

5 • Political developments in the Americas after the Second World War, 1945–79

100,000, was closely modeled on the Cuban example, a model, in Bishop's words, "of what socialism can do in a small country—for health, education, employment, and for ending poverty, prostitution and disease." Cuba was true to its word and provided support, also with the construction of an airport at Point Salines to help the small Caribbean nation develop its tourism, much to US concern at what they regarded as a Soviet–Cuban base. These threats and internal divisions within the revolutionary movement saw the end of Bishop's regime at the hands of his own movement in October 1983, and the subsequent US invasion.

Perhaps the most revealing complication of the Cuban model, and its international allegiances, however, was revealed in Cuban relations with Allende's Chile, from 1970. Castro was a long-time friend and supporter of Salvador Allende, the newly elected president and leader of the Chilean Socialist Party, who himself was possibly the warmest supporter of the Cuban Revolution within Latin America. Castro's problem was his newly established allegiance to the Chilean Communist Party that meant he could no longer show support for the revolutionary movement of Allende's. His relationship with Allende became strained and his presence on a state visit to Chile proved unsettling to the country's bourgeois democracy, contributing to internal opposition that ultimately led to the September 1973 coup in which Allende was deposed. As a Soviet-backed state, Cuba became increasingly isolated and turned its attention to the new states and allied regimes in Africa.

Populist leaders in Latin America

Populism, in Latin America, was a response to the political, economic and social conditions and challenges nations faced during and following the Great Depression. It was founded on a charismatic leader who created a multi-class political alliance that represented the significant economic and social changes which had occurred in many Latin America nations because of industrialization and the growth of a prosperous and educated middle class and a rapidly organizing working class. Historian Robert Dix defines populism as:

... a political movement which enjoys the support of the mass of the working class and/or peasantry, but which does not result from the autonomous organization power of either of these sectors. It is supported by non-working class sectors upholding an anti-status quo ideology.

Source: Dix, Robert H. "Populism: Authoritarian and Democratic." *Latin American Research Review*. vol 20, no.2, 1985. p. 29.

In some nations populists challenged the long-standing agricultural elites and the Catholic Church for control of the masses. The military exerted an ever-increasing influence that often stifled meaningful change and in many cases resulted in regime change.

"Give me a balcony and I will become President."

José María Velasco,
President of Ecuador

The key element was a charismatic leader who adopted the "popular" causes of the people, promised immediate rectification and was supported by the military (at least initially). Populism was not as ideologically driven as communism, socialism or capitalism, but should be thought of as a political tactic used to gain and maintain political power in a multi-class political environment relying on mass support. The successful populist was able to continually adjust government priorities and programs to satisfy his supporters, often commanding a coalition government. The appeal of the populists was a new nationalism that promised economic independence from foreign control and a better life for the people. It also fostered a new sense of patriotism. Urban-oriented, and thus less likely to involve land reform, populist regimes promised improvements in social welfare, healthcare, education, wage increases, industrialization and nationalization of resources and public works. The programs, initially at least, offered something for everyone, a panacea and placebo. Higher wages ended strikes and increased productivity. Workers had more money to purchase food, clothes and better housing which put profits in the pockets of businessmen and taxes in government coffers. Such programs created political stability for as long as the prosperity lasted. Populists did not seek the support of the nation's economic élite nor did they challenge their economic dominance. In that sense the populists were more **Mussolini** than Marx, more fascist than communist. They embraced the corporatist state structure that controlled, regulated and directed the economy, including Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI).

The pattern was to provide an immediate stimulus to the economy that often proved unsustainable and, after few years of rapid growth, revenues toppled and the government would be dismembered. When this happened the populist leader had to pick sides in order to stay in power. This generally necessitated a move to the right, seeking support from the military and economic élites against left-wing groups and parties. These authoritarian measures resulted in the violent repression of political opponents and the suppression of civil rights in what was usually to become the final stage in the populist regime. Instead of stifling the opposition, these measures galvanized political dissidents. Strikes, protest marches, riots, kidnapping and political assassinations by urban guerrillas opened the door for the military to step in to restore order. By the mid-1960s, populism had run its course (for now) and was replaced by military juntas supported by wealthy élites (industrial and agrarian) with the tacit support of foreign governments who feared South America would be engulfed by left-wing revolutionary movements inspired by Fidel Castro. The populist era had ended—the era of military dictatorships had begun.

Populism ultimately became unstable because it relied on the leader's popularity. Public opinion and popularity are fickle. As their star became tarnished, the populists were consumed by a virulent form of military dictatorship, determined to eliminate

Benito Mussolini was a European populist who took power in Italy in 1922 advocating a doctrine of corporatism. The doctrine prescribed government regulation and management of the economy. The government would negotiate agreements between the various groups—labor and management for example, which would create social harmony and prosperity for all. The Italian model was based on a political system that managed industry (workers and employers) with a state bureaucracy. It was a method of conscripting the nation to serve the greater good as determined by the leader. In 1932 Mussolini wrote in "The Doctrine of Fascism" that the nature of corporatism was to strengthen the individual and the state through the collective pursuit of common (national) goals.

Far from crushing the individual, the Fascist State multiplies his energies, just as in a regiment a soldier is not diminished but multiplied by the number of his fellow soldiers.

The model was top down, the message was marital, patriotic and paternal and was popular with Latin American populists like Vargas and Peron.

the threat of communist revolution and create capitalist industrial economies. These juntas opened the doors to foreign corporations and investment, luring them with tax breaks, anti-union policies and security forces. They rolled back wages and reduced social welfare programs. The regimes were oppressive and violent; thousands of dissidents were arrested, tortured and disappeared. By the 1980s, a new era dawned, democracy made a comeback and the military returned to the barracks.

Between 1930 and 1974, Latin America witnessed the rise and fall of a number of populist regimes and leaders including Lázaro Cárdenas of Mexico, José María Velasco of Ecuador, Getúlio Vargas of Brazil and Juan Perón of Argentina. These last two with their unique brand of populism will provide the case studies for this section.

Getúlio Vargas: president of Brazil

Getúlio Vargas was a political chameleon, able to change color and camouflage his true intentions. He once said that he had no political enemies, just people he hadn't made friends with yet. Underneath the wry smile and cherubic face ringed by the smoke of his ever-present cigar, lurked a consummate politician who would run Brazil in 1930–45 and again in 1950–54, putting his mark on the nation as no one had done before (and arguably since). The pinnacle of his power was 1937 to 1945 when he set out to establish the *Estado Novo* (the New State) based on corporatist principles. Shortly after passing the 1937 constitution, Vargas seized power and became a populist *caudillo*. He began to implement the political philosophy laid out in his book *A nova política do Brasil*. It would be a new beginning, making Brazil a modern state by reducing its reliance on coffee, creating modern government institutions, building the infrastructure that could support and encourage industrialization. Fractures in the political framework between right and left, labor and management would be healed by including all views in the corporatist agenda. No one would be left out. At least that was what Vargas said, and to some extent that is what he did.

By the time of the *Estado Novo*, economic changes and modifications were well under way. Import Substitution Industrialization had helped increase industrial output on average by 6% annually. Brazil's industrial sector boasted 44,100 plants and nearly a million workers, tripling in size in just 20 years. Expansion had been funded by foreign investors who provided 44% of Brazil's total investment by 1940.

The regime became increasingly fascist in rhetoric and tactics. Vargas announced that "the decadence of liberal and individualist democracy represents an incontrovertible fact." He became increasingly friendly with Germany, Brazil's biggest buyer of cotton

Discussion point

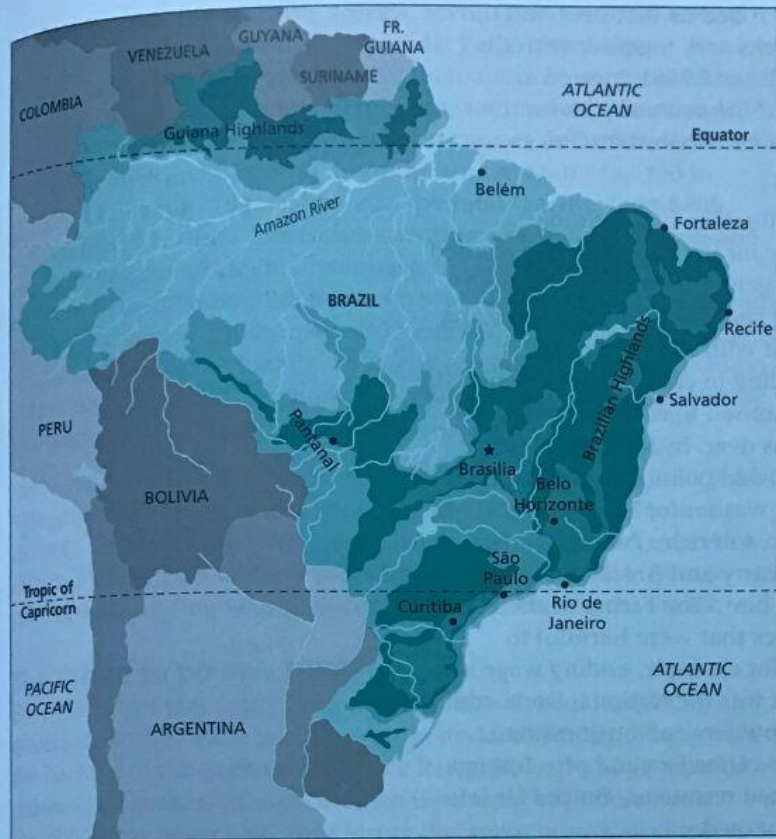
Political influences

The great political philosophers have found converts to their theories who are willing to fight and die to bring about change. The French Enlightenment philosophers, men like Voltaire and Rousseau, made Americans dream of democracy. Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations" influenced Bolívar and his followers. Castro converted to communism. Perón's populist philosophy of "Judicialista" inspired Argentines.



"Is the pen mightier than the sword?" Would these leaders have succeeded without a new philosophy?

These questions challenge us to critically assess the causes of historical change.



Map of Brazil.

and second biggest coffee market. German investment grew and the German military trained and equipped Brazil's Army. This development made the United States and the United Kingdom nervous. Economics aside, Vargas did not support Germany's expansionist agenda and as the nations of Europe marched towards war, Vargas distanced himself from the Germans and Italians and became closer to the United States.

When the Second World War broke out Vargas stayed neutral until German submarines sank several Brazilian ships and Vargas declared war in 1942, sending 25,000 Brazilian soldiers to fight with the Allied armies in Italy. He used this to leverage loans and technical help from the Allies to help build the new state-owned iron and steel plant—the Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional (CSN) in Volta Redonda which was producing about 650,000 tons by 1955.

His focus, however, remained steadfastly on Brazil. In 1940 he implemented a Five Year plan with goals to develop heavy industry and new sources of hydro-electric energy to power the factories and expand the railroads, connecting the vast, often isolated regions of the country. A modern economy needed modern infrastructure and Vargas ambitiously set out to achieve both simultaneously. In 1942, he established the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (or CVRD), to mine iron ore deposits in the Itabira province. Several of his most important projects were finalized shortly after he was ousted in 1945.

Discussion point

Consider this map of Brazil, to assess the challenges of the infrastructure, and transportation requirements on the development of Brazilian industry and trade.

Refer to section starting p. 225 on "Latin American responses to the Depression," Chapter 4, for further discussion of the Brazilian economy.

In 1946, the National Steel Company rolled its first steel and the National Motor assembled its first trucks and, together with the National Petroleum Company (established 1938), formed an impressive corporatist triumvirate. But the economy had serious inflationary problems that Vargas was unable to stem. Prices rose 86% in 1940–44.

Vargas also adopted the heavy-handed tactics of a dictator, determined to maintain power by any means necessary. He banned strikes but won labor's approval with generous wage and benefit settlements. The hypocrisy of fighting fascist dictatorship but using fascist tactics at home was a sore point with many Brazilians. Opposition grew and Vargas, ever willing to change course when the political winds changed direction, promised to call an election and end the *Estado Novo* when the war was over. In January 1945, he released all political prisoners and allowed political parties to enter the political arena again. The election was set for December 2, 1945, and would be the first free elections in a decade. Political parties sprang to life. The Social Democratic Party and Brazilian Labor Party were sponsored by Vargas who called him "The Father of the Poor." He signed a decree to stop any practices that were harmful to Brazilians (i.e. the working class) by, for example, ending wage and price controls. Occupying the far right was the National Democratic Party, a conservative coalition of landowners and businessmen. Their platform was pro-American, pro-capitalism and pro-foreign investment to exploit Brazil's untouched resources. On the far left, a well-organized Communist Party emerged.

Other groups made their voices heard and became politically active, employing non-traditional methods. The Women's Committee was a national organization that monitored food prices, demanded social justice and enjoyed wide support. In the machismo Brazil, this was an astounding development. Afro-Brazilians, long the victims of racism and ignored by Vargas, used cultural expressions of discontent such as theater and music to plant and grow cultural consciousness. One of the most popular expressions of protest was the music and dance of the Samba which Vargas tried to marginalize. Other forms of protest included secret worker's groups and spreading absenteeism that became a de facto work slowdown.

Vargas remained above the fray and declared he would not run for president despite the encouragement of his supporters, the *Queremistas* (from the Portuguese verb "to want"). The conservative elements in the military and business were poised to move Brazil into the US Cold War camp and adopt free enterprise economic practices, reduce state intervention and encourage foreign investment and ownership.

The October Coup, 1945

On October 29, 1945, the military forced Vargas to resign and put the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in office until after the election. Two generals became the front runners for the presidency. When the votes were tallied, General Eurico Gaspar Dutra had won. Vargas drifted into the shadows and worked behind the scenes to plan his return to office.

Dutra adopted a conservative agenda, severed ties with the Soviet Union and outlawed Brazil's Communist Party, expelling Communists elected to Congress. He then attacked organized labor and froze wages. Dutra implemented free enterprise policies and turned his back on the state-run institutions set up by Vargas. A rush of foreign investment, mainly from the United States poured in (US\$323 million in 1946 alone) and the total reached over \$800 million in 1951. Dutra turned his attention to curbing inflation and did so by restricting credit, lowering social security benefits in addition to maintaining the freeze on wages. Dutra spent the nation's foreign exchange surplus, over \$700 million, earmarked by Vargas to fund industrial development, on imported consumer goods including many luxury items. The spending temporarily revived the economy but when the money ran out took a dive.

Dutra did achieve some benefits. He built railroads that connected Salvador and São Paulo and constructed 4,000 new rural schools. In 1951, he set up the National Research Council (still in existence) and implemented a military program to promote domestic arms production, sending young officers to train in the United States.

The return to power, 1950–54

By 1950 Brazil was ready for a return to the style of leadership and government they were used to. Vargas declared his candidacy with the backing of the Social Democratic Party. He had also re-created a coalition of workers groups, industrialists and the middle class. It was the old Vargas at his best, convincing divergent groups to come together to pursue a common cause and that cause was Brazil for Brazilians. He attacked his rivals brilliantly, claiming they wanted to keep the nation chained to producing coffee and cattle to maintain the old power structure of agrarian élites (the Paulistas) and the church. He preached modernization and progress and it was exactly what Brazilians wanted to hear.

He won the election easily but had inherited a bankrupt economy. Vargas needed money so he printed more, increasing inflation. The United States refused to lend Vargas money, going further by withdrawing from a joint commission on economic development. Undaunted, Vargas established a new corporation, the *Petróleo Brasileiro S.A* (the Brazilian Petroleum Corporation, also known as Petrobras). This joint venture between government and business created a monopoly on oil drilling and new refineries. Next, he created the equivalent electrical corporation, *Electrobras*. Vargas's supporters hailed these achievements but his opponents became convinced that he was leading the nation in the wrong direction.

Labor unrest also challenged Vargas. He had tried to win them back with a new minimum wage in 1951 but it didn't keep pace. Strikes became a common event, climaxing in 1953 when 300,000 workers walked off the job demanding higher wages and improved benefits. Vargas sacrificed his Minister of Labor, João Goulart, who sided with the workers and recommended doubling the minimum wage. Vargas fired Goulart to pacify the army but then did an about-face and at the **May Day** celebration announced the wage increase and praised his departed minister.

May Day (May 1) is International Workers' Day, also called Labor Day, and is a public holiday in many countries. It is often marked by political demonstrations and celebrations organized by unions and other groups.

The Carlos Lacerda affair

Carlos Lacerda was the editor of the conservative newspaper *Tribuna da Imprensa* and a relentless critique of Vargas's left-wing policies and called for his removal. In early August, a gunman attacked Lacerda, killing his volunteer bodyguard (a major in the air force) and leaving Carlos for dead. But the wounds were minor and Lacerda recovered. The gunman was captured and confessed that he was working for Gregório Fortunato, the head of Vargas's personal security detachment. A search of Fortunato's office exonerated Vargas of any wrongdoing but records were uncovered that detailed rampant corruption, influence peddling and monetary kickbacks. Fortunato was living a luxurious life on a modest government salary. The implications for Vargas's administration were serious. The proximity to the president's office lost Vargas the support of the military. On August 18, it became clear that the military would demand his resignation. Vargas told his staff he would never resign. During the early hours of August 24th the military met several times and concluded there was no alternative but resignation. The ultimatum was delivered to Vargas. Crowds had gathered outside. Vargas gave his aide an envelope, closed his office door and a shot rang out. Vargas was dead. The envelope contained his suicide note and read "I leave life to enter history ..."

Activity

Getúlio Vargas: an assessment

Source A

Ever since, some of Brazil's most successful politicians have proudly defined themselves as disciples of Vargas. They would agree with the opinion of Professor Emir Sader, for whom a typical caudillo like Vargas was just a democratic leader whose only "sin" was to fight against U.S. imperialism. In reality, such "intellectuals" and populist leaders honour Vargas because he much contributed in Brazil to the advance of their xenophobic nationalism, as an ideology whereby the ruling groups can more easily manipulate the popular masses, so as to make them eternally hopeful for a saviour to inaugurate the tropical paradise on earth.

Source: Zimmerman, Augusto. 2005. *Brazil: President Vargas's most enduring Legacy is His Xenophobic Nationalism*. Hispanic American Center for Economic Research.

Source B

Populist rapport does not require tub-thumping demagoguery [sic]: Cárdenas [Mexican populist leader Lázaro Cárdenas] was no more a flamboyant speaker than was Vargas; both acquired support by virtue of their policies, image, and career—and despite (or because of?) their dour personalities. Effective populism, in other words, derived from lived experience rather than rhetorical extravagance.

Source: Knight, Alan. "Populism and Neo-Populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2. May 1998. p. 237.

Source C

Another benefit of the Vargas period was the temporary breaking of the dominance of the state of São Paulo over the rest of the country. For too long the fortunes of Brazil had been determined by the interests of this very powerful and important state.

What was good for São Paulo was good for the remainder of Brazil. Sometimes this may have been true; often it was not. Often Paulista businessmen made the north of Brazil their own type of colony. The north and the northeast were secure markets and also the source of raw materials for southern Brazil. The Vargas period to a slight degree dislodged the complete power control of São Paulo over the country. Credit should be given to Getúlio Vargas for his conscious attempt to break down the strong regional sentiments that existed before 1930, for Brazil during the Vargas period became more of a unified nation. Regionalism still existed, to be sure, and exists today in Brazil; but for the first time in modern Brazilian history a chief of state had spoken to Brazilians from a non-Paulista base.

Thus, the Vargas epoch was a mixture of gains and benefits in some sectors, setbacks and negative results in others. Nevertheless, by comparison with other Latin American countries during the same time span, in Brazil the era was one of economic and social progress and continuous development.

Source: Young, Jordan. 1967. *The Brazilian Revolution and Aftermath*. Rutgers University Press. pp. 81–97.

Source D

In the elections of 1950, Vargas was returned to office as democratically elected president. If anything, he was more nationalistic in both his pronouncements and his actions during his second administration than in his first. As we have seen, it was during this administration that he created Petrobras and attempted to extend government control over energy and power resources; he also inaugurated his own five-year plan for industrialization.

Ironically, much of Brazil's remarkable industrial progress during these years was due to the mounting investment of foreign capitalists, whom the nationalists, as always, suspected of a variety of evil motives. Vargas became even more outspoken in his criticism of foreign ownership of industry, and he launched a bitter attack against foreign investors, accusing them of "bleeding Brazil." The nationalists cheered each pronouncement. Yet funds continued to flow in from abroad, and industrialization expanded at a rapid pace.

Clearly, Vargas had mastered the rhetoric of the nationalists and adapted it to his own purposes. He relied upon the popular appeal of nationalism more than he had in the past, and these nationalist feelings strengthened his second administration which was less stably anchored than his first.

Source: Burns, Bradford. 1968. *Nationalism in Brazil: A Historical Survey*. New York: Frederick Praeger. pp. 72–89.

Questions

- 1 According to source A, what the most important contribution made by Vargas? Quote from the document to support your answer.
- 2 Evaluate the views expressed by historians in sources B and D on the merits of Vargas's economic policy.
- 3 Compare and contrast the views expressed in sources A and B on the populist characteristics of Vargas.
- 4 To what extent do you agree that "the Vargas epoch was a mixture of gains and setbacks"?
- 5 Why and with what success did Vargas use the following approaches to stay in power?
 - a Anti-imperialism
 - b Nationalism
 - c Economic and social progress
 - d Anti- Paulista (control by São Paulo)
 - e Cult of personality (personal appeal of Vargas)

Populism in Argentina

Juan Perón was an important Argentinean leader for three decades from 1945–74. His popularity peaked during his first term as president (1945–91), when he was married to Eva Perón. Together they captured the hearts and minds of the people with their promise of better days ahead. Perón's rise to power was meteoric and unexpected. In 1941, he had joined the *Grupo de Oficiales Unidos* (the Group of United Officers or GOU) comprised of military officers from middle class backgrounds. Ardent nationalists, they believed in industrialization and modernization and were deeply distressed by the corrupt nature of Argentina's political parties during the 1930s labelled the "Infamous Decade". In 1943, they could no longer tolerate the machinations of President Ramón Castillo and took control. Perón was appointed to a minor cabinet post as Minister of Labor. The government was pro-German and pro-fascist. Perón studied Mussolini's writings, and many officers had been trained by the German military. They had grown to admire the manner in which Germany transformed itself in the 1930s from a vanquished and humiliated nation into a proud and mighty world power. Like Germany, the GOU took control of the unions, censored the media, suppressed opposition and jailed dissidents. As in Germany, the government in Argentina demanded territorial concessions from its neighbours and threatened to destabilize the region. Unlike Germany, however, the tactics failed to intimidate the working classes or neighbouring states.

Perón was gaining power within the GOU. Cunning, capable and charismatic he used his position as labor minister to win the trust and support of organized labor by offering pensions and benefits. In short order he became the Minister of War and then vice president. Rival officers feared his ambition and disliked the "left-wing" programs he implemented and had Perón jailed. But his supporters in the labor movement staged a massive pro-Perón demonstration in the streets of Buenos Aires that forced his release on October 17, 1945.

An election was set for 1946 and Perón ran for the presidency extolling the virtues of democracy. Standing on balcony, above adoring crowds, with his glamorous wife Evita at his side, Perón spreading the message of Argentina for Argentineans, made the election seem like a formality. He was unwittingly aided in his bid by the US Ambassador to Argentina who publically called Perón a fascist. Perón captured 54% of the vote.

Perón's economic plan

Perón called his vision for Argentina "Justicialismo", a political dogma that advocated making accommodations between competing economic and political forces (i.e. capitalism, collectivism and communism). The objective was to attain social harmony, economic prosperity and political stability. Perón's allegiance to Justicialismo had limits and was shelved continually when challenged by the realpolitik of events and practical problems. Perón's success relied on three tactics.



Juan and Eva Perón in 1946. The glamorous couple became international celebrities.

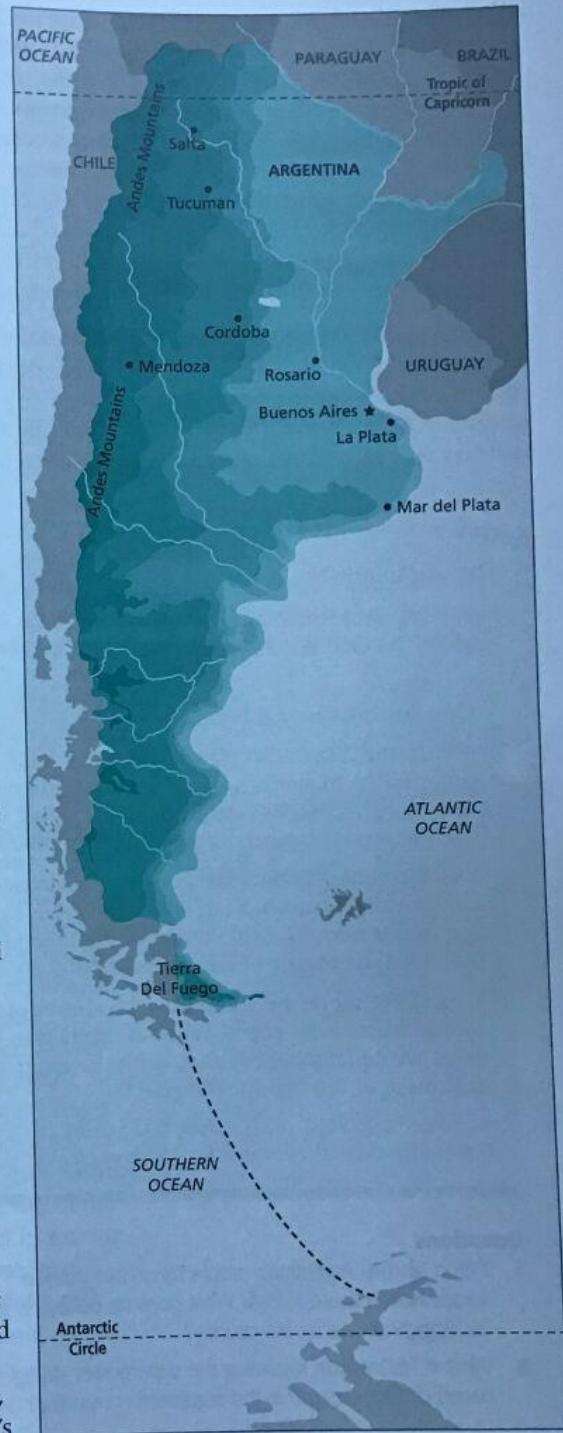
First, creating a coalition of the traditional élites and the working classes; second, extolling patriotism and nationalism by attacking internal and external forces that prevented Argentina from attaining its true destiny (such as nationalizing key industries); and third, provide immediate social benefits (health, education, pensions) to the workers. In the short term, this third tactic paid the biggest dividends creating a cadre of dedicated supporters who remained a force in Argentinean politics long after Perón was removed. His priorities as a populist president are contained in a letter written to newly elected Chilean President Carlos Ibáñez del Campo in 1952.

Give the people, especially the workers, all that is possible. When it seems to you that already you are giving them too much, give them more. You will see the results. Everybody will try to frighten you with the spectre of an economic collapse. But all of this is a lie. There is nothing more elastic than the economy, which everyone fears so much because no one understands it.

Circumstances now favoured Perón. A postwar export boom of wheat and beef to war-ravaged Europe produced a large foreign exchange surplus which Peron funnelled into industrialization and ushered in a period of significant industrial expansion. By 1948 industrial workers wages had increased by 20% without crimping the profitability of the export sector and industrial profits remained significant even with the wage increases.

Next, the government implemented its first five year plan that proposed large-scale government intervention in the economy and the reassertion of Argentina's control of its own economy. The first interventionist agency was the El Instituto Argentino de Promoción del Intercambio (the Argentine Institute for Trade Promotion or IAPI), a state trade monopoly to ensure foreign markets bought Argentinean goods and commodities. Next, workers' wages received a boost and the military's budget was increased (Perón never cut military spending). He ensured the loyalty of industrialists with government patronage, for example, government contracts. He then made good on his promise to nationalize foreign companies and expropriated British-owned railroads, the US-controlled telephone network, and the French-owned dock yards. Compensation was high as the government paid the price demanded by the owners; a costly strategy, it avoided a serious international incident with Argentina's main trading and investment partners. He also nationalized the foreign-owned Central Bank which ensured the government's directly control over fiscal policy. Finally, the government paid off the nation's foreign debt in July 1947 followed by Perón's "Declaration of Economic Independence."

1948 was the high-water mark of Perón's success, his "New Argentina" had gone from dream to reality virtually overnight, but it didn't last



Map of Argentina.

long. Two forces conspired to end the prosperity. In 1949, foreign competition in commodities was largely responsible for a trade deficit and inflation began to spiral upward to 31%, twice the 1948 rate. Commodity prices were dropping and prices on imported consumer goods were rising. The situation was further compounded by a drought that lowered production for several years, made worse by the fact that farmers lagged behind in adopting modern technology and techniques. These factors—inflation, trade deficit, deflated commodity prices, lower harvest yields—decreased foreign demand, resulting in real wages falling 20% and, as they fell, so did Perón's popularity.

Something had to be done to stop the economic downturn and the government resorted to tight credit, reduced spending, wage and price controls. But things got worse. By the early 1950s, world commodity prices and demand had dropped sharply and the IAPI's ability to finance industry was eroded. No relief to these problems appeared at hand.

Activity

The Justicialists

Juan Perón wrote this manifesto after losing power in 1955. This was at the height of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.

On Capitalism and communism

For us, the justicialists, the world today finds itself divided between capitalists and communists in conflict: we are neither one nor the other. We aspire ideologically to stand outside of that conflict between global interests. This doesn't imply in any way that we are in the internationalist camp, dodging the issue.

We believe that capitalism as well as communism are systems already overtaken by the times. We consider capitalism to be the exploitation of the man by capital and communism as the exploitation of the individual by the state. Both "insectify" the individual by means of different systems.

We believe more; we think that the abuses of capitalism are the cause and that communism is the effect. Without capitalism, communism would have no reason to exist; we equally believe that, with the extinction of the cause, there will be the beginning of the end for the effect.

Source: Perón, Juan. (trans. Edsall, T. M.). 1958. *La Fuerza es el Derecho de las Bestias* (Force is the Right of the Beasts). Montevideo: Ediciones Cicerón. p. 18.

Questions

- 1 Perón blames Argentina's problems on two outside forces. Name these forces? What does he believe is the ideological stance for his country?
- 2 What is his position regarding the superpower struggle based on this excerpt? Is the argument convincing?
- 3 Based on your knowledge of Perón, what was his approach as president to implementing a "Justicialist" regime in Argentina?
- 4 Would you agree that, for Perón, pragmatism and maintaining power were more important than ideological considerations?

The second term, 1951–54

Perón wanted a second term as president but the 1853 constitution imposed a one-term limit. Undaunted, Perón amended the constitution so that he could contest the 1951 election. Next, he

created a political party, the Perónists and was soundly reelected with 67% of 6.9 million votes, in part due to the extension of voting rights to women in 1947, a move supported by Eva Perón. Eva (Evita) was adored by the workers and urban poor, the so-called *descamisados* (the shirtless ones). She had become indispensable to Perón as the popular face of the regime, the nation's heart and soul. Juan and Eva were inseparable. Perón wanted Eva to be vice president but the military vetoed the move. If anything happened to Perón, a woman would become president and commander in chief. This began a decline in support for Perón from the military.

By 1951, Juan and Eva Perón were firmly in power. Buoyed by their movie star status and the unquestioned loyalty of the people, Perón became increasingly reckless and authoritarian. It started when the government seized the leading opposition newspaper, *La Prensa*, and drove it out of business. In 1952, the tough economic measures seemed to pay off and the economy started to turn around. But a second five year plan was adopted that changed the course of Perón's populist agenda. He could no longer afford lavish wage settlements and actively pursued foreign investment to ingest new funds into industrial development. Over the next three years, he struck a number of deals with foreign companies to drill oil and produce automobiles, borrowing foreign capital to buy technology and increase industrial efficiency and output which would increase profit margins but had the unfortunate consequence of increasing unemployment. Perón further alienated the military when he cancelled a military aviation project in favour of funding automobile production. To make matters worse, the government printed more money increasing supply ninefold and with it inflation. Then tragedy struck: Evita died of cancer at the age of 33 in 1952 and Perón's popularity plummeted.

The legacy of Eva Perón

In a political system dominated by machismo chauvinism, Eva set a powerful example for Latin American women. She told them that "Just as workers could wage their own struggle for liberation, so too could only women be the salvation of women." As the de facto minister of labor, she proved herself to be tough-minded, benevolent and petulant as the situation required which earned her the reputation as the lady with the whip. In 1947, she toured Spain Italy

Maria Eva Duarte de Perón (1919–1952)

Eva Duarte was born in rural Argentina to a poor family. At age 15, in 1934, she moved to Buenos Aires and pursued a career in radio and film gaining local fame as a cabaret singer. "Evita" soon joined the society of high-ranking army officers and acquired fine clothes, jewels and a bad reputation. She met Colonel Juan Perón sometime in 1944. The couple were married the following year and during their engagement she became a dedicated Perónist. Thereafter her rise to fame and power was meteoric. In 1946–52 she was one of the most famous celebrity icons in the world. Shunned by the upper classes, she captured the emotional imagination of the Argentinian nation, championing workers' rights and women's suffrage. She founded the charitable Eva Perón Foundation and a female branch of the Perónist Party after women received the vote in 1947, which they exercised for the first time in 1951. Eva received the vice-presidential nomination of the Perónist party in 1951 but was opposed by the military and bourgeoisie. Not long after she withdrew her acceptance of the nomination, also due to declining health. She died of cancer on July 26, 1952, and the nation went into extravagant mourning: clocks were stopped, the grief was palatable and many called for her sainthood. "Don't cry for me Argentina," the haunting anthem from the 1978 musical *Evita* symbolizes her celebrity status for Argentinians, many years after her untimely death.



descamisados (the shirtless ones) was a term of affection for the working poor coined by Eva Perón.

and France and was received by the French president and had an audience with the pope. She charmed the Europeans and the trip made her the most visible (and recognizable) female political figure in the world. She returned determined to help Argentina's *descamisados*.

Eva set up the Eva Perón Foundation in 1948 after being snubbed by the socially elite womens' *Sociedad de Beneficencia*. A presidential decree gave Eva control over charities and the foundation's aim was to provide scholarships, schools, hospitals and orphanages for the underprivileged. Eva provided the first 10,000 pesos from her own purse and donations poured in, eventually totalling hundreds of millions of pesos. At its height, the foundation employed over 14,000 workers, purchased 500,000 sewing machines, 400,000 pairs of shoes and 200,000 cooking pots for distributed to the poor. Homes, schools and hospitals were built and for the first time in Argentina's history healthcare was available to all citizens regardless of race or gender. Pictures of Eva working with the poor, visiting hospitals and schools and dispensing tenderness to all made her the heroine of the people. The foundation's accounting methods were rather slipshod and rumours of fraud and embezzlement, including a Swiss bank account for funnelled funds persisted. Whether these accusations had merit remains a question of historical controversy. Nevertheless, the foundation provided large numbers of low-income Argentinians with a degree of social assistance that did not exist prior to Eva's arrival on the scene. After Perón was ousted from government the foundation fell into disarray.

A womens' branch of the Perónist party was founded by Eva Peron after women received the vote in 1947. By 1951 it had over half a million members. Politically and socially active the party established 3,600 offices nationwide and from these centres dispensed healthcare, legal advice and social services. The party helped women attend university and the number doubled overnight. In 1951 women voted for the first time; 90% of eligible women voted, 65% for Peron. Twenty-four female Perónist candidates were elected as deputies and seven as senators, giving Argentina the distinction of having the most elected female representatives of any Western democracy. The party remained active in the Perónist movement despite the setbacks of Eva's death and Juan's exile and played a significant role in Perón's return to power in 1973.

Perón, realizing his hold on power was becoming increasingly tenuous, went on the attack. He ordered the National Liberating Alliance, Perón's version of the paramilitary Nazi brown shirts, and the federal police were force to intimidate and exile his opponents. The Perón-controlled General Confederation of Labor muzzled dissidents in the ranks of workers and prominent leaders were jailed.

The coalition was breaking up but the government refused to bend to the demands of industrialists to lower wages. In retaliation the business leaders joined with agrarian interests to form an economic

élite that increasingly opposed Perón. The military had already lost faith in Perón and were further upset with his scandalous behaviour following Eva's death. Wage and price controls further contributed to eroding the all-important labor vote. But Perón wasn't finished yet and his next target was the Roman Catholic Church. Why he attacked the church remains a mystery but it sealed his fate with the military. Divorce was legalized, and the government took control of church-run schools. The Perónists claim that the church was the last hurdle in the achievement of Argentinean independence. The military began to plot Perón's overthrow. The first attempt to oust him in June 1954 failed. In September another attempt was made and Perón had the choice to flee or fight. He threatened to arm the *descamisados* but lost his nerve and fled to Paraguay.

After a decade in power, Perón's personal appeal could no longer hide the shortcomings of his economic policies and increasing disconnected from his followers. As Perón transformed from populist leader to authoritarian dictator he lost the support of the military which had been the cornerstone of his regime. The regime that had given millions of Argentineans hope for a better future was ended, but the legacy lived on. The Perónist Party survived and paved the way for Perón's triumphant, albeit, brief return to power 1973.

Populism: the balance sheet

Within weeks of each other, the two most important populist leaders of the postwar era had been ousted from power and were replaced by ultra-right-wing military dictatorships that tried to turn back the clock and roll back the gains made by the working classes in particular under Perón and Vargas. Why had the populist leaders failed to survive politically and did they make a difference during their time in office? Where were countries better off after they left office? Two problems that were to some extent beyond their control had contributed to their demise. The state-led ISI policies were initially successful in helping to create an industrial base, alleviating the effects of the Great Depression. After the Second World War, protectionist policies had run their course and the ISI was no longer viable in the vibrant world economy of the 1950s and 1960s. The second factor was the new reality of the Cold War and the pervasive influence of the Cuban Revolution on Latin America in the 1960s. The major flaw with populism was that it relied on charismatic and influential leaders to create and maintain the fragile coalition between groups who were bound to be in conflict (e.g. workers and industrialists). Populism regimes could not survive for long without leaders like Perón and Vargas. What happened subsequently, when the military took control over the next two decades, remains a dark chapter in the history of the region.

Activity

Argentina under Perón: an assessment

Source A

It has been said that without freedom there can be no social justice and to that I respond that without social justice there can be no freedom. You, co-workers, have lived in the drawn out times of the so-called freedom of the oligarchies; and I ask you, co-workers: if there was freedom before or if there is freedom now. To those that say that there is freedom in the nations where workers are exploited, I will answer with the words of our workers: what beautiful freedom, the freedom to die of hunger! And to those that accuse us of being a dictator, I will say that the worst of all dictatorships is the foolish ineptness of governments. ... Let us be united, because if we are united, we are invincible; do not let politics divide the workers unions or pitch some against others, because the workers' cause is above all other interests.

Source: Labor Day Speech by Juan Domingo Perón, May 1, 1949, Plaza de Mayo Square, Buenos Aires, Argentina (excerpt translated from Spanish found in <http://www.elhistoriador.com.ar/>).

Source B

During a historical period in which Argentinean society was socially and politically fractured as a result of, on the one hand, the authoritarian practices of the Peronist government, and, on the other, the conservative political positions of the middle classes, who were not willing to allow a new distribution of the symbolic capital or the social recognition which they felt they deserved, or the value of their cultural capital and the technical skills associated with it, Peronist schoolbooks—innovative in some respects, but transmitters of hierarchic and authoritarian values in others—continued to offer, like their predecessors in earlier decades, an image of social harmony that did not exist. While the schoolbooks of the initial decades of the century ignored the existence of power relations and social conflict, or presented them as something that was natural and therefore morally justified, Peronist schoolbooks related situations of inequality, injustice and denigration to the past.

Source: Rodríguez, Miguel Somoza. "Poverty, Exclusion and Social Conflict in the Schoolbooks of Argentina during the First Peronist Period." *Paedagogica Historica*. Vol. 43, no. 5. October 2007. pp. 633–52.

Source C

Though Evita was the most prominent female political figure in Argentine history, she played a secondary role in addressing housewives during the government's campaign, echoing Perón's call for austerity with few variations. The agony and prostration before her death from cancer in July 1952 only partially explains her lack of involvement, because she continued to work at her foundation and to make public appearances up until her final days. Perón, in contrast, led the campaign personally, talked to housewives directly, and put himself in the position of culinary advisor and shopping consultant, an unexpected role for a man in the 1950s in Argentina and even more unexpected for a president. The way he assumed his role may be peculiar, but the role itself was not: the ubiquitous patriarchal figure who presides over the nation, the aggregate sum of households. In this regard, the national economy depended on the women's decisions but Perón was there to guide them in the process. Women were doing the cooking, but Perón still decided what was for dinner.

Source: Milanese, Natalia. "The Guardian Angels of the Domestic Economy": Housewives' Responsible Consumption in Peronist Argentina." *Journal of Women's History*. vol. 18, no. 3. Fall 2006. pp. 91–117.

Source D

Some parts of the life of Juan Perón read like a radio script, in which, of course, the radio actress Eva Duarte plays herself. There is about both of them a staged quality, contrived, so that in the end there is no sense of tragedy, no inclination toward pity for them, just a feeling that their audience—the “shirtless ones” was the melodramatic phrase—was used for corrupt purposes. Yet Perónismo lives on, representing a strong force among Argentines, a political movement that has outlived the follies of its progenitor. It does so because Juan Perón touched a nerve among working people, one that had been ignored, if not oppressed, by Argentine elites. For that reason, Juan Perón deserves to be remembered.

Source: Adams, Jerome. 1991. *Liberators and Patriots in Latin America*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Questions

- 1 Look at source A and pick out examples of populism. What message is Perón giving to the workers and their unions?
- 2 Compare and contrast Perón's patriarchal role represented in sources B and C.
- 3 Considering origin and purpose, what are the value and limitations of sources A and D to historian's writing about Perón's style of government?
- 4 Using your own knowledge and the sources, discuss how Perón dealt with traditionally marginalized Argentines: workers, women and children.

Military regimes In Latin America, 1960s–80s

The landscape changed quickly after the Cuban Revolution, and throughout Latin America the military seized control in the first years of the 1960s. There were ten coups alone between 1961 and 1964. Military dictatorships were not new to Latin America but the regimes that appeared in the 1960s were different. Before Fidel Castro, the military took control to restore order or remove corrupt civilian politicians. Following Castro's revolution a more pressing reason to take control was to prevent further Cuban-style revolutions. The military governments were reactionary and anti-revolutionary. They were determined to expel or destroy communist and left-wing movements by any means necessary and establish closer economic and political relations with the West, in particular, the United States. Internally, they were supported by conservative economic and political elites who stood to lose the most if the communists succeeded.

The counterinsurgency strategy adopted by these regimes came from the French experience in Algeria and became a pan-Latin American effort to resist revolution culminating in Operation Condor (1975), a cooperative military effort between Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. The first tactic was to pacify the general populace and eliminate it as a safe haven. Castro, they correctly surmised, had survived because he had earned the trust and support of the people. Without this haven, the insurgents would be exposed