

Peronism

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Peronism is one of the main social and political movements of contemporary Argentina. Peronism owes its name to its founder Juan Domingo Perón – three times president of Argentina (1946–1952, 1952–1955, and 1973–1974). Peronism is a national-populist movement related to the first incorporation of laborers into Argentina’s political arena. The movement since then has evolved and diversified.

ORIGIN

The origin of Peronism is a highly contested issue. The core of the debate is related to the characterization of Peronism as a rupture or a continuity with the past development of the struggles of popular sectors (the poor and/or marginalized strata) for incorporation in and transformation of the political regime.

There are a number of factors that together explain the origin of Peronism. The massive internal migration of politically inexperienced poor people to the large urban areas during the 1930s produced a huge demographic change and the alienation of politically inexperienced new migrants (Germani 1973; Di Tella 1990). Simultaneously, there was an accumulation of Communist and Socialist union struggles that produced a disparity between the material expectations of redistribution and the few actual or perceived achievements obtained, which led old and new union leaders to support Perón for pragmatic and ideological purposes (Murmis & Portantiero 1971; Torre 1990). A group of politically unrepresented elites also found an opportunity to access power. Peronism included the emergent national industrialists as well as politically marginal civil and military right-wing and Social Christian intellectuals (Di Tella 1990; Brennan 1998). Last,

the charismatic bond built between Perón and the popular sectors allowed for the replacement of much of the previous labor movement arrangements by ideologically transforming the popular sectors (James 1988; Plotkin 2003).

The combination of these elements built a populist multiclass coalition that worked until the 1955 coup against Perón (Di Tella 1990). However, from 1955 to 1973 the Peronist movement gradually added a youth left-wing sector and increased the role of unions while detaching the industrialists and right-wing elites. In this period the Peronist movement was proscribed and entered into a phase of state persecution that increased the movement’s radicalization, leading to the creation of Peronist guerrilla organizations.

IDEOLOGY

Justicialismo – a blending of the Spanish terms for social justice – is the ideology proclaimed by Peronism. The scholarship on the Peronist movement has produced a rich debate about its ideology, due to Perón’s changing discourse and scholars’ use of European analytic categories to explain a Latin American phenomenon. *Justicialismo* is founded on Social Christian values and has three basic principles: social justice, political sovereignty, and economic independence. In pursuit of these three principles, Perón elaborated two key notions. The first is related to the location of Peronism as a movement in a third position “equidistant from both idealism and materialism and, in terms of socio-economic models, counterposed itself equally to capitalism and communism” (Gillespie 1982: 18). The second is related to the societal model to achieve social welfare. The organized community idea is one of direct state intervention to assure harmony between laborers and employers (Perón 1951). The Peronist economic model could be considered as an emulation of the Scandinavian welfare states

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in a mixed economy with a central role for unions in corporatist arrangements. In comparative terms, Peronism is the equivalent for Argentina to the US New Deal, and Getúlio Vargas' *Trabalhismo* in Brazil.

PERONISM AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The great internal diversity of the Peronist movement has produced some confusion among scholars due to equating the electoral Partido Justicialista (PJ) with Peronism as such. As the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands is not the German labor movement, the PJ is not the Peronist movement, just the most important of a series of Peronist parties. Even Perón asserted that Peronism was not a party but a movement (Perón 1951), which was composed of four branches during the 1946–1976 period: (1) political, the electoral and patronage instrument based on the PJ; (2) female, created by Evita Perón after the enfranchisement of women and later underdeveloped; (3) labor, by far the most developed and structured sector, based on the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT); and (4) youth, incorporated in 1971–1974 through the creation of a Peronist student movement and left-wing guerrilla organizations such as the Montoneros (Gillespie 1982; McGuire 1997). From 1955 the industrialists were gradually marginalized, through being represented in the weak Confederación General Económica.

Redemocratization in 1983 and neoliberal reforms from 1976 undermined the unions' power as the PJ mutated into a patronage-machine party (Levitsky 2003). This new context produced a decline of the CGT influence inside the PJ during the 1990s. At the same time, the Peronist movement diversified, with the creation of the new union Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA) in 1992, and the piqueteros movement that mobilizes unemployed laborers in 1996. The PJ has been quite dominant but has been weakened by disputes within its constituency by alternative Peronist

parties since the 1990s, such as the right-wing *Movimiento por la Dignidad y la Independencia* and the center-left *Frente Grande*.

In brief, Peronism can be studied as a movement because it is composed of a network of union, party, and social organizations that are interrelated through grassroots branches and informal gatherings, making use of contentious and routine strategies for electoral and other political purposes. The Peronist movement has transcended any specific protest with periods of latency and underground resistance networks during the 1955–1973 and 1976–1983 periods. Finally, as has happened with equivalent labor-based movements elsewhere, Peronism developed a popular political culture that unifies multiple actors and individuals, providing them with an identity that does not require membership.

POLITICAL POPULAR CULTURE

Historically Peronism was the movement that first incorporated workers into the nation's politics. For this reason, the formation of the dominant laborers' tradition in Argentina is intimately related to the Peronist movement. Peronism has an emblem, hymn, intellectuals, and is the hegemonic political popular culture of the poor people. Among the varied elements of the Peronist popular culture, Evita is the best-known figure, sometimes even worshiped as a saint comparable to the Virgin Mary (Karush & Chamosa 2010).

The Peronist popular culture is the most resilient element of the movement, resisting multiple persecutions and twists on elites' discourses and practices. The neoliberal policies of Carlos Menem's (PJ) presidency (1989–1995, 1995–1999) put into crisis some of the Peronist national-populist principles, while it showed the movement's resilience. Martucelli and Svampa (1997) identified union, revolutionary, and party pragmatic types of Peronist militants during the 1990s. Auyero (2000) provided a detailed analysis of the clientelistic grassroots logics of the

PJ and the redefinition of the Peronist anti-establishment mythical origins.

In a new turn of Peronism, Néstor Kirchner's (2003–2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's (from 2007) center-left Peronist presidencies have promoted a redevelopment of some of the first incorporation and left-wing Peronist symbols and rhetoric while including part of the piqueteros and unions in the government coalition.

SEE ALSO: Alienation and social movements; Charisma; Guerrilla movements; Ideology; Labor movement in Latin America; Leadership; *Piqueteros* (workers/unemployment movement in Argentina); Poor people's movements; Populism/populist movements.

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