



**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

and eliminated. The tactics included the rapid expansion of capitalism, a diminution of legal and civil rights, suspension of democracy, control of the media, outlawing trade unions and the wholesale application of violent repression, including incarceration, torture and assassinations. The threat was real and the tactics worked. During the 1960s, 25 communist guerrilla movements appeared across the continent. Many groups were quickly eliminated or dissolved under government pressure. Others waged war for a decade and after limited initial success became more of a nuisance than a *bona fide* threat. Several of the most prominent groups were Fidelista (Cuban) or Soviet supported. They were hunted down by specially trained elite units. Che Guevara was captured and executed in 1967 by one such unit of the Bolivian army. The assumption was that the guerrilla fighters, student protest, trade union activism and media unrest were part of a coordinated effort to destabilize and overthrow the governments of Latin America and were being orchestrated by Moscow. What the military did not know, at least initially, was that the rebels and dissidents were much more fractured than that, and engaged in internecine disputes that undermined any possibility of a coordinated movement.

The Cold War and Castro changed how Latin American generals thought about security and approaches to military training. This shift was most pronounced in the training of a new generation of young officers who studied the social and economic conditions of their own country in addition to the more traditional military curricula. Senior officers, colonels and generals from across Latin America attended the same staff colleges as part of the Inter-American Military System. Small wonder these regimes looked similar in power. The sub-text was that civilian governments were incapable of removing the revolutionary threat. Only the military, they agreed, had the knowledge, skills, personnel and equipment to do the job. The suspension of civilian rule appeared to be the only viable solution to the problem. Once the threat had been removed, consideration could then be given to restoring civilian government. Across Latin America, beginning in early 1960, the military seized control in ten countries including Brazil and Argentina and remained in power until the 1980s. Each coup was unique in its own right according to national circumstances, military traditions, cultural imperatives and the personal qualities of the leaders. Nevertheless, they shared a common cause to eliminate the communist threat and to restore law and order. They also represented a new strain of military intervention, no longer selecting, installing and supporting a chosen civilian leader but taking on the role of government themselves. In the case of leaders like General Pinochet in Chile, this was to evolve into long-term dictatorships.

**Latin-American military coups, 1961–64**

El Salvador	January 24, 1961
Ecuador	March 29, 1962
Perú	July 18, 1962
Guatemala	March 31, 1963
Ecuador	July 11, 1963
Dominican Republic	September 25, 1963
Brazil	March 31, 1964
Bolivia	November 4, 1964.

Once in power, these military governments moved rapidly to eliminate or reduce social welfare programs and workers benefits, lowering wages and outlawing unions. This was designed to attract foreign investment which would be the most expedient way to create a prosperous capitalist economy. These leaders reduced government intervention in the market place in favour of private investment, while also suppressing democracy and democratic institutions and organizations. Individual political rights were subsumed by the collective security of the nation.

These regimes also received considerable support from the United States. This included military equipment, counterinsurgency training and the tacit support of every president from Johnson to Carter in support of containment. They preferred to support repressive ultra-right-wing military dictatorships and turn a blind eye to human rights abuses rather than permit any more successful Cuban style revolutions that would further expand Soviet influence in the Americas. But by the late 1970s the communist threat was over; only in Nicaragua had it succeeded, briefly. Internal and external pressure brought an end to the dictatorships, replaced by new experiments in democracy. Yet the stain and scars of military rule was not easily forgotten. For two decades the military had ruled with an iron fist, resembling in the conquering and subjugation of a people, the tactics of an invading army in reaching far beyond the goal of protecting national security.

### **Military government in Brazil**

Getúlio Vargas committed suicide August 24, 1954, refusing to resign or flee from the military coup. Juscelino Kubitschek was president in 1956–60, promising 50 years of progress in five, but corruption and inflation were rampant and he was replaced. João Goulart took office in 1961. He had been Secretary of Labor under Vargas and initiated populist-like reforms to redistribute wealth. Goulart was popular with workers and the lower classes but the middle-class and powerful business community called for his removal. On March 31, 1964, the military, of whom Goulart had previously been critical, seized power. The agreement was that no leader would stay in power for more than one term. During the 20 years of military rule they installed five presidents.

The first was Marshal Humberto Castelo Branco (1964–67). He set out to purify the economic system by ending Goulart's populist reforms. Castelo coined a new term "manipulated democracy" to defend his regimes policies that were anything but democratic. This initial period has been described as rule by military moderates (terms not usually paired together) because they used existing civilian institutions and bureaucracies to govern on military terms. The subtext, however, was the gradual yet perceptible reduction of political rights and the suppression of dissent. Over the next five years, the military enacted legislation that created an absolute military dictatorship.

The first of these Institutional Acts, passed in 1964, declared that the cleansing of Brazil's corrupt political system had begun. The Act affirmed the 1946 constitution and then did an about-face and

cancelled presidential elections. Presidential powers were increased and included the discretion to suspend political rights and remove elected officials for suspected corruption and subversion. The Act had effectively prevented left-wing political parties from contesting elections because anyone elected could be removed for subversion. The government also took control of Labor unions and farmers' organizations which the military considered a safe haven for communist organizers and agitators.

Castelo's government then called for tough economic measures to fight inflation and attract foreign (mainly US) investment. This included a guarantee against expropriation of new foreign companies and ventures. It was an unhappy time for workers; strikes were banned, wages rolled back and social welfare programs reduced. The result was that Brazil's poor got poorer. Not surprisingly, resistance grew and the military responded with a second Institutional Act in October 1965. The Act further reduced democracy, regulated acceptable parties and decreed that only candidates approved by the government could run for office. In addition, the president could dissolve Congress and rule by decree. The President controlled the Supreme Court, appointed pro-military judges and anyone charged with subversion was tried by a military tribunal instead of a civilian court.

Institutional Act no. 3 was passed in February 1966. The military extended its power to the hinterland and ended the election of state governors and city mayors. These changes were codified in the Constitution of 1967. The following year, 1968, was the year of worker and student rebellion, protests and illegal strikes in Brazil as elsewhere. The normally pliant Congress refused to support the president when he ordered the leader of the opposition removed for supporting the students. This led to Institutional Act no. 5 which suspended the 1967 constitution, dissolved Congress and state legislatures, suspended **habeas corpus**, tightened censorship and signalled the end of civil rights and the start of violent oppression.

In November 1969, General Emilia Garrastazu Medici (1969–74) took office with significantly more power than Vargas had during the *Estado Novo*. The opposition went underground and began urban guerrilla warfare. The government's counterinsurgency tactics focused on attacking the guerrillas along with their families, friends and associates. Organised crime increased and the police and the military were supplemented by private death squads to whom the government turned a blind eye. It was vigilante justice, instilling a reign of terror.

### **Brazil's economic turnaround**

In 1967, Brazil's economic planners had reduced government spending and instituted wage and price controls to fight inflation. The measures worked, inflation fell, and the economy, fuelled by foreign investment and loans, experienced an average five year growth rate of 10% of GDP. It was called the Brazilian miracle and admirers touted the success as an example for others to follow. The recovery had significant shortcomings. The growth was unequal with the greatest gains in the economically stable and wealthy coffee and industrial sectors. In the rural areas, growth was otherwise

**Habeas corpus** literally means "produce the body," and is a time-honoured protection in democratic legal systems against incarceration without being charged or put on trial.

stagnant. Wealth was increasingly concentrated in the pockets of fewer and fewer Brazilians. The earnings of 5% of Brazilians accounted for 39% of the national income while the low-income earners accounted for 12% (a drop of 6% since the military takeover). The plight of the poor was made worse by growing unemployment lines and the rapid reduction of social services. By 1973, the recovery had ended. Brazil was an oil-importing country and with OPEC's price gouging started a worldwide recession that had a big effect on Brazil's export economy. The nation was required to borrow large sums of money to support itself, increasing national debt.

### The end of the dictatorship

A few years earlier, President Ernesto Geisel had promised a "distensão," a gradual end of the dictatorship and the return of political rights. Under Geisel, there was less repression and public debate was tolerated to some extent. Geisel's replacement, João Figueiredo, stated publically that it was time for the army to return to the barracks and return government to the civilians. He signed an amnesty that released political prisoners and set to work dismantling the dictatorship. Why, after 15 years in power, did the military decide it was time to relinquish power? The nation was safe from revolution. It was evident that the military's economic plan had not solved Brazil's problems. Despite considerable growth in some areas of the economy, the basic problems of poverty, social injustice, illiteracy, poor healthcare, and regional disparities had been made worse. There was considerable pressure on the government for a return to civilian rule.

### The military regime in Argentina, 1976–82

In the spring of 1973, after two decades in exile, Juan Perón made a triumphant return to Argentina. In October he was elected president and his new wife Isabel became vice president. The Perónist Party had made it happen. The Party had been outlawed during the years following Perón's departure but had been an active and influential force in Argentina after the ban was lifted. The euphoria of Perón's return was short-lived. On July 1, 1974, he suffered a fatal heart attack (he was 78). Isabel took over, becoming the first female president in Latin America but her term in office was characterized by political and economic instability. On March 24, 1976, she was ousted by a military junta lead by General Jorge Rafael Videla.

The business community had started the coup when it approached the military to restore order. They were concerned about the growing number of foreign businessmen being kidnapped by urban guerrillas and held for ransom (170 in 1973 alone). The armed wing of the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (Peoples' Revolutionary Army or ERP) had exploded dozens of bombs and targeted key government officials including planting a bomb under the bed of the Chief of the Federal Police. These tactics scared off potential foreign investors and the rebels' war chests were brimming with ransom money to buy weapons. To make matters worse, the economy was collapsing, inflation reached 17,000% in 1976. Labor abandoned the Perónists and joined forces with right-wing thugs and death squads. In 1975

alone, 137 soldiers and police were killed by the guerrillas. The country was in a state of anarchy. In September 1975, leaders of the Argentine Industrial Union, comprised of the nation's foremost business leaders, met with the army commander General Jorge Rafael to plan a coup. Six months later, the military was back in power.

### The process for national reconstruction

By the time of the takeover, the military had become accustomed to governing and considered themselves the guardians of the nation. They determined that it was their mission to impose order on an unruly and revolutionary civilian population, cleanse the society of communism, populism and collectivism and steer the nation along the path of order and security. They were willing to use any means necessary to achieve these goals. Unlike in Brazil, they did not assume power gradually, but took over the entire nation from the start. The new regime was headed by three officers who held the reins of power until 1981. Generals Jorge Rafael Videla and Orlando Ramon Agosti and Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera all took a turn at the presidency, effectively running it as a triumvirate.

Shortly after taking power they declared their intentions and promised a fundamental reorganization of the nation, under a plan known as *El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (The Process for National Reconstruction). The *Proceso* was based on the model provided by **General Pinochet** in Chile: the economic guide was supplied by **Milton Friedman**, from the Chicago School of Economics, who favoured supply side capitalist solutions; the military tactics were based on the measure applied by the French counterinsurgency in the Algerian civil war. The *Proceso* had three goals: reinstate the essential values of the state (as defined by the military), eliminate subversion, and promote economic development. A military model was imposed on the courts and civil service, and democracy was suspended with opposition political parties and unions outlawed. The constitution was ignored and elected assemblies were dissolved. Admiral Massera became the regime's first president with the self-declared mandate that: "God has decided that we should have the responsibility of designing the future."

### Economic policy

The first step was to control inflation and reinvigorate the economy. The goal was to reintegrate Argentina into the world economy, reduce state control and end ISI policies and tariffs. The measures were draconian. Real wages were reduced, social welfare benefits were stopped and foreign investment and loans flooded the economy. Similar to Brazil, the lower classes suffered the most as the standard of living plummeted, unemployment increased and government support dried up. The importation of cheap foreign goods overwhelmed Argentinean industry that had been protected for so long by the ISI and now found they were unable to compete. The government took



The ruling triumvirate: (left to right) Massera, Videla and Agosti. These men orchestrated the 1976 coup and "Dirty War." They were later tried and convicted of war crimes.

**General Augusto Pinochet** ousted the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende in a coup on September 11, 2003, with the covert support of the CIA. Pinochet's regime was infamous for its brutality and became the example for the "Dirty War".

**Milton Friedman** was an influential, Nobel-Prize winning economist from the University of Chicago. In the 1960s, he rejected Keynesian economics and argued that it would cause stagflation (high inflation and minimal economic growth). He advocated reduced taxation, privatization and deregulation of industry.

over all institutions capable of challenging its authority: Congress, the courts, political parties, unions and the press.

### **"The Dirty War", 1976–81**

The military's strategy was simple: eliminate dissidents and guerrillas, their families and friends, along with anyone else associated with the guerrillas. The terror would last until Argentina was purified. In that sense, the Dirty War was brilliant in its excesses. Between 10,000 and 30,000 Argentineans vanished. They were called *los desaparecidos* (the disappeared). No records were kept of their arrest, detention, torture, killing or the disposal of their bodies. The majority were unarmed civilians, students, unionists and Perónists who disappeared because they protested against the junta's policies. Over 340 camps and torture centers were secretly constructed throughout the countryside, the most infamous being an abandoned automobile factory where thousands were executed. The government steadfastly denied their existence or any knowledge of whereabouts of the *desaparecidos*.

The second tactic involved special counterterrorist units that hunted and destroyed armed guerrilla groups. The most important being the Soviet-backed *El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, (People's Liberation Army) which was responsible for dozens of bombings, kidnappings and murders. The ERP was eventually driven from the cities and fled to the countryside with the army in hot pursuit. They won a few skirmishes early on but was defeated in a series of pitched battles between 1976 and 1979. About 8,600 *detenido desaparecido* (detained disappeared) were eventually released from detention camps. Several thousand had been imprisoned for five years or more.

International attention was aroused by the *Madres desparacido* (mothers of the disappeared), a grass roots protest movement that met each Sunday in Plaza de Mayo in front of the presidential palace. They demanded the government release information on the whereabouts of their sons and daughters who had disappeared during the dirty war. No information was forthcoming. In fact, the government denied any wrongdoing or knowledge of the "disappeared." Initially, the government ignored the protest movement, but this became increasingly difficult in the face of growing international awareness of the human rights abuses. The *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* played a significant role in undermining the junta and in bringing those responsible to justice.

### **The end of the dictatorship**

By 1979, the Argentinian military dictatorship had soundly defeated the insurgents but like Brazil had failed to stimulate the economy. In 1981, the GNP had fallen by 11%, stagflation had returned, the national debt had substantially increased and unemployment and poverty seemed unsolvable. A resurgent labor movement took to the streets. The triumvirate had been replaced by General Leopoldo Galtieri, who led the invasion of the *Malvinas* (Falkland) Islands in April 1982. This short but costly war with the United Kingdom ended in defeat and the end of the dictatorship. In 1983, Argentina held its first elections in nearly a decade.



## Military regimes: an assessment

Brazil and Argentina were two examples of repressive military regimes that dominated Latin America for two decades during the 1960s and 1970s. These regimes emerged as a direct response to the success of the Cuban Revolution and Fidel Castro's threat to export revolution throughout the region. Following the Cuban Revolution, euphoria swept Latin America among left-wing radicals and dissidents suggesting that political change was inevitable. But the launch of a coordinated pre-emptive strike by the military, supported and to a large extent orchestrated by the United States, put an end to the aspirations of those national groups inspired by the Cuban example, also giving rise to a more deadly Latin American version of McCarthyism. If the anti-revolutionary regimes were successful in stopping communism they did not solve the economic or social disparities. The gap between rich and poor increased and the rights of women, workers and visible minorities made no headway. Moreover, these regimes were willing to suspend democracy and use wholesale, indiscriminate violence, incarceration and torture to prevent opposition and populist movements from gaining root. These regimes still casts a shadow over Latin America. Many of those most responsible for the terror, notably Augusto Pinochet of Chile and the Argentinean triumvirate of Agosti, Massera and Videlo, were given **political amnesty** or died before they were prosecuted. Many of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* died without ever knowing what happened to their children, but 20 years on their fate is no longer in doubt.

### Extended discussion point

- 1 To what extent were the military dictators justified in using the tactics they employed to prevent a Castro-style revolution?
- 2 How do these tactics compare to the investigations of Senator Joe McCarthy, and the repression of civil liberties for communist sympathisers in the US?
- 3 How real was the threat of Soviet-style communism taking root in Latin America?

### Discussion point

#### A question of compensation

State sponsored oppression of its citizens takes on many forms. During the Second World War, following Pearl Harbor, the US and Canadian government stripped citizens of Japanese ancestry of their constitutional rights, seized their property and interned them behind barbed wire in camps for the duration of the war. Decades later, the US and Canadian governments apologized and paid compensation to the internees or their families.



Should the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* or their families receive an official apology and compensation from the Argentinean government?

**Political amnesty** After the Second World War, Allied jurists and prosecutors created a new category of international law called "Crimes Against Humanity", defined as the indiscriminate use of violence against civilians. Japanese and German leaders were tried, convicted and executed or sentenced to life imprisonment. The International Court of the Hague is responsible for prosecuting war criminals and recently convicted Serbian leaders who were responsible for the ethnic cleansing of Croatia in the early 1990s. In 2002, the Court decided that forced disappearance constituted a crime against humanity.

The situation in Latin America was different because it was the national governments of Argentina or Brazil that suspended civil rights and murdered their own citizens. In 1985, nine high ranking leaders of the Argentinian junta including Videla, Massera and Agosti were tried and convicted by six Argentine judges and sentence to life imprisonment. In 1989 and 1990 President Carlos Menem granted the generals amnesty. The amnesty laws were overturned by the Argentine Supreme court in 2005 but by then most had died of natural causes. As a consequence, they spent virtually no time in jail for their actions.