

President Raúl Alfonsín of Argentina: going, going, gone?

by Robyn Quijano

Since the surprise electoral victory of the Peronists last September, Radical Party President Raúl Alfonsín has matched the Argentine economy's serious depression. This writer found Buenos Aires buzzing with rumors that Alfonsín was about to resign, and, except for a media-inspired rebound during his December state visit to Italy, he has demonstrated daily his incapacity to govern. Even Italy's boost of \$5 billion of promised investments betrayed Alfonsín's precarious status by conditioning the investments on the "consolidation of democracy." Since the first of the year, Alfonsín has attended public events surrounded by three medical doctors, sparking rumors about the state of his health. Whether or not Alfonsín bows out, his Radical government, and the liberal economic policies that have created chaos, have demonstrated the bankruptcy of the present order.

The Peronist electoral victory in 17 out of 22 governorships has ironically signaled the weakening and disintegration of the Peronist Party as well. While the nationalist ideals of the Peronists remain very much alive, in what is still loosely defined as the Peronist movement, the party itself, taken over by the *renovadores* or reformers, and headed by Buenos Aires Gov. Antonio Cafiero, is now dominated and controlled by liberalizers with more in common with the Socialist International, than with the historic Gen. Juan Domingo Perón and his movement. The Peronist movement, based on the trade unions and other nationalist sectors, was responsible for the electoral victory, yet has been largely disenfranchised within the party apparatus. The strong-arm tactics of the reformers caused the real Peronist base to look elsewhere to reassert their political clout.

Cafiero regularly boasts of his wrecking of the Peronist Party, as in an interview published in the *New York Times* on Dec. 12, 1987. This writer was in Buenos Aires at that time and interviewed a dozen Peronist leaders of the orthodox or traditionalist wing of the party, who had been wiped out of the present power play by internal factional battles. Cafiero attacked such Peronists as "Mr. Feudal, the old expression of Peronism that we don't want any more," in the *Times* interview. He also proclaimed the death of the trade union power base within Peronism as key to his "reform."

Henry Kissinger, deeply involved in Argentine politics since the days of his close relationship with the generals of the military "process" (1976-83), and his buddy, Finance Minister José Martínez de Hoz, who designed the ultra-liberal economy that indebted and looted the nation, pronounced upon his favored solution to the current crisis. According to Buenos Aires Radio Mitre, Kissinger noted that Alfonsín may resign before his term ends in 1989. Cafiero would not be able to win the presidential race, Kissinger said, favoring "one faction of the UCR [the Radical Party]," in combination with "liberalism," that is the Union of the Democratic Center (UCD) of Alvaro Alsogaray.

Alsogaray is a disciple of Friedrich von Hayek, and his party is made up of rabid free-enterprise cultists, dedicated to the deregulation of everything, the imposition of the "informal [black market] economy," and the virtual disappearance of the state. Kissinger's UCR faction is led by probable presidential candidate for 1989, Córdoba Gov. Eduardo Angeloz. Angeloz got the backing of the Rockefeller crowd during a recent visit to the Council of the Americas in New York. Such an alliance, despite their "right-wing" credentials, would continue handing the country over to the Soviets as Alfonsín and the previous military government have done.

Potential for a new nationalist movement

While the alliance of the UCR and the UCD, and the return of the Martínez de Hoz policy with the radical new cover of the "informal economy" revolution, is the solution of Kissinger and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), another movement is emerging that could impose a nationalist policy. A "moral backlash" has occurred against the hideous opening to pornography, drug traffic, and crime associated with the Radical government. The old power blocs around the Liberal military government, the Radical Party, and the Peronist Party are each increasingly discredited.

A new movement is emerging from within the nationalist military sectors, hostile to both the old liberal military, and the "human rights" mafia handing the nation over to moral disintegration. This movement includes many of the popular Peronist bases disenfranchised by the liberal Cafiero, includ-

ing trade unionists and industrialists who have been wiped out by Alfonsín's policies. International forces that so gleefully promoted the liberal destruction of the Peronist party forgot that the nationalist Peronist movement could strike out in another direction. This new movement also includes the traditionalist wing of the Catholic Church, which has great strength within Argentina, unlike many other Ibero-American nations where Liberation Theology factions are on the offensive.

An upset in December of the government's plan to impose a radical liberal education reform, showed the muscle of the new movement. Alfonsín convened a pedagogical convention to invite the participation of parents in the educational reform. The Catholic Church hierarchy, already upset by the government's permissiveness toward pornography and drugs, called for a parental rebellion against an education reform that was designed to prohibit religious education in the country. Without a party mobilization, parents, educators, and other citizens came out against the immorality of the reforms, and won all the delegates in the vote in Buenos Aires. The Radical Party representatives were made the minority delegates since they lost the vote, thus jeopardizing the reform.

This writer spoke to several families that had participated in the convention, and found that the sense that a movement might stop the moral chaos was strong. The only party that intervened into this operation was the government party, and they lost the battle badly.

This was one of the sparks of optimism I observed in a population that is by and large enmeshed in desperation over the destruction of a nation with some of the greatest natural wealth in the world. Argentina held the world's record for industrial growth in the late '40s, and in 1960 was ahead of Japan in industrial production per capita, with a comparable level of scientific and technical education. When the Mexico oil boom was on in the late '70s, President Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski stated that the United States would never permit "a Japan south of our borders."

One cannot fully understand what has become of Argentina's vast potential, unless one understands the special operations run against this nation by the international oligarchy determined to secure the southern hemisphere as their undeveloped raw materials reserve. Since Perón's first government in 1945, they have been determined to destroy the nation that could change the economic history of the entire continent. Since the Malvinas war, the fervor of the oligarchy to "get Argentina" has even increased.

Driving out from Buenos Aires to the Pampas, one is amazed by the flat rich land that produces some of the best beef in the world. This is the land that had highly mechanized agriculture, advanced industry, a scientific elite that closed the nuclear cycle, and a political elite with a profound knowledge of history and world events. The valuable resource that Argentina represented for the entire subcontinent, scientifically and culturally, as well as in production of physical

wealth, is now disappearing into desperation and economic chaos.

This land of agricultural wealth now has 70,000 fewer tractors than 10 years ago. A study released by Argentina's national statistical institute reports that 40% of all primary school children, one and a half million, "live with their basic needs unsatisfied, without adequate nourishment." This, in a nation that could easily be the breadbasket for the entire continent.

For workers, living standards have deteriorated increasingly in the last three months. All wage earners, including the military and professionals, are unable to meet the basic needs of their families. Industries are being destroyed, and industrialists have turned to speculation as the only means to survive. One nostalgic industrialist told me that he speculates to put the money into his hobby, industrial production.

The inflation of the last months has caused book and newspaper sales to plummet. A daily paper cost 1.2 australes in early December, more than 25¢. Sales of cigarettes are down 15%, and attendance at movie theaters down 42%. Industrial salaries have fallen 7% since the imposition of a new austerity program in mid-October. As income falls, cafés and stores empty out, and taxis roam the streets looking for customers who are walking or taking buses. Consumption of gasoline is down 20%. In the first three weeks of November, the collection of taxes by the General Tax Division fell 10%. Since industry is failing and consumption is down, a new tax plan, which the government hopes will bring in \$3.5 billion, will simply send more of the economy underground.

The Argentine Industrial Council (CAI) issued a document in December entitled "A New Attack on Small and Medium-Sized Industry," which hits plans to eliminate tariff barriers on Jan. 31 for several categories of industrial inputs. "What is really being proposed is the broad and unrestricted import of all those industrial products currently produced in our country," supposedly to "eliminate inefficiency" and allow "freedom of the marketplace," but really in "an effort to get rid of what still remains of national industry," states the document.

While IMF pressure is on to end all regulation and protectionism, which had allowed for industrial growth from the time of Perón's first presidency, there is equal pressure for the banks to come up with some camouflaged debt deal, or "agreed-on" moratorium to try to save Alfonsín's skin. With the mood in Buenos Aires, it is unlikely that such a deal could buy Alfonsín more than a few weeks. No bankers' moratorium will heal the wounds already inflicted on the physical economy. A popular explosion is coming, which could put into power the "harmony of interests" of a nationalist military, the traditional Church, industrialists, and the powerful Peronist trade unions. The big news from Argentina in the coming months will be the increasingly hysterical efforts by Kissinger, the Trilateral Commission, and their Soviet cohorts to prevent such an occurrence.