice but to once again seize power in 1976.

The Power of Peronism Without Perón

In spite of all the instability of the Peronist era, it appears that Argentina cannot escape his legacy. The continuing economic problems especially ruinous inflation, the weakening of the middle class, disastrous adventurism of the lost war in the Malvinas (Falklands Islands), the legendary “good times” of Juan and Eva Perón continue to exercise a fascination and a political power that seems to defy gravity.

More than any other country, Argentina’s political history over the past seventy years can be framed in terms of Peronism, a philosophy uniting many elements of both the Left and the Right against the Center. In its own words, Perón’s Party, still in existence today (but divided into antagonistic competing wings) and called El Partido Justicialista (PJ) describes itself as an “Argentine Political Party, a continuation of the Peronista Party, founded by General Juan Domingo Perón in 1947. Its original principal banner is The Defense of the Workers, remaining since then a deep attachment to the Working Class and the Unions.”

This declaration has provided it in the minds of many of those on the Marxist Left with a set of indulgences like those the church granted to sinners in the Middle Ages. Today, it is not only the President of Argentina but the entire movement that stands condemned for behind the scenes moves linking it to the Iranian mullahs and Hezbollah just as its sordid past in helping Nazi war criminals find refuge. Since Nisman’s death, the respected Jewish journalist of the English language Buenos Aires Herald, Damian Pachter fled the country for his life reaching Israel via Uruguay. Whether the President is in charge or “rogue elements” of the intelligence services, no Argentinians are safe and Jews must face the reality that they will continue to be the favorite scapegoat of the regime’s many failures under the still lengthy shadow of Juan and Eva Perón.

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