

## 2

## JUAN PERÓN AND ARGENTINA

Peronism is one of the most controversial topics in Latin American history. Historians have tried to unravel why the ideas and image of Juan Domingo Perón have been so passionately defended, or rejected, since his reign. They have studied Perón's rise and fall to understand why, both during his 18-year exile as well as after his death, he has continued to influence Argentine history and politics.

This chapter focuses on the rise to power and rule of Juan Perón in Argentina. It addresses the reasons and ways in which Perón came to rule in 1946 and covers the domestic policies implemented in the country during his two consecutive terms in office (1946–52 and 1952–55). It also looks at the reasons for his fall in 1955, and refers to his third presidency between 1973 and 1974.



Juan Perón

#### Timeline – 1895–1976

- 1895** Juan Domingo Perón is born in Lobos, province of Buenos Aires.
- 1911** Perón starts his military training.
- 1919** Eva Duarte (Evita) is born in Los Toldos, province of Buenos Aires.
- 1930** A coup involving the Argentine armed forces led by General Uriburu, with the participation of Perón, overthrows President Hipólito Yrigoyen. The 'Infamous Decade' begins.
- 1936** Perón is appointed military attaché to the Argentine embassy in the Republic of Chile.
- 1939** Perón leaves Argentina for Europe on a military mission. Outbreak of World War II (1939–45). Argentina proclaims its neutrality.
- 1941** Perón returns to Argentina and is promoted to the rank of colonel.
- 1943** A military coup against President Castillo is organized by the Grupo de Oficiales Unidos (GOU; United Officers' Group). One of its leading figures is Colonel Perón, who becomes Secretary of Labour and Welfare.
- 1944** Perón meets Eva Duarte at a fundraising event for the victims of an earthquake in the province of San Juan. Argentina breaks off diplomatic relations with Japan and Germany. General Farrell becomes President. Perón is appointed Minister of War and Vice-President.
- 1945** Perón is pushed out of office and imprisoned in the island of Martín García. Five days later, hundreds of thousands of workers march to Casa Rosada to demand Perón's release.
- 1946** Perón wins elections for the presidency.
- 1947** Women are granted the right to vote.
- 1949** A new constitution strengthens the power of the President, allows for his re-election and incorporates social rights.
- 1951** Perón is re-elected President with a huge majority.
- 1952** Eva Perón dies.
- 1955** An attempted coup by the Argentine navy is crushed by forces loyal to Perón. In September, a coup by all three branches of the armed forces leads to the 'Liberating Revolution'. Perón resigns and goes into exile.
- 1958** Presidential elections are held. Perón orders the Peronists to make a **blank vote**. Arturo Frondizi is elected President.



#### Blank vote

A blank vote means the voter does not endorse any candidate in an election or other kind of democratic process.

### The Great Depression

Economic crisis that began in the USA in 1929 with the collapse of the stock market, and which led to the financial ruin of banks in Europe and the USA and impacted on economies worldwide during the 1930s.



- 1962** Frondizi is overthrown and replaced by José M. Guido, President of the Senate.
- 1963** Arturo Illia is elected President.
- 1966** A coup led by General Juan Carlos Onganía overthrows President Illia.
- 1970** General Onganía is deposed and replaced by Roberto M. Levingston.
- 1971** President Levingston is deposed and replaced by General Alejandro A. Lanusse.
- 1972** Perón makes a brief visit to Argentina.
- 1973** The Peronist Party wins elections in March. Hector Cámpora becomes President. Perón returns to Buenos Aires in June. Cámpora resigns and Perón is elected President in September.
- 1974** Perón dies in July. His third wife, Isabel, succeeds him. Terrorism from right and left escalates, leaving hundreds dead. There are strikes, demonstrations and high inflation.
- 1976** Isabel Perón is overthrown by a military coup.

## Section I: Historical background and the road to the presidency

**Figure 2.1**  
Map of Argentina



Argentina, the largest country in Latin America after Brazil, achieved its independence from Spain in 1816. The Argentine economy in the 19th and early 20th centuries developed based on the export of food such as wheat and meat and the importation of manufactured and luxury goods, largely coming from Europe. Industrial development was mostly restricted to meatpacking and refrigerating factories to facilitate the exports of food to distant markets. The arrival of immigrants from Europe provided the country with a rural working class and skilled urban labourers, which in turn fuelled a continuous increase in the agricultural output. European – and later US – capital was invested in developing the Argentine railways and meatpacking, communications and service industries, and Buenos Aires became a major port for exports. The ruling class in the country represented the land-owning families who defended the economic agro-exporting model, which enjoyed a sustained level of growth until the **Great Depression** of 1929.

### The Infamous Decade (1930–43)

As a result of the Depression, the prices of commodities plummeted and by 1933 they were at 50 per cent of their 1928 level. The drop in prices was less severe for manufactured than industrial goods. This situation eroded the **terms of trade** for Argentina, and it was not long before the country faced difficulties in affording the importation of the industrial and luxury goods which it did not produce.

The economic problems affecting the nation contributed to political instability and in 1930 caused the overthrow of the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR; Radical Party) democratic government, led by **Hipólito Yrigoyen**, by army officers with popular support. This event was followed by a period of autocratic conservative rule known as the 'Infamous Decade',

which, despite its name, extended for 13 years. Argentine Presidents came to office either through *coups d'état* or fraud in elections.

The period inaugurated by the 1930 coup brought many changes to the Argentine economy and society. Although the immediate economic effects of the Depression were relatively short-lived, it became clear that there was a need to overcome the country's economic vulnerability. The governments after 1930 began to develop national industries to substitute importations and reduce dependency. With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the idea that Argentina needed to gain economic independence was strengthened.

During the Infamous Decade, traditional political parties were banned from participating in elections; opponents to the regime were persecuted, imprisoned and tortured. Corruption was widespread. People lost faith in the political system and rejected the prevailing corruption and government impunity.



### Terms of trade

Relationship between the prices at which a country sells its exports and the prices paid for its imports.

### Hipólito Yrigoyen (1852–1933)

The first Argentine President elected by universal male suffrage. He represented the Radical Party (UCR). Yrigoyen ruled between 1916 and 1922 and, after a four-year rule by another member of his party, was re-elected in 1928. The rule of the UCR between 1916 and 1930 represented the first time in Argentine history when the middle class played important political roles. Under Perón, the UCR party became his main opponent.



To access Worksheet 2.1 on 'Cambalache', please visit [www.pearsonbacconline.com](http://www.pearsonbacconline.com) and follow the on-screen instructions.



### ToK Time

The tango music and dance is universally associated with Argentina, though it is more representative of the city of Buenos Aires, its capital. Tango originated towards the end of the 19th century, and was first danced among men in the brothels and ports of Buenos Aires. Read through the lyrics below, then tackle the questions that follow, thinking generally about the relationship between the arts and politics.

*Today no one gives a damn  
Whether you are straight or bent!  
Ignorant, scholar, crook,  
Kind or con!  
Whatever! No matter!  
Great professor or dunce,  
Who cares!  
No lesser, no betters,  
The immorals have made us all the same  
(...)  
And, like a mule,  
you may work night and day,  
but you are just the same  
As the man who lives off others,  
the man who kills, who cures,  
who lives by breaking the law.*

From the lyrics of tango 'Cambalache', composed by Enrique Santos Discépolo in 1934. Quoted in Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo (eds), *The Argentine Reader: History, Culture and Politics*, 2002

### Questions

- What is the message of 'Cambalache'? The word is used in Argentina and Uruguay to refer to shops that sell all kinds of second-hand products. Why do you think the author chose this word as a title for his tango?
- Can you think of other examples of songs that express critical views of specific historical events or periods? How effective has social criticism been when channelled through the arts? To what extent are political and social criticisms legitimate roles of the arts?

## The international context

To better understand the context of Perón's rise to power, you need to be aware of the events that were happening in the world between 1930 and his election as President of Argentina in 1946. We have already mentioned the impact of the Depression on the Argentine economy, and how it led to a revision of its economic model in favour of a policy of import substitution. The economic problems that began in 1930 and the plans to industrialize Argentina exposed the gaps between the rich and the poor. Rural workers arrived in the cities hoping to find jobs in factories, but lived and worked in very precarious conditions. The fear that the new social and economic conditions would make communism attractive to these

### Examiner's hint

Paper 2 questions will not focus on the foreign policies of the selected leaders. However, it is very difficult to understand how and why Perón came to power in 1946 without considering some of the most relevant ideas and events at the time. You may have already referred to some of these in your lessons.

sectors also played a role in the support for Perón, as we will later examine. Moreover, the outbreak of World War II in 1939 encouraged support for the idea that Argentina needed to break away from international economic dependence and achieve self-sufficiency.

In the political field, the emergence of ideologies such as fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany, with their contempt for democracy and support for nationalist ideals, also contributed to the circumstances in which Perón rose. There were many Argentines who were disappointed at the fake and corrupt democracy of the Infamous Decade, which had not brought effective solutions. They were attracted to the European models of government, which at the time seemed to have improved the social and economic situation in countries like Italy and Germany.

## Origins and nature of authoritarian and single-party states – Argentina

This section analyzes Perón's rise to power. It addresses the structural problems of Argentina at the time, as well as the immediate events surrounding his rise (1943–46) in an attempt to explain how and why he became President of Argentina in 1946.

### Why did Perón come to power?

There is no straightforward answer to the above question, and several issues need to be considered. Long-term conditions, which we have briefly considered, were of great importance in making Juan Perón an appealing figure to the Argentines. An analysis of the circumstances in which he appeared on the political scene in 1943 also contributes to understanding the short-term factors behind his rise.

### Long-term factors

The reasons why Perón came to power are related to the social, political and economic structures of Argentina. The governments of the Infamous Decade were unpopular for many reasons. We have already noted the lack of genuine democracy and the widespread corruption prevailing during those years. At a political level, we could add that the middle class felt their voices were not heard; intellectuals felt politically frustrated, since they couldn't voice their thoughts and were unable to fight against fraud and **nepotism**. Yet the working class lacked the organization – and perhaps even the political awareness – to fight against this system, while the middle class had not yet found a leading figure to organize the opposition.

Juan Perón is best known as the first political figure to address effectively the many problems of the working class. Governments before 1943 had done very little to grant the social legislation that protected workers in other countries. No laws protecting workers' rights existed, to the advantage of employers. Labour movements and socialist parties had had limited political participation and had not brought about significant changes in these conditions.

### SOURCE A

*In the initial stages of industrialisation, characterised by under-capitalised small scale industry, makeshift machinery, poorly designed buildings and a tendency to cut corners, workers laboured under marginal conditions. Dust, chemical fumes, stench and dangerous solvents assaulted the health of workers. Packinghouse floors covered with blood, entrails and excrements made for ghastly work. Men who carried meat to the freezers covered their faces*

#### Nepotism

Favouritism shown in business and politics on the basis of family relationships.



*and hands with rags or old newspapers so that the fresh blood would not freeze on their bodies. Rheumatism disabled many packinghouse workers within five years. Child labour resulted in prematurely aged and wizened children. Employers, accustomed to the grim reality of factory life, demonstrated little concern for the health and comfort of their employees... In rural areas conditions differed but presented their own hardships. Low wages, payments in scripts, inadequate food and conditions of semi-servitude could all be found.*

From Colin M. MacLachlan, *Argentina: What Went Wrong?*, 2001

## STUDENT STUDY SECTION

### QUESTIONS

- What, according to Source A, were the social problems of Argentina in the 1940s?
- On the bases of the evidence in Source A, imagine you are a trade union leader in 1940. What demands would you present to the government? Why?

Another structural problem of Argentina was that Buenos Aires ruled over the country. This rule was not only in political terms, but also in economic terms. The railroads designed by the British in the 19th century connected the provinces to Buenos Aires, but not the provinces to each other. Hence the industrial boom was heavily concentrated around Buenos Aires (with some industrial areas in cities like Córdoba and Rosario – see map on p.10). All this led the provinces to be economically and socially backwards compared to Buenos Aires. The levels of malnutrition and illiteracy were far higher in the interior; the rural workers lived far apart, as roads were still very few. These circumstances pushed them to Buenos Aires, where they found poor living and working conditions. Such long-term factors played a significant part in explaining Perón's rise, as they relate to the promises and proposed solutions he made during his ascendancy and rule.

## Short-term factors

The events and circumstances surrounding the emergence of Perón on the political scene relate to two main areas: 1) the outbreak of World War II and its impact on Argentina; 2) the action of a military secret society, the Grupo de Oficiales Unidos (GOU; United Officers' Group).

### Argentina and World War II

When World War II broke out in 1939, Argentina declared its neutrality in the conflict. Great Britain welcomed this declaration because, as neutral vessels, the Argentine ships could continue to sail and supply Allied Europe without facing attacks from the enemy. However, after its entry into the war in 1941, the USA began to put pressure on the Argentine government to break diplomatic relations with the **Axis**. The Argentines were divided between those who wanted to declare war against the Axis and those who felt that Argentina should maintain its tradition of neutrality. Although there was a small group who sympathized with the Axis, represented, for example, by certain circles in the armed forces, they did not openly express this and tended to join those who favoured neutrality.

On 4 June 1943, the military intervened in the political life of Argentina again, leading a coup that overthrew President Ramón S. Castillo and ended the Infamous Decade. The ostensible aim was to prevent another fraudulent election from taking place. However, there were other reasons for the coup. Some sectors of the armed forces had grounds to believe that the candidate who would have won the elections by fraud had intentions of declaring

### **Axis**

The alliance of Germany, Japan and Italy and their allies. The enemy of the Axis is referred to as the Allies, which consisted primarily of Great Britain, the USA and the Soviet Union, with Italy switching sides to the Allies in 1943.

war against the Axis. The armed forces interfered in political life to prevent this from happening and to continue with the position of neutrality. This position was interpreted both within the country as well as by the USA as an implicit support of the Axis.

### The GOU

The group that led the coup was represented by a secret society known as the GOU, of which Colonel Juan D. Perón was a founding member. They were young officers from middle- and lower-class families of anti-communist, ultra-catholic and nationalist ideas. The ideas of the GOU responded to the situation in Argentina in the early 1940s:

- They claimed they had come to end corruption and fraud and to restore the Argentine constitution.
- They believed that Argentina had to develop its national industry and strengthen its defences.
- Fearful of the possible expansion of communism after the end of World War II, they considered it was better to introduce improvements in the living and working conditions of employees from above, to avoid them being attracted by left-wing ideas.
- At an international level, they defended the idea that Argentina should remain in a position of neutrality towards the war and resisted US pressure to declare war on the Axis.

But although they had a set of aims, it was only with Perón that these aims became a programme of action to address the specific problems of Argentina. He was fundamental for the government to gain civilian support. His role within the government that emerged from the 1943 coup became an important factor in this rise.

### SOURCE B

*On June 5, one day after taking power, the new government issued a proclamation, probably written by Perón, making public its objectives. According to this proclamation, the principal problem of the country, whose resolution the new authorities took it upon themselves to solve, were: immorality in public administration, the absence of God in public schools, the excessive power of 'usurious capital' to the detriment of national interests, the lack of moral authority of the judicial system, and the Communist threat. The military authorities also stressed the importance of industrial development as a prerequisite for attaining 'economic independence'.*

**From Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: A Cultural History of Perón's Argentina*, 2003**

#### ● Examiner's hint

Exam questions on authoritarian and single-party states may ask how and why a leader came to power. To analyze the reasons (why), you should focus on the long- and short-term factors that explain his rise. In the case of Perón, it would be important to look at the characteristics of the background against which he rose: a discredited democracy; a working class that lacked representation and labour legislation; the rise of industrialization, etc. You also could assess the significance of World War II in creating circumstances that were favourable for Perón's rise and address the ideas Perón represented and how they related to the issues described above.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTIONS

- What principles of the GOU are reflected in Source B?
- How do they relate to the problems Argentina faced between 1930 and 1943? Which sectors of society do you think found these principles appealing? Why?

## How did Perón rise to power?

We have now learnt about some of the problems Argentina faced, such as its discredited democracy, the difficulties of an agro-exporting economy and the rise of an urban working class on the eve of industrialization. We have analyzed how these factors led to the collapse of the system implemented in the Infamous Decade, and to the success of the military coup in 1943. These issues have helped us understand the circumstances that played a part in

Perón's rise. We now need to look at the ways in these long- and short-term causes were cleverly used by Perón in his ascent to power.

Colonel Perón did not occupy the presidency of the Republic in 1943. This was held for three days by General Arturo Rawson, who was replaced by General Pedro Pablo Ramírez and, in March 1944, by Edelmiro Farrell, a supporter of Perón.

## Perón: Secretary of Labour and Welfare

The process of industrialization that began in the early 1930s caused a rush of **internal migration** – that is people moving within a country – from the countryside to the major cities in search of employment in the factories. This exponential growth met with severe problems in terms of housing and the very poor living conditions for those arriving to join the urban workforce, many of whom did not find jobs fast enough. Consequently, slums developed outside the industrial areas of the large cities, but the government provided them with very little social assistance. Also, trade unions were poorly prepared to absorb the masses of workers, of which only a limited number had unionized before 1943. The urban and rural workers, now formed largely by native Argentines rather than immigrants, felt their interests and needs were not taken into account either by the government nor the trade union leaders. This is significant because native Argentines, as opposed to immigrants, could vote. Remember, Perón was legitimately elected President for his three terms in office.

The military coup of 1943 placed Perón in the Labour Department, an institution that did not have significant political weight. In November that year, it was raised to the status of Secretariat of Labour and Welfare by unifying different welfare agencies and putting them under Perón's control, with the aim of centralizing them and making the new Secretariat more efficient. His work as Secretary of Labour and Welfare, from November 1943 to October 1945, achieved far more for the workers than anything the unions had achieved since 1930. Instead of repressing the workers, as the government had done in the past, or allowing them to be attracted by the leftist political parties, Perón listened to them and acted upon their demands and needs. His reforms included:

- Improvement in labour legislation (such as the establishment of labour courts to rule in conflicts between employers and employees).
- Regulations against arbitrary job dismissal.
- The right to paid holidays for workers.
- Regulations covering the apprenticeship of minors.
- Retirement benefits for workers.
- New syndicates were created for those economic activities that had not been unionized before.
- Commissions were formed by representatives of workers and employers to negotiate matters related to work conditions and pay.
- Wages were increased.
- The passing of the Peasant Statute: for the first time, rural workers were unionized and their working and living conditions subject to the law rather than to the goodwill of their employers.
- Other measures included the freezing of the rent paid on fields to the owners and the suspension of peasants' evictions.

Perón offered a new vision as regards labour. He said that in labour issues there were three actors: the workers, the employers and the state, and all should have a say. He made sure he was seen as the creator and producer of all reforms and changes (see Source C following).

### ● Examiner's hint

If asked how a leader came to power, you should focus on the methods he used. In other words, if the problems of the working class were a condition that supported Perón's rise, you should now analyze what he did in relation to such a condition and how those methods or policies contributed to his political achievements. Did he use legal methods? Did he make use of force? You could also refer to events that may have either weakened the opposition or strengthened Perón's position.



### Internal migration into the cities

It is estimated that the population living in the industrial area of greater Buenos Aires increased by one million between 1936 and 1945.

● **Examiner's hint**

Some of the leaders you have or will study are charismatic; others are not. This word refers to whether people see a leader as somebody who is set apart from the rest of the people because of his exceptional personal qualities or his exemplary actions, both of which inspire loyalty among his followers. Consider why Perón could be considered a charismatic leader. Think of how you would justify the idea that Perón was charismatic (you can find examples throughout this chapter). Analyze the role charisma played in Perón's rise and rule, and consider how this information can help you demonstrate your understanding of Perón. Have you studied any other charismatic leader? Explain the nature of the leader's charisma.

**SOURCE C**

*If a law was to be proposed, Perón made the announcement. When delegations came to discuss the matter, Perón addressed them. When the law was signed, it was his hand that held the pen. If there was a ceremony that could be worked up, it was held in his office. If a gesture was desired to tilt a strike negotiation to the side of labour, it was Perón who would visit the premises and be photographed chatting with the strikers. If union leaders had to be coaxed, it was to Perón's office that they were invited... As time went on the entire national movement came to be seen as the personal and sole achievement of Perón, a movement in which Perón led and the labour leaders struggled to maintain his pace. He was using them, not the reverse.*

From Robert D. Crassweller, *Perón and the Enigmas of Argentina*, 1987

**STUDENT STUDY SECTION**

**QUESTIONS**

- Looking at Source C, explain the meaning and significance of the sentence 'He was using them, not the reverse.'
- Perón later referred to his years as Secretary of Labour as his 'charismatic years'. What do you think he meant by this? To what extent do you agree with this description?

In exchange for the recognition of these rights and the mediation of the Secretariat, which often benefited the workers over the employers, Perón expected the unions to recognize government leadership over their affairs. Before the end of the year, Perón had made significant progress in his attempt to militarize the trade unions, that is, to make them respond to the government. The most important central labour organization at a national level was the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT; General Confederation of Labour), which was founded in 1930. Shortly before the 1943 coup, it split into CGT1 and CGT2, responding to political differences in the leadership. Perón dissolved the CGT2, claiming that it was dominated by communists. He restructured the CGT1 as one single union that responded to him.

**SOURCE D**

*At this point Perón in no way controlled the CGT or the labour movement. The colonel had no punitive mechanism at his disposal and could not enforce the loyalties of organised labour. But what he could do and did do was bind labour's recently acquired privileges to his tenure in office. Union leaders understood perfectly well that if Perón lost power, the progress they had been making would swiftly deteriorate.*

From Joseph Page, *Perón: A Biography*, 1983

**STUDENT STUDY SECTION**

**QUESTIONS**

- How does Source D explain the ways in which Perón benefited from his position as Secretary of Labour?
- What limitations does Source D identify in Perón's influence over the workers?

## How did Perón's work as Secretary of Labour contribute to his rise?

There are two main reasons why Perón's role in the Secretariat of Labour strengthened his position. First, the fact that Perón fulfilled many of the demands of the unions meant that traditional left-wing parties, which claimed to represent the interests of the workers, lost their appeal. Workers realized that it was more likely that conflicts were resolved and demands met if they went to Perón and accepted his role in the negotiations. Second, and equally important, was the extent to which Perón was personally associated with the newly acquired rights. This meant that the workers – who feared the loss of their benefits – became unconditional supporters of Perón. The working class had been transformed from a potential threat to a strong and compliant source of support. Perón's political alliance with organized labour became a fundamental instrument in his rise to power.

There was also a significant event that gave Perón the opportunity to go beyond the circle of labour relations into an area of higher profile, that of social aid. Early in 1944, a devastating earthquake hit the northern province of San Juan. Perón led, organized and attended fundraising campaigns to assist the victims of the earthquake. This event had an unexpected but equally significant ramification. It was at one of these fundraising events that he met actress **Eva Duarte**, who played a fundamental role in Perón's rule.

## Perón: Minister of War and Vice-President

In January 1944, Argentina abandoned its neutrality and broke relations with the Axis. Argentina only declared war on the Axis in 1945, the year the war ended. This shift in policy led to President Ramírez's resignation and the appointment of General Edelmiro Farrell as President. As a consequence of these changes in cabinet, Perón took office in the War Ministry (without abandoning his position of Secretary of Labour), which had been under the command of now President Farrell.

Perón launched a massive expansion of the armed forces. He increased both the army's size and its budget: the army's manpower tripled by 1945 and army expenditure more than doubled between 1943 and 1945. He ordered the purchase of new military equipment, expanded local factories for the production of military material, raised officers' pay and improved military barracks and living quarters. These policies gained Perón the support of the army. In July 1944, Perón also became Vice-President of Argentina.

## The Perónist ideology

You now have an understanding of the background against which Perón came to power and of how these circumstances relate to the actions of Perón within the government. To understand his rise, you should also study his ideas and assess how and why they became appealing to the Argentine people. It is important to keep in mind that the rise of Perón, unlike that of some of the other single-party leaders you may study, is completed with his election as President of Argentina in February 1946. In this context, it becomes important to understand why his thoughts became appealing to a majority of voters.

Although there are hundreds of writings, speeches and recorded interviews with Perón, historians and political analysts have always found it very difficult to agree in their

**Eva Duarte (1919–52)**  
Eva Duarte was born in the small village of Los Toldos in 1919. At the age of 15, Eva decided to move to Buenos Aires to become an actress and had some success as a radio star. When she met and later married Colonel Perón, her life changed dramatically and she became an important political figure in her own right.



Eva Perón

interpretations of Perón's ideas and aims. Even if there are some prevailing ideas on the role of the state, the importance given to economic independence, and political sovereignty and social justice, there also are contradictions in some of his thoughts.

### SOURCE E

*Peronism is humanism in action; Peronism is a new political doctrine, which rejects all the ills of the politics of previous times; in the social sphere it is a theory which establishes a little equality among men, which grants them similar opportunities and assures them of a future so that in this land there may be no one who lacks what he needs for a living, even though it may be necessary that those who are wildly squandering what they possess may be deprived of the right to do so, for the benefit of those who have nothing at all... That is Peronism. And Peronism is not learned, nor just talked about: one feels it or else disagrees. Peronism is a question of the heart rather than of the head.*

From a speech by Juan D. Perón, 20 August 1948

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTIONS

Read through Source E, and answer the following questions:

- What do you understand by 'Peronism is humanism in action'?
- What, according to this source, are the aims of Peronism?
- Which problems of Argentina in the early 1940s is this source addressing? Explain your answer fully.
- Using this source, discuss who you think Peronism appealed to and who may have had grounds to reject these ideas?

## The influences on Peronist thought

In many ways Peronism was not a new ideology, but rather borrowed concepts from existing organizations and ideologies. The army, contemporary European right-wing experiences, Catholicism and socialism were all possible sources of many Peronist ideas.

### Bolshevik

The Bolshevik revolution that occurred in Russia in 1917 established the first Marxist government. Bolshevism promoted a form of communism aimed at a violent revolution to overthrow capitalism.



### The influence of the army

One great influence on Perón was his time serving in the military. Life in the army gave Perón the opportunity to travel across Argentina and to witness the hardships of the provinces first hand. This experience made Perón very aware of the conditions of inequality in the country. He came to the conclusion that if those conditions were not redressed by the government, a violent revolution following the **Bolshevik** example could follow.

Military values also played a part in shaping Perón's thoughts. Discipline and a sense of 'spiritual unity' – the idea that one single thought had to dominate the entire group and that disagreement should not be tolerated – were important to him. As you shall see, his domestic policies were planned accordingly.

### The influence of Catholicism

The members of the GOU were Catholics and, as such, shared with the Catholic Church in Argentina the view that the conditions of the working class needed attention. They also believed that remedying social injustice was an effective tool to prevent the expansion of revolutionary ideologies such as Marxism, which were strongly anti-religious. Perón

legitimized his ideas by echoing the Catholic doctrine with his ideas of solidarity. He was aware of the importance of the Church in the largely Catholic Argentine society, and contributed to the Catholic cause by promoting the inclusion of religious education at schools, which in turn, granted him the support of the Church.

### The influence of contemporary ideologies

Perón's trip to Europe between 1939 and 1941 allowed him to come into contact with the Nazi regime in Germany and with Mussolini's fascism in Italy. He imitated some of the aspects of these right-wing ideologies which, at the time of Perón's visit, were experiencing popularity at home. In the same way as Perón felt attracted by some features of European fascism, he rejected **Marxist** ideas as well as liberalism. He preferred to describe his movement as a 'Third Position'.

#### SOURCE F

*[In Europe, Perón] not only came to appreciate firsthand the achievements and organization of the Fascist regime, but he also personally witnessed the horrors of immediate post-Civil War Spain. Perón never hid his admiration for Mussolini, not even for Hitler... From Fascist Italy, Perón learnt some practical ways in which the masses could be organised and controlled. As he himself would say in Conducción Política, 'The value of the people ... does not reside in the number of men who are organised. Its value resides in the rulers who lead the people, because action is never generated by the mass or by the people, but by the rulers who lead them. The mass goes wherever its rulers take it; otherwise, it overflows and God forbid!'*

From Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: A Cultural History of Perón's Argentina*, 2003

#### SOURCE G

*Perón rejected the two orthodox political-economic systems of the time, capitalistic liberalism and Marxism, and proposed an alternative of his own: the 'Third Position,' equidistant between capitalism and communism and opposed to them both. He presented this concept as part of a new national project that included the social integration of the masses and the transformation of Argentina's economic infrastructure. In his words: 'We have a third position, in which we do not wish the individual to be exploited in the name of either capital or the state. We want the individual ... not to be an instrument serving the appetites of capital or the state.'*

From Mónica Esti Rein, *Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946–1962*, 1998



#### Marxism

The political and economic philosophy of Karl Marx (1818–83) and Friedrich Engels (1820–95), in which the concept of class struggle – the motor of history – plays a central role in explaining the development from bourgeois oppression under capitalism to a socialist and ultimately classless society by means of revolution.

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTIONS

- How, according to Source F, was Perón influenced by his experiences in Europe?
- According to Source F and G, what importance did Perón attribute to leadership?
- In what ways was Perón's rejection of liberalism related to the conditions of Argentina in the early 1940s?
- You may be familiar with other leaders who have declared their opposition to both Marxism and liberalism? How does their ideology compare to that of Perón?

You have now seen which ideas contributed to the formation of Peronist thought. You have learnt where Peronism stood in relation to liberalism and Marxism. The most effective way

to summarize Perón's ideology is to refer to the three Perónist principles: social justice, economic independence and political sovereignty.

## Social justice: The integration of the working classes

Peron made constant reference to the concept of 'social justice'. Like many of the elements in Peronist thought, this was not a new idea. The term refers to the idea that wealth or privileges in a society had to be distributed to achieve a fairer order.

In order to avoid huge gaps between the different social classes, Perón thought that the state should share and distribute wealth with discipline. In Perón's words: 'We aim at eliminating class struggle, replacing it by a fair agreement between workers and employers under the law which derives from the state'. Most of the labour reforms carried out by the Secretariat of Labour and Welfare were attempts to bring about social justice.

### SOURCE H

*In our trade unionist work – says a metallurgic worker – we witnessed incredible things as from 1944: the labour legislation which in the past had not been regarded was now respected; there was no need to go to Court to obtain holidays; other labour legislation such as the recognition of factory representatives and the reassurance that they would not be fired, etc, etc had immediate and rigorous enforcement. Internal relations between industrialists and workers completely changed in nature. Owners were disconcerted while the workers were astonished and cheerful. The Secretariat of Labour and Welfare had become a power for the organization, development and support of the working class. It did not operate as a state regulation above the classes, but rather as a state ally of the working class.*

Translated from Hugo del Campo, *Sindicalismo y Peronismo: Los comienzos de un vínculo perdurable*, 1983

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTIONS

- To what extent does Source H reflect the principle of social justice? Explain your answer fully.
- With reference to its origins and purpose, assess the value and limitations of Source H to an historian studying the influence of the working class in the rise of Perón.

## Political sovereignty: The role of the state in society

In the light of the social conflicts that needed to be addressed, Perón gave great importance to the role of the state. Under the governments that had preceded the 1943 coup, the state had represented the interests of a specific social class, the landowners. Perón proposed a change in how the state stood in relation to the different social classes. It was the role of the state to determine the aims of the country and mobilize all necessary resources to achieve them. The state stood above all social classes and was understood as the engine of progress. As such, it had to play an active part in social and economic developments, mediating where interests clashed.

## SOURCE I

*[The aim is to] improve the standards of living of the workers but without tolerating social conflict... I shall not allow free reign to the agents of destruction and unrest, who are often not even Argentines but foreigners. I have working class issues completely under control, not by force but through agreements. Don't believe we are anti-capitalists. We are not.*

From a statement by Juan Domingo Perón in November 1943, quoted in David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, its History and its Impact*, 1993

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTIONS

- What is the message of Source I?
- Identify the 'agents of destruction and unrest' to which Perón referred.
- What elements of the Peronist ideology surface in this source?

## Economic independence: An appeal to nationalist elements

To prevent crises like the one experienced in the 1930s, Perón believed that Argentina needed to become economically independent. This focus raised two main issues: the achievement of autarky (self-sufficiency) and the **nationalization** of foreign companies operating in Argentina. The mechanism for achieving economic independence was to centralize economic activity in the hands of the state. The model proposed by Perón was one in which Argentina would develop a national industry to satisfy its domestic needs and demands. To do this, **protectionist** policies had to be applied and foreign-owned companies nationalized.

## SOURCE J

*The Peronist economic reform had two main purposes. One was to preserve the country's resources from the appetites of foreign interests and to put them at the service of the state. The other was to divide up those resources fairly so that there would be no excessively wealthy people at the expense of excessively poor ones. Policy directors did not speak of socialism, of course, but rather of the social reform of the capitalist system: the capitalist system would remain in place but it would be restricted by state management.*

From Mónica Esti Rein, *Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946–1962*, 1998

### STUDENT STUDY SECTION

#### QUESTIONS

- Why, according to Source J, did Perón favour nationalization of foreign companies?
- In what ways does Source J relate the concept of economic independence to the principles of social justice and political sovereignty?
- 'Promises of improved social and economic conditions win more support for would-be single-party rulers than ideological pronouncements.' How far do you agree with this claim?



### Nationalization

The acquisition by the state of property previously owned by private individuals or companies.

### Protectionism

Government policies promoting home industries by preventing the competition of foreign goods. The importation of foreign goods is checked or discouraged by the imposition of duties (tariffs), quotas or other regulations.

### Examiner's hint

Questions that ask that you to assess the validity of a claim require that you first show understanding of the claim itself. In the case of Question C below, you need to show that you understand the difference between the promises made and the ideological pronouncements. Do you consider Perón offered both? If so, which were they? Which of them was more effective in winning support? It will not be enough to say that you agree, in Perón's case, that promises of better conditions gained him more support than explanations of his ideological stance. You will need to give specific examples of both and analyze why one became more effective than the other. You may consider them both to have been equally important, but again, you will have to explain why and how.