

# NAHUEL MORENO

## 1982: THE REVOLUTION BEGINS



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1983

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**English Translation:** Daniel Iglesias

**Cover and interior design:** Daniel Iglesias

**Editor notes:** Daniel Iglesias

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[cehus2014@gmail.com](mailto:cehus2014@gmail.com)



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# Foreword

Nahuel Moreno (1924-1987) went into exile on 1 July 1976 after the genocidal military dictatorship was installed in March of that year. Seven years later, in June 1982, when the military surrendered to the English, a massive mobilisation in the Plaza de Mayo repudiated it and forced the resignation of the dictator General Galtieri. A few days later, the last representative of the military junta took office, General Bignone, who handed over power in December 1983 to the president-elect, the Radical Raul Alfonsín.

As soon as Galtieri fell, Moreno began to elaborate and discuss in the leadership of the Argentine PST and his international current to define the changes and the new situation in the country after the defeat in the Malvinas war. He quickly concluded that there were conditions for his return to the country, even if it was in conditions of rigorous secrecy. He returned and for several months was living inside party premises, without announcing his return to the party or most of the leadership.

One of his first works, available at [www.nahuelmoreno.org](http://www.nahuelmoreno.org), was the *Letter from afar*, discussed in the central committee in November 1982. In it, he explained his definitions of the change of stage in the country after the resignation of the dictator Galtieri, the assumption of Bignone, the characteristics of the “molecular” but massive rise and the rearrangement of the slogans in the face of the new situation.

In March 1983 there was a meeting of the international leadership, in which Moreno presented an extensive report, available at [www.nahuelmoreno.org](http://www.nahuelmoreno.org), with the title *Argentina: a triumphant democratic revolution*.

Based on the progress made in the elaboration on the changes in the stage, the situation, the program and the slogans for the intervention of the party, in May 1983 Moreno published this work, *1982: The revolution begins*, in which he exposed the Party positions since the end of the government of Isabel Peron and the military coup of 1976, the harsh years of repression and genocide of the dictatorship, the Malvinas war and its consequences, the resumption of the workers’ and popular rise, the evolution of the Peronist bourgeois movement and the guidelines for the construction of the revolutionary party.

Also available at [www.nahuelmoreno.org](http://www.nahuelmoreno.org) are two other later works linked to the elaborations on the great events of those years: *Argentina: Party cadres’ school* (1984), and *Revolutions of the 20th Century* (1984).

All notes are by the editors.

**The editors**

December 2021

# Introduction

In June 1982, General Bignone<sup>1</sup> took over the government of Argentina, having gained the support of all the bourgeois parties in the country, primarily from the two major parties, the Peronist and the Radical. For the author of this work, this date has become part of national history. Without wanting to exaggerate, we consider it has been the most important event so far this century. It is the final fall of the bloodiest and most totalitarian regime we have known in Argentina. The total collapse of the genocidal dictatorship established in March 1976, which kidnapped and murdered tens of thousands of people.

Hence, it has significance far greater than other historical facts that can be compared to. The introduction of the secret ballot and the victory of Yrigoyen<sup>2</sup> in 1916, for example, had lesser importance. It defeated a conservative regime sustained by electoral fraud; but this regime, compared with the one of Videla,<sup>3</sup> was a lady's college or Emmaus workers.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the Peronist electoral victory of 1946, which finally liquidated the "infamous decade"<sup>5</sup> and the "patriotic fraud", is much less important. It was the defeat of a regime that, in 16 years, did not even assassinate 20 political opponents. In terms of horrors, there is no comparison between conservative governments or those of the "infamous decade" and the last military dictatorship.

June 1982 is, therefore, the dividing date between two stages. The differences between them are so abysmal that can be felt. During 1981, any person who met in his home with his friends to criticise the military regime was in certain danger, if they were discovered, of being kidnapped, tortured or murdered. Since Bignone took over, this same person walked the streets across the

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- 1 **Reynaldo Bignone** (1928–2018) was a Argentine general who served as dictatorial President of Argentina from 1 July 1982 to 10 December 1983. In 2011, he was sentenced to life prison for his role in the kidnappings, torture, and murders during the time he was in power.
  - 2 **Hipolito Yrigoyen** (1852-1933), was an Argentine politician, a relevant figure in the Radical Civic Union, twice elected as president of the Argentine Nation. He was the first Argentine president to be democratically elected, through secret and mandatory male suffrage established by the Saenz Peña Law of 1912. His first term began in 1916, thus opening the historical period known as the first radical presidencies. He was overthrown in 1930 by a coup led by Jose Felix Uriburu.
  - 3 **Jorge Rafael Videla** (1925–2013) was the general who led the genocidal coup of March 1976 together with Admiral Massera and Brigadier Agosti. Between 1976 and 1978 he served as the de facto presidency of Argentina, of that first Military Junta.
  - 4 The **Emmaus** movement was founded in France by the Capuchin Franciscan priest Abbé Pierre. In 1947, Pierre rents a run-down house in Neuilly-Plaisance, 14 km east of Paris. He rebuilds it and opens an international youth hostel which he names "Emmaus", as a symbol of renewed hope. The guiding principle was "Serve those worse off than yourself before yourself. Serve the most in need first."
  - 5 The **Infamous Decade** in Argentina is the name given to the 13 years that began in 1930 with the coup d'état against President Hipolito Yrigoyen by Jose Félix Uriburu. This decade was marked by lack of popular participation, prosecution to the opposition, torture to political prisoners, growing dependence of Argentina from British imperialism, and the growth of corruption.

country screaming “*it will end the military dictatorship*”. Or worse, like “*the military of the Process<sup>6</sup> are all murderers*” or “*firing squad to all the military who sold the nation*”. And, with very few exceptions, absolutely nothing happened to them.

The work that follows aims to analyse and define what happened in the country since the fall of Galtieri<sup>7</sup> in June 1982 and the new government of Bignone. We will attempt to scientifically define what is self-evident: that a new stage opened or a new political regime emerged. It is not simply to note obvious facts, like those mentioned above, but to define the phenomenon that took place, the reasons for this dramatic change, and the prospects that have opened in Argentina.

Nahuel Moreno

May 1983

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6 The **National Reorganisation Process** (often simply “the **Process**”) was the name used by its leaders for the genocidal military dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983, and established a “systematic plan” of state terrorism and the disappearance of persons.

7 **Leopoldo Galtieri** (1926–2003) was the Argentine military ruler who initiated the disastrous 1982 war with Great Britain over the Malvinas Islands during his brief period as the head of the military junta that ruled Argentina in 1976–1983. The revolutionary mobilisation in June 1982, repudiating Argentina’s ignominious surrender led to the almost immediate downfall of Galtieri and the downfall of the junta itself and the call to elections in 1983.

## CHAPTER I

# The triumphant revolution

### Isabel's government and the putsch of March 1976

March 1976 saw the putsch that brought to power a sinister military dictatorship, imposing and maintaining for six years a tight and stable counter-revolutionary regime, called the “National Reorganisation Process”. In many respects, the Process was the continuation of the reactionary government of Isabel Peron, as evidenced by the kidnappings and murders perpetrated under both regimes. But there were crucial differences between them. The key difference was that Isabel could not defeat the working class. On the contrary, the rise of the struggles triggered by the “Cordobazo”<sup>8</sup> of 1969 remained, broadly and with the inevitable ups and downs, until the end of Isabel's government. The best proof was the great general strike against Isabel and her ministers Rodrigo<sup>9</sup> and Lopez Rega<sup>10</sup> in 1975, preceded by the factory occupations of 1973 during Campora's<sup>11</sup> government and followed by the almost spontaneous development of a new general strike against Rodrigo's successor, Minister Mondelli.<sup>12</sup> The betrayal of the Peronist trade union bureaucracy prevented the realisation and success of this new general strike that would surely have overthrown Isabel herself and prevented the coup. But the fact is that, in 1975, the working class was as much or more combative than when the Cordobazo.

Precisely the government of Isabel (July 1974 to March 1976) lived from crisis to crisis because its political project was to put the workers into line, closing the pre-revolutionary stage that

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8 **Cordobazo** refers to an important worker's and students' uprising that happened in Argentina on 29 May 1969, in the city of Cordoba, one of the most important industrial cities of the country. Its most immediate consequence was the fall of the military dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía and, four years later, the return to elections

9 **Celestino Rodrigo** (1915-1987) was an Argentine engineer and politician, who served as Minister of Economy of Argentina during the government of María Estela (Isabel) Martínez de Perón. He is remembered for having applied a policy of strong adjustment: a devaluation of 60 per cent of the value of the currency and a sharp price increase of fuels and energy. He was forced to resign by the workers' mobilisation against his measures, popularly known as Rodrigazo.

10 **Jose Lopez Rega** (1916-1989) was a politician and Argentine minister, known for his influence on Juan Domingo Perón and María Estela (Isabel) Martínez de Perón and organising, from the position of Minister of Social Welfare, the Triple-A, a paramilitary right-wing terrorist group. His influence increased rapidly since 1973, especially after Perón's death in mid-1974, becoming a virtual prime minister because of his influence on Isabel Perón, to the point that almost all the cabinet was made up of men of his trust, promoted by him. Nicknamed “the Sorcerer” by his adversaries for his affinity to esotericism.

11 **Hector Jose Campora** (1909-1980) was an Argentine politician. Perón chose him as his “personal delegate” in 1971. As presidential candidate for Frejuli and having the Conservative Solano Lima as his VP, he won the March 1973 election with 49.5% of the votes. Perón forced him to resign on 13 July 1973, and the president of the Congress, Raúl Lastiri became interim president. Lastiri called a new election and General Perón and his wife María Estela (Isabel) Martínez de Perón were elected President and Vice President in September 1973.

12 **Emilio Mondelli** (1914–1993) was an Argentine banker, the last Minister of Economy in the government of Isabel Perón. In his brief term, he tried to carry out a brutal economic adjustment plan, trying to balance a budget that had become unmanageable and a situation that seemed uncontrollable after Rodrigazo.



had opened with the Cordobazo. But this project failed again and again because of the tenacious resistance by the workers' movement. Thus, under her government, a wide margin of democratic and parliamentary freedoms remained. Political parties and trade unions, with their internal commissions and delegates committees,<sup>13</sup> remained legal. There was relative freedom of the press and assembly. In short, the government of Isabel was semi-dictatorial, reactionary, but not an iron-fisted counter-revolutionary dictatorship like what would follow because it could not liquidate the pre-revolutionary stage opened with the Cordobazo by defeating the working class.

The Radicals<sup>14</sup> and the political wing of Peronism wanted Isabel to end the pre-revolutionary situation, framing it in a serious and stable bourgeois regime of presidential-parliamentary type, what we Marxists have defined as a democratic reaction or democratic counter-revolution. This desire was shared by the most influential sectors of the military top ranks, not wishing to give a coup for fear to the possible reaction of the workers' movement, proven more than once in the last decades of our history. But Isabel sought to impose herself as a reactionary and totalitarian, Bonapartist type of government, and she failed again and again when hitting the workers' resistance. In this play of Isabelist offensive and workers' counter offensive, the stability of the semi-colonial capitalist system as a whole was threatened. And to this threat was added the systematic provocation of the adventurer guerrilla. The bourgeoisie and the military had no other alternative but to risk giving the counter-revolutionary putsch, taking advantage of the great confusion and paralysis caused by the betrayal of the union bureaucracy within the working class in late 1975 and early 1976, when they refused to continue the strikes until the overthrow of Isabel.

Thus, the semi-dictatorial semi-parliamentary regime of Isabel Peron was overthrown and, what is more important, the working masses were dramatically defeated. The pre-revolutionary stage opened with the Cordobazo was closed. And the first openly counter-revolutionary regime ever known in Argentina took over.

## The military dictatorship

As of the military coup, all democratic freedoms are drastically suppressed. Workers' organisations are placed under government control, the activity of political parties is frozen, censorship is imposed and all social and cultural life is controlled. The military dictatorship massifies and institutionalises methods of selective civil war, the kidnappings and assassination of labour, union, political and student activists and guerrillas, which were already being applied by Lopez Rega and the union bureaucracy shielded under the acronym of Triple-A.<sup>15</sup> The state, military and police apparatus become a Triple A. Quantity is transformed into quality: hundreds of dead under Isabel become tens of thousands under the dictatorship. The methods of selective civil war, which were an important feature but not the fundamental one of Isabel's government, become the dominant feature of the new regime.

State terror turns not exclusively against the guerrillas. In a few months, the guerrilla's military details and their leadership are annihilated, with their survivors in exile. But the terror continues in a diabolical "crescendo" against everything that was considered progressive.

The working class, abandoned by its cowardly and venal union leadership, suffers a heavy defeat. Its vanguard, the activists who organised and led the great struggles of the period 1969-1975, is murdered by the thousands or forced into exile by hundreds of thousands. For the first time in its history, the Argentine people, astonished, witness with their own eyes what is genocide.

13 In Argentinian labour legislation since the 1940s enterprise or workplace committees are called **internal commissions**. In enterprises with a large number of workers, the workers elect their delegates and these form the **delegates committee**; then the delegates committee elect a smaller internal commission.

14 **Radicals**: followers of the Radical Civic Union (UCR), a centre-right bourgeois political party founded in 1891.

15 The **Argentine Anticommunist Alliance** (usually known as **Triple-A** or **AAA**) was an extreme right-wing terrorist group in Argentina under the government of Peron in 1974, encouraged by a sector of Peronism, the trade union bureaucracy, the Federal Police, and the Armed Forces. It was responsible for the disappearance and death of almost 700 people

The change in the balance of power between classes is abrupt. The working class goes from the offensive in the previous period to a retreat in disarray. The bourgeoisie launched into a relentless attack.

This change in the relations between the classes produced, as I could not be otherwise, a change of government or state regime. Isabelism was a reactionary regime but with a wide range of democratic freedoms: parties and parliament still existed and had real weight, although not dominant, in the system of government. There were unions and within them, at the level of grassroots organisations, internal commissions and delegates committees, a wide swath of the working class had defeated the union bureaucracy and imposed class-struggle or left leaderships. The Process, however, suppressed this institutional play, liquidating parliament and cancelling the role of political parties. It thus inaugurated a totalitarian regime, seated in the government of the Armed Forces, whose first act was to remove every vestige of workers' democracy. The military took control of many unions and in the rest, the mandate of bureaucrats was extended indefinitely. Internal commissions and delegates committees were destroyed. Activists and leaders of the left or class struggle were killed or forced to leave the companies and even the country.

The highest institution of Government in the Process is the Junta of Commanders in Chief. It does not emerge, as in Pinochet's Chile, an absolute and omnipotent dictator. In this regard, the Argentine regime resembles the Uruguayan, where the military ruled through a weak messenger (in their case civilian), without their own strength. The collegiate power that was expressed in the Military Junta went to the extreme as soon as it began to descend the steps of the state apparatus. The so-called "military feudalism" consisted of the distribution of one-third of said apparatus for each armed force. In this third, which included from some ministries to radio and television stations, through the provincial governments, neither the president nor the Junta was in charge. The ministers and governors were from the army, navy and air force and only obeyed and were accountable to the respective Commander in Chief.

## The murderous Junta falls

As of Argentina's defeat in the Malvinas War in June 1982, the situation changes abruptly at all levels. The fundamental change that takes place is the political regime: the Process no longer exists.

Galtieri falls and the Military Junta was dissolved. General Bignone assumes the government appointed exclusively by the army and supported by the parties. All the legal structure of the Process falls apart, reflecting the fall of the regime with its institutions. According to the Process's "Statutes", the highest organ of State was the Junta, but this disappears. The president should be appointed by the Junta but is appointed by a single armed force, the Army. The "political ban" is still in force, but the parties are called formally and solemnly to legitimise the new president before he assumes (and as an indispensable condition for him to do it).

The first government action by Bignone will be to lift the "political ban", a belated recognition of the new situation. Since the fall of Galtieri, the political parties already had gone from being "frozen" to being arbiters of the situation. And, in fact, from their meeting with Bignone forwards they go to be made co-rulers, displacing the Junta of Commanders in Chief and becoming the decisive factor for holding the government.

Instead of a strong and totalitarian government as were those of the Process, the government of Bignone (June 1982 to November 1983) is weak, rather pitiful. Instead of censorship and totalitarianism, the most democratic era the country has seen in the last 50 years is opened.

The press achieves a high degree of freedom. Any political current publishes what it wants, including the Trotskyists and revolutionary socialists. Marxist newspapers, magazines and books are sold freely. Censorship is becoming extinct.

Political parties open thousands of premises, including the Trotskyists, Maoists and the former Montoneros,<sup>16</sup> who act as internal factions of Peronism. Anybody pastes posters or paint walls at will.

Any public meeting or demonstration requesting the appropriate police authorisation gets it instantly. And if it does not request, it is the all same because not only is it not repressed but the police cuts traffic to facilitate it.

The military chiefs, denounced public or semi-publicly of having directed kidnappings and murders with absolute power and ungrudgingly and with guaranteed impunity, start going to jail.

This does not mean that counter-revolutionary elements from the past have not survived. Under Bignone are killed Dupont, Dalmiro Flores, Pereyra Rossi and Cambiasso, but they are four killings in 15 months, and previously there were thousands per year. The second general strike was declared illegal, but the strike was carried out and they could not take reprisals. A march of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo was banned, but the march was held and they could not repress it. Some publications were censored, but the own judges appointed by the Process lifted the censorship.

Specifically, from June last year, Argentina is a completely different country, which has nothing to do with the previous one. We are living through a stage or regime (or whatever we want to call it) quite different from that of horror and terror we suffered for six years and three months between the coup of March 1976 and June 1982. Who does not see and recognise that before and after this date we have two totally and absolutely different situations is an incorrigible sectarian.

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16 **Montoneros** was the main Peronist guerrilla organisation in Argentina. It was born encouraged by Peron himself. In 1973 it supported the brief government of Hector Jose Campora, who was quickly overthrown by Peron. On 1 May 1974, Peron drove them out from the massive rally of the day. It pursued guerrilla warfare between 1970 and 1979. It was primarily composed of young men and women of the middle class and formed in Catholicism.

## CHAPTER II

# The genesis of the revolution

The fall of the counter-revolutionary regime in June 1982 and the beginning of a new regime or stage, of a democratic type, with the rise of Bignone, did not happen by spontaneous generation, nor was it lightning in a clear sky. Like any phenomenon, it has a history that explains it, a process that leads to it, a genesis. This process has three clearly defined stages or periods.

The first period begins with the economic crisis and the government of Viola<sup>17</sup> and extends throughout the government of Galtieri until the start of the Malvinas War. Although the government was still relatively solid. This period is characterised by the bursting of the deepest economic crisis since 1929 in Argentina's semi-colonial capitalist system, and to its tune begins the military government crisis. The dictatorship loses the almost massive support that until then had been offered by the middle class and the working class and popular resistance expands. The situation evolves from counter-revolutionary throughout 1981 to pre-revolutionary.

The second period is the war itself. It begins on 2 April 1982 and culminates with the military defeat in the South Atlantic. In this period, the breaking of the mass movement that supports the reconquest of the islands combines with the colossal intensification of the military dictatorship's economic and institutional crisis. The evolution of the situation from counter-revolutionary to pre-revolutionary accelerates to the maximum and becomes directly revolutionary.

The third period begins with the military defeat, continues with the fall of Galtieri and culminates with the government of Bignone, which opens a period or regime of democratic freedoms as we had never seen in Argentina. This is the period of the revolutionary crisis, which buries the old regime and gives rise to a new one.

## First period: the crisis of the Government and the system

At the beginning of 1980, the country is shaken by the worst economic crisis of the post-war period. More than just a crisis, it is the collapse of the national capitalist economy after decades of degradation and decay. The sinking of the largest financial groups in the country (Trozzo,<sup>18</sup> Greco,<sup>19</sup>

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17 **Roberto Eduardo Viola** (1924–1994) was an Argentine general who briefly served as president of Argentina from 29 March to 11 December 1981 during the military dictatorship known as the National Reorganisation Process (1976–1983). Viola succeeded General Jorge Rafael Videla.

18 **Jose Rafael Trozzo** owned the Banco de Intercambio Regional (BIR), which was the main Argentine private bank and was closed by the Central Bank at the end of March 1980 for its insolvency. In political circles, the closure was described as the worst “financial scandal of the century” and a “consequence of the economic policy” of the time.

19 **Hector Greco** was president of the holding company that bore his name. Together with his partners, his brother Jose and businessman Jorge Basil, they became owners of more than 100 companies. Among the best known were Furloti, Resero, Arizu, Agua Villavicencio, Mendoza daily and Banco de Los Andes. The Greco group came to concentrate 30% of the province's GDP. In April 1980 the Central Bank of the Nation liquidated Banco De Los Andes. The fall of Banco

Sasetru<sup>20</sup>), the spectacular flight of capital, the bankruptcy of the famous monetarist policy with its “tables” that kept depressed the dollar against the national currency, the uncontrollable run of the dollar, the dizzying inflation, showed the utter failure of the economic policy of Videla-Martinez de Hoz,<sup>21</sup> direct agents of imperialist and national financial capital. This economic catastrophe caused changes in the relations between classes, between the different sectors, and between all of them and the government.

The middle class, which had thrived and paraded as a tourist all over the planet thanks to the crumbs left to them by the financial “homeland” from the millions they took from the super-exploitation of workers and the plundering of the country, found from one day to the next, that the “easy money” had run out. The very same who had celebrated the genocide because it offered them the order and security to enjoy in peace the feast, broke violently with the dictatorship. From then on, they placed themselves on the side of the working class and the working people, the only ones who had been facing the regime from the beginning, without losing the instability and cowardice typical of the petty bourgeoisie. This was the most important change in the situation because it left the dictatorship without any mass social support. The passage of the middle class to the field of the working class and the opposition to the regime is precisely the clearest symptom that the situation begins to transform into pre-revolutionary.

The result was that all the people began to confront the military dictatorship. They did not do it united in a huge movement but in scattered, molecular form. They didn’t have a clear common political axis. This was so because the mass leaderships, Peronism, Radicalism and the union bureaucracy avoided like the plague to raise the slogan “Down with dictatorship” and to bring together all the rebellions in a single anti-dictatorial and democratic movement and action.

The struggles, the resistance took then fragmented and partial objectives, although all of them were caused by the military regime. They fought for economic problems in the factories, in resistance to the collapse of regional economies, protesting against censorship by intellectuals and artists, claiming for those missing among their relatives and by the general hatred against the economic policy of the dictatorship.

The call for a general strike by the CGT-Brasil,<sup>22</sup> on 22 July 1981, had an important but only partial response. The actions by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo did not find a massive response. However, they were already signs, still weak, of the profound change in the mentality and attitude of the mass movement that had begun their active resistance to the regime.

In the field of the bourgeoisie, the crisis which had begun in the economy, extended and deepened at all levels. The bourgeois parties, mainly Peronism and Radicalism became divided into public factions. The different sectors of the bourgeoisie could not agree among themselves and faced each other when it was time to define an economic outcome and their relations with the government. The union bureaucracy crystallised its division into two centrals and several factions — the “20”, “25” — with their own discipline.

This generalised crisis began to hit the heart of the regime itself. It was already in tachycardia when, after long deliberations, General Viola was appointed as successor to Videla in March 1981. And it had already suffered the first heart attack when Viola was forced to leave the presidency

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De Los Andes left all the group’s companies bankrupt, leaving more than 1,500 employees without work. The same happened with agricultural sectors, vine growers and with clients who had used this bank with their savings.

20 **Sasetru** was a food company in Argentina, which became one of the most important in its country until shortly before its bankruptcy in 1981.

21 **Jose Alfredo Martinez de Hoz** (1925–2013) was an Argentine executive and policymaker. He served as Minister of the Economy under the military dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla, between 1976 and 1981. He is considered a political representative of the “Chicago school” of economic liberalism at any cost and intimately linked to international financial agencies and centres.

22 In 1979 the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) split itself into two sectors. The sector supporting the military dictatorship and with the approval of the latter kept the traditional headquarters in Azopardo Street, while the sector more in opposition to the dictatorship had headquarters in Brasil Street. They became then known as CGT-Azopardo and CGT-Brasil.



in December the same year, after failing in his attempts to overcome the economic crisis and the mounting of a ruling party to implement a “Brazilian” style solution. Videla had lasted five years, Viola only six months. The “Statutes” of the Process by which presidents appointed by the Junta of Commanders had lasted three years had ceased to be met for the first time. In December 1981 the third Junta headed by Galtieri assumed power.

Further evidence of the change in the situation was the foundation of the Multiparty in July 1981. The most lucid of the bourgeois leaders alive, the Radical Ricardo Balbin,<sup>23</sup> had a fine sense of smell to detect this change and prepare an outlet for the situation not to evolve to downright pre-revolutionary or directly revolutionary. The title of the founding document of the Multiparty, “Before it’s too late”, speaks for itself.

## Second period: the war opens a revolutionary situation

The initiation of the Malvinas War in April 1982 was a manoeuvre of the most classless and reactionary elements of the regime, perched on the government of Galtieri. Its main goal was trying to divert towards the British the popular hatred against the dictatorship, whose most recent expression had been the demonstration on 30 March by the CGT-Brasil, which resulted in heavy clashes in the streets with the police for the first time since 1976. The famous interview with Galtieri and the recently published reports of the “Rattenbach Commission”<sup>24</sup> show that it had never entered into their heads to make an anti-imperialist war. They foresaw a military, symbolic walk and were confident of winning at the negotiation table because of the alleged support by Yankee imperialism, its fraternal partner and ally in suppressing the masses in Argentina and Central America. They thought that thanks to this hypothetical victory the workers would forget the economic crisis and the crimes of the regime and would earn for themselves six years, at least, to enjoy the power... and the millions of dollars they could keep stealing.

But the effect of the recovery of the Malvinas turned out to be exactly the opposite of what those who caused it expected: instead of averting the crisis, they opened a clear revolutionary situation.

Several miscalculations were tragic for the dictatorship.

The *first miscalculation* came to the fore when Yankee imperialism not only did not support them but instead, together with the other imperialist countries, fully supported British imperialism. Thereafter, the regime was between a rock and a hard place. To win the war against the entire world imperialism it should take revolutionary measures: mobilisation and arming of the entire people, ruthless economic war upon all enemy countries (non-payment of debts and expropriation of their companies), imprisonment of capitalists and executives of enemy powers in concentration camps, calling to the Latin American and “Third World” peoples to the anti-imperialist struggle, demand for military aid from the USSR and other workers states, attacking the British fleet as soon as it was within reach of Argentine weapons and so on. But they were willing to do none of this.

Surrender without a fight and withdrawal of troops was the other “sensible” solution, but it was political suicide because the regime has committed a *second miscalculation* that would be fatal: it had tried to manipulate the masses into supporting “their war”. This attempt, whose first consequence was the great popular demonstration of 3 April, produced the outbreak of the first united anti-imperialist and revolutionary mobilisation of the Argentine mass movement since 1976. The mass movement transformed the insane military adventure, whose ultra-reactionary

23 **Ricardo Balbin** (1904—1981) was an Argentine lawyer and politician, and one of the most important figures of the Radical Civic Union (UCR), for which he was the presidential nominee four times: in 1951, 1958, and twice in 1973.

24 **Rattenbach Commission:** After the defeat in the Malvinas War, President Bignone approved the formation of the Commission for Analysis and Evaluation of Political and Strategic Responsibilities in the South Atlantic Conflict (CAERCAS), better known by the surname of one of its members: Lieutenant General Benjamin Rattenbach. The Commission analysed the responsibilities of the higher command of the Armed Forces related to the Conflict. Its conclusions are known as the Rattenbach Report. The British High Command let it be known several times their opinion that Argentina had all the conditions to defeat them but the military leadership of the war caused Argentina’s defeat.

goal was perpetuating the dictatorship, into a revolutionary mobilisation at the national and Latin American level, against British imperialism, the US and all other imperialist powers. The war and the demonstrations that it caused managed to impose an anti-imperialist front of the Argentina nation with all the world anti-imperialist movements and with the Latin American countries, touched by the imperialist aggression and also attacked themselves by the economic plundering of the big global banks and the IMF. Even more importantly, it managed to weld, with a firm revolutionary will, the working class with all other exploited sectors in a single mass mobilisation. And the goal of this mobilisation was not the preservation of the regime that Galtieri and his men had planned, but to defeat imperialism. As a result, the workers finally overcame the stage of partial, fragmented and defensive pre-war struggles.

Finally, the *third miscalculation* of the dictatorship was to believe the war could overcome the crisis of the regime. Just the opposite happened. Like any war, it brought out all the rot and contradictions of the dictatorship and the semi-colonial capitalist system itself. The bourgeoisie and its parties, almost unanimously, rejected frightened and cowardly the idea of fighting the imperialist senior partner, and it was, in fact, confronted with Galtieri. The Armed Forces moved to the war arena the military feudalism which served them to divide the plunder of the country: at no time did they form a unified command and haggled among themselves what was their part in the sacrifice of men and equipment to keep power in the mainland which for six years they had taken their booty as occupation forces. Sections of the officers were ready to win the war, for professional pride or because of the ideological influence of a stale Catholic nationalist far right-wing, while other sectors were fleeing from combat to seek refuge in the rearguard to make new and lucrative business with food rations, the donations and even arms and ammunition.

The dictatorship was a prisoner of these three miscalculations. It wanted to make a military cakewalk to save its counter-revolutionary regime and ended up embroiled in a war with world imperialism. It wanted to overcome the crisis that corroded it and caused the crisis to explode. And, the worst of the three miscalculations, it called for the mobilisation of the masses for a “patriotic” war and it had as a response the revolutionary anti-imperialist arousal of the workers and the people. When the United States turned to the British side, it could only win the war with revolutionary measures, which in no way was willing to take. The dictatorship thought, as Galtieri confessed and the “Rattenbach Commission” confirmed, to withdraw without fighting but it could not because the masses were in the streets. And thereafter it was a leaf in the storm: neither did it make a serious war nor did it withdraw without a fight. It condemned itself to military defeat, which, for a military regime, is the worst of defeats.

The mass mobilisation began against British imperialism, continued against US imperialism, strengthened ties with Latin American peoples, and finally, given the shameful capitulation, ended facing the own Galtieri and the dictatorship in general, for inept and traitors in conducting the war, as happened when the masses booed and insulted Galtieri in a popular rally in Plaza de Mayo, shouting “*the kids died, the chiefs sold them out*” on 15 June.

The crisis came and struck deeply also in the bourgeoisie and its mass parties. Because the emergence and revolutionary unity of the working people against imperialism was the opposite by the vertex to what the bourgeois and their parties did, which, except for tiny sectors, did not want to break with or confront imperialism. The Pope came to the country from 8 to 12 June to reinforce this defeatist attitude of the bourgeoisie and its parties. His masses, preaching peace when the British began the final struggle to take Puerto Argentino, sought to mobilise the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois masses to impose capitulation. And all the bourgeois parties, along with Stalinism and *Politica Obrera* [Workers Word – PO] called to attend them. This led to a radical distinction between the bourgeoisie and their parties on the one hand and the people on the other. Because who was mobilised to support the war giving it an anti-imperialist character were the people, not the defeatist bourgeoisie. Perhaps who came out of this process worse off was Peronism, which after 40 years of declaiming its character of an anti-imperialist national movement, at the moment of truth was absent without notice.

All these elements led us to define the stage of the war as a revolutionary situation because combined in it was a virtually total crisis of the military regime and all the institutions of the bourgeoisie, including the Armed Forces and political parties, with an offensive, revolutionary emergence of the working class and the people in an immense general mobilisation unified around a revolutionary political axis: the defeat of imperialism.

### Third period: revolutionary crisis and triumph of the revolution

The defeat in the war, with the capitulation of Puerto Argentino on 14 June sparked a new leap in the general crisis of the system and the military regime, bringing it to unsuspected limits, with the fall of Galtieri and the birth of a new regime.

Galtieri was deposed by a palace coup on 16 June and during long days no one could be appointed to replace him. Upon the dissolution of the military Junta, the country has no institutions to rule because the Junta was the fundamental institution of the military regime. “Military feudalism” goes to an extreme because with the Junta disappearing, each armed force continues to do what they please in the sector of the state apparatus it controls, but now without having to be accountable to any institution of national or centralised type.

This situation of total collapse of the, until then, national institutions of bourgeois rule— the Junta and President appointed by it— and the fact that for days and days no other institution or personality appears to fill this void is what we call a *revolutionary crisis*.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the result of this revolutionary crisis was the destruction of the old regime, in other words, of the Process, and the birth of a new regime, which Bignone formally presides, and which is exactly the opposite. Previously, it was a strong, counter- revolutionary, genocidal and totalitarian regime; now, it is a weak regime with very broad democratic freedoms. Previously, the Junta and the President appointed by it ruled. Now, political parties are the principal institutional mainstay of power. Precisely because there was a revolutionary crisis that culminated in the destruction of the old regime and its replacement by a new one diametrically different, we say that in our country a revolution triumphed.

## CHAPTER III

# Bignone in government

### The character of Bignone's government

On 1 July, General Bignone assumed the presidency, finally. The fact that Bignone was a general formally “designated” by other generals could confuse a precise definition of the regime and government. Even more so when, a few months after his inauguration, the Junta of Commanders in Chief is reconstituted. From a formal point of view, of the institutions, it could be thought as a government of the Army supported by the Multiparty that, with the new Junta, becomes a government similar to those of Videla, Viola or Galtieri, supported by and agreed with the political parties.

But this is not the case. What matters is whether the Army has appointed Bignone but rather when and why he is appointed. Before assuming and to do so, Bignone asked for support from all political parties — mainly the Peronist and the Radical — and the trade union bureaucracy. In his meeting with them on 24 June, Bignone said he did not know if he was going to assume or how many days he would last if he was not given such support. The parties controlling the mass movement — the Peronist, with its union bureaucracy, the workers' movement and Radicalism the middle class — give him their absolute support. Thus, they become his strongest institutional support because the Air Force and Navy do not, and possibly neither do important sectors of the Army itself.

This capitulation of the army, this request to political parties for help, is not a favour of the high-ranking officers but is caused by the total crisis of power, by the victorious revolution.

This is evident not only by the leading role assumed by the political parties but by the categorical program of the new government: the complete liquidation from the institutional point of view of the military regime, broad political freedoms and elections in a fixed term. Unlike Videla, Viola and Galtieri, Bignone is not president for the regime, the Process, to perpetuate itself, but rather to finally bury it with a “decent” funeral. He is the administrator of the defeat of the Process, a fact that the three Armed Forces recognise. It is no coincidence that disagreeing on everything human and divine, the old Junta, before bursting into pieces, had agreed on one single point: to call elections and set March 1984 as the deadline for delivery of power.

One of the major tasks given to Bignone's government is to urgently rebuild the unity of the three Armed Forces, a pillar of the bourgeois state. That is, the bourgeoisie and the military themselves recognise that there is a total crisis, of a revolutionary type, which is prolonged, and that it is necessary to restructure the Junta. Hence, this restructuring points fundamentally towards the “home front” of fragmented Armed Forces. It is entirely formal. It does not achieve a solid or strong Junta or to fortify Bignone's government. Never again will the Junta of Commanders in Chief regain its role of the highest governing body, definitely lost with the fall of the regime. And Bignone's government will be extremely weak, with virtually no strength, a living dead prolonging its agony or, as the doctors say, it “has survival” but is already dead. Because it is the child — rather the abortion

— of a successful revolution and because of its utter weakness, we define Bignone's government as Kerenskyst or semi Kerenskyst.

## A new revolutionary situation

The constitution of Bignone's government closes the revolutionary crisis because, somehow or other, it filled the power vacuum that takes place between the fall of Galtieri and his assumption of the presidency during June 1982. But it does not alter the most general characteristic of the situation, which remains revolutionary. Four factors characterise this new stage of the revolutionary situation.

The first factor is the inexorable move towards elections. The second is the extraordinarily broad democratic and legal opening. The third factor is the worsening of the crisis of the semi-colonial capitalist system and, as part of it, of the government and other bourgeois institutions, which become extremely weak. The fourth is the extension of mass mobilisations, presenting as a fundamental feature the appearance on the scene of the working class, with its organisations and traditional methods of struggle, unions, strikes and demonstrations, and general strikes, as the undisputed leader of the working people.

On the first two factors, we have already paused in previous chapters. Let us consider now the third and fourth.

What characterises the stage opened by Bignone is that the mobilisation, of masses, unitary and revolutionary against imperialism during the war, has been transformed into a gigantic struggle against the Armed Forces, against the most terrible expressions of the military government and the Argentine semi-colonial capitalist system. This is the meaning of the large demonstrations against taxes, of land and housing occupations and the resistance to evictions and indexations of rents and hire-purchase instalments, of the insubordination and public protest against high-ranking officers, of the regional mobilisations against a government policy that condemns the provinces to decadence without remedy, the massive growing of the rallies of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo against the genocide and for democratic freedoms and by the chain of police strikes for salary increases and with soup kitchens.

Amid this avalanche of struggles, this massive outbreak of accumulated hatred against the military, the working class breaks with its first general strike on 6 December. A clearly political strike because none of the strikers had any illusion that they would win with it the slightest wage increase. And also, a revolutionary strike because the working class dragged behind itself, massively, the entire working people, small traders and transport owners, self-employed, etc. It was followed by a second general strike in March this year, with the same characteristics, which had a hint of mockery to the grotesque government threats that had declared it "illegal". Without diminishing the importance of popular and democratic mobilisation, general strikes are by far the most important expressions of this extension of the revolutionary rise of the masses.

Parallel to this, the crisis of the entire system continues exacerbating. The police strikes have a significance that goes beyond the economic struggle itself because they question the effectiveness of a key sector of the repressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie. The upper echelons of the Armed Forces — in fact, the institutions themselves — are not only the object of hatred but also of contempt and utter disrespect by the entire population. Nobody fears uniforms and epaulettes any longer. Malvinas veterans insult in a public ceremony the highest officers without anything happening to them. An irate officer points his gun at the head of one of the protesters... and the officer goes to jail. The Commanders in Chief are also insulted by the parents of soldiers killed during what had been planned as solemn ceremonies to award Medals of Military Honour in tribute to their children. General Merlo, governor of Tucuman, declares: "I will send to prison" all teachers who go on strike... and he gets the strike to be unanimous. The same general tries to break, pistol in hand, the strike of his provincial police... and he is removed from office as governor.



But the procession also continues on the inside. All three Forces continue to confront each other publicly at every turn. They take different positions on general strikes, foreign debt, economic policy, the dispute with Chile, the succession of military leaders... After the defeat, there is a major purge of the senior officers of the Navy and the Air Force, not so in the Army. For publicly expressing their positions Admiral Rojas,<sup>25</sup> Zariategui,<sup>26</sup> Galtieri, and Cesio<sup>27</sup> suffer arrests. Almost nothing can be kept secret because there are always “leaks”, even documents qualified as completely confidential. Such is the case of the Rattenbach Commission report, which is made public nearly the same day the Junta of Commanders receives it. The war begins between the different intelligence services, whose most spectacular episode were allegations by Kelly,<sup>28</sup> his abduction and subsequent release. The top brass of the old regime are becoming regulars of the court. Some, like Admiral Massera,<sup>29</sup> go to prison.

Other bourgeois institutions suffer as well. The parties are extremely weak and a wave of panic erupts out in the first weeks of the reorganisation because it seems that nobody wants to join them. Its internal sectors do not reach an agreement and must rely on an exhausting struggle for leadership and candidates. The union bureaucracy remains divided and each of its sectors only cares about tying backroom agreements with military and party factions.

## The bourgeois imperialist counteroffensive

Placed in this difficult situation, the imperialist bourgeois reaction outlines its strategy. It tries using in its favour two elements of the revolutionary situation to neutralise the other two. Specifically, it wants to use the inexorable move to elections and the all-encompassing democracy conquered by the masses to halt and reverse the total crisis of the bourgeois regime and its armed forces and to neutralise and contain the revolutionary mobilisation. They tell the working class and the people, *“Now there is democracy and elections; stop fighting against the semi-colonial capitalist system, the Armed Forces, the regime and government and ‘mobilise’ by joining parties, attending their elections rallies and voting them in the elections.”* The bourgeoisie attempts, through democracy and the elections, won by the masses, to strengthen the military and political parties and establish a stable new regime, based on the institutions defined by the ultra-reactionary 1853 Constitution: a strong president, a parliament dominated by an aristocratic Senate and a justice appointed by the president and this Senate.

For now, this attempt is failing because democratic freedoms have allowed, as we saw, the masses to lose their fear and launch themselves in waves into struggles, deepening the crisis of the

25 **Isaac Rojas** (1906–1993) was an Argentine Admiral of the Navy and de facto Vice President of Argentina from 1955 to 1958. Together with Eduardo Lonardi, he headed the self-titled “Liberating Revolution” coup d’état against Peron in September 1955.

26 Rear Admiral **Horacio Zariategui** (1926–2002), was one of the most critical voices to the military leadership during the Malvinas War.

27 **Juan Jaime Cesio** (1926–2017) was a brigadier of the Argentine Army, noted for having supported human rights organisations during the dictatorship of the National Reorganisation Process, at a time when all the military became accomplices by action or omission. For this, he was persecuted and degraded.

28 **Guillermo Patricio Kelly** (1921–2005) was an Argentine nationalist journalist and activist. In 1981, he denounced the theft from Argentina of 60 million dollars, with 10% of that debt belonging to General Suarez Mason, considering him a “Murderer of the people.” He also said that Suárez Mason worked as a mercenary, training troops to fight in the Caribbean, that he received money from the Nord high command, accused in turn of murdering the brother and two nephews of former president Arturo Frondizi. In 1983, he gained notoriety after formulating a series of complaints related to the P-2 Lodge, the emptying of YPF and the murder of Fernando Branca, in addition to filing a criminal complaint against Emilio Massera. Shortly after, in August, Kelly was kidnapped and severely beaten by a gang led by Anibal Gordon, who claimed to have acted on the orders of General Bignone and the I Corps of the Army.

29 **Emilio Eduardo Massera** (1925–2010) was an Argentine Admiral and a leading participant, together with Jorge Rafael Videla and Orlando Ramon Agosti, in the Argentine coup d’état of 1976, self-titled National Reorganisation Process, that overthrew María Estela Martínez de Peron. Many consider Massera to have masterminded the Junta’s Dirty War against political opponents, which resulted in nearly 13,000 deaths and disappearances, according to official records. Human rights groups put the toll closer to 30,000.

system. Although we cannot rule out, as theoretical hypotheses, that they succeed and achieve their objectives for a short interregnum. In such a case, it would be what we call bourgeois-democratic counter-revolution or reaction.

The best demonstration of the meaning of this bourgeois imperialist politics to overcome the crisis and remove the revolutionary mobilisation with the move towards elections and to a new regime based on the 1853 Constitution is the antinomy that took place between the Multiparty and the two large general strikes. The Multiparty, even though there was no shortage of opportunistic left —like the CP and PO that described it as “opposition” to Bignone— was opposed to the two general strikes. Its rally on 16 December last year had a precise and fundamental purpose: to prevent the first general strike, held 10 days earlier, from shaking the government and the bourgeois parties themselves. At the same time, with this funereal counter-revolutionary march towards bourgeois democracy, it tried to kill two birds with one stone, to gain prestige and stand on centre stage as “opposition” to the government, robbing this position to the working class and its trade union organisations.

It is also true that the rally had a second goal: clinching the deal with the government to ensure the course towards bourgeois democracy was carried out without military constraints, forcing the government to recognise the defeat of the Armed Forces and the fact that it was totally dependent on the bourgeois parties. Therefore, the rally is a rejection of the “consensus” proposed by the Junta of Commanders and rejected by the parties. They did not accept the military conditioning because they wanted to keep their hands free and ample leeway to mount and use the future institutions of bourgeois democracy most elastically and efficiently to channel and control the mass movement rising amid a total, economic and institutional crisis of the bourgeoisie. With the rally, the Multiparty showed the government and the Armed Forces that the bourgeois parties remained the fundamental support of Bignone and would also be it for the future bourgeois-democratic regime. That the power was in the streets and would be in the hands of the working class and the people, if these parties had not taken care of avoiding it by giving it to Bignone, instead of assuming it themselves, as they might have done if they wanted, the day after the fall of Galtieri. And, from then on, it was them, the parties and not the defeated military, the ones in charge of dealing with the revolutionary mass movement, for which they needed the most absolute freedom of action.

In summary, the goal of the Multiparty’s rally was to ratify its support for the government but to remind it that this support would continue if, and only, if Bignone continued administering the suicide of the military regime and the establishment of a bourgeois-democratic regime.

The fact that this policy of bourgeois imperialist reaction has failed to end the crisis of the system and the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses should not hide the fact that, however, has achieved some important successes.

Apparently, it has laid the foundation for overcoming the crisis of the political parties, with an impressive membership that reaches 30 per cent of the electorate. It has sparked a political-electoral passion among workers as we had never seen in our country, despite our people being so politicised. By this means, it is achieving, in some degree, to make us forget the exploitation and colossal economic crisis. It has largely achieved to postpone the clashes against the semi-colonial capitalist system, pushing away the possibility of a general strike to confront the regime, in a total, complete way until its fall.

This is quite a lot for the bourgeois imperialist reaction, which for the time being is content to avoid the outbreak of another revolution and to overcome the crisis of the basic institutions of the new regime that it wants to build, the political parties. Like every manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie in a period of crisis and revolutionary upsurge, it is an ephemeral success, of short flight and contradictory effects. The political passion, for example, is allowing the rupture of a sector of the labour movement with Peronism, which explains the success of MAS [Movement to Socialism] and PO in the field of affiliations. Nonetheless, it is still a victory for the reactionary bourgeois manoeuvre. A short-term success, but dangerous if it becomes an accumulation of successes.

As far as we are concerned, we must draw revolutionary conclusions of the successes in the opposite direction: the general strikes as the most important expression of the revolutionary rise, the deepening, in general terms, of the crisis of the semi-colonial capitalist system and its institutions, the opportunities open to begin winning a sector of the working class to revolutionary socialism.

## CHAPTER IV

# New slogans for a new stage

After the coup d'état in March 1976 inaugurating a counter-revolutionary stage, it is evident that the central slogan of the revolutionary socialist program becomes "Down with the dictatorship!" This slogan summarised the most immediate need of the workers' and popular movement: to get rid of the genocidal regime to regain democratic freedoms and freely reorganise their unions and political parties.

There were, indeed, other slogans of enormous importance: the democratic struggle against repression, the genocide, censorship; the economic struggle for the defence of wages and jobs, cruelly submerged by the bourgeoisie and its regime. But these slogans were only partial aspects revolving around the central slogan against the Process. We called to resist the regime in all these areas but, at the same time, we said the only way to defend wages or regain political freedoms for all people and freedom of organisation for the workers' movement was by overthrowing the dictatorship.

When the economic crisis begins to produce a change in the situation from counter-revolutionary to pre-revolutionary, the central slogans of our program remain the same. They begin to cease to be only for propaganda, as in the previous period, and acquire a more agitational character. But they are the same slogans centred on the same axis: "Down with military dictatorship!", "For the return to the democratic rights of the 1853 Constitution".

This was our main difference with the rest of the "left" and the bourgeois parties. All of them, including and in the first term the CP, did not raise to defeat and expel the regime and return to constitutional rights but they begged for a self-reform, a gradual process of democratic opening controlled by the military. Both Alfonsín<sup>30</sup> and the CP argued, for example, the need for a civilian-military transitional government, and this only after the crisis erupted. *Política Obrera* [Workers Policy], the forerunner of the *Partido Obrero* [Workers Party], meanwhile, was limited to a purely economic and democratist line. They called to fight for wages and freedoms but without focusing these partial struggles on the problem of government, in the denunciation of all and each one of the struggles and partisan activities, in targeting all batteries to achieving this fundamental, immediate task of liquidating the military regime.

What allowed us to succeed in the program and slogans for this stage was our correct analysis in general lines of what had happened in the country with the military coup. We argued that the working class had suffered a tough defeat, but it had not been crushed, as it did happen in Chile and Uruguay. And, therefore, the military regime inevitably could not be stabilised for a long period but that it would go to a total and also revolutionary crisis. From there, it was raised from the first day the task of defeating it as the immediate goal. Otherwise, if the workers' movement had suffered a historic, crushing defeat, to focus even the smallest of its struggles with this offensive criterion, of confrontation with the regime, would have been a grave ultra-leftist mistake, condemning our class

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<sup>30</sup> **Raul Alfonsín** (1927–2009) was one of the main leaders of the bourgeois Radical Civic Union (UCR). He was the president of Argentina between December 1983 and July 1989, following the military dictatorship.

to new and tremendous defeats. The struggles of this period, such as, for instance, the heroic railway strikes, proved us right; they were objective confrontations with the military regime.

Nowadays, when we have already eliminated the dictatorship in just six years, while our Uruguayan and Chilean class brothers have not yet managed to do so in 10 years, it is patently obvious the correctness of our analysis and our program.

## The Malvinas war

Our analysis was confirmed by the Malvinas war. There it took place, although in an unforeseen way, what we had predicted: a defeated but not crushed working class took the first opportunity that presented itself, the scandalous miscalculation of the class enemy and its regime of provoking imperialism, to launch itself massively into revolutionary mobilisation along with the rest of the people, opening a revolutionary situation.

Precisely because we had the correct analysis, we could realise that the recovery of the Malvinas would inevitably lead to this revolutionary rise. And we managed to quickly adapt our central slogans to the new situation.

The revolutionary mass mobilisation ceases to be directly against the government and the regime, to go to confront British imperialism in the beginning, the Yankees, British and the rest of the imperialist powers later and to all of them and the “Argentine” traitors, both civilian and military, finally. We understood that with this new reality the main task and slogan had ceased to be denouncing the government and had become the total support to the war to defeat the imperialist aggressor.

The denunciation of the regime remained essential but we had to do it around the new axis: to win the war against all imperialisms. We said that to win the war we had to end with the attack on the living standards of workers and to give the widest freedoms to the workers’ and popular movement and we denounced the regime for not doing so, thus weakening the chances of success. We said that to win the war we had to take revolutionary measures against capital and the agents of imperialism in the country and denounced the government for not doing so. We said that to win the war we had to arm the people and mercilessly attack from the first day the aggressor fleet and denounced the government for not doing so. We said that to win the war we had to appeal to international solidarity and mobilisation of the peoples oppressed by imperialism, to the workers’ states and the mobilisation of workers in the imperialist countries themselves, and denounced the government for not doing so. In short, we raised a revolutionary program to win the imperialist war, denounced the regime because it was incapable of any kind of consistent anti-imperialism and called to replace it and impose a government that will fight against imperialism in all fields, relying on the popular mobilisation.

Within this framework, we had the great wisdom of calling to not attend the Pope’s counter-revolutionary and pro-imperialist masses, rejecting his slogan of “peace” for being defeatist. In this, we were also alone because all the bourgeois parties, including the Peronist Youth of the “left”, called to attend. And so did the union bureaucrats and the opportunist or centrist left parties, like the CP and PO.

## The slogans for the revolutionary crisis

As of the military defeat, as we already have seen, a short period of revolutionary crisis opened, that is, of a power vacuum, of the collapse of the institutions of the Process, with the fall of Galtieri and the burst of the Junta of Commanders-in-Chief, which lasted until the assumption of Bignone. During this period and the next, we were slow to make an analysis of the new situations and to adapt our slogans and program to this analysis. We shall not dwell in detailing the slowness or in trying to



explain it. We merely note, from our current perspective, what should have been the central slogans of the party.

The revolutionary crisis immediately raised the question of power. There was neither a regime nor an actual government. The old slogan of “Down with the dictatorship!” had become relatively abstract, because “dictatorship”, i.e., the regime had already fallen.

If the issue of government, of power, was raised, it was necessary to meet it with a positive slogan, a proposal of power. This slogan, to be concrete, had to be based on actual institutions that exist or have existed. The working class and the people, throughout their revolutionary mobilisation, had not built their own organisations capable of seizing political power. The trade unions, divided by the Peronist bureaucracy had not had a decisive role in the popular anti-imperialist mobilisation, whereas the bureaucracy itself had not fallen behind in their adherence to defeatist pacifism of the bourgeoisie and the Pope. The unions, with military comptrollers or severely controlled, had not emerged, therefore, as organisations recognised by the people, not even by the working class itself, to take charge of the nation. There were thus no organisations, that is, institutions of power forged by the struggling masses and recognised by all the people.

It was clear that the progressive solution to the revolutionary crisis was still on the ground of bourgeois democracy. The slogan for this short period of revolutionary crisis was Down with Galtieri! Let the Congress of 1976 assume government! Specifically, we had to clearly say that there was no power in the country and we proposed one, the last bourgeois-democratic institution that we had already had: the Parliament dissolved by the military coup.

## The slogans and the program for the new stage

The assumption of Bignone closes the revolutionary crisis and aims to be the birth certificate of a new political regime based on the institutions of the 1853 Constitution. Although the country now has a government, that of Bignone supported by the bourgeois parties, it is not at all a regime of this kind, because the deepening of revolutionary mass mobilisation prevents it. The very weak Bignone has nothing to do with the strong presidential institution established by the Constitution. Sailing like a ship in a storm, Bignone is limited to preparing for elections that should put to working the institutions of the 1853 Constitution. In another sense, of political and democratic freedoms, the Constitution is already in effect although Bignone is a general not elected by the vote. The parties operate fully and the masses in struggle have won freedoms, in fact, higher than those established by the Constitution. For example, occupying houses and land they go over the constitutional private property, and by insulting and disobeying the senior officers of the Armed Forces, they commit with impunity the “crime” of mutiny, severely punished by it.

With unerring instinct, the working class and the working people act, though not consciously, as if the dictatorship has already been demolished. Their new concerns relate to how to survive the appalling decline and collapse of the economy caused by the semi-colonial capitalist system: poverty wages, unemployment, overwhelming foreign debt, lack of housing, education and health, massive school dropout. All mobilisations after Bignone have this character: they denounce and fight the evils of the bourgeois imperialist system as a whole. Its immediate objectives are apparently the same as in the previous stage but before they went against a political regime, the dictatorship, and now they question the entire semi-colonial capitalist system. The working class and people act, even without being aware, with iron logic: we already conquered democracy but our terrible suffering continues as before; let us keep up the struggle to uproot their deep causes: the semi-colonial or imperialist bourgeois capitalist system. Even without knowing it, the masses are already preparing for the socialist revolution.

Their democratic mobilisations around the issue of the disappeared, although they may seem a relic of the Process, objectively point in the same direction: they go against the pillar of the bourgeois state, the Armed Forces that committed genocide.

This change in the objective situation requires a change in the party program and slogans. In the counter-revolutionary stage, under the Process dictatorship, our central slogan was negative: Down with the dictatorship! Just like it was in Russia, Cuba or Nicaragua: Down with the Tsar, Batista or Somoza! Because, first and foremost, to make way for the socialist revolution we had to destroy the obstacle of the bourgeois counter-revolutionary regime. But as of the triumph of the democratic revolution, of the fall of this regime, anti-capitalist slogans have become central. If we used to call the workers to concentrate their demonstrations in overthrowing the dictatorship, now we call them to focus on liquidating the imperialist capitalist system. We tell them the great task is to defeat the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties in power for the working class to assume the government with its parties and organisations. We call them to make a new revolution to change the character of the state, not just the political regime; a social or socialist revolution. We might say that we call them to do in a conscious and centralised way what they are doing in fact in an unconscious and scattered way: fighting against capitalism and the bourgeois state.

Apparently, the partial slogans of this stage are the same as in the previous: we always call to the struggle for wages, jobs, education, housing, health, the disappeared, freedom and national liberation from imperialist oppression. But before the Malvinas War, all these slogans joined around the overthrow of the political regime, of the military dictatorship. Now, in this revolutionary stage and under the new regime, they unite around the axis of ending the semi-colonial capitalist system, in other words, with the bourgeois state, to impose socialism.

Therefore, in this stage, our central slogans are no longer negative as before, but positive. We say, of course: Down with the semi-colonial capitalist regime! But fundamentally we propose: For a government of the working class supported by the working people! This central slogan will take on the most concrete possible form, as it was in Russia: All power to the soviets! Or in Bolivia: All Power to the COB! At the very moment, in Argentina, organs of power of the masses as were the soviets or the revolutionary unions do not yet exist, thus we still have to raise a more abstract and general slogan for a socialist or workers' and socialist government. But we must be prepared to detect the emergence of these organs of power of the masses. And also, in case they do not appear or are weak, or take place simultaneously with the appearance of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties that objectively face imperialism, we must be prepared to call these parties — which do not exist today — to take power and break with the bourgeoisie, i.e., the workers' and peasants' government or, in our case, workers' and popular.

### Three fundamental transitional slogans

Within this program to make the socialist revolution, three groups of transitional slogans of fundamental importance stand out clearly: those that go against imperialism, those that go against the new political regime of the bourgeoisie, and those that respond to the great unresolved democratic problem: the genocide.

Against imperialism, while we continue raising our traditional slogans (expropriation of industrial, commercial and financial imperialist monopolies, breaking of the political and military pacts that bind us to it, like the OAS,<sup>31</sup> TIAR,<sup>32</sup> etc.), we raise a great central slogan: non-payment of the foreign debt. This slogan summarises in a sense all others because it attacks the most tremendous expression of imperialist exploitation of the country and the people.

31 The **Organisation of American States (OAS)** is an international organisation created in April 1948. The OAS broadly aligned itself with the positions of the United States government since its formation.

32 The **Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR)**, also called the Rio Treaty, is an inter-American mutual defence pact signed in September 1947 in Rio de Janeiro. The geographical area of action of the treaty includes the American continent and up to 300 nautical miles from the coast. According to article 3.1 in case of "(...) an armed attack by any State against an American Country, it will be considered as an attack against all American Countries, and consequently, each one of the Contracting Parties undertakes to help to confront to attack in exercise of the immanent right of individual or collective self-defence recognised in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations."

If we continue paying, there will be no economic recovery, no wages, and no jobs. And it raises the remaining problems: the need to expropriate imperialism and its national partners to prevent economic sabotage, as well as the need to arm the people to face an eventual retaliation of world imperialism and, finally, to impose a workers' or workers' and popular government to carry it out.

In the field of the fight against the new political regime, there is also a radical change of slogans accompanying the change of stage. The previous requirement, of overthrowing the dictatorship to restore the Constitution of 1853, has changed from progressive into reactionary because in this new stage the bourgeoisie is exploiting and oppressing the proletariat precisely through the 1853 Constitution and its institutions. Now the enemy is the current government and institutional regime on which it rests. Now the fight is against the new government that will emerge from the elections, and also against future governments that will replace it. We call to fight against the presidential institution, with its enormous powers and six years of unmovable validity. Against the aristocratic Senate. Against the election by electoral districts in which the parliamentary representation of urban and working concentrations are seriously diminished. Against an Armed Forces and a Justice whose leading members are appointed by the president and the Senate. And against the guarantees, this Constitution gives to private ownership of land and other means of production and exchange.

Specifically, we fight against the reactionary Constitution of 1853 and for the convening of a fully free and sovereign Constituent Assembly, that establishes absolutely proportional elections where the whole country is a single electoral district, that eliminates the Senate and implants a single assembly, that ordains the revocation of mandates of members of the assembly at any time by a simple requirement of the voters, that implants the election of the president by the assembly and his removal at any time by the same, that imposes people's justice, for democratically elected juries and that sets an absolute democracy of the Armed Forces, with the right to unionisation and political organisation of soldiers and NCOs, military training in businesses, neighbourhoods and/or study centres, and a dishonourable discharge and trial to any element of the Armed Forces involved in the genocide. Along with this, we propose the new Constitution should clearly establish the break with imperialism in the economic, political and military arenas and the socialisation of the means of production and exchange under state administration and control by the workers.

Concerning the genocide, our central slogans are the formation of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, involving organisations for the defence of human rights, primarily the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and the unions; that the results of their investigations be made public in a comprehensive manner; that what the Process has done over the years falls under the concept of genocide and therefore cannot be tried by ordinary courts, just as the war crimes of Hitler and his accomplices were not; that justice must be done through democratically appointed popular juries.

As we have already mentioned, the democratic struggle against genocide goes objectively against the Armed Forces. Precisely for this reason, the wise and perfidious Catholic Church has tried to lock it in the slogan of "appearance with life", exploiting the understandable feelings of mothers and family. It has been a well-orchestrated manoeuvre to bring the movement to a dead end, when faced with the harsh reality: if not all, the vast majority of the disappeared were assassinated. The position Alfonsín has the same character, to have a political trial of the Commanders in Chief who decided mass murder, to bring ordinary justice to those who committed "excesses" in fulfilling their orders and to absolve of guilt and responsibility those who kidnapped or murdered following orders. That is, leaving intact as much as possible these armed forces, a great part of whose officers were executing the genocide.

The slogan of non-payment of foreign debt, like the one of Constituent Assembly, and those relating to genocide are three very powerful levers to the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses towards the victory of the socialist revolution. Neither is the first bourgeois anti-imperialist nor are the last two bourgeois-democratic. One is popular-revolutionary anti-imperialist, the other two are popular-revolutionary democratic. The three go frontally against the semi-colonial capitalist system and its government and regime of the day.

## CHAPTER V

# The outbreak of Peronism and the construction of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of masses

Nothing will be the same in our country since the victory of the democratic revolution against the dictatorship. Everything will be subverted, challenged and overcome. Everything old will enter into crisis. Of these crises, the most important, the one which will have more historic consequences will be of Peronism and its trade union bureaucracy.

The colossal affiliation the Justicialist [Peronist] Party has achieved seems to indicate otherwise. However, we argue that, despite it or precisely because of it, Peronism has entered another stage of its agony. The crisis of Peronism will cause a real mental revolution throughout the workers' and mass movement, whose political and union leadership it has been monopolising in an almost absolute way for 40 years.

To understand this present and immediate future, we will begin by remembering its past and its contradictions.

### Peron's government and the workers' movement

Before Peronism, the leadership of Argentina's working class had been in the hands of anarchism and socialism first and of communism and socialism later. By the time Peronism emerges, anarchism was on the verge of extinction. Socialists and communists, however, controlled the proletariat politically and in the unions. They were reformist and bureaucratic, not revolutionary parties. But they expressed a high political consciousness of the workers, who did not trust the bourgeoisie or its governments and aspired to achieve socialism.

Both parties brutally betrayed the working class on the preliminaries and during the Second World War, when they joined with everything the colonising offensive of Yankee imperialism on a country that, until then, depended on British imperialism. The main slogan of this betrayal was the requirement that Argentina entered the war within the Allied camp. Subsequently, it would be to integrate unconditionally to the inter-American system mounted by the United States to institutionalise in the economic, political and military fields its control over its Latin American semi-colonies.

Peronism tried to resist this colonising offensive but not because it was a revolutionary nationalist movement. On the contrary, it was a derivation of the old reactionary regime and tried to defend the old structure of the country, closely tied to England. Neutrality in the war had been imposed by the old empire, which had reserved for its semi-colony Argentina the role of supplier of food for their troops and wanted to ensure this through neutral flag vessels. However, the decay and weakness of the British forced them to begin withdrawing from their former colonies and semi-

colonies. Meanwhile, almost all sectors of the bourgeoisie were abandoning the old master and jumping in with both feet onto the burgeoning field of Uncle Sam's empire.

To defend its reactionary plan, Peronism had no choice but to rely on the workers' movement. Through the Secretary of Labour, Peron encouraged and favoured the development of any union organisation that was opposed to the entry of Argentina into the war and faced the Radical-Socialist-Communist political front, the Democratic Union led by the US Ambassador Braden. Every union that complied with these conditions achieved significant economic concessions for its workers. The working class, which faced daily the British and American companies, felt betrayed, also in the field of demands, by socialists and communists who were totally opposed to strikes against "democratic" bosses. The proletariat could see clearly that the new enemy were the Yankees and suffered firsthand both the political and union defection of its old parties. It broke with them and turned overwhelmingly to Peronism. Never, so far, have the reformist Communists and old socialism managed to recover from this disaster and regain a foothold in the workers' movement.

Once in government, Peron consolidated his control over the workers employing large economic concessions. He could do it because Argentina was the world's most advanced semi-colonial country, the richest, the Saudi Arabia of the imperialist system. It had held for over 50 years fifth place in world trade. Although it had begun its decline in 1930, this was gradual and slow. During the Second World War, it accumulated millions in foreign exchange and managed an even stronger and privileged economic position. These new riches, added to those already inherited from the previous great capitalist accumulation, allowed Peron to grant these enormous gains to the workers' movement, making it one of the best paid in the world. It did not, of course, get to the standard of living of a Yankee or European worker, but their consumption patterns were similar and the workers were not condemned to starvation as their Latin American brothers. And the resources were so great, that Peronism could do all this without losing its reactionary features, of defence of the bourgeois-oligarchic structure of the country.

For the proletariat, these advances were, at the same time, a tragedy. It lost its previous political consciousness of class, of independence of the bourgeoisie and its socialist aspirations. As of Peronism, Argentina's working class sees no need to exercise government, either by electoral means or, much less, by revolutionary means. They believe their problems can be solved through a good, paternal bourgeois government, which gives them better conditions of life from above, from the state.

## **A serious contradiction: political consciousness vs trade union consciousness**

From power, Peron favoured the development of a most powerful union apparatus, with united unions by a branch of industry centralised in a single workers' federation, the CGT and with grassroots organisations by company: internal commissions and delegates committees. These unions have organised since then over 90 per cent of wage earners. At the same time, he was responsible for ensuring the tight state control over the trade unions, encouraging the birth and consolidation of a rich bureaucratic caste, enormously privileged; in fact, bourgeois state officials designated in the corridors of the Ministry of Labour took full control of the trade union leadership.

But there a contradiction was being generated that would cross over four decades the workers' movement and the country. The union organisation was accompanied by, and at the same time produced large workers' struggles, not only because of Peronism state protection. The internal commissions and delegates committees were organs of workers' power within the companies, disputing control of these with the bosses themselves. Large union strikes were almost a daily occurrence. General strikes were a thing of almost every year and more than once, several per year. The Argentine workers' movement achieved a consciousness and union organisation of the highest in the world, comparable only to that of the British proletariat and perhaps to the Israeli.



Political consciousness went backwards, union consciousness forwards. The proletariat followed a bourgeois party and wanted a bourgeois and Bonapartist government — not even democratic — such as Peron. At the same time, through its organisations and union militancy, it defended its high standard of living, defeated bourgeois austerity plans, questioned the control of the bourgeoisie over the companies, fought and triumphed over reactionary coups d'état or destabilised and mortally wounded the civilian governments of its historical enemy, the anti-worker gorillas,<sup>33</sup> such as the government of the Radical Illia.<sup>34</sup>

During all these years, the Argentinian working class could not overcome this contradiction between their reactionary ultra-capitalist political consciousness, that looks backwards, that wants to go back to a bourgeois, paternalistic and Bonapartist government that makes them concessions, regardless of whether or not it is reactionary, and its tremendous fighting spirit and trade union organisation. This contradiction is now being expressed in the crisis of Peronism.

## Peronism in opposition

The fall of the Peronist government by the gorilla coup of 1955 did not change its character of bourgeois organisation with Bonapartist characteristics and looking for the protection of the state. From outside government, Peron had as much or more strength than when he ruled to impose his will on his party and to maintain control of the workers' and mass movement. The gorilla coup, rather than weakening him strengthened him because it cut by its roots the experience that workers had begun to do with his government when the prosperous years had ended and which had begun to express itself in the first strikes of still minority sectors of the working class in the last years of his government.

After the coup, a period of 18 years opens when the workers' movement will fight for Peron's return to the country and government. A clear expression of the political backwardness of the workers, who wanted to go back to the Bonapartist bourgeois government of Peron, not to march forward, towards a workers' government. This backward consciousness is the key behind the tremendous strength of Peron and his union bureaucracy, who could manipulate the workers to act directly against its historic interests, abide by the order to vote for Frondizi<sup>35</sup> — a government directly pro-imperialist — or accepting the support of their leader and their bureaucracy to the coup by Onganía<sup>36</sup> without going into crisis with them. Peron, his party and his union bureaucracy have their hands free to do the worst iniquities, like those mentioned or the more recent of fully cooperating with the Process, the same that had overthrown Isabel.

But this great room for manoeuvre, this existence of a Bonaparte who arbitrates in disputes between the different wings of the movement and manages to hold it together and unconditionally supported by the workers and the people, even from outside government, is explained again in the economic field. Even without a Peronist government, Argentina remains in a gradual, not explosive decline. Industrial development oriented towards a powerful domestic market to replace imports continues and generally manages to maintain full employment. It maintains and reinforces workers and popular consumption similar to the Yankee or European workers with a massive influx of

33 **Gorilla** is a term from Argentina's domestic politics, historically used to refer in a derogatory or pejorative way to detractors of Peronism. Over the years, the term has been extended to a greater or lesser extent to other countries in Latin America, as synonymous with "reactionary right".

34 **Arturo Umberto Illia** (1900–1983) was an Argentine physician and politician, who was President of Argentina for the Radical Civic Union (UCR) from October 1963 to June 1966. He was deposed by a coup d'état of the self-named Argentine Revolution and replaced by General Juan Carlos Onganía.

35 **Arturo Frondizi** (1908–1995) was an Argentinian lawyer and politician elected President of Argentina between May 1958 and March 1962. He was elected on the ticket for the Intransigent Radical Civic Union (a splinter group from the Radical Civic Union). He won with the support of Peron who gave the order, and was massively taken up by the workers, to vote for him. Under his program of "Developmentalism", he encouraged increased foreign investment. He was overthrown by a military coup d'état in 1962.

36 **Juan Carlos Onganía** (1914–1995) was de facto President of Argentina from June 1966 to June 1970. He rose to power as military dictator after toppling the president Arturo Illia in a coup d'état self-named "Argentine Revolution".

imperialist capital, especially during the governments of Aramburu<sup>37</sup> and Frondizi. The worker can realise, even if at the end of a hard life as exploited, the dream of homeownership with the necessary artefacts of comfort. Many of the workers' wives are not forced to work. Their children can go to school, many go on to secondary education, some to university. Health is good, guaranteed by the state and the welfare work of the unions. Tens of thousands of workers have cars, can install their own small businesses and even buy a modest house for the weekends. They can also go to the best tourist centres in the country, thanks to the great hotels of the unions.

Since the last years of Peron's government onwards there is, indeed, a bourgeois offensive against this high standard of living. But the powerful union movement takes advantage of the fact the economic decline is slow to resist it with relative success. New and higher gains are not achieved, but they can more or less withstand this offensive, fight for wages, and achieve more or less acceptable labour agreements. They always lose something, but slowly. The share of wages in the production of national wealth decreases, but not qualitatively, compared to 50 per cent at the time of the first government of Peron.

This situation keeps open in the consciousness of the workers' movement the perspective to live relatively well under capitalism. They attribute the gradual and not qualitative loss to these successive governments and feed the illusion that a new Peronist government will make new concessions and return to its heyday. But they also allow the union leadership to continue to maintain its relations with the bourgeois state making agreements with successive governments, except for brief and exceptional periods — the first year or year and a half of Aramburu and to some extent the period of Illia. There are economic margins to maintain a reformist policy, if not enough to get new concessions, at least to defend existing gains by negotiating and taking only small steps back. Hence, the union bureaucracy can play such a treacherous and reactionary role throughout this stage without losing control of the unions. Peronism keeps its core structure, what Peron himself called the "backbone of the movement", the working class organised in unions. And this structure retains the Peronist ideology: the bureaucracy seeks agreement with the military and State protection — whomsoever is in government — and at the same time, is supported politically by Peron, so as not to break with the working class that remained Peronist.

## The crisis begins: the government of Isabel

This entire phenomenon begins to crumble, in anticipation of a total change when it bursts the great economic crisis of the world capitalist-imperialist system starting in 1974–1975. The impact of this crisis on the Argentine semi-colonial capitalist system is devastating. What until then was slow and gradual decline turned into a violent crisis, collapse and breakdown of Argentina's economy. Thereafter, no more reformist solutions for the bourgeoisie, or their parties — included Peronism— or for the union bureaucracy. The bourgeoisie is compelled by the crisis to launch a full economic offensive against the workers' movement; precisely under the new Peronist government that the workers and popular struggles had managed to impose after 18 years of struggles. It is no longer a question of curtailing the conquests of the proletariat but of directly removing them by the roots. The Argentine working class can no longer look itself in the mirror of Europe or America. Now, the mirror returns the image of Latin American and "third world" workers. Homeownership, education of children, health, wives at home: they are dreams of a past that vanishes. Ahead there is hunger and unemployment.

Peronism economic base of support has disappeared. The contradiction between high union militancy and the consciousness of the proletariat and its very backward reformist political consciousness becomes antagonistic. The workers' movement faces Isabel Peron with the general strike of 1975 which expels from the government the Minister of Economy, Rodrigo, and Lopez

37 **Pedro Eugenio Aramburu** (1903–1970) was an Argentine Army general. He was a major figure behind the military coup self-named Liberating Revolution against Juan Domingo Peron in 1955. He became de facto president of Argentina from November 1955 to May 1958. He was kidnapped and executed by Montoneros.

Rega. The Montoneros break with the government they voted for and return to terrorism. Peron throws them out of the Plaza de Mayo.<sup>t</sup>

The working class begins to realise the deeply reactionary character of Peronism. It begins by hating Isabel, although still worshipping the dead leader. Actually, Peron died in time to save his image. Had he been alive, he would be the one hated, not just his wife.

However, two momentary obstacles arise that prevent the disappointment of workers with Peronism from becoming a massive rupture. The first is the own Montoneros, with their elitist and criminal policy. They make their own “pocket” civil war against the government, in ways alien to the working class. Ways which are repudiated by it and whose consequences it suffers because the bourgeoisie takes advantage of the guerrilla provocation to repress the entire left and the emerging class-struggle and independent trade union vanguard. To make “their” war, Montoneros removed from the factories, universities and schools, the working-class and student vanguard they mostly grouped, took them away from the masses aborting the possibility of the emergence of new alternative leadership to the bureaucracy of the Peronist party and led them into extermination.

The second obstacle is the military coup, which overthrows Isabel and prevents once again that the workers complete their experience and finish breaking with the government. Faced with the atrocities of the Process, anything, even the government of Isabel will be remembered by the workers and mass movement as a lesser evil.

But the seeds of the definitive and total crisis of Peronism were already sown and had begun to germinate. The nefarious actions of Montoneros and the military coup postponed its outburst but failed to stop its development that, for seven years, was maintained even though it remained underground.

## Peronism in crisis

The military government took Isabel’s policy to the ultimate: its offensive against the workers and the people was ruthless. It cancelled all the conquests that Peronism had granted, i.e., it succeeded where Isabel had failed. It thus closed definitively the reformist economic-social stage that explains the 40 years of Peronist monopoly of the political and union leadership of the workers.

Peronism suffered the impact. Its political sector was divided between the ultra-top-down, who wanted to preserve the character of the Bonapartist movement around the figure of Isabel and the “anti-top-down”, who wanted to convert it into a “serious and respectable” bourgeois-democratic party, as well as infinite variations and currents between the two poles. The union bureaucracy also broke into two confederations. The one led by Triacca,<sup>38</sup> which accepts the new situation and is in close contact with the anti-top-down sector, promotes a new type of unionism, which does not get into politics, is strictly “professional” and keeps its privileges from the direct collaboration with the bosses of each company or branch and not primarily from state protection. Ubaldini<sup>39</sup> and Miguel,<sup>40</sup> instead, want a new covenant with the military to regain the political role of unions as quasi-state agencies, get some concessions to resettle the bureaucracy against their rank and file and, above

38 **Jorge Alberto Triacca** (1941–2008) was a Peronist union bureaucrat, Deputy Secretary of the Union of Plastic Workers and Employees (UOYEP) and General Secretary of the CGT-Azopardo. He later was a national deputy between 1985 and 1989 and a minister of labour between 1989 and 1992 during the first government of the Peronist Carlos Saul Menem

39 **Saul Edolover Ubaldini** (1936–2006) was the Secretary-General of the small union of beer-industry workers. During the dictatorship, he was elected Secretary General of the CGT, the trade union umbrella body, in 1979. Later, he led the “Brasil” faction of the CGT, which showed a harder line against the military than its “CGT-Azopardo” counterpart.

40 **Lorenzo Miguel** (1927–2002), a Peronist bureaucrat, was one of the historic chiefs of the Peronist trade union bureaucracy. Head of the powerful metalworkers’ union (UOM) since 1970. During the government of Isabel Peron, he linked with Jose Lopez Rega to give birth to the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance or Triple-A a death squad that appeared on the scene in 1973. After the coup against Isabel Peron, he was sent to prison, but his close relationship with Junta member Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera protected him.

all, to take into their hands the resources of the union's social welfare, calculated from three to five billion dollars annually.

Underneath these fractures, under the military regime, the deterioration of political and union Peronism among the masses continued. The working class deepened its hatred of the Peronist leadership for its inability to resist the coup, for its collaboration with this, and above all, for its cowardly passivity towards the offensive against the conditions of life and work. All summed up in one phrase, repeated by millions: the Peronist politicians and union leaders "do nothing" or "disappear" and leave us alone and disorganised against a genocidal military government sending us to starvation. A doubly felt absence when the popular anti-imperialist and revolutionary mobilisation for the Malvinas broke out, during which Peronism, abjuring its proclaimed anti-imperialist banners, was totally absent.

The triumph of the democratic revolution has hit Peronism hard, in a much more terrible way than the counter-revolution with its dictatorship. The masses are hungry for democracy, not only in the political country but in every field, including their traditional party and their unions. Peronism is shaken in what is its fundamental character: vertical, top-down Bonapartism. Massive affiliations force it to enter into a process of democratic party reorganisation or at least formally democratic. Dozens and dozens of factions arise that will vie in the polls the leadership of the Justicialist Party. The "wise finger" of Peron no longer exists to impose a leadership on a whim, arbitrating undisputed among the different sectors. The ultra-top-down sector, while still making it a matter of principle for the vertical, non-democratic structure of the movement to subsist, are forced to fight this project in the primaries, like any other current.

Regardless of which current wins, we do not believe that Peronism can avoid the final collapse. Not because two conflicting projects, such as the top-down and the anti-top-down, or the projects of Triaca and Miguel, cannot survive for long periods within the same movement, but because this coexistence is impossible in the current extreme economic crisis and revolutionary rise of the masses. The masses hit and hit while the bourgeoisie cannot, even if they wanted to, give them economic concessions to calm them. Under these conditions, some kind of Peronism or neo-Peronism may exist. But what cannot survive is Peronism as it has been since its origin, that is, based on a rich and powerful bureaucracy protected by the state that achieves economic concessions to the workers. Everything leads, therefore, to the rupture of the workers' movement with this Peronism it has remained stuck to for many decades precisely because of these concessions or the hope they might return.

Nothing can prevent this rupture and together, before or immediately after it, with the outbreak of Peronism in different factions, it will inevitably take place. This outbreak may cause the emergence of organised Peronist currents or tendencies that go towards the left or, what is more likely, will cause rupture processes of individuals or groups, but equally massive.

We believe that this explosion of the crisis will take place either whether Peronism wins the next elections or it is defeated. Currently, the elections have managed to forge a weak unity of action of all factions and a kind of electoral front, to try to win them. But once in government, nothing can prevent workers from doing their last experience with it, and definitely leave. Neither can it postpone the most frontal collision between the various and antagonistic political projects in their midst. On the contrary, if it assumes government, fighting and fragmentation among them would be fulminating because they would be discussing specifically which of the projects to implement from power. The internal crisis will be expressed not only in the environment of the executive branch but publicly in Parliament.

Although it may adopt other forms, the same will happen if the Radicals win. Discounting the impact of an electoral defeat on a party that has won since its birth all free elections held in the country, a Radical win would also divide waters in Peronism. Radicalism in power will negotiate with a sector, either political or union, to divide it around the following option: for or against the offensive against the living standards of the masses and against their own country to continue colonising in the service of imperialism. Peronism undoubtedly will be divided around this dilemma, with the

vast majority of its top political and union leaders willing to cooperate with the Radical government against the workers' movement.

The possibility of Isabel coming back does not change this prognosis, whatever her attitude: to take part with everything in the movement and even to proclaim herself as a candidate, or abstain from doing it. In either case, she shall pour fuel to the fire of the crisis. For the reasons already outlined — the economic crisis, the revolutionary mobilisation and the bourgeois imperialist offensive of the future government against the workers, the people and the country — the different political projects existing within Peronism are doomed to break.

In any case, with Peronism in government or "opposition", with or without Isabel, the most important crisis will be of its working-class and popular rank-and-file. A crisis that will be expressed in the streets, in all the demonstrations held by the workers' movement. If the government is Peronist, it will be the continuation of the "Rodrigazo" of 1975. If it is Radical, it will be the extension of over three decades of fighting the gorillas perched on power and the Peronist sectors that will ally with it. In one way or another, all Peronism will blow out in smithereens.

## **Towards mass Revolutionary Socialist Party of masses**

Peronism is already in crisis. This is demonstrated by its public, political and union factions. The hundreds of slates presented to the internal election ratify it. Its relations with the workers and popular movements have deteriorated extremely. There is little Peronist working-class militancy. Scepticism of the workers in the leaderships and hatred of Isabel is widespread, although they continue routinely in the movement. The large membership drive, where this routine adherence by weight of inertia is combined with the great passion for participating in politics that has awakened among the masses the triumphant democratic revolution, should not hide from us this profound reality.

The Peronist trade union bureaucracy is not better off. It is detested by the workers' movement. To the crisis expressed in the division of the CGT, this other, much more important crisis is added. The bureaucracy comes out very weak from the counter-revolution because the Process gave hard blows to the union structure in which it thrives and pulled out for many years the inexhaustible source of income of social welfare. But above all, it is very weak because no worker believes in it. There are no middle cadres, grassroots activists of the bureaucracy in the workplaces, as there were in all previous periods. The total crisis of bureaucracy does not have to be simultaneous in time with the crisis of Peronism as a political movement. But the democratic revolution will leave no stone unturned on any of the totalitarian structures of the country. Sooner or later, it will leak into the workers' organisations and the bureaucracy, as we know it, will be annihilated. The fact that in the first union elections that take place the slates of the bureaucracy may succeed again should not confuse us. It will also be by weight of inertia, as in the surely millions of Peronist votes in the upcoming national elections. But we have already entered the stage where workers will perform their own democratic revolution and cast the hated bureaucrats with their thugs through the windows of the unions.

The electoral process has been able to avoid so far this crisis of Peronism bursting out. Perhaps it will not do so until after the new government takes office. But the outbreak is there, in the immediate future, in coming weeks or coming months. When it happens, the Peronist slab that for 40 years prevented the emergence of a new socialist and revolutionary leadership of the working class will be gone.

Our current must be prepared for it. We have had the wisdom to point out that the assumption of Bignone opened an electoral stage and that because of the absence of a revolutionary socialist leadership recognised by the masses, it would inexorably come to bourgeois elections, even amid large and growing mobilisations. Our participation in the legal and electoral process has allowed us the spectacular growth of our headquarters and our press. There are major symptoms that a wide vanguard or perhaps even still minority sectors of the working-class Peronist rank-and-file

are breaking right now with their traditional party. This is the only objective explanation of our successes.

We begin to walk towards the construction of a revolutionary socialist party of masses. But we have not yet reached it because the crisis of Peronism has not yet erupted. It doesn't take much imagination to imagine what will happen when it takes place, in those neighbourhoods, factories and workshops, where workers are no longer Peronists and decide to get rid of the union bureaucracy. Only then, when the crisis of Peronism and the bureaucracy bursts open and is not hidden, we will enter fully into the construction phase of a party with mass influence. A substantial part of the workers' movement can be won by our party. Perhaps the majority, or perhaps only a minority but very important. Perhaps we will win them directly with our policies, or perhaps we will win them in combination or mediated by our anti-bureaucratic and anti-bosses union currents, expanding and continuing the heroic experience of Sitrac-Sitram.<sup>41</sup>

The question is whether we will win the majority or a large minority, whether a new directly political or trade union-political leadership will emerge. But we will inevitably win and extend our party's influence over a large sector of masses.

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41 **Sitrac-Sitram** are acronyms for two unions associated with the companies ConCord and Materfer, subsidiaries of the Italian automotive multinational Fiat, in the city of Cordoba in Argentina. They are strongly linked to trade union disputes surrounding the Cordobazo of 1969, milestone in the history of Argentine workers' movement.