

PERONISM AND RADICALISMO: ARGENTINA'S TRANSITIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 1955, the most visible feature of the Argentine political system has been a higher level of instability. Not only did military coups become more frequent, but the installation of each new regime was invariably followed by a repetition of the same cycle: the failure to develop an alternative political formula, signs of the emergence of political fragility, and the final collapse. More significantly, beneath the tumultuous surface of political events, the key mechanisms of the 1945-55 state were dismantled without being replaced by alternative arrangements. Those mechanisms had been based upon the partial institutionalization of Perón's own personal leadership. During those years, Perón had not only been the head of government, he had also played two other key roles by channeling the political representation of the popular masses through himself and by promoting the subordination of the armed forces to the political institutions.

Despite the ultimate failure to create alternative political mechanisms to replace those of the Peronist state, the course of post-1955 events was shaped by the unfolding of the successive projects. Following the 1955 coup, three different attempts were made to create an institutional system based on political parties. During the first eleven years, the goal was to restore the hegemony of the "democratic" political parties with the exclusion of Peronism. <sup>1/</sup> Although public liberties were somewhat expanded and constitutional guarantees were seldom suspended, the proscription of Peronism made a mockery of the claims of its "democratic" adversaries and ultimately resulted in growing political instability. The military developed a pattern of tutelary intervention whereby they repeatedly enforced the exclusionary measures, and exercised their power to selectively veto the policies and initiatives of the civilian governments. A distinct style of societal functioning was established during the 1955-1966 years; the most profound economic, cultural, and organizational processes were fairly autonomous from transformational initiatives "from above." Rather, the dominant social tendencies were the result of the interrelation of the pressure, resistance, and struggle of the different actors of civil society. As a consequence, the organized social actors, and most notably business and labor, perfected their ability to block government intervention from above. All this, finally, contributed to the constitution of a dual political system. In this system the non-Peronist parties and parliament operated on one side. Neither these parties nor parliament could, however, channel the interests and orientations of the fundamental social actors. On the other side, a system of extra-parliamentary negotiations and pressures operated by going around the political parties. In this system, agreements were made and obligations were contracted, and the various sectors accepted cuts in their original demands. Nevertheless, they let it known that their support for substantive agreements had been given reluctantly, and that they would not hesitate to break these agreements even at the risk of provoking a breakdown of the institutional framework.

The dual political system of the 1955-1966 period was characterized by the fact the parliamentary mechanisms and the party system helped to strengthen the opposition by proscribing Peronism and condemning it to work from outside the institutions. In turn, the participants in extra-parliamentary negotiations, notably business and the military, used their threats to destabilize the political

institutions of government as a weapon of last resort.

In comparison with the years of "semi-democracy," the two more recent attempts at implanting constitutional democracy --i.e. that of 1973 and the present one-- started within a quite different set of circumstances. 2/ Beginning in 1966 the military became convinced of the futility of trying to correct "negative" political practices without directly involving themselves in governmental affairs. From 1966, in fact, "surgical" analyses predominated which identified different illnesses --the crisis of authority (in society as well as in the state), labor unrest, lack of class discipline. All agreed that the "cure" would require very deep cuts. Argentine society was, then, subjected to brutal "treatments" in which the generalization and extension of state repression, often conducted in violation of legal norms, was one of the "remedies" most often applied, albeit not the only one. The political formulae devised by the military from 1966 on proposed to overcome the dualism which had prevailed in the political system hitherto. This would be done by channeling back into a non-democratic institutional framework those processes of negotiation which had developed outside the formal system in the previous period. The military governments proved ultimately unable either to corral politics into corporatism or to impose rigidly repressive social schemes: nevertheless, the consequences of the projects of 1966 and 1976 were that those interstices through which politics had filtered up to 1966 without great explosions were blocked. Therefore, political interactions gradually began to take place outside the institutions, and were conducted in an increasingly savage manner. The different actors rapidly put aside previously understood game rules, and adopted strategies in which progressively less attention was paid to the destructive consequences of their individual actions --both in relation to "the others" and to the collective whole.

One of the consequences of the intensifying of authoritarianism from the mid-1960s onwards was that both reversions to a party-controlled democratic government were made against the will of the military, rather than under its protective tutelage. Hence, the installation of civilian regimes in 1973 and 1983 were the culminations of open confrontations between the collapsing military regimes and the oppositions of the time. The confrontationist style of politics that prevailed during the transitions could have hardly been avoided. Although each one of the last presidents of both dictatorships, General Lanusse and Bignone respectively, had been explicitly appointed to administer the liquidation of military rule, the armed forces made last-minute efforts to determine who their successors would be, or at least to impose restrictions upon them. Although the military failed to achieve those objectives, military intransigence acted as a catalyst for significant changes in the patterns of relationship between Peronists and Radicales. In 1970 the two largest parties signed a pact, La Hora del Pueblo, whereby they reversed the antagonism that had made them irreconcilable opponents since the mid-1940s. In the early 1980s, in turn, the overwhelming electoral supremacy which Peronism had enjoyed over the Radical party since its creation finally came to an end with the victory of Alfonsín at the polls in October 1983.3/

Actually, Peronism and the Unión Cívica Radical were respectively the central protagonists of each of the two transitions. Thus, I propose to analyze the characteristics of the two parties, paying special attention to the roles

they played in 1973, in the case of Peronism, and in 1983, in the case of the Radical party. This allows me to underscore the basic features and modes of action of the two parties

### PERONISM

The hegemonic position achieved by Peronism during Perón's first presidency of 1946-1955 had been based on three elements: the close identification of the party with the state, the development of a mass-based union movement, and the successful generation of a new collective identity associated both with the value of social egalitarianism and with contesting the traditional oligarchy's cultural supremacy. 4/ The control of the state and Peron's dual role as leader of the masses and head of government had been essential mechanisms in the political formula of Peronism. Hence, the successful military coup of 1955 did more than simply remove Peronism from power; it also affected the very nature of Peronism itself. As a result of the change in regime, all three of the above-mentioned elements were profoundly redefined.

Before 1955 the subordination of the Peronist party to the state was manifest in several ways. In the first place, it meant that an autonomous party organization was missing: the party as such was little more than an appendage of state institutions, and especially of the agencies of the executive, both at the national and provincial levels. Perón and a couple of his close associates in the presidency decided on every important party issue, including the selection of candidates for elective office. A similar scheme was followed at the provincial level where every governor ran party affairs strictly enforcing the adherence to the principle of verticalismo. 5/ One of the most important consequences of verticalismo within Peronism was to render congress an irrelevant institution almost completely dependent upon the executive.

The subordination of the party to the state transformed the former into simply a means to help secure the legitimacy of public policies among the population. Therefore, the party served neither to articulate social demands, nor to mediate the conflicting interest and values of its members. Last but not least, statism gradually became the all-encompassing, albeit largely implicit, ideology of the Peronist party-in-power. In this sense statism was much more than just a correlate of economic interventionism: it was also associated with a political culture in which the state was conceived as the embodiment of the public good and political pluralism was deemed a divisive, and sometimes evil, phenomenon.

The fall from power created a vacuum within Peronism. The interruption of the contiguity between the state and the party structures did more than remove Peronism from the control of public resources. It also brought about the evaporation of the principle under which Peronism had been organized since the mid-1940s. The history of post-1955 Peronism was one of a succession of largely ineffective attempts to devise an alternative formula for the internal generation, distribution and legitimation of authority. The unfolding of each attempt, however, had effects that went beyond its respective period. Three different stages followed after Perón's overthrow: 1955-1970, 1970-1974, and 1974 to the present.

## Proscription

The 1955-1970 period was defined by the electoral proscription of the Peronist party and by the exile of Peron.<sup>6/</sup> During those fifteen years, the ban imposed on Peronist activities and symbols made it impossible for formal party structures to develop. Although Peron's leadership remained a powerful factor, the party's character was largely redefined. A series of vice-royal delegates and tactical commands were appointed by Perón to "conduct operations in the field," but they were by and large powerless not least because Perón often gave ambiguous signals by refusing to acknowledge responsibility for specific decisions, or by making parallel appointments. <sup>7/</sup> In practice, although day-to-day affairs within the Peronist domain moved outside the control of the former president, he still retained the capacity to make the final decisions on electoral choices at the national level. <sup>8/</sup> He was also capable of fulminating against heretics and those who openly challenged his authority, this being in turn associated with the fact that he remained the custodian and reformulator of the movement's ideological legacy.

The second major change within post-1955 Peronism was the politicization of the union leaderships. The catalyst of the transformations was the military government of 1955-1958. In the three year period, the military failed in a double way. In the first place, it was unsuccessful in eradicating Peronism from the working class. Likewise, its attempt to implement a multiple union affiliation and representation system to replace that established by the Peronist law of the 1940's collapsed in its inception. However, the Peronist unionists who had controlled the unions until 1955 were, with few exceptions, effectively removed from the union scene and never regained their former influence. Moreover the military's frustrated project created the conditions for the emergence of a new breed of union leaders. They still identified themselves as Peronist but nevertheless achieved a significant degree of autonomy vis-a-vis Perón and other party figures. The main basis of their power was their control of the possibility of disrupting the production of goods and services through strikes and other work stoppages. Collective bargaining became effectively established in the late 1950s and thus added a powerful weapon to the arsenal of the union leaders. Moreover, unlike what had been the case until 1955, the new unionists were part of a system in which, as a result of Perón's removal from office, the state had lost its capability to legitimately impose its arbitration on the unions. Until that year, state power had been greatly expanded by the fact that labor leaders could be reminded of their obligation to follow the directives of the "first worker," who also happened to be the country's top political official.

The privileged bargaining weapon of union leaders became in addition a political resource within the Peronist camp. The other major resource, i.e. Peronist votes, had of course a severe limitation: its leverage was restricted to electoral periods and it could not be used in a positive fashion since the proscriptions barred Peronist from policy-making positions.

Finally, a third variable in the post-1955 equation of Peronism was the political cadres who, in varying degrees, enjoyed influence among the Peronist

electorate. The efforts of the politicos to gain space were hampered by several factors: the most severe being that they had to surmount a formidable subcultural obstacle, Peron's rejection of politics during his presidency. His view of politics as squabbling and often erosive factionalism had of course fitted the image that he projected of the wise and strong, but reconciling, father. But it had also made it impossible for any other Peronist leader to surge from the ranks and gain sustained political recognition. Since that legacy was compounded by the difficulty in building a stable electoral machine, an obvious raison d'etre for politicians, and by Peron's successful post-1955 manipulations of his subordinates, it was not surprising that not one Peronist politico achieved national stature during 1955-1970. At the regional and local levels, this was also true for the large electoral districts of urban, industrialized Argentina, i.e. the provinces of Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Córdoba, and Mendoza and the Federal District, where no individuals or groups except for a few union leaders, developed autonomous bases of political power.

After 1955 the less developed provinces outside Argentine's industrial core provided a more propitious socio-political environment for the rise of a relatively autonomous leadership. To a greater or lesser extent, these provinces had smaller concentrations of industrial workers, and the resources controlled by the provincial state were a key economic variable. In part as a consequence of those factors, a clientelist pattern of a rather traditional variety gave several Peronist provincial politicians bargaining power as they acted promoting the participation of potential Peronist voters and as brokers between the national government and the provincial universes. 9/

In 1969 Peronism seemed to be at its nadir. For the preceding three years, General Onganía had been firmly in control of a military regime which explicitly aimed at the consolidation of a sine die dictatorship. Not only Peronist unionists had been subdued --by the government's combination of repression, cooptation and industrial expansion-- but Perón and the politicos had apparently lost their hitherto strongest bargaining chip; the de-stabilizing threat that votes posed to weak civilian governments. Besides, the Peronist movement was internally disorganized and its unity was crumbling, although this did not seem to matter very much in comparison with the external circumstances. However, in May of 1969 a series of student demonstrations in several provinces cities, and above all the mass riots in the country's second largest industrial center, Córdoba, doomed Onganía's regime. He managed to survive for yet another year, but finally he was unceremoniously fired by his military comrades, who, as early as the second half of 1970, also realized that their extrication from power was inevitable. The collapse of military authoritarianism confronted Peronism with two major challenges: (1) how to force the military to refrain from proscribing it yet once more, thus translating its presumable electoral supremacy into its return to power, and (2) how to transform the party into an effective electoral instrument capable also of providing the foundations for a stable government. This second question obviously required the resolution of the issue that had been pending since 1955, i.e. the definition of the party's structure of legitimate authority. 10/

During the next four years Peronism initially seemed to manage an adequate response to both challenges. On the one hand, Perón skillfully outmaneuvered the military who, in a quite paradoxical turn of events, ended up by pleading with Perón to occupy the presidency, instead of his former crony, Héctor Cámpora, who had been elected only because the armed forces initially vetoed Perón's candidacy. On the other hand, Perón succeeded union leaders and party back under his reign, not only disciplining rebellious union leaders and reunifying the dispersed flock of Peronist politicians, but also coopting factions from other parties as well. 11/ However, the final exit of the old leader from the stage of Argentine politics --his death in July 1974-- would reveal the tenuous nature of his late political achievements. Let's examine the "second coming" of Peronism and its subsequent collapse.

#### Return to power.

The success of Perón's tactics in the early 1970s was associated with his ability to orchestrate the aggregation of the heterogeneous opposition front that brought about the collapse of the military government. This was certainly a major accomplishment, given the fact that during the 1970-1972 years the opposition to the waning military regime grew in several different, and not necessarily compatible, directions including the emergence of a politically significant insurrectionary left-wing resorting to guerrilla tactics and calling for the overthrow of capitalism. The largest guerrilla group, the Montoneros, called itself Peronist, a claim that Perón was not going to challenge until 1974.

When the old general was triumphantly reelected to the presidency in September 1973 he completed his operation by rescuing some of the old ingredients of the Peronist formula but also introducing some starting innovations. One of the changes was related to the development of a powerful unifying myth which underscored what the different sectors, both those with and without a Peronist ancestry, had in common: their opposition to the military regime. Perón and his movement were ideally suited to invoke a return to past glories: after having been proscribed and harassed for eighteen years, they were and successfully claimed to be, the quintessential opposition force. In turn, an idealized version of the sort of country Argentina had been before 1955 became, for lack of a better alternative, the only theme with an affirmative connotation. This, obviously had both advantages and disadvantages. The myth of the return to the Golden Age appealed to most organized groups and individual citizens, inasmuch as they identified the Golden Age with the specific gratifications that they were pursuing at the sectorial and individual levels --with the military government being the only obstacle apparently standing between each one and immediate satisfaction. At the same time, however, the emphasis on immediate gratification inevitably imposed a most formidable task on the coming (Peronist) regime: that of satisfying peremptory demands which often involved the pursuit of rather contradictory objectives. In any case, immediate gratification was inextricably associated with the early years of Peronism. The high growth years of 1945-1948 had provided economic space for the development of a non-zero-sum intersectorial game, and for a twenty-five percent increase in real wages.

A second front on which Perón also introduced unprecedented changes, albeit without altering the traditional style of Peronism altogether, was the crucial area of the relationships among the state, the party, other political actors, and himself. To begin with, Perón repeated his old line and pushed in the direction of reweaving the hierarchically-controlled organizational web that had been dismantled during the previous fifteen years. He also reasserted his monopoly on the movement's ideology; he was able to succeed in this enterprise before, rather than after, regaining the government. One of Peron's boldest moves was to welcome the emergence and expansion of the self-proclaimed Peronist guerrillas --to whom he affectionately referred as "his boys" (mis muchachos)-- using them to blackmail the military and to make the políticos and the unionists toe the line. This was particularly the case with the traditional labor leadership which was left with no say in the electoral campaign and selection of candidates, and was forced to remove the secretary general of the 62 Organizations, Rogelio Coria, from his top position. 12/

As a result of his shrewdness, Perón was thus able to regain control of the already legalized party. 13/ Once the Peronist occupied the government, however, the picture became more complicated. Perón, as in the old times, decided on every party matter, including the most strategic one of how the various areas of government would be distributed among the different factions. But, at the same time, the party became an almost empty carcass. The competing sectors --the most significant being the traditional union leadership, the emerging para-military right wing squads, the left-wing Montoneros guerrillas, and the políticos-- were subordinated to Perón within the party, but kept most of their resources outside of it. Perón nevertheless retained in part the power to mediate, but the eclipse of the party meant that no common institutional arena where the sectors could negotiate and settle their conflicts was created during the first year of the Peronist government.

The arena where the old leader was much more innovative and ultimately achieved better results was in the relationship with other parties --i.e. those which had supported his overthrow in 1955-- and specially with the UCR. The key there was the historic reconciliation of the two parties, which, together with several minor forces, signed in 1970 a document known as La Hora del Pueblo. According to it, the two party presidents, Perón and the UCR's Ricardo Balbín, agreed that neither party would participate in a coming election if any of them was proscribed, and both of them would support the resulting constitutional regime, irrespectively of the winner. La Hora del Pueblo, in fact, became a major turning point in Argentina's political history: for the first time the two major political groupings agreed to sustain the democratic institutions without preconditions. It also indicated a shift in the practices of Peronism, whose emergence and twenty-five year history had been associated with the rejection of party politics. However, the new relationship between the two parties had a flaw: most of the internal factions of Peronism gave only lip service to support Perón's initiative. Despite their own ideological differences, the Montonero guerrillas, the union leadership and the fascistic palace clique which surrounded Perón and his wife and vice-president, Isabel, coincided in their hostility toward the establishment of a party-dominated political system.

In part, the shortcomings in the nevertheless innovative attempt to develop a stable pattern of inter-party relationships were caused by one of the most resilient features of Perón's style: his reluctance to admit the growth of political linkages independent of his own mediating role. In the 1970s Perón dropped many of the more arbitrary and dictatorial traits that had prevailed during his first presidency. This probably reflected his greater experience and his recognition of the fact that Argentine political society had become more complex with diverse groups gaining in power and autonomy. But although Perón promoted the creation of a more complex formal political system incorporating most parties and social class organizations --including his adversaries of the past-- he did not relinquish a crucial role: that of linking the various parts of the emerging network. Thus, for example, the UCR was able to gain a significant amount of influence upon policy --making during the less than nine months of Perón's presidency. But this influence was more a consequence of Perón's receptiveness to the advice and criticisms of the Radical leader, Balbin, than of an increase in the weight of those institutions, like congress, where the Radicales and other opposition parties were represented. Beyond that, the relationship between the Peronist and Radical parties as such only involved the weakest category of Peronist leaders, the políticos, while unionists and other factions shunned political bargaining with the opposition parties.

During Peronism's first year in government Perón also sought to bring class organizations into the institutional framework. <sup>14/</sup> He promoted the signing of the Social Pact, whereby the CGT and the major business associations agreed to a temporary freeze of wages and prices, and agreed to submit proposed increases to governmental arbitration. The pattern, however, was similar to the one which defined the relationships with the major opposition party, Perón's bargaining with, and cajoling the class associations brought about some temporary successes, but the government party as such did not provide any instrument for economic and political bargaining.

In sum the advances made in the direction of building up a system of political bargaining in the early 1970s increasingly depended upon the role played by Perón in linking the policy-making agencies of the state, the political opposition, and the class associations. The party itself lagged behind. The fact that several actors operating within the Peronist conglomeration had more power than in the pre-1955 days acted rather as a centrifugal force leading to a situation where the extermination of the adversaries within Peronism soon became the rule. Although the extremism of two of the most visible actors --i.e. the Montoneros and the right wing faction-- contributed to that outcome, the reluctance of Peronist leaders in general to make the concessions and accommodations required to sustain stable institutional procedures was another factor of equal importance.

Perón's disappearance: a void yet to be filled.

On July 1, 1974, Perón died and was formally replaced as head of state

and as party president by his wife. In turn, Isabel was deposed by the military less than two years later although formally she was the party president until early 1985. The political incompetence and personal instability of Isabel certainly contributed to the steady deterioration of the political situation between 1974 and 1976, and thus to the success of a military coup which was not actively opposed by any sector of Argentine society. At a deeper level, however, Isabel and her political survival expressed the double failure of post-1974 Peronism: i.e. proving incapable both of providing the political foundations for a democratic regime and of reorganizing the party by designing procedures and creating symbols with which to fill the organizational vacuum resulting from the disappearance of the old leader.

During Isabel Peron's tenure, Peronism became a battlefield where the different factions waged a war of all against all in which even those who were able to defeat their adversaries scored what soon turned out to be pyrrhic victories. In that sense, the pace of events accelerated during 1975. The Peronist guerrillas went back to clandestine activities, resorting again to terrorist tactics, this time against a Peronist government. The Montoneros suffered a sound political defeat, losing whatever support they have enjoyed during the last year of the military dictatorship. However, the defeat of the Montoneros did not put an end to political violence: on the contrary, state terrorism kept increasing in scope and brutality with the liquidation of the guerrilla movements becoming a pretext to launch a campaign of extermination of leftist dissidents and middle and low-rank trade union activists who questioned the top Peronist leadership. 15/

Likewise, the Fascistic cliques led by Welfare Minister López Rega, who was the power behind the throne during Isabel's first year in office, attempted in mid-1975 to eliminate the only serious contender they had within Peronism, the union leadership. The operation, both economically and politically, was unprecedented in the history of Peronism. On the one hand, it attempted to contain the uncontrolled race between prices and wages by putting a limit on wage increases. On the other hand, it tried to involve the armed forces through the appointment of an officer on active service as Interior Minister and of a commander-in-chief of the army with Peronist credentials. According to this scheme, the military would have become the main support for a political regime which would have suppressed parliamentary institutions and would have subjected the unions to stern disciplinary measures. The union leadership successfully blocked Lopez Rega's bid for absolute power thus forcing Isabel to fire her minister and to abort the stabilization program. Nevertheless, the union bosses kept emphasizing short-term considerations and showing a lack of concern for institutional consolidation. During the last months of Isabel, only the unions' active support of an economic stabilization plan could have saved the Peronist government. Ultimately, the fragmentation of Peronism led to the decomposition of the government itself, which lost contact with social processes and became totally incapable of influencing events.

The only attempt to reverse the deterioration of the government was in fact made by the weakest link of Peronism, i.e. the politicians. The deterioration of the presidential figure and the transformation of the executive into a disequilibrating factor gave some space to congress, both of whose houses were controlled by the Peronist party. Congress made two bold moves: first it forced the resignation of the speaker of the chamber of deputies, a relative and close associate of López Rega, and later it put pressure on Isabel, who requested a leave of absence. Since there was no vicepresident, the president pro tem of the Senate, Italo Luder, became the temporary head of the executive, hoping that Isabel would finally submit her resignation. The latter initiative, however, was frustrated when Isabel chose to reoccupy the presidential seat, thus pushing the military conspiracy beyond the point of no return, culminating in the coup of March 1976.

The failure of Peronism in 1975 to find an institutional alternative to what was otherwise an unavoidable collapse provided a clue to what lay in the decade ahead. Neither the factions advocating the use of political violence nor the union bosses seemed capable of providing the leadership that was necessary to turn Peronism into a viable political party. But even the politicos, who desperately searched for a formula in order to save institutional stability by making it to the elections that were scheduled for late 1976, were impaired by their formal respect for verticalismo. Despite the fact that Luder and many of his colleagues were aware that the permanence of Isabel and the irresponsibility of labor leaders made disaster inevitable, they chose not to challenge a formal hierarchy which had already lost all the initiative.

In what was a striking contrast to the situation emerging after Perón's 1955 downfall, between the 1976 coup and the war with Britain in 1982, the Peronists remained largely inactive. Or to put it more accurately, the few and limited activities in which Peronists were engaged --like their 1979 endorsement of the OAS condemnation of the military government's human rights abuses-- had hardly any political impact. This was in part the result of the unparalleled, and effective, repression engaged in the military which made any opposition activity extremely difficult, and dangerous. Many left-wing Peronist, including thousands of union middle rank officials and cadres, teachers, and students activists, were among the disappeared. The repression also reached many moderate Peronists who simply criticized the policies of the military; not surprisingly, the possibility of being killed became a powerful deterrent to political activity. But it was not only repression that explained the paralysis of Peronism.

Unlike the 1955-1973 years, there was not a leader in exile with the charisma and manipulative powers of Perón, capable of becoming the focal point of the opposition. And, perhaps even more significantly, the image of Peronism among many of its followers was seriously damaged by its dismal performance in government, and by the contributions it had made to the generation of a context in which politics were reduced to the savage confrontation between armed bands, and the hunting of defenseless victims. Most sectors mobilized since 1969 were caught in a parabola of deactivation and political withdrawal because of fear of, and disappointment with Peronism.

Anyway, the fiasco in the South Atlantic war confirmed and accelerated what had already been glimpsed in 1981 and the early months of 1982: the military regime was not going to be able to survive the failure of the ambitious program of economic reform it had launched in 1976. In yet another turn of the wheel, the fourth military president since the coup, General Bignone, announced that presidential elections were going to be held in 1983 preceded by the reorganization of the political parties. Unlike the transition to a democratic regime of the 1970s, this time the military recognition of its failure was not preceded by any form of social mobilization or political insurgency, thus giving political parties the uncontested supremacy in the process of transition. The first months of 1983 seemed to suggest that the Peronist party had successfully erased the memories of the previous ten years: over 5 million people registered in order to participate in primary elections of the authorities and candidates of parties, with approximately sixty percent choosing to register as Peronist. <sup>16/</sup> However, this was the prelude to the first electoral defeat in the history of Peronism.

In the first place, although verticalismo was not formally challenged and all the major sectors and figures kept invoked Isabel Perón as president of the party, nobody but a tiny minority really counted her as a factor in the internal power equation. This minority, i.e. the so-called ultraverticalistas (a selection of name which obviously suggested that the verticalistas were not quite so) gained control only in two relatively small provinces, Jujuy and Corrientes, and achieved no significant representation in other districts. The unsuccessful bid of the ultraverticalistas was not the only failure to build a current capable of imposing its hegemony within the party. A more serious attempt developed around the creation of an internal movement named MUSO which was promoted by one of the presidential precandidates, Antonio Cafiero. The purpose of MUSO was to forge an alliance between the labor leaders of the 62 Organizations and the provincial caudillos of non-Pampean region on the basis of a programmatic coincidence. In turn, the program of MUSO proposed a slightly modified version of the middle-of-the-road economic platform upheld by Perón in 1973-1974 --with its emphasis on the Social Pact between the unions and the entrepreneurial associations-- and the renewal of the policy of peaceful coexistence with the Radical party.

MUSO never got off the ground. Actually, Cafiero was largely responsible for the outcome: he made several mistakes and proved hesitant in his negotiations to secure the support of the major brokers. But MUSO's collapse also reflected the reluctance of both the union leaders who controlled the 62 Organizations and the provincial caudillos to commit themselves to a programmatic agreement requiring definitions of substantive issues, <sup>17/</sup> before the race for the candidacy had been defined.

In the context of the debacle of the attempts of ultraverticalismo and MUSO to attain national predominance, a series of changes took place. Perhaps the most significant was the acceptance of all factions of the legitimacy of the principle of "one man, one vote" for the selection of authorities and candidates. This was a reversal of the practices of the past: Perón had always been the grand-elect. Furthermore, it practically denied the right of Isabel, or of whoever

happened to occupy the presidency of the party, to impose a hierarchical structure from the top. However, the one man, one vote rule was undercut by the use of a two-tier electoral system whereby regular party members elected slates of delegates who, in turn, then elected authorities and candidates. In all districts different slates of delegates competed, with most of them not being committed to any specific national slate. The use of the two-tier system had one important consequence: many district bosses became "favorite son" candidates, and since there was limited coordination among the different districts, the provinces with the largest delegations --Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Córdoba and the Federal District-- acquired an enormous weight.

The democratizing impact of the Peronist reorganization was further limited by the fact that in two of the largest districts, Buenos Aires and the Federal Capital, the winning factions resorted to strongmen tactics whereby they were able to deny representation within the party organs and the candidate lists to opposing factions which had received significant support among the membership.

And precisely Buenos Aires and the Federal Capital were the main operational basis of the two sectors which, in a sort of loose and not always easy coalition, made the most gains in the process of reorganization: the old union leadership of the 62 Organizations, and a comparatively new political machine built by a hitherto secondary figure, Herminio Iglesias. 18/ Iglesias was a new type of Peronist politician. Although he had been a minor union official in the 1960s, the basis of his power was unrelated to traditional Peronist labor politics. He purposely resorted to a brusque style, using offensive terms in his speeches and emphasizing his lower class origins; Iglesias, a sort of conservative populist, developed strong ties to sectors of the Catholic Church and the army. He was particularly successful in building an extensive network of *unidades básicas* (local party offices) in the Gran Buenos Aires and in the other major provincial cities, with the mass of his followers coming from the declassé marginal poor. 19/

Iglesias and the 62 Organizations controlled the national congress of the party overshadowing the presidential candidate, Italo Luder, who managed to get selected by negotiating an alliance with several provincial caudillos and reaching a deal with Iglesias and Miguel. Luder, anyway, failed to mellow the tone given to the Peronist campaign by the party leadership; this had a disastrous effect upon its electoral changes. There was widespread violence against the internal oppositions and a frequent use of insults in public rallies and television speeches with the main target being the Radical party candidate, Alfonsín who was accused of anything from abetting communist terrorism to being the US candidate and a traitor to the fatherland. All this became a powerful reminder of the 1973-1976 years when internecine violence and the reluctance of the union leadership to bind itself to some sort of interest concertation had paved the way for the coup and the subsequent military regime. The Peronists got barely forty percent of the national vote --a substantial drop from previous results-- and lost all but one of the more populated districts of industrialized Argentina with large working class contingents.

The political thaw which began in 1982, and the unfolding of the electoral campaign turned the dormant crisis Peronism had been suffering since 1974 into an

overt one. The unprecedented electoral defeat of October 1983 accelerated the pace. Internal confrontation multiplied and factionalism became rampant; this process culminated in December 1984 in a national congress in which the party structure split into two sectors with each sector holding separate congresses in early 1985. Furthermore, the party suffered yet another electoral setback when it promoted the electoral abstention in the national plebiscite on the peace treaty that the Argentine government had tentatively signed with Chile to put an end to the territorial dispute in the Beagle Channel. 20/ Within this context of violence, fragmentation, and erosive authoritarianism, during 1984 two trends suggested that a complete breakdown of Peronism was not necessarily inevitable.

The pattern of break-up of the Peronist vote by district in the general elections of 1983 had a most important, and paradoxical, consequence. The sectors from the largest electoral districts associated with the 62 Organizations and Buenos Aires strongman Iglesias who controlled the party structure, achieved very limited institutional leverage. Peronism was defeated in all the major districts of the industrial core of the country, except Santa Fe, gaining just two senate seats and one governorship in that region. Conversely, the clientelistic caudillos and cliques from the less populated, and non-industrial, provinces gained a significant representation in the Senate and the lion's share of provincial governorships. Fourteen of the twenty-one Peronist senators --the largest bloc in the 46-member upper house-- came from the eight northernmost provinces which were all won by this party. Furthermore, the senate became the key institution for the balance of power, given the fact that the Radicales won a comfortable majority in the chamber of deputies while they only had eighteen seats in the senate. 21/ Although Peronist senators and governors --as well as the provincial leaderships they represented-- were not able to develop concerted actions during 1984, a substantial majority came to oppose the party's leadership, and late in that year seemed to be moving in the direction of translating their institutional leverage into gaining more power in the party organization. Their contribution to the eventual reversal of the erosion of Peronism could be decisive in the near future.

The other space in which there was a major turning point during 1984 was the labor front. For the first time since 1956, the 62 Organizations lost control of the Peronist union movement. After a bill submitted by the executive was defeated in the senate in early 1984, a compromise was reached and a new law was approved, changing the procedures for the election of union authorities. The new law guaranteed governmental impartiality and prevented gross manipulation and coercion by labor bosses. During the last quarter of 1984, relatively fair and open union elections were held and a surprisingly pluralist pattern emerged both in general and within the Peronist camp. In the latter case the 62 Organizations mixed victories and defeats at the national level, with two other tendencies, the "25" and Gestión y Trabajo, making spectacular advances. In terms of the history of the Peronist labor movement, the "25" and Gestión y Trabajo were heirs to two opposed, and always minority, traditions: the Combativos (hard-liners) and the Participacionistas (soft-liners), but in 1984 the temporarily joined forces in

successfully promoting a democratization of the Peronist labor movement which was able to loosen the tight hold that the 62 Organizations had had on union participation within the party organizations.

The second year of democracy in Argentina, 1985, thus opened with a Peronist party in turmoil. Two major issues were in the process of being settled--the control of the party organization and the distribution of power within the General Confederation of Labor; the future of the party, and its very existence, depended on the outcomes.

### THE RADICALES

When Perón was deposed in 1955, the UCR seemed to be strategically located within the Argentine political system to achieve political supremacy. The military, who saw themselves as the benign rebuilders of a democracy which had been distorted and corrupted by the "totalitarian dictator," clearly intended to give power back without delay to a constitutional government controlled by the "democratic" parties. And, with the exclusion of the Peronist, the UCR was the only national party left; the other parties, which had also conspired with the military and had answered its convocation, had very limited electoral appeal and no national organization. 22/ The Radicales did not live up to expectations, however. The party split immediately in two, and later in three, and in the following fifteen years failed both in government and as opposition. Although each of the two original branches, the UCRI and the UCRP, were in government --the former between 1958 and 1962 and the latter between 1963 and 1966-- they were never able to overcome the stigma that their victories were made possible by the proscription of the party which remained throughout as the strongest electoral force. Moreover, each of the respective regimes was overthrown by the military without their being capable of any resistance. In 1970, when La Hora del Pueblo was signed between Perón and the Radical leader Balbín in the aftermath of the military government, the Radicales had had little impact as an opposition and were portrayed, with disastrous electoral consequences, as being in fact preferred by the military as their successors.

The dismal performance of the Radicales during the 1955-1970 years was not entirely their fault. It was also an almost inescapable consequence of the operation of a dual political system as described above. In fact, between 1955 and 1966, the two Radical parties developed diametrically opposed visions of, and strategies toward, Peronism, thus making it possible for the "impossible political game" portrayed by O'Donnell, to sustain itself over a decade. 23/ That is, the UCRI and the UCRP combined their stands on economic and political strategies in such a way that they increased the changes for Peronism to penetrate, and to disrupt, the political scene but neither of the two Radical parties dared to challenge the proscriptions imposed by the armed forces, an initiative which would have created the conditions for a truly democratic system to emerge. What was the essence of the positions they sustained vis-a-vis Peronism? From as early as 1956, significant sectors of the UCRP had advanced reformist and

nationalistic economic policies very similar to those applied by the Peronist regime during the last 1940s. However, at the same time, the UCRP supported the electoral proscription of Peronism --at least until the early 1960s-- and favored a system of union affiliation which would have atomized the working class organizations. The formula of the UCRI was almost opposite to that of their old comrades-in-arms. Beginning in 1958, when the party leader Frondizi assumed the presidency, they advocated the expansion of industries producing consumer durables and capital goods, as well as the modernization and gradual privatization of the energy, transport, and communication sectors. The program also reserved a strategic role for foreign capital and initially imposed a drastic reduction in real wages. 24/ The UCRI, however, never abandoned the "integrationist" goals which they had pursued since 1956. That is, they tried to reinforce Peronist predominance in the labor movement while also inducing union leaders to act "responsibly," which meant: a) controlling the "excessive" wage demands of the rank-and-file, and b) distancing themselves from Perón.

With the Peronists excluded, the two Radical parties exhausted the gamut of significant electoral forces in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The conservative forces which had supported the anti-Peronist coup of 1955 lacked a party of their own with a real chance of winning a presidential election, or even obtaining significant parliamentary representation. After 1955, consequently, the conservative social forces faced the fact that the defeat of Peronism would not by itself resolve their political problems. Thus, they were recurrently forced to choose between two "lesser evils" --i.e. UCRI's developmentalism which was, however, too "soft" on Peronism, and UCRP's harder line on Peronism which, however, supported economic policies the conservatives abhorred --and to modify their assessment repeatedly. The alternating directions of the conservative swing consistently distorted the political game, corroding the fundamental pillars of the party system, and especially undermining the strength of the two Radical parties, not least because they became bitter political antagonists who did not hesitate to conspire against the institutional order. 25/ Finally, the conservatives became increasingly aware that their long-term goals --the eradication of Peronism, and the rectification of the statist and pro-industrialist economic orientation-- were not served by their continual swings. Towards the mid- 1960s, this progressive dawning of awareness was a decisive factor in inducing the conservatives to opt for an openly anti-democratic strategy. They broke with the non-Peronist party establishment, particularly with both the UCRP and UCRI, and sought to bring about the installation of a sine die military dictatorship. At that point, some of the confusion of the previous period was eliminated, but the Radicales were experiencing the most acute crisis of their contemporary history: Argentina was entering into what seemed to be the beginning of a military millenium and their 10-year division was becoming a three-way split; the UCRI broke into two factions which would compete for the name of the party for several years. One line strictly followed the developmentalist and integrationist prescriptions of Frondizi; the other adopted a more progressive course under the leadership of Oscar Alende, a former governor of Buenos Aires.

The early 1970s: the resolution of the struggle over the Radical legacy.

The first five years of the military regime inaugurated in 1966 was a time of reckoning for the Radical parties. Only the UCRP chose to follow a consistent opposition line --in fact, the UCRP's government was the one deposed by Onganía-- trying, at the same time, to preserve and expand the territorially-extended party organization which the UCRP had largely inherited from the pre-1955 united UCR. Another important development within the UCRP was the emergence during 1967 and 1969 of an internal dissident group, challenging the established leadership of Ricardo Balbín: Renovation and Change (RyC). RyC demanded that the party follow a more militant line against the military dictatorship by attempting to mobilize the popular sectors, even those which had traditionally been a part of the constituency of Peronism. RyC also sought, fairly successfully, to recreate the party's youth movement whose predecessor had been largely absorbed by UCPI at the time of the division. However, breaking with traditional Radical patterns of intransigence, RyC's leader Raúl Alfonsín did not seek to found a new party, but stayed within the UCRP as head of a minority faction. 26/

Meanwhile, UCRI's two branches, Frondizi's and Alendes's, tried unsuccessfully to influence the policies of the military regime from within. Frondizi and his close associate Frigerio attempted to capture the economic ministry and broke with Onganía only when he shunned them. Alende, in turn, gave support to the second military president, General Levingston, trying to induce him to follow a nationalistic line and to resort to popular mobilization as his political basis. He also failed: Levingston was indeed a nationalist, but a rabid right-winger too who in seeking to found a corporatist regime for which he lacked support among his colleagues, was rapidly overthrown. 27/

The replacement of Levingston by General Lanusse did not only put an end to Alende's attempt to become l'émminence grise of the Argentine version of a military regime like Velasco's Perú, it also signaled the military recognition that their projects of 1966 were doomed. The opening of the electoral season again put at the top of the political agenda the question of Peronism and what would be the response of the Radical parties if the armed forces were to insist on their proscription of Peronism. In one sense the three parties struck a unanimous chord: the experience of the 1955-1966 years had convinced them that no stable political regime based on the respect of popular sovereignty could be built in Argentina without the full participation of the Peronist party. From that point their paths diverged. Balbín, the UCRP's president began to unfold a long-term strategy whose first step was for his party to become the sole heir to the old UCR. Balbín's tactics were favored by the fact that most of the party's structure had stayed with the UCRP, and by the 1963 split suffered by UCRI, which left both of its factions without a national organization. He also counted on the circumstance that a former high ranking member of the party, Arturo Mor Roig, became the Interior Minister during the last throes of the military regime and was put in charge of implementing its phasing out. It was not altogether accidental, then, that the courts settle the dispute between the feuding Radicales in favor of the UCRP, which again became the

UCR after fifteen years of division. The former branches of UCRI were forced to change their names, with Frondizi's adopting the one of Movimiento de Integración y Desarrollo (MID), and Alendes's that of Intransigent Party (PI). But beyond the conjuncture of 1971, Balbín's success in recapturing the UCR was related to the second, and more foresighted, part of his strategy as it was first delineated in La Hora del Pueblo. The UCRP envisioned in the early 1970's the formation of a party system of which Peronism was indeed an irreplaceable ingredient, and perhaps the dominant one in the short term. But this system, if it were to come about, required at least another party, which had to be resigned to losing the upcoming elections at the hands of Peronism without withdrawing its support to, and its participation as a loyal opposition in, the process of consolidating democratic institutions.

It was in this sense that the UCRP's claim to inherit the tradition of the other historical mass party in Argentina, was more solidly grounded than those of its adversaries. Neither Frondizi nor Alende and their respective followers, were betting on the emergence of a stable two party system. In fact despite their considerable ideological differences, both of them, and subsequently their two new parties MID and PI, were pursuing, although with different diagnoses, and accordingly different tactics, the same objective: to become the heirs of Peronism. One of them, Frondizi, sought to bring about the metamorphosis of Peronism, whereby it would become a multiclass national movement to which his party would add indispensable ingredients: entrepreneurial support, technocratic cadres, and a developmentalist ideology. Alende, in turn, perceived Peronism as a popular movement with a bourgeois ideology which was temporarily glued together by the charismatic personality of Perón. Consequently, Peronism would break down after Perón's death, with the PI becoming first, the next logical stage for its working class and anti-imperialist components, and then the instrument for their more thorough organization. The electoral strategies implemented by MID and PI followed from their respective diagnoses. MID joined the party front led by the Peronists, FREJULI, while PI became the leading force of a left wing front, Alianza Popular Revolucionaria (APR) which also included the Communist party, and a left wing faction of the Christian Democrats. Alende became APR's presidential candidate.

Once the dispute around the name of the party was settled, the UCR's internal front was reopened. Alfonsín/RyC decided to seek the presidential candidacy thus triggering a realignment of the different sectores. Most of MIR, i.e. Balbín's Buenos Aires party machine from which Alfonsín also came, remained faithful to the old leader with the exception of half a dozen of local bosses. Likewise, Balbín was able to renew the alliances with most provincial caudillos and leaderships, and with the rather corrupt machine of the Federal District. There was an exception, though: Alfonsín negotiated a deal with the Radical leadership of Córdoba, which was quite an important district in internal party politics because it had a high number of registered party members and a history of local victories over the Peronist party. In the internal direct elections, Alfonsín made rather an impressive showing although he was beaten by Balbín. Despite the fact that the RyC organization was quite poor in most districts outside the large industrialized areas of the country, Alfonsín received over 40% of the votes cast and RyC

secured the minority representation in the party organization. 28/

The UCR and the second coming of Peronism.

The presidential elections of March 1973 proved disastrous for the UCR. It received just 21% of the votes, not much more than the party which came in third, a hastily put together confederation of conservative forces, the Federalist Alliance, which received 15%. There were several reasons for the Radical failure. The party had not overcome the image of ineptitude and lack of dynamism that it had carried since the 1960s. At the same time, and despite its unaltered opposition to the military governments of the 1966-1973 period, the UCR was perceived as being the party favored by the military president General Lanusse in the upcoming elections. Lanusse was desperately trying to avoid a victory of Peronism without proscribing it, and the UCR was seemingly in the position of becoming the rallying point for an eventual anti-Peronist coalition 29/. Last but not least, Balbín was a lackluster candidate. All his cunning had proven valuable in building a machine within the party, but outside of it he was perceived as a loser and the epitome of all the vices of politiquería (politicking) 30/

Actually, Balbín's style pervaded the UCR campaign; the emphasis was put on small comité (local office) meetings of the party's faithful, and there was very little television advertising, while the Peronists ran a sophisticated campaign in the media. UCR's closing rally in the Federal District --which had a tradition of high Radical vote-- attracted less than 30,000 while the Peronists were holding meetings with crowds of hundreds of thousands all over the country.

However, in fairness to Balbín, the tone of the Radical campaign was not simply the result of his personal imprint. Two other factors intervened. The first was beyond the control of the UCR: Perón absolutely outmaneuvered the military and the other parties. The second factor was related to the UCR's strategic shift whereby the party reversed its traditional anti-Peronist position. The essence of anti-Peronism had been to adamantly oppose Peronist participation in national elections, and, therefore, to reject the possibility of becoming the opposition party in the context of a Peronist administration. The co-signing of La Hora del Pueblo by the UCR made explicit its acceptance of an eventual Peronist electoral victory and its commitment to the stability of the constitutional regime, independently of the winner. A logical corollary to the holding of free elections in Argentina in the early 1970s --with a Peronist party which had obviously suffered little erosion, if any, in its support and with Perón himself going through a renaissance-- was the return to power of the party which had suffered eighteen years of proscription. However, that was not a foregone conclusion. Governmental surveys suggested that only 35% of the voters supported FREJULI and with a two-round election it seemed entirely feasible to defeat the Peronist candidate in a decisive second round. In that context, in which the underestimation of Peronist strength was not obvious to most of the protagonists, the historical antecedents of the UCR could have thrown doubts on the sincerity of the reversal of its position on Peronism. The UCPP had supported a hard line against Peronism

in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and its administration had implemented a labor law which sought to undermine the power of the Peronist labor movement in the mid 1960s. Against that background, Balbín's 1970 historical reconciliation with Perón could have still been interpreted as a hypocritical move designed to legitimate a Peronist defeat through shrewd engineering of the electoral laws, and the last-minute formation of a "Stop Perón" coalition. Possibly in order to dispel any suspicion that this was indeed the case, Balbín chose not to address Peronism or Perón as UCR's electoral adversaries. That left the party in the self-defeating position of not presenting itself as an alternative either to the military regime (since Peronism had already the opposition place) or to the other major electoral option, i.e. Peronism.

Beyond the electoral conjuncture the course taken by the UCR in 1973 pre-figured a trend which would subsequently ruin the chances that the party might have had of reversing its minority status, and thus capturing the government at some point in the future. Balbín was aware that the formation of a party system in Argentina was indeed a prerequisite for the consolidation of democratic institutions, and that it required both a viable government party, and a loyal opposition which would abstain from trying to destabilize the political system. Besides, in the context of the 1973 transition, it also became evident that the demarcation line between what could have been deemed as reasonable opposition tactics vis-a-vis the recently elected Peronist government and destabilizing practices was not precisely drawn. As a consequence of these perceptions and choices, until Peron's death in June 1974, Balbín followed an extremely careful approach whereby public criticism of governmental policies was avoided, and suggestions for changes were privately made directly to the president. Perón, in fact, proved to be an increasingly receptive interlocutor for Balbín, and several of the Radical's suggestions were implemented. 31/ But the Radical tactics had one major drawback. The influence that the UCR had on public policies was completely dependent on the special relationship that Balbín developed with Perón; in fact, most sectors of the Peronist party, and particularly the most extremist elements like the Montoneros and López Rega's clique, resented Perón's closeness to Balbín. The preservation of the special relationship required that the UCR abstain from practices which any opposition party could have legitimately undertaken, like serious congressional discussion and public questioning of governmental decisions. It also limited the UCR's opportunities to appeal for the support of those social sectors --like the working class and the poor, whom Perón considered to be naturally and exclusively under his tutelage. Hence, the likelihood that the huge margin separating the two parties could have been significantly reduced, in the case of serious governmental mismanagement or even collapse, for instance, was almost nil. The correlation of forces between Peronism and the UCR was frozen at the level which made it practically impossible for a normal swing in the respective supports of the two parties to bring about an institutional change in government.

In summary, the UCR moved from one extreme to the other: from being a disloyal opponent of Peronism to occupying the role of a permanent and subordinate opposition. The death of Perón, which was followed by a series of unsuccessful attempts by Balbín to turn into a sort of grandfatherly tutor of Isabel, showed that the role to which the UCR had condemned itself was not only detrimental to its chances of achieving power; it also prevented the party from developing the means

for pressuring Isabel and her entourage, thus losing all possibility of having an impact on a fast deteriorating government. But, worst of all, the disintegration of the government also pulled down its opposition, which could do nothing to become a credible institutional alternative capable of preventing the breakdown of democracy.

After Perón's death and the falling of even minimal norms of political coexistence, it became evident that a new formula had to be found in order to fill the power void and to overcome the system crisis opened in 1974. When the Peronist politicians failed to displace Isabel, it also became apparent that the UCR could not provide an alternative. Balbín and his associates squarely rejected the possibility of mobilizing popular support around the opposition's stands, and their restrained public warnings and off-the-record criticisms had no impact. In the end, the UCR could do nothing but helplessly witness the coup of 1976 which promised yet another military millenium and put a ban on the activities of all political parties.

#### The rise of Alfonsín.

The freeze imposed on political activities by the regime of General Videla (1976-1981) was completely effective. The public domain remained closed during those five years; systematic state terrorism, a total breakdown of the rule of law, and press censorship erected a solid fence around parties, unions, and other voluntary associations that isolated them from an already privatized citizenry. While the Peronist party remained in a state of paralysis, there were however some developments within the UCR. Alfonsín, and his RyC fellow leaders, who had steadily lost ground to Balbín during the Peronist interlude, were able to start the task of building a national structure again. This was not only associated with the undertakings of Alfonsín himself, who relentlessly expanded the network of local caudillos and neighborhood punteros, but also to the active life maintained by the RyC youth movement that had emerged in the late 1960s. 32/ The first generation of the leadership of RyC's youth, who were now in their late twenties and early thirties, had already become full members of the party and proved especially effective in maintaining and expanding RyC in districts where the UCR had been traditionally weak, like the working class and poor suburbs of Buenos Aires (which were part of the province of Buenos Aires) and Santa Fe.

Neither the UCR nor the Peronist movement, however, had any significant impact on the political processes leading to the collapse of the military regime; nor for that matter did other opposition forces. The breakdown of military domination was triggered by the failure of the government's economic policies. After Videla stepped down, there was a crescendo of innovations introduced by successive military presidents in order to avoid disaster, which only succeeded in making it come faster. During 1981, Videla's successor, General Viola, tried to implement a more pragmatic economic program and to engineer a political liberatization controlled from above. Both as a result of the fragmentation of the internal military front and of Viola's indecisiveness, his projects never got off the ground, and he was deposed at the end of the year. However, it was during

Viola's term that political parties reoccupied the public space, but still without being able to generate any momentum. Anyway, the politicians correctly sensed that Viola did not have any power to implement the announced liberalization. All this coincided with the formation of the Multipartidaria, in which Peronist and Radicales joined with the PI, MID, and the recently reunited Christian Democrats in creating a mechanism in order to present a common front in what was perceived as the inevitable negotiation of the transition with the armed forces. The formation of the Multipartidaria was, in fact, the last political act of Balbín, who died immediately afterwards.

The Multipartidaria, however, was not going to be the other protagonist of the transition, to a large extent because there was in fact no transition, but a sudden collapse. The new military president, General Galtieri, inaugurated 1982 with an attempt to recover the impetus lost by the military. First, he tried to return to an even stricter version of the neoconservative orthodoxy. After the new economic plan lost its momentum in just three months, Galtieri launched the South Atlantic venture, and the defeat at the hands of the British did not only signal the hasty replacement of Galtieri, but to all intents and purposes the end of the military regime. The armed forces dragged on for yet another long year, basically trying to secure from the political parties an agreement not to punish them for the human rights violations they had committed. Their failure to extract such a promise was in principle an indicator of how low the influence of the military had sunk in the aftermath of its double failure --in government and in war. This set the stage for an electoral campaign in 1983 which differed entirely from the one of ten years earlier.

In 1973, the military, in its attempt to retain influence in determining who would succeed it, set the terms under which the election was held. After not allowing Perón to run, the armed forces attempted to legitimize a military-backed candidate with enough leverage to become a factor in the second round, and to engineer a Peronist defeat. <sup>33/</sup> They failed in achieving their goals, but in the process they became one of the terms of a confrontation in which the Peronist successfully monopolized the space of the opposition, and won. As I have argued above, the 1973 electoral patterns left the UCR in a floating vacuum which was detrimental to its chances. In 1983, with the same two major parties occupying the stage, Alfonsín was confronted with a double challenge: how to capture the candidacy within his own party, altering the minority status of RyC, and how to defeat the Peronist who, despite their problems, were still the majority party, having won the previous two elections within a better than 2-to-1 margin, and having outdistanced the UCR precisely by that margin in the more recent 1983 registration process. Against this background, Alfonsín made a bold, and rather innovative move, by defining the campaign in terms of the opposition between democracy and authoritarianism, making the claim that the UCR was the party best suited to build a democratic system in Argentina. Hence, unlike 1973, the reference was to the future --i.e. the need to, and the capability to construct democracy-- rather than to the past --i.e. the return to a Golden Age which had been negated as a result of the eighteen-year proscription of Peronism. Alfonsín thus managed to simultaneously alter the electoral equation vis-a-vis Peronism, and within his own party. Setting the election in terms of the future appealed to an electorate

which was emerging from, and eager to leave behind, a long decade of political violence and state terrorism. And while the recourse to state terrorism had largely been the work of the military, Peronism could not escape being blamed for the contribution it had made to political violence from both ends of its ideological spectrum in the 1970s. Furthermore, Alfonsín made an explicit, and credible, connection between Peronism and the military when eight months before the election, he denounced the so-called Pacto militar-sindical, i.e. a pact between the top leadership of the armed forces and the Peronist labor bosses, whereby the former would support a future Peronist regime in exchange for the human rights violations they had committed being condoned.

At the same time, the claim that the UCR was better equipped than the Peronist party to launch a process of consolidation of the democratic institutions contradicted one of the implicit, albeit fundamental, ingredients of the formula that Balbín had put together with Perón in the 1970 La Hora del Pueblo, i.e. that the UCR was indeed essential for the making of democracy in Argentina, but that it would have to dutifully accept its minority status. In making the credible claim that he was the only Radical leader who could effectively bring about an electoral victory for the party, Alfonsín turned the tables within the UCR, and transformed what seemed to be a close race against Fernando de la Rúa, into a lop-sided victory. 34/

Once the Radical election was settled, Alfonsín monopolized the political initiative, never to relinquish it until the election. RyC resorted to mobilization tactics which had not been used by the UCR since the times of Yrigoyen, and was also able to penetrate the working class and the urban poor to an extent unparalleled since the emergence of Peronism. With the election of December, 1983 the UCR not only reversed a history of defeat at the hands of Peronism, it also became a multi-class party.

#### Recent changes within the Radical party.

When the Peronist party assumed office in 1973, the internal struggle for state power and for control of the union movement soon turned Peronism into a quagmire. By contrast the first year of the Radical government, the renewal of internal competition --temporarily halted during the electoral campaign-- was characterized by negotiation and compromise. The state apparatus and the party structure were the two arenas where the different factions sought to increase their relative power, but it was in the party where the competition was keener. At the governmental level, Alfonsín selected members of the different party factions for the top positions, with all sectors accepting the legitimacy of the presidential prerogative. RyC leaders were appointed to approximately two thirds of the positions in the ministries, state banks and public enterprises, a circumstance which reflected its relative strength within the party. However, Alfonsín appointed one of his more adamant adversaries within the party, Antonio Tróccoli, to the key Interior Ministry, while the Foreign Ministry and the Planning Secretariat were filled with two of the president's closest associates, who were nevertheless recent comers to the party. In fact, it was only in the Labor Ministry

that two sectors of RyC openly competed for office, after the initial appointee, an independent labor leader who led the government into its only political defeat during 1984, resigned. <sup>35/</sup>

Actually, the continuing feud over control of the Ministry of Labor was symbolic, and also one more of the effects of a rift within the ranks of the leadership of RyC, which started in 1983 and became more open once Alfonsín took office. One of the currents, which called itself "los históricos," among whom the successor of Mucci in the Labor Ministry, Juan Manuel Casella, was prominent, argued that it was advisable to follow a moderate course, thus consolidating the unprecedented gains of the UCR at the polls<sup>36/</sup>. Consequently, los históricos mellowed the strong rhetoric used by RyC during the campaign, and promoted a rapprochement with the Peronist union leader in order to gain their acquiescence to the austerity measures that the government implemented, beginning in the second semester of 1984. During that year too, los históricos developed very close ties with some of the former opponents of Alfonsín in Línea Nacional, and especially with the sectors associated with Interior Minister Tróccoli and the president of the Chamber of Deputies, Juan Carlos Pugliese. Línea Nacional, in fact disintegrated after Alfonsín's victory, and many of its regional caudillos and local punteros entered in various alliances with the internal sectors of RyC.

The other current in RyC was the Junta Coordinadora, or just Coordinadora (Coordinating Caucus), which became the heir to the Radical youth movement founded in the 1960s. The emergence of the youth had enabled the party to secure a foothold in the student movement. During the late 1970s the Radical youth gained strength within the large student population of Argentina, ultimately overtaking those sectors which had enjoyed supremacy earlier, i.e. the Peronist in the early 1970s, and the Communists and other leftist groups in the 1960s. The Coordinadora criticized its opponents for compromising too much with the Peronists, and for their abandonment of the mobilization tactics that had enabled the Radical party to increase its appeal with the popular masses. Accordingly, the Coordinadora raised the motto of the "Third Historical Movement" as the connecting link between, on the one hand, the renewed popular appeal of the Radical party and, on the other, the memories of the previous two political movements which had enjoyed widespread mass support: Yrigoyen's wing of the UCR in the 1910s and 1920s, and Peronism. The theme of the "Third Historical Movement" had in the eyes of the Coordinadora leaders a double advantage: it highlighted the claim of RyC to express continuity with Yrigoyenismo, which represented the popular side of the UCR, and it also recognized the weight of the Peronism traditions while hinting at their exhaustion. However, the title of "movement" has an antiparty resonance which was not absent in the two first "historical movements," both Yrigoyen and Perón had tended to distrust politicians, and to identify party politics with divisiveness, factionalism, and selfishness. This implicit ambiguity was not addressed by the Coordinadora.

During 1984 the disputes between the históricos and the Coordinadora centered around the renovation of party authorities. According to the UCR charter, all officials in the executive branch had to resign from their party positions. This meant that Alfonsín and vicepresident Martínez, as well as most of the

members of the UCR national Committee and of many provincial committees, had to be replaced in the party hierarchy. Since the históricos controlled a majority of the positions in the party structure, the Coordinadora pressed for the rule to be applied in order to force a renovation of the authorities. Alfonsín, nevertheless, chose to freeze the conflict by getting a 1984 party convention to approve a temporary suspension of the rule. He was obviously aware that nobody was going to be able to openly challenge his decision since it would have been tantamount to demanding Alfonsín's resignation from the party presidency. Alfonsín was explicitly concerned with the possibility that internal competition could weaken the party and thus reduce its chances of becoming the motor of the hitherto unsurmountable task of consolidating democratic institutions. However, the risks associated with his strategy were not insignificant. First, elected officials were really dedicating most of their time to the running of government, and this meant that the management of party affairs could fall in the hands of a de facto, and thereby not entirely legitimate, leadership. Secondly, the double role of Alfonsín as head of both the government and the party could not but raise the specter of Peronism, where the extreme personalization of authority had indeed contributed to that party's difficulty both in supporting mechanisms for the institutionalization of conflicts, and in accepting internal pluralism.

#### THE OUTLOOK FOR THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1980s.

The last twenty years of Argentina political history have witnessed the gradual articulation of a comprehensive authoritarian model, as well as the steady deterioration of the patterns of self-restrained interaction among the various social and political actors. However, despite the worsening political situation, two steps forward were taken in the direction of creating a party system: the healing of the Peronist-antiperonist fracture, and the reversal of the long-term pattern of destabilizing imbalance between the country's leading parties.

The 1983 election opened a new period, in which the possibility of the construction of a party system was renewed. One of the central dilemmas of the current stage is if the style of negotiation and cooperation inaugurated by Balbín and Perón in the early 1970s would survive the intensification of the inter-party competition initiated during the last electoral campaign. This intensification seemed unavoidable in the light of the reversion of the traditional image of the UCR as a party without initiative. However, even if the two parties manage to reestablish the patterns of coexistence, thus consolidating the common terrain that prevailed during a decade, they still have to overcome another serious shortcoming. Argentine parties have been quite unsuccessful in aggregating the interests of the different social sectors. This, in part, was the result of the reluctance of the associations representing class interests, i.e. those of industrialists, workers, large landowners and farmers, to agree on at least some common objectives. But it also reflected the failure of political parties both to act as arenas for compromise among social groups, and to assume the costs of promoting unpopular economic policies designed to tackle the dilemmas of contemporary Argentine society. This weakness of political parties has become apparent again during the first year of Alfonsín's government. The two large parties have not been able to put forward proposals which politically take into

account the brand new type of economic crisis affecting the country.

In the first place, both Radicales and Peronists have shrunk from confronting Argentine citizens with the fact that during the coming years there can be only a sharing of losses. This would have required them to question their common myth of a powerful Argentina as a country with endless resources. More specifically, the governing party has not assumed the responsibility of allocating differential costs and benefits through its economic policies. The attempt to postpone harsh decisions could end up hurting the less privileged strata of the population more than if some negotiated agreement among business, labor, and landed interests had been strenuously pursued. The Peronists, in turn, often relapsed into pure obstructionism, choosing not to acknowledge the inevitable negative impact that a program of economic adjustment would cause. They opted to indict publicly the government for "giving in" to the demands of the International Monetary Fund and the creditor banks. In choosing this course, they shunned the responsibility of admitting that any alternative implies sacrifices for all social sectors.

In this context of ineptitude of the two largest parties, the eventual gains of the minor parties of the right and the left in the congressional elections of November 1985 might mean more than just the electoral reemergence of those portions of the citizenry which substantively adhered to their tenets. This circumstance might also reveal a dangerous tendency of the major parties to lose sight of the real issues, with the consequence that the predominance of extremist views, with their captivating simplicity, might again contribute to hide the need to pursue negotiation and compromise as the only means to settle conflicts of interest.

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Naturally, this was done in the name of democracy. Peronism, and Communism after 1959, were equated with "anti-democracy." Consequently, the actions taken against Peronists, Communists, and those politicians and officials who supported or tolerated them, were justified with the argument that such actions were necessary to protect democracy.

<sup>2</sup> In Autoritarismo y Democracia, I have characterized the regimes of the 1955-1966 period as "semi-democratic." (Cfr. 1983, pp. 13-35)

<sup>3</sup> In every open national election held since 1946 the Peronists had increased their majority vis-a-vis the Unión Cívica Radical. In the two 1973 presidential elections, the Peronist margin of victory went from 50 to 22% in March to 60 to 25% in September.

<sup>4</sup> It should not be forgotten, however, that Argentina's "traditional" oligarchy was a relatively young social class based on the extensive capitalist agriculture of the Pampas, rather than a hacendado class exploiting peasant producers.

<sup>5</sup> One of the basic tenets of the Peronist creed in the 1940s was that in all organizations, including the party, authority had to be concentrated at the top, while party leaders were not held accountable for their actions vis-a-vis the rank and file.

<sup>6</sup> There were partial exceptions to the proscriptive regulations. The party was often allowed to present candidates for congressional elections and to run for office at the provincial and local levels. However, Perón himself was forced to remain in exile throughout the whole period. Besides, the tickets standing for Peronism were not allowed to call themselves Peronist, or Justicialista (Justicialismo has been the other designation recurrently used since the 1940s)

<sup>7</sup> The use of the word "delegado personal" was an indication of Perón's intention to suggest that supreme authority ultimately rested in himself. The "order from Madrid," where the old leader spent most of his years in exile, remained a powerful last-minute resort which he never surrendered entirely. Besides, since orders usually came in cassettes, their full authenticity was often in doubt, and therefore complete certainty was never achieved. Perón became a skillful manipulator of the different levels at which his orders could be read.

<sup>8</sup> The range of choices varied from abstention to the support of "neo-Peronist" tickets and candidates from third parties. "Neo-Peronism," in turn, ranged from largely autonomous provincial parties to interchangeable labels which were little more than façades for the candidacies selected by Perón.

9 The two most prominent políticos of this kind, and the only ones who became the undisputed bosses of their provinces, were Bittel from Chaco and Sapag from Neuquén. Both led splinters of Peronism in the early 1960s and their popular appeal was recognized even by military governments, which appointed them governors. Beginning in the 1970s, however, each of them followed different courses. Bittel returned to the Peronist party and became an important national figure in the late 1970s; Sapag led the consolidation of the only successful breakaway from Peronism, the Movimiento Popular Neuquino. Since 1983, the Movimiento has run one of the three provincial administrations not controlled by either of the two major parties. In most other provinces clientelistically-oriented Peronist politicians also emerged. However, their fortunes were much more erratic, and they could not overcome factional disputes. None was as successful as Bittel or Sapag.

10 This was clearly realized by Perón who was soon announcing that nobody but "the organization" would inherit his power.

11 The winning coalition in 1973, the Frente Justicialista de Liberación Nacional --FREJULI-- included former sectors of the Radical, Conservative, Christian Democratic and Socialist parties.

12 Beginning in the late 1950s, and after a short period of joint action with some minority groups like the Communists and independent labor leaders, the 62 Organizations became the most important part of the Peronist labor movement. They coordinated the actions of the different unions, compensating to some extent for the vulnerability of the CGT (General Confederation of Labor) to governmental control and repression. In fact, the CGT was under the administration of the unions themselves for less than half of the 1955-1973 years.

13 The last military president, General Lanusse, and his Interior Minister, who was a former Radical politician, legalized all parties in March 1971.

14 Beginning May 25, 1983, Héctor Cámpora occupied the presidency for less than fifty days. Then, Perón, who apparently did not intend to become the head of the government but resented Cámpora's leading toward the left, forced his resignation as well as that of the vice-president Solano Lima, in a palace coup which opened the way to new elections and Perón's assumption of the presidency in October 1973. Perón died on July 1, 1974 to be replaced by the vice-president, his wife Isabel.

15 Besides the Montoneros, there was a Trotskyite guerrilla faction, the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) which was all but exterminated by the army during 1975. ERP bands had some strength in the mountainous countryside of the province of Tucumán but were not significant elsewhere.

16 The 1983 electorate was slightly above the 18 million figure.

17 In addition to the ultraverticalismo and MUSO, there was a third internal current which gave emphasis to ideological definitions, Intransigencia

y Movilización (IyM). If the ultraverticalistas represented the right-wing within the always fluid ideological spectrum of Peronism --with their emphasis on anti-communism and traditional values-- IyM was the left-wing. It advocated the return to the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Peronism of the early 1970s and the use of popular mobilization as the instrument for changing Argentina political society. IyM only gained control of Catamarca, one of the most traditional and less populated Argentine provinces, and was subjected to a sort of political quarantine by the other factions until mid 1984.

18 The 62 Organizations had been created by the most powerful post-1955 union leader, Augusto Vandor. Vandor, who was for more than a decade the secretary general of the UOM (Metallurgical Workers' Union), was assassinated by the Peronista guerrillas in 1969. His successor at the helm of UOM, Lorenzo Miguel, also became the head of the the 62 Organizations, a position he retained even when he was jailed by the military during the late 1970s.

19 Gran Buenos Aires has a population of over nine million, with a third living within the Federal District. All other cities and towns of the larger metropolitan area are located within the jurisdiction of the province of Buenos Aires.

20 Although voting in the plebiscite was not obligatory, and several extremist right and left wing groups in addition to Peronism supported abstention, over seventy percent of the electorate voted; with four of each five votes for yes. Participation in obligatory national elections has been usually around the 80% level.

21 According to the constitution, the senate has to approve the executive's appointments in the judiciary and promotions in the armed forces. National deputies are elected according to proportional representation within each province.

22 The remnants of the Conservative party had all but disappeared from Buenos Aires and the other large provinces, and it could compete for power in just two districts, Mendoza and Corrientes. The Socialists, who had never been strong outside Buenos Aires, had lost whatever support they had among the working class. In fact, the potential constituencies of both Conservatives and Socialists had been siphoned out by the populist Peronism. The Communist party, in turn, emerged from the Peronist decade with a relatively intact apparatus but it could not attract more than 3 or 4% of the voters. Other parties, like the recently created Christian Democrats and the Demócrata Progresista, were even smaller.

23 Cfr. O'Donnell, 1973, Ch.4.

24 Net foreign investments in the 1959-1961 years were the highest of the 1930-1982 period. Real wages dropped over 20% during 1959.

<sup>25</sup> The UCRP did not oppose the military overthrow of Frondizi in 1962 and it merely advised him to resign when he requested support to withstand the pressures of the armed forces. Frondizi dutifully reciprocated in 1966 by actively supporting General Onganía's takeover, terminating the civilian regime of UCRP's Illia.

<sup>26</sup> In the 1960s in fact, Alfonsín was widely considered to be the leader being groomed by Balbín to succeed him in the presidency of the party. It would later become obvious that Balbín's ultimate decision to sack Alfonsín as his successor was not related to personal clashes but to their substantive disagreement over the party's strategy. Both leaders came from the province of Buenos Aires, which had been the dominant district since the creation of UCRP. The faction from which they came, MIR, had never attempted to develop a national organization; it rather established its predominance on the basis of coalitions with local and provincial caudillos.

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. O'Donnell, forthcoming University of California Press.

<sup>28</sup> Unlike the case of the Peronist party, the UCRP and afterwards the reunited UCR have chosen their presidential formulas through internal primaries. Minorities were also given representation in the party's leadership provided they gained at least a quarter of the votes in a given districts.

<sup>29</sup> Lanusse tried to block the victory of Peronism by altering the law and establishing a two-round presidential election in cases where no candidate achieved the absolute majority. He hoped that anti-Peronist parties would opt for a common candidacy in the second round. However, FREJULI's ticket headed by Campora received over 49% of the vote in the first round and Lanusse decreed the suspension of the second round requirement. The UCR also announced that it would not present a candidate for the ballotage.

<sup>30</sup> Balbín had been twice defeated as a presidential candidate, in 1952 and 1958. When he decided not to run in 1963, the UCRP won the election.

<sup>31</sup> Key advisers of Perón and Balbín have recently revealed that, at the time of his death, Perón was considering engineering the succession in order to have Balbín designated as his successor by congress. This was not only paradoxical given the history of confrontation between the two leaders; it also indicated the lack of confidence that the president had in his constitutional successor, Isabel Perón, and in his party.

<sup>32</sup> Punteros are the neighborhood leaders who run local offices and organize the mobilization of party members for registration and internal elections. Their constituencies ran from a few hundreds to several thousands.

<sup>33</sup> However, even the minimalist strategy was hardly played. The natural candidate of the military was the regime's Social Welfare minister, Francisco Manrique, who had gained some popularity devising and running an institution for

the distribution of spoils. Manrique ran as the candidate of the Federalist Alliance, but president Lanusse decided to sponsor the candidacy of an entirely unknown Air Force general, Ezequiel Martínez. Manrique made a respectable showing, he received almost 15% of the votes; Martínez only got a meager 2%.

34 The Radical party's internal election had one more presidential precandidate in addition to Alfonsín and de la Rúa: Luis León. León and his grouping, MAY, did not have any chance, although they won in two small districts, including León's own, Chaco. De la Rúa emerged as the precandidate of Línea Nacional (LN) which became the formal expression of all the provincial groupings that had provided the basis for Balbín's supremacy until his death. LN, which controlled the national organization of the party and most of the provincial offices, was hampered by a serious confrontation within the province of Buenos Aires and by the lack of candidates with comparable appeal to Alfonsín's. It experienced a prolonged attrition when three leaders sought the candidacy, with de la Rúa, a young former senator from the most conservative sectors of the party, being backed by one of the Buenos Aires strongmen and a former adversary of Balbín, García Puente. The two other precandidates, Antonio Tróccoli and Juan Carlos Pugliese, had been close associates of Balbín and finally withdrew from the race, not before the latter made an attempt to convince Alfonsín to become the unity candidate in exchange for selecting de la Rúa as his running mate. Alfonsín chose not to break his alliance with the Córdoba leadership, which had selected Víctor Martínez as the vicepresidential candidate, and internal elections were held. RyC scored landslide victories in all the large districts --Santa Fe, Córdoba, the province of Buenos Aires, and the Federal District-- and also defeated LN in most of the others.

35 The Labor Minister Mucci failed to get congress to approve his proposal for a new law regulating union elections. The government's bill was defeated in the Senate when the Peronist bloc managed to obtain the support of two key senators from the MPN.

36 Los Históricos claimed that they represented the historical traditions of RyC; in many districts they kept the original name for themselves.

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