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Was Perón a Fascist?
An Inquiry
into the
Nature of Fascism

PAUL H. LEWIS

STUDENTS OF FASCISM have long debated whether the Argentine dictatorship of Juan D. Perón (1946-55) falls within the purview of their subject. A. F. K. Organski includes Perón's regime among his "syncratic," or fascist, systems, along with Mussolini's Italy and Franco's Spain. Seymour Martin Lipset also classifies Peronism as fascist, but because of its working class appeal he treats it as a unique kind of "fascism of the left." Other noted writers on fascism, such as Alan Cassels and Eugen Weber, also place Perón in the fascist camp. As for specialists on Argentine politics, José Luís Romero, George Blanksten, Arthur P. Whitaker, and Peter Smith all trace Perón's ideological inspiration back to Mussolini's Italy.¹

On the other hand, Renzo De Felice and Ernst Nolte exclude

¹ A. F. K. Organski, *The Stages of Political Development* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 150-155; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1963), 173-176; Alan Cassels, *Fascism* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: A. H. M. Publishing Corp.), vii, 191, 339; Cassels, "Janus: The Two Faces of Fascism," in Henry A. Turner, Jr., ed., *Reappraisals of Fascism* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), 79; Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1964), 31; José Luís Romero, *A History of Argentine Political Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 239-245; George Blanksten, *Peron's Argentina* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1953), 298-305; Arthur P. Whitaker, *Argentina* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 104-105, 108; and Peter H. Smith, *Argentina and the Failure of Democracy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin), 103.

Perón from their studies of fascism on the grounds that the term "fascist" should apply only to certain European political movements in the era between the two world wars. Dante Germino rules out the Peronist regime as fascist because, he argues, it had no counterpart to the Italian Fascist Militia or the Nazi S. A., and also because it never completely eliminated the opposition parties. For similar reasons many experts on Argentina like Gino Germani, Lars Schoultz, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Walter Little, Donald Hodges, David Rock, and Eldon Kenworthy prefer to call Perón a "national populist" or an "authoritarian populist." They note that Perón was legally elected to office by a large popular vote, and that Congress continued to function under him with anti-Peronist representation. Moreover, it is argued that his pro-labor policies clearly distinguish his regime from the elitist and socially regressive fascist systems. Thus, Peronism is better viewed as a variety of developmental nationalism based on mass mobilization commonly found in the Third World.²

This sort of dissensus among scholars reflects not only disagreement about the real nature of the Peronist government, but also about the characteristics of fascism. This paper, therefore, will reexamine the salient features of Perón's rule to evaluate earlier generalizations about its politically repressive and socially progressive character. But to answer the question of whether Perón was a fascist still requires a definition of fascism to use as a yardstick. So we must begin by offering a concept of fascism that most students can agree upon.

² Renzo De Felice, *Fascism, An Informal Introduction To Its Theory and Practice* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1976), 89-90; Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966); Dante L. Germino, *The Italian Fascist Party In Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1959), 127; Gino Germani, "Fascism and Class," in S. J. Woolf, ed., *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 90-96; Lars Schoultz, "The Socio-Economic Determinants of Popular Authoritarian Electoral Behavior: The Case of Peronism," *American Political Science Review* (December, 1977), 1423-1424; Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Leader and Vanguard in Mass Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971), 41; Walter Little, *Peronism: Was It and Is It Populist?* (Glasgow: U. of Glasgow, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1975), 10-11; Donald Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1976* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1976), 10-11, 17; David Rock, "The Survival and Restoration of Peronism," in David Rock, ed., *Argentina In the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1975), 184n; and Eldon Kenworthy, "The Function of the Little-Known Case in Theory Formation, Or What Peronism Wasn't," *Comparative Politics* (October 1973), 17-45.

A DEFINITION OF FASCISM

Writers like DeFelice and Nolte, who would restrict the study of fascism to Europe between the wars, must be overruled at the outset. Otherwise it would be pointless to go on. Besides, the great majority of writers on fascism reject such a narrow definition in favor of retaining fascism as a generic term to apply to a certain category of dictatorship. This keeps open the possibility of applying the label to Perón but by no means guarantees it, for the inclusion of any given dictatorship under fascism depends on what criteria are used to define the category. One major controversy is over whether fascism is a conservative or revolutionary phenomenon. Nolte, for instance, views it as a reactionary, anti-modern movement, despite its borrowing of certain techniques such as mass mobilization and propaganda from the Marxists. Similarly, S. J. Woolf, John Weiss, Alexander Groth, and Organski argue that fascism's claim to being revolutionary is belied by the fact that once in power fascists have always looked for support from industrialists and big landowners. Furthermore, they claim, fascist social and economic policies tend to lower the living standards of the poorer classes and protect traditional ways of life from modernization.³ Other writers, however, see fascism as revolutionary. Weber places it in the radical jacobin tradition, which emphasizes national unity and glory even at the expense of liberty, private property, or class interest. Similarly, A. James Gregor defines fascism as any movement which pursues nationalist, socialist, and totalitarian goals. Its aim is to "organize collective energies behind extensive programs of national rehabilitation, industrialization, or renovation." Both Weber and Gregor concede that fascists often have to ally with conservatives en route to power, but afterwards a second struggle always occurs to determine whether the dynamic fascists or their conservative allies will dominate. If the fascists win out, as they did in Germany and Italy, the regime will take on a more proletarian character and class privileges will come under attack. If the conservatives win out, as in Spain, the regime will become ossified and reactionary.⁴

³ Nolte, *Three Faces*, 421, 433-434; Woolf, "Introduction," to S. J. Woolf, ed., *European Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 3-8; John Weiss, *The Fascist Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 2-4, 16, 20-21; Alexander Groth, "The 'Isms' In Totalitarianism," *American Political Science Review* (December 1964), 890-891, 898-899; Organski, "Fascism and Modernization," in Woolf, *The Nature of Fascism*, 31-32.

⁴ Weber, *Varieties*, 19-21, 24-25, 38, 49-50, 53-59, 61; A. James Gregor, *The Ideology of Fascism* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 380-381.

Whether one views fascism as radical or conservative, however, certain features are almost always associated with it which distinguish it from traditional dictatorships. First, it mobilizes the masses through its propaganda, its party activities, and its public ceremonies. And within the ranks of the movement itself social distinctions are erased. This mass participation in politics is controlled and channeled, as in communist systems, through the technique of a single, all embracing party. Also, in most fascist systems there is a set of vertically structured trade associations, or "corporations," by which capital, labor, and other interests are represented in the government and are controlled by it. Secondly, fascist parties, like Marxist ones, have an ideology which aims at bringing about some utopia. This goal is different from that of traditional dictatorships, which justify themselves on narrower grounds such as the need for law and order, respect for religion and custom, or a defense of national interests. In content fascism rejects the idea of class conflict in favor of class collaboration for the good of the nation-state. And while its corporatist institutions enhance the state's power to regulate the economy they do not propose to abolish private property or the profit motive. Also, fascism rejects Marxian universalism in favor of aggressive nationalism. If fascists seem fascinated by technology it is because an industrial base is the *sine qua non* for military power and imperialism. Third, fascism's impulse is toward totalitarianism—complete control by the state of all political activity—however much actual fascist regimes may fall short of that goal.

These three general characteristics of fascism should serve to delimit it, as a type of regime, from both traditional and communist dictatorships. Mussolini's Italy is, in the opinion of many scholars, the archetype of such a system. Nolte, for instance, constructs a spectrum of fascisms based on how socialist and totalitarian certain regimes were. Starting with conservative "pre-fascist" regimes like Salazar's Portugal, it ranges to "early fascism" (Franco's Spain), then to "normal fascism" (Mussolini's Italy), and finally to Hitler's "radical fascism." Similarly, H. R. Trevor-Roper distinguishes "clerical fascism," which is the heir of aristocratic conservatism, from "dynamic" fascism, which draws its support mainly from the industrial middle classes. Every fascist system, he claims, is really a compound of both these elements, but the ratio varies. As in Nolte's scheme Franco and Salazar are placed on the conservative, or "clerical," end of the scale, Hitler's regime is the most radical or "dynamic," and Mussolini's Italy occupies the mid-point—although it

leans somewhat to the "dynamic" side.⁵ Fascist Italy may be considered, therefore, a concrete example of a normal fascist system. As such it offers an additional yardstick to the three general characteristics of fascism noted above by which to measure whether or not Perón's dictatorship fits the category.

MASS MOBILIZATION AND CONTROL

Fascism is often assumed to be a movement of the middle and upper classes. Many writers have therefore refused to classify Perón as a fascist because of his regime's presumed working class bias. But in fact a closer look at Peronism and "normal fascism" under Mussolini may require revising current opinion about both systems. Kenworthy points out, for instance, that in the 1946 elections which brought Perón to power, organized labor could have accounted for little more than a third of his vote, at best. Peronism's backing came from a broad spectrum of Argentine society.⁶ On the other hand, the proletarian character of Italian Fascism has not always been sufficiently emphasized. According to Fascist Party figures, in 1921 there were some 152,000 members, of whom almost 62,000 were blue collar workers, while another 23,000 were clerical employees and soldiers. By 1934 there were 1,850,000 members, and nearly 1,250,000 of those were drawn from the industrial and agricultural working classes.⁷ It would seem more accurate to conclude, therefore, that Italian Fascism was more proletarian than is often assumed and that Peronism was less so—and that both were essentially multi-class movements.

In Mussolini's Italy mass participation was channeled through the Fascist Party and the Corporate State, two institutions which gave the regime its distinctive character. The Fascist Party resembled an army, with a clear chain of command running down from Mussolini, through his hand-picked National Secretary and the Grand Council, to the provincial and local organizations. In addition there were ancillary organizations to tie in labor, youth, women, and

⁵ Nolte, *Three Faces*, 459-460; H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Phenomenon of Fascism," in Woolf, *European Fascism*, 25-28, 32-37.

⁶ Kenworthy, "The Function Of the Little-Known Case," 24-28. See also, Peter H. Smith, "The Social Base of Peronism," *Hispanic American Historical Review* (February 1972), 55-73.

⁷ Herman Finer, *Mussolini's Italy* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), 143; and Gregor, *Ideology*, 163.

veterans, and to carry out such activities as propaganda, social assistance, leadership training, and the control of after-work amusements. Economic activity was regulated by the Corporate State, which came into being by stages. The first stage was the "Syndicalist State," created when the government forced the Confederation of Italian Industry and the Fascist Confederation of Workers to agree to bargain only with each other, to the exclusion of all non-Fascist organizations. The Law of Syndical Organizations (1926) and the Charter of Labor (1927) further provided that (1) employers and workers could have only one legally-recognized "syndicate" in each economic field; (2) only state-approved syndicates could represent their members in collective bargaining or in the labor courts; (3) labor contracts were not valid unless approved by the government; (4) strikes and lockouts were forbidden; and (5) the government would collect syndical dues and determine how funds could be spent. The Corporate State finally came in 1934 when the employers' and workers' syndicates were merged into 22 corporations whose governing boards consisted of representatives of both classes, plus the Fascist Party and the Ministry of Corporations.⁸

Like Mussolini, Perón developed an official party whose structure resembled a military organization. He named and removed at will the party's Superior Executive Council, which in turn directed all the local organizations. Throughout the organization, right down to the basic units at the neighborhood level, duties were divided between "strategic commands," which formulated policy, and "tactical commands," which carried it out. In every case lower officials were appointed from above, not elected. The emphasis was on obedience, discipline, and centralized command, in order to "avoid confusion of ideas and wills, the dilution of decisions, and the dispersal of efforts."⁹

Perón's approach to industrial relations also resembled Mussolini's. As Labor Secretary in the military junta which preceded his administration he brought most of the unions under his control through the 1945 Law of Professional Associations, whose provisions were almost identical with Mussolini's Labor Code: (1) no union or em-

⁸ Roland Sarti, *Fascism and the Industrial Leadership In Italy, 1919-1940* (Berkeley: University of California, 1971), 30-31, 77; and G. Lowell Field, *The Syndical and Corporative Institutions of Italian Fascism* (New York: Columbia University, 1938), 62-66, 72-79, 87-94.

⁹ Partido Peronista, *Directivas básicas del Consejo Superior* (Buenos Aires, 1952), 47-49.

ployers' association could sign a labor contract without official recognition; (2) only one employer and one labor association was permitted in each economic field; (3) all contracts had to be endorsed by the Labor Secretary; (4) the government would collect and disburse all union funds; and (5) strikes and lockouts were forbidden. It was not until 1952, however, that Perón finally succeeded in bringing big business under control by setting up the General Economic Confederation (CGE), to which all entrepreneurs had to belong. In tandem with the Peronist-controlled General Workers' Confederation (CGT) it gave the state enormous regulatory power over the economy. Similar control was placed over higher education through the Peronist General University Confederation, and over the professions with the creation in 1954 of the General Confederation of Professionals. These were the foundations of a "syndicalist state," although it was not called such. Finally, the capstone of this emerging corporatist system was the Economic Consultative Committee, which brought together leading representatives of the CGE, CGT, and the state economic ministries.¹⁰

What about the policies that emerged from these systems? Was Perón strongly pro-labor while Mussolini favored big business, as conventional wisdom has it? Certainly Italian labor bore much of the brunt of Mussolini's industrial development program. Much of the capital was raised by increasing savings and controlling consumption. Exports, which brought in additional income, were made competitive by keeping wages low. Indeed, wages were rolled back by some 16 per cent between 1928 and 1934. The eight-hour day was also surrendered, and the Fascist-controlled unions now agitated to increase productivity rather than defend labor's class interests. By contrast, under Perón labor's real wages rose by over 30 percent from 1946 to 1949, and fringe benefits added as much as 40 percent over that. There were also more government services such as public housing, social insurance, health care, and educational opportunities. Workers also worked less. In addition to the large number of legal holidays were frequent unofficial holidays proclaimed by the CGT. By 1951 it was estimated that for every two days that an Argentine laborer worked he was entitled to a day of rest. Furthermore,

¹⁰ Robert J. Alexander, *Labor Relations in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 177-179; and Bertram Silverman, *Labor and Left-Fascism: A Case Study Of Peronist Labor Policy* (New York: Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation, 1967), 155-156, 219-220, 228.

absenteeism increased so much that on any given day as much as 15 percent of the work force might not show up. Not only was this tolerated by Perón, but workers were rewarded by officially-decreed year-end bonuses amounting to an extra month's wages.¹¹

As for capital, Mussolini turned the Confederation of Italian Industry into an arm of the government, with the power to issue binding regulations for all industrial employers. Also, the government promoted cartelization at the expense of small business, with high profits guaranteed for the top capitalists. Such collaboration finds no parallel in Perón's Argentina. Although profits were high (stock dividends rose by an average of 16 percent a year), businessmen were antagonized by the regime's social legislation. They resented the closing down of their independent *Unión Industrial Argentina* in 1946 after a Peronist faction failed to get control of the executive committee, and they feared the spread of state regulatory power as represented by the Argentine Institute of Production and Trade (IAPI), which forced farmers to sell to it at low fixed prices and then made profits for the government by selling those goods on the free market.¹²

But while real differences did exist between the two regimes, they were not so great as it might seem, and they tended to narrow the longer Perón was in power. For one thing, the fall in labor wages under Mussolini occurred during the Great Depression, when wages were falling all over the world, and this was accompanied by a similar drop in prices. Also, fringe benefits like paid vacations, social insurance, family subsidies, free medical care, and year-end bonuses helped to compensate for a smaller paycheck. By 1935 increased military spending for the Ethiopian War created a demand for labor and wages began to rise—by about 34 percent from 1936 to 1939 (although living costs did too). In all, if labor did not

¹¹ Michael T. Florinski, *Fascism and National Socialism* (New York: MacMillan, 1936), 89-91, 129-133, 197-204; Samuel Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics in Argentina* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University, 1967), 98-101; and James Bruce, *Those Perplexing Argentines* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1943), 149, 158.

¹² Carl T. Schmidt, *The Corporate State In Action* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), 162-166, 182-196; Eldon Kenworthy, "Did the 'New Industrialists' Play a Significant Role In the Formation of Peron's Coalition, 1943-1946?" in Alberto Ciria, et. al., *New Perspectives On Modern Argentina* (Bloomington: Indiana University, Latin American Studies Program, 1972), 16, 20; and Carlos F. Díaz-Alejandro, *Essays On the Economic History of The Argentine Republic* (New Haven: Yale University, 1970), 261, 540.

gain much from Mussolini, it did not fare so badly either. Nor was it the enslaved class that Marxists like to claim it was. Strikes continued to take place, despite the official ban on them. There were 165 of them between 1926 and 1934, and over 90 between 1935 and 1936 alone.¹³

In Argentina 1949 was the watershed year for labor. After that the regime began to demand more discipline, sacrifice, and productivity from the workers. Expansionary money and wage policies combined with falling production had resulted in a 50 percent inflation rate. Stock values plunged on the Buenos Aires Exchange and foreign exchange reserves were so depleted as to force a suspension of import permits. The government placed a large share of the blame on the unions and proceeded to tighten up on labor discipline. As it did so real wages began to decline sharply, by over 20 percent between 1949 and 1955. Those unions which struck in protest were overwhelmed by the state's police power.¹⁴

If Perón's regime was less pro-labor than is often assumed, and Mussolini's regime less anti-labor, somewhat the reverse can be said about their dealings with capital. Italian businessmen found themselves increasingly enmeshed in government restrictions and controls, such as compulsory labor arbitration; trade and credit controls; the regulation of new investments; higher taxes on capital, dividends, and real estate; the compulsory liquidation of foreign securities holdings; forced investment of "excess profits" in government bonds; and the frequent solicitation of "voluntary contributions" to the Fascist Party and the state. Also, there was the ominous expansion of the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction, which began as an emergency Depression measure to help failing businesses with state loans, only to become the holding company for a new state industrial empire which, according to Roland Sarti, was "unequaled outside the Soviet Union."¹⁵ In Argentina big business began receiving favorable treatment in the later stages of the regime, in the form of easier loans and high guaranteed prices. But rapprochement did not go far, because official propaganda still painted the upper classes as enemies of the people. Private domestic investment and output

¹³ Sarti, *Fascism and the Industrial Leadership*, 92-93; and Cesare Vannutelli, "The Living Standard of Italian Workers, 1929-1939," in Roland Sarti, ed., *The Ax Within* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 147-48.

¹⁴ Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics*, 138, 142; Aldo Ferrer, *The Argentine Economy* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967), 202.

¹⁵ Sarti, *Fascism and the Industrial Leadership*, 124.

continued to lag, forcing Perón to depart from classical fascist policy—which always stresses economic independence—and solicit foreign investment. Between 1953 and 1955 he signed controversial contracts with the Kaiser Corporation and Standard Oil which cost him the support of many Argentine nationalists. Still, a dictatorship may use foreign aid as a stop-gap without sacrificing its long-run totalitarian goals, as the Soviet Union did from 1922 to 1928 under the “New Economic Policy.” For that matter, German influence increasingly affected Fascist Italy’s foreign and domestic policies from 1938 on, and ended in the Nazi occupation of the country. Thus, fascist regimes can realize their ideal of economic and political self-sufficiency only in varying degrees according to their industrial and military strength.

IDEOLOGY

Justicialismo, the name of Perón’s official ideology, is a term difficult to translate into English, but it indicates a “third position” between individualistic capitalism and collectivist communism. Eva Perón claimed that it was superior to capitalism because it placed the nation’s interests above those of private property, while also avoiding the errors of materialistic Marxism by stressing the importance of ideals. What were those ideals? In its rhetoric *justicialismo* was reminiscent of Italian (but not German) fascism in that it emphasized nationalism, authority, and leadership. It constantly placed the citizens’ duties above their rights and demanded that they sacrifice to achieve national glory. The same sort of hero-worship associated with the cult of Il Duce also surrounded the Peróns. Streets, public buildings, towns, and even provinces were named after Juan and Evita. In 1952 General Perón was accorded by Congress the official title of “Liberator of the People,” and Eva was named “Spiritual Chief of the Nation.” In one congressional session the deputies rose reverentially to their feet a hundred times when the names of Juan and Eva Perón were spoken.¹⁶

It may be argued that Perón never practiced aggression against his neighbors the way Mussolini did. Within the limits imposed by U.S. paramouncy in the Western Hemisphere, however, Perón made

¹⁶ Eva Perón, *Historia del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Freeland, 1971), 123-128; Whitaker, *Argentina*, 141.

considerable progress toward creating an Argentine-led bloc in Latin America. During 1953 and 1954 he negotiated trade and investment treaties with Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Paraguay in which Argentina, with her superior resources, was to be the senior partner. Also, a Peronist international labor federation was created, with its headquarters in Buenos Aires. Labor attaches from the CGT were assigned to every Argentine embassy in Latin America, from which they pumped money and propaganda into local labor movements—with some success in Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Peru. Furthermore, Peronist money and military aid were instrumental, in varying measures, to get sympathetic governments into power in Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Paraguay. If in the end Perón was unable to establish Argentina as the center of a new sphere of influence, the failure was due to his regime's economic collapse rather than a lack of will.¹⁷

THE TOTALITARIAN IMPULSE

The term "fascism" suggests a tightly-organized dictatorship in which all opposition has been eliminated and all components of the regime are under a military-type discipline. We have seen that some writers refuse to call Perón a fascist because opposition parties continued to exist and even sit in Congress; because elections were held; because there were no storm-troopers; and because certain groups like the army, the clergy, and big industrialists retained a certain degree of autonomy. Are such objections accurate and conclusive?

The 1946 elections, which were marred by violence, resulted in a Peronist sweep of both houses of Congress, all provincial governorships, and all provincial legislatures but one. Only the Radical and Conservative parties managed to get minority representation in Congress. Subsequently, the Socialist, Progressive Democratic, and Communist parties were barred from any hope of representation by changes in the electoral laws. Moreover, the opposition in Congress was reduced even further in 1949 when a bill was passed making it a crime to speak disrespectfully of any government official. Even a congressman could lose his seat and his congressional im-

¹⁷ Thomas F. McGann, *Argentina, The Divided Land* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1966), 50, 90; Pedro Santos Martínez, *La nueva Argentina, 1946-1955* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones "La Bastilla," 1976), vol. I, 282-303.

munity under this law. Almost immediately the Radicals' two top leaders in the Chamber of Deputies were eliminated by it.¹⁸

The next general elections, in 1952, were held in an atmosphere of intimidation. The opposition's party newspapers had all been closed down and anti-Peronist candidates could not get access to the radio. Meeting halls were closed to them, printers were warned not to turn out their propaganda, and local officials frequently refused them permission to hold rallies. Many of them, including the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the Socialist and Conservative parties, were in jail or in hiding. The Radicals' presidential candidate had just been released from prison, where he had been sent for speaking disrespectfully of the regime. The Communist candidate for president was first jailed during the campaign and then killed when a Peronist mob shot up one of his meetings. When the votes were tallied the opposition lost all representation in the Senate and fell from 45 to only 14 seats in the 157 man Chamber of Deputies.¹⁹

Does opposition have any meaning under such conditions? What if a stunted minority bloc remains in Congress—in fact, fascism is not incompatible with the temporary existence of such an opposition. Until January 1925 Mussolini governed with anti-Fascist deputies attacking him in parliament. Indeed, his first government was a minority one. Not only were Fascists a minority in parliament, but they had only 4 of the 15 cabinet portfolios. Not until 1923, when the electoral laws were changed, did they engineer a majority in parliament and edge their coalition partners out of the cabinet. Even then anti-Fascist deputies continued to oppose the government. Although the cabinet was always able to pass its bills, the atmosphere grew steadily worse, culminating in the famous “Aventine Secession,” in which the opposition walked out of the Chamber of Deputies in protest. Then the Matteotti crisis brought matters to a head. Even so, the speech of 3 January 1925, proclaiming a totalitarian state, was made—so we are told—reluctantly and under pressure from extremists in Mussolini's party. Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick claims that if the anti-Fascists had been willing to tone down their

¹⁸ Robert J. Alexander, *The Peron Era* (New York: Columbia University, 1951), 68-69.

¹⁹ Blanksten, *Peron's Argentina*, 84, 362; Peter Snow, *Argentine Radicalism* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1965), 68-70.

attacks, Il Duce might have postponed indefinitely the proclamation of a one-party dictatorship.²⁰

In any case, there is evidence that Perón's opposition would not have been tolerated indefinitely. In 1952 orders went out to all local Peronist Party committees instructing them to compile lists of opponents in every province, department (township), ward, and neighborhood—with the person's address, occupation, place of work, and party affiliation. Local committees were to discover also which government posts in their districts were currently being filled by non-Peronists, and they were to note all sports and cultural clubs in their area so that competing Peronist organizations could be formed. The goal was to "undermine the morale and ability to resist of the enemy" and spread a "sentiment of despair" among them—to "localize, combat, and neutralize" all their actions. It was necessary to create for the public a Peronist "climate of victory" and an image of "meanness and injustice" in its adversaries.²¹

Some writers have suggested that the Peronist regime became really repressive only after the economy turned sour in 1949. Samuel Baily notes that the workers' real wages hit their lowest point in April 1953, the same month in which mobs sacked the Jockey Club—the preserve of Argentina's traditional social elite—and burned down the opposition parties' headquarters. Other writers point to the abortive military coup of November 1951 as the turning point. It is true that in this period a continual state of siege was imposed which suspended constitutional liberties; that the universities were taken over; that the country's leading newspaper was confiscated; that courses in *justicialismo* were required in all public schools; and that the campaign against the Catholic Church was started. But there had been high-handed acts before then. Between 1946 and 1950 the Supreme Court and all lower courts were purged and filled with Peronists; the constitution was rewritten to expand the executive power and permit Perón's reelection; dozens of opposition papers were closed down or attacked by hoodlums; provincial and local governments were put under martial law and had their non-Peronist officials removed; and congressmen were expelled for "disrespect." *Control del Estado*, a secret police operating directly under the president, already had begun infiltrating government agencies, including the military, to weed out disloyal elements.

²⁰ Ivone Kirkpatrick, *Mussolini, A Study In Power* (New York: Avon Books, 1964), 234-235.

²¹ Partido Peronista, *Directivas básicas*, 66, 70-71, 74, 77.

From the early days of the regime concentration camps existed in Patagonia to keep dissident labor leaders, politicians, and military officers; and police torture of political prisoners—often with electric cattle prods—was common practice.²²

Still, the climax of repression was not reached until the last months of the regime when Perón, having just survived a serious military revolt in June 1955, was struggling with the Catholic Church and a suddenly hopeful party opposition. In a violent speech on 31 August 1955 he told a mass rally that “. . . anyone, in any place, who tries to change the system against the constituted authorities, or against the laws, or the Constitution, may be killed by any Argentine.” “Every Peronist must apply this rule,” he urged, “not just against those who commit such acts, but also against those who inspire and incite them.” And he promised that for every Peronist who fell in the cause five of the enemy would fall.²³ Like the Argentine Secessionists in the Matteotti crisis, Perón’s enemies had forced the issue of his survival. Can there be any doubt that, had he survived, those remnants of opposition would have been wiped out?

What is more, Perón did have the use of strong-arm squads comparable to the Fascist Militia or the Nazi S.A. Although not officially integrated into the Peronist Party, the *Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista*, a para-military organization of some one thousand well armed men, was at his service. Although the *Alianza* was originally an independent nationalist group whose founding predated the regime, it had been taken over by Peronists in 1953. Subsequently, in that same year, its thugs destroyed the Jockey Club, and later, during Perón’s struggle with the clergy, it sacked and burned several churches in downtown Buenos Aires. Fanatical to the core, the *aliancistas* were the last Peronists to surrender when the regime fell in September 1955.²⁴

Finally, if totalitarianism means total dominance it must include control of the military. The Nazi and Soviet dictatorships achieved that goal, but Mussolini did not—since the Italian army deposed him in 1943. Germino, who considers Mussolini a totalitarian, ex-

²² Baily, *Labor Nationalism, and Politics*, 152; Blanksten, *Peron’s Argentina*, 166-173; Santos Martínez, *La nueva Argentina*, vol. I, 67-68.

²³ Juan V. Orona, *La dictadura de Perón* (Buenos Aires: Juan V. Orona, 1970), 263-265.

²⁴ Marysa Navarro Gerassi, *Los nacionalistas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Alvarez, 1968), 203, 211, 213; Whitaker, *Argentina*, 147; and Orona, *La dictadura*, 221.

plains that this could have happened only after serious military defeats. Yet Hitler and Stalin also suffered disastrous military setbacks, but neither of them was overthrown. Thus, "normal" fascism did not achieve the totalitarian stage, even though it strived to do so. By the same test Perón's dictatorship was not totalitarian, since he too was overthrown by the military. In his case, though, the bulk of the military was still loyal to the regime at the end. Perón might have crushed the rebels, but decided instead to flee the country. Furthermore, he was never repudiated by his own party, as Mussolini had been by the Grand Council just before his fall. Perón had probably gone further than Mussolini in penetrating his military establishment. Noncommissioned officers were especially well treated, and in return they were encouraged to inform on their superiors. As for the top brass, after 1949 the commander-in-chief was a Peronist of proven loyalty who began eliminating the disloyal and doubtful. By 1955 the military academy was requiring courses in *justicialismo* and officers were required to take an oath of loyalty, not only to the nation, but to Peronist doctrine as well.²⁵

CONCLUSION

Perón's dictatorship is an example of fascist rule if one accepts the two measures used in this paper. Its use of a single party and corporatist economic institutions; its stated ideals of government-imposed class collaboration, obedience, and national power; and its tendency to extend its coercive powers in a totalitarian fashion make it fit the definition of fascism offered earlier. Its main features also bore a close resemblance to Mussolini's Italy, our example of a "normal fascist" regime. In some respects Peronist party and corporative organizations were not so far developed as Fascist Italy's. But if the vocational groups for capital and labor had evolved only to the "syndicalist" phase in Argentina, it must also be kept in mind that Perón was in power for only 9 years, as compared to almost 21 years for Mussolini. Also, in other areas such as mass support and indoctrination of the military the Argentine regime may have been more radical, or "dynamic," than the Italian. In any case, the similarities between the two systems are so striking that the conclusion seems warranted that Perón was indeed a fascist.

²⁵ Marvin Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, and Nationalism In Argentina, 1930-1966* (Austin: U. of Texas, 1972), 104, 111, 119, 126; and Whitaker, *Argentina*, 129, 143.