**Interview With Raúl Alfonsín**

Former President of Argentina, 1983-1989

President of National Committee of Unión Cívica Radical

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JM: I'm interested in the relationship between the unions and the PJ, and between the unions and the government.

RA: First of all, that which they call the CGT, is really the CGTP -- CGT Peronista. This means that workers who are Radicals or Socialists or Communists never form part of the leadership of that organization. A Peronist union culture has formed. There are leaders of other parties, above all Radicals, who have risen to certain levels of that organization, but not in proportion to the number of Radical workers. That is to say, the non-Peronist leaders are not in proportion to the non-Peronist workers.

JM: What happened with those two senators from Neuquén when it came time to vote on the law of union reform?

RA: One of them, Senator Sapag, changed his vote. He was closely tied to the CGT and they convinced him.

JM: Who was the source during the [1983] electoral campaign who provided the information on the union-military pact?

RA: The sources were very diverse. It was widely reported in the press. We put everything together and made the corresponding denunciation. There was no specific source, there was just a lot of information from various sources that certain meetings had taken place...but the union sectors have always had conversations with the armed forces.

JM: Why did you decide in March 1987 to invite a Peronist unionist to join the cabinet?

RA: I had too many conflicts. We put up not just with 14 general strikes but also with thousands of strikes. It was too conflictive a situation. Also, the situation with the armed forces was getting increasingly tense. So, I wanted to calm social conflict a bit, to have the support of all the workers. And when the Semana Santa events occurred, the whole CGT came out to defend democracy. And that was the most important goal I sought. All of my governments have been impregnated with that fundamental objective. I did things I wouldn't have done had it not been for the fear of instability, and I didn't do things I would [otherwise] have done, because I had the obligation to consolidate democracy.

JM: The general strikes clearly had political objectives. But do you also think that the smaller strikes, for example a strike of all the metalworkers, could also have had political objectives?

RA: No, there are also specific objectives. In a situation of poverty like the one you see in Argentina you always have to consider that a strike has some legitimacy to it. But there is one way to treat a government you want to help and another to treat a government you want to destroy. In our government the CGT acted like Justicialismo's battering-ram to destroy the government, not to drive it out of power to make it lose prestige. When the Plan Austral was going well they called a general strike on us. A unionist I just spoke to, who today is working with those who won the election, was among those who most strenuously demanded wage increases to destabilize the government and make the Plan Austral fail, and that's what happened. The economic situation was delicate, and that brings with it a certain response. But we also launched important social programs aimed at those who suffered the worst poverty.

JM: The CGT may sometimes act as the spearhead for Justicialism, but it seems to me that sometimes it acts neither for economic or political reasons, but because of struggles inside unionism. For example, without the general strikes, it seems that Ubaldini wouldn't have much power.

RA: It could be that there is also an internal ingredient too, but I think the motivation was political more than anything else. There could also be an internal motivation, but that comes out most often perhaps in the particular strikes.

JM: Was there any opposition when toward the beginning of your government your party suspended the clause in its charter which said that the president of the party couldn't be at the same time the president of the nation?

RA: No, on the contrary. No such clause existed. What we introduced was a new clause, later withdrawn, so that there would not be bicephalism. There were no repercussions.

JM: I've heard from some Argentines who sympathize with Radicalism that this contributed to movementism.

RA: They're mistaken.

JM: When you made the decision to move the capital, did you bear in mind that the move might have the effect of reducing public employment? It seems to me that many public employees would not want to live outside of Buenos Aires.

RA: Well, that's an effect that the move might have had. There's a guy named Bryan Dobson at the Interamerican Development Bank who can give you a lot of information on the move of the capital (202) 623-1491.

JM: I have some impression of your view of the current government with respect to the consolidation of democracy, with the decrees, what's happening in Catamarca [Alicia Saadi episode]. Would things have been different had Antonio Cafiero won the internal election?

RA: Without a doubt. There is a big difference. What we have here is a government without limits. This could never have happened had the people succeeded in democratizing Peronism.

JM: Now it seems like Bordón is the one who most represents this tendency.

RA: I don't want to mention any names because *los quemo*. There's De la Sota in Córdoba, Cafiero in the Province of Buenos Aires.

Aide: Is this off the record?

RA: Yes, this is off the record.

[tape recorder switched off]

[tape recorder switched back on]

JM: Do you think that the Peronist people will vote for Bordón?

RA: If things keep going like they are, and Menem does not win the right to re-election, no one is going to beat Duhalde, governor of the province of Buenos Aires, in the *interna*, and that will be more of the same. If the people want something different, they'll have to play from the outside, to form another political force.

JM: A political force outside Peronism and Radicalism?

RA: I participated in the [unintelligible] could have a coalition government

[tell him a bit about myself and my research]

JM: Would you have been a candidate for the governor of Buenos Aires in 1967?

RA: It could have been.

JM: If you could govern again from 1983 to 1989, would you have done anything differently with the military issue?

RA: Anyone who accepted Argentine democracy wouldn't have had many alternatives, would have had to work more or less they way I did. There are more than 10,000 documented disappeared. There could have been a disatrous relationship between the relatives of the disappeared and those who were accused of making them into victims. The trials of those responsible pacified the country.

JM: Some say it would have been better if the trials had been taken earlier out of the military courts and put into the civilian courts.

RA: That would have been unconstitutional. Actually there are two constitutional problems, because having the trials in the military courts was itself unconstitutional, and taking them out of those courts was also unconstitutional.

JM: Is the Radical Party a party of the left?

RA: We don't like to define ourselves in this manner. We generally define ourselves less ideologically than ethically. We have a moral conviction that we first need to solve the problems of the neediest. Our democracy is participatory, we seek equality. This would place us in a zone of thinking than in a European version would be the center-left. I think Peronism in these moments has become a sort of rightist populism, and to the extent that the best thinking prevails, it would be a Christian Democracy -- I'm going out on a limb here -- and we would be closer to social democracy. But we speak of social democracy [social democracia], not Social Democracy [Democracia Social]. But the lines cross - there are Radicals who are to the right of certain Peronists and Peronists who are to the right of certain Radicals. It would be good for the country if Peronism would finally disembark in some port or other, to become something defined that one could catalog, that could have its own discourse, that could be argued with. Nowadays no one knows, completely different positions are being taken. Every political party has to have a spectrum, every party has wings, but the Radical spectrum is restricted, whereas today the Peronist spectrum goes from the extreme left to the extreme right, from Communism to fascism or similar things. This way you have to begin define it in other ways, it has acheived a level of unscrupulousness or authoritarianism that has compromised the situation. If it disembarks in Christian Democracy it could provoke other problems, for example in the area of religion, but it would be tendency one would have to respect, you would have to concede many things to it.

JM: Does a Partido Justicialista really exist today in anything but a formal way?

RA: Yes, it has a Consejo Superior, its acting vice-president is Eduardo Menem, but the one who signs the statements is always Roberto García, a union leader who is absolutely with Menem, and the one who gets everything moving is a Sr. Arias, who is a dangerous fundamentalist.

JM: But García and Digón and all of those formed part of renewal Peronism

RA: Yes, and García has stayed with Menem; these days Digón's might be in a somewhat better position.

JM: People like Victor de Gennaro of ATE...

RA: That's a man you have to respect, but today he leads a union that has little strength because the current government fears strikes. We weren't scared when he launched strikes against us. But he's a good guy [buen tipo], a good leader, recently he's gotten closer to Christian Democracy and the CLAT in general. He's also more to the left. In Latin American unionism Christian Democracy can be placed to the left of the CIOSL. This is another rather strange phenomenon. He's a decent man.

JM: It seemed that ethically your government and some of the more combative renewal Peronists had a lot in common -- you, De Gennaro, and even Ubaldini, who seems very ethical to me.

RA: No, he's not unethical. En fin.

JM: Was it Nosiglia and Cavalieri who worked out the 1987 pact?

RA: It was a whole group of unionists, but I was mainly interested in SMATA and Luz y Fuerza, not so much Cavalieri. He has a certain presence but it's not with sindicalismo luchador. I was interested in SMATA and Luz y Fuerza. I would have preferred José Rodríguez of SMATA to become minister, and if the UOM had come with him it would have given me coverage that would have reduced the level of conflicts, which in fact happened.

JM: Did your government follow the rate of labor conflicts very carefully? Did you change any of your policies in response to it?

RA: Yes, we kept in mind. Also, after the 1987 elections there was a perception that we were weaker, and my first priority was the consolidation of democracy. We had to change the bill about the law of union associations to calm things down, which I didn't want to do, but the first priority was the consolidation of democracy. Those last two years were very tough.

JM: Why did you make the decision to change ministers in September 1987?

RA: The argument between the ministries of economy and labor was a permanent disaster. I wanted to do things in a different way..

[end of interview except for small talk]