**Interview Nº 2 With Alberto Serú García**

Peronist National Deputy, 1963-66

President of Movimiento Popular Menodicino, 1960s

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Mendoza, Argentina

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ASG: On p. 240, you write Vandor wanted "to form a political party independent of Perón." You could maybe begin with that, but there could be some nuances of difference. I can't say what's in the minds of others or of the union leadership -- in particular Vandor, who wasn't the kind of guy who talked all the time; on the contrary, he was pretty closed-mouthed...In my personal opinion, Vandor never had a plan involving Peronismo sin Perón. What he, and we, wanted, was...I said it then and I'll repeat it now: Peronism without Perón wasn't going to go anywhere. Perón is the creator, the charismatic man...also it would have been a tremendous injustice to create a party of Peronismo sin Perón and exclude Perón, because he was the creator. It would be like having Menemiso sin Menem, pushing Menem to the side. Of course, in politics, injustice is practically the order of the day. But it would have been so irritating, so serious, to have a Peronism without Perón, that it would have been like having Peronism without Peronists, which is what was happening, and which today is happening more than ever. Perón, through the policy of maintaining his leadership, through his delegates, was becoming disconnected from the living reality of Peronism. In the end he wound up with the delegate structure, increasingly devoid of content at least in many regions -- Mendoza was a prime example. That Peronism, the immense majority, was with us in the Movimiento Popular Mendocino. So, if Peronism without Perón wasn't about to work, neither was Peronism without Peronists. It would have been Perón sin Peronistas -- good for no one except the chupavelas, the obsequious ones. This is what we really think. We wanted a Perón who was the leader, chief, principal figure of the movement. What we didn't want is the delegates taking advantage of the charisma and prestige of Perón and acting in a practically arbitrary way, ignoring the Peronist bases. We didn't want a party independent of Perón -- we weren't fools. What we wanted was a structured Perón, away from the principle of charisma, which would have been hard because he utilized very well -- a Perón mediated, if you will, within an organization, a Perón that would respond to a political organization.

Also on p. 240, you say that the neoperonist parties refused to submit to Perón's orders. That wasn't true for all the orders; indeed, not for many of them. What we wanted was more participation for the leadership, with our opinions and knowledge of local conditions, in the elaboration of strategy, or better yet tactics, because Perón managed the strategy very well.

On p. 243 there is a title "Peronism moves away from Perón." It was more a matter of re-establishing a different relation with Perón. Which was hard, because the existing modality was one of relation with a charismatic leader, and it's not easy for such a leader to change his relation with the people.

On p. 244 you call the 1943-46 goverment "anti-labor." There were some anti-labor leaders, but the public expression of the military government wasn't anti-labor even initially. It was a populist government, extraordinarily, exaggeratedly, demagogically populist. [tells a story about eating in the Constitución railway station on 4 June 1943. His brother was a sub-oficial in the FFAA at the time.] On 9 July there was a big parade for Independence. I went to the Avenida ?, which is now Libertador, at the corner of Ugarteche. There was a huge crowd in support of the military government. [An officer marching told a cop who was bothering people to leave the people alone. Everyone clapped. There's a story about it in La Razón, maybe July 10]. Of course when Perón joined the government is when it became definitively pro-labor. Also, many of those who surrounded Perón were of humble origin, like Lt. Col. Mercante, who was the son of a locomotive engineer -- a skilled profession, but a worker nonetheless. He was very important, the number 2. There were others too.

JM: But the initial military government intervened a lot of unions, closed down the CGT-2, and enacted the initial law of professional associations, which had a lot of restrictions.

ASG. Yes, that's true. But the CGT-2 was run by socialist, leftist sectors. That was the real motive.

JM: Mercante's father was a Socialist.

ASG: True, and Bramuglia was too. On p. 244 you say that "Aramburu and his allies generated a climate of siege and struggle that reinforced this identity and strengthened the union factory commissions which led the Resistance." It is true that the main sectors who mobilized the resistance were sectors linked to the union leaders and the labor movement. This is true. But chronologically, the resistance started with the actions of political, not union, leaders. The unions formed the main base for recruitment. One concrete case is that of Cooke. And I initiated the resistance in Mendoza. We published the newspaper "Tres Banderas," which helped bring people together to confront the military government; another group of friends, politicians in Mendoza, published one called "Combate." We were politicians, though many of those who collaborated with us were workers. The politicians participated actively in the initiation of the resistance.

JM: What did Cooke (h.) do before 1955?

ASG: He was a national deputy who belonged to an intellectual group that revolved around Ricardo Guardo. There were 6 or 7 others, all friends of Jauretche, the group around FORJA. Also, they named him interventor of the Partido Peronista in the Capital. That's where he began to organize the groups who later participated in the Resistance, just before the 1955 coup. Cooke was from the clase media muy alta of Mendoza, closely connected to the capital. Those with English or Basque last names are very well received by Porteño society. He lived right here on the Calle Santa Fe; I know the house. He was a "chico bien." He later became a communist, a marxist. He was at the Bay of Pigs. He told me, he had photographs. I saw him in the Hospital de Clínicas just before he died. He spoke against the Petroleum Contracts signed by Frondizi.

[interruption]

I was elected national deputy in 1962 at the age of 40. But they nullified the election. But they re-elected me in 1963, and I served until 1966. Curiously, I have never completed a mandate. Note even as a city council member, which I was from 1948 to 1950 in Mendoza. But they changed the constitution and cut short my term. Then I was a provincial deputy from 1951 to 1955, though my mandate was supposed to last until 1961.

On p. 260 [first sentence]: I can't put myself in the mind of Vandor, but from what I knew of Vandor, there was no idea, or at least a clearly and publicly expressed one, to form a political party without Perón. What we wanted was, just like we couldn't conceive of a Peronism without Perón, we couldn't conceive of a Perón without Peronists. We thought that the Peronists, the Peronist leadership, had to participate. I have a letter from Corvalán Nanclares in which he clearly defended what we said that we...Corvalán was always with me, period, until we separated there before the election. He was a good interpreter of what we were, really. In the eyes of the politicians, it wasn't a Peronism without Perón. Just before March of '65 we had a big assembly with Anglada who had been Perón's minister and the Governor of Buenos Aires, con Elias Sapag, of the Movimiento Popular Neuquiño, and with all the others, we had a big federal assembly of Peronismo in San Nicolás de los Arroyos, where all the provincial governors had met [unintelligible] the fall of Rosas. So symbolically we, leaders of the current we could call neoperonism, met in San Nicolás de los Arryos before the March election. And it was all about support for Perón! We wanted to organize a party representing por Perón y para Perón! Ah, here it is! 9 March 1966! The letter I couldn't read when I went to see Perón, whom I couldn't see because he was already committed to oppose me in the campaign. [singles out part]: "I take this opportunity to relate to you a detailed, objective, and true evaluation of the political events that have taken place in our country, with special attention to the Peronist movement. I offer my modest opinion about them, because in my judgment, the highest and most constructive expression of loyalty is criticism formulated at the opportune time and to the appropriate person..." In criticism! Formulated at the opportune time and to the appropriate person...in Criticism! "If in April there are elections" -- the 17 of April, which was the date of the elections -- "I shall be the gubernatorial candidate of a unified Peronism in Mendoza" -- because three sectors existed: the "62," the Partido Justicialista, and the MPM -- "and I have no doubt that we shall gain enough voters to be elected. I shall be then, as I am now, at your disposition for anything when there is something great and disinterested to do to support the movement, yourself, and out country." I had just come to Madrid to ask for help, which was a little out of line, almost an act of insolence at the time. Because in politics, when the cause is good, it is left alone. I had only come to ask that aid not be given mistakenly to revisionist minorities who would inevitably be defeated, but who would tarnish the luster of the Peronist victory in Mendoza. Later the General accepted my afectuosos abrazos -- I have a copy the letter

JM: Why did you say "if" there are elections the 17 April?

ASG: Well, they could have been delayed, they could have said there would be no elections, the government might have suspended them, whatever. Even the military coup. The military coup came from '65 or thereabouts. Anyway, on p. 260, there's something about organizing a party to represent Peronism without Perón. I think it wasn't like that. Even if Vandor had wanted to do this, which he never told me -- quite the contrary -- but from what I know, he wouldn't have been able to do this, because a national party would need the support of leaders from the whole country; the union leaders wouldn't have been sufficient. There were political leaders throughout the country who would not have accepted this. Then came Avellaneda...on p. 269, a matter of detail: I have always heard it called the "declaration" of Avellaneda, not "proclamation."

JM: It was mistranslated -- in English I wrote "Declaration of Avellaneda"

ASG: We didn't meet to "ratify a declaration." We met first in an unoccupied health clinic that belonged to a friend, I don't know who it was, on the Calle Sarmiento Nº 2649. In this clinic, when it got to be about 11 at night, a lot of people had come together from all over the country -- there were more than 100, maybe 150, it got to be close to 200, I can't remember very well. We resolved on the spot to move to Avellaneda, and we went to the local of the Municipal Workers of Avellaneda. It wasn't so well prepared, and less still was it the order of the day to, as it says here, "ratify the declaration later known as that of Avellaneda." To the contrary, I would put it like this: at a preceding meal, before the meeting in the clinic, when the main leaders got together -- Vandor, Cafiero, Luco, Carlos Juárez -- we were about 10 or 12 -- Castillo, the union leader Maximiliano Castillo, Izzetta, the municipal workers' leader, Cavalli of the oil workers -- we got together to eat in a bar, in a restaurant in Once, and we stayed there -- Iturbe was there, Perón's delegate, and we resolved, practically at the suggestion of Iturbe, and the opinion of Vandor, who also gave his opinion -- and Niembro, who was also there..

JM: And Vandor, or only Niembro?

ASG: No, Vandor and Niembro -- Vandor was there. Where I don't remember well, I don't have the image of Vandor in my mind, but he must have been there, was in the Avellaneda meeting itself, after; I can't visualize it, but he must have been there. We resolved to make no declaration. So we didn't meet "to approve the Avellaneda declaration," which didn't exist yet. We met to see what we were going to do given the situation in which Isabel had come and there were a lot of evident [unintelligible], a lot of confusion, a lot of schisms, there was the sensation that she had come bother us, to fight against us. So, we met to figure out what we could do. Anyway that Isabel had come to fight against us was what was being said, but she, publicly, no, she met with us, with friends of Vandor, she was friendly, it wasn't a question of a confrontation. So, this is the observation I would make. It was a very disorganized thing, totally disorganized...this is the draft of the Avellaneda Delcaration; where they were correcting things, but they kept just about everything, this is the handwriting of Cavalli, and here is a draft in my writing. "First: We recognize Juan Domingo Perón as chief of the Peronist national movement. Second: We pay homage to the irreplaceable [verbal emphasis] memory of Eva Perón..." Here it's true what you [referring to JM] said; [ASG says to his friend present at the interview;] he noticed and said: "here's an attack on Isabel." But it was an inderect attack.

JM: Yes, of course, of course.

ASG: To say that Evita was irreplaceable was to say....[breaks off]. "Third -- this is the draft --: we reaffirm our categorical will to promote the institutionalization of the movement from bottom to top, without digitaciones, according to an internal democratic process..." Would you like white wine or juice?

JM: Juice please

ASG to friend: What would you like?

Friend: Un vinito

ASG: Me too.

[brindis]

ASG: This a note from Cafiero when he calls me to a meeting -- because I was a member of the Junta Coordinadora Nacional del Peronismo in October 1965, when Avellaneda happened. And at Avellaneda I was the secretary of the meeting. [starts to read Doc. 4, notes that 197 were present at the beginning, clarifies that Fernández means Isabel when he says "ultimos sucesos" in first intervention, reads Iturbe's intervention, clarifies that the Mesa Analítica is that of the JCN of Peronism. Stops at "el proyecto de fusión el cual fué elevado a J.D.P. Stops reading]. This was a very important thing in Peronism. For the past year we had been meeting, the representatives of all of the currents of Peronism, all of them. The Partido Justicialista then, whose national president was Lascano, with all of the presidents of the provincial parties that were Peronist but were not in Justicialism, as in the case of the Movimiento Popular Mendocino, of which I was the president, and in the case of Sapag, who at that time was participating, later things opened up and everything happened, but then he was a member of the Junta Coordinadora del Peronismo, and he came to the meetings dealing with fusion. We drew up the organic charter for the fusion, of a single party joining all of us together. We were all ready to resign from our own parties..

JM: In the Avellaneda meeting?

ASG: No, I'm talking about the meetings we were having through the whole year of '65.

JM: You had resolved to dissolve your own parties?

ASG: Yes, to make a single party. And I wrote the Carta Orgánica practically by myself. We worked very hard. It was hard to get an agreement, because Framini participated in the meetings, Vandor participated, also the one who they later killed...

JM: Alonso?

ASG: Alonso! to give you the names of the main... of course Cavalli participated, Maximiliano Castillo of the glass workers, Izzetta of the municipal workers participated...OK. And also all the political leaders, the Justicialists and non-Justicialists...Carlos Juárez, president of the Partido Tres Banderas del Santiago del Estero participated, Tachella, president of the Partido Tres Banderas de Entre Rios participated, Riera of Tucumán, Ruperto (Godoy?) of San Juan, Sapag de Neuquén, and so on, and after terribly hard work, we had come to agreement. It was a very hard job to make a single party. And we showed it to Perón, and Perón practically rejected the agreement.

JM: Why?

ASG: It was a letter that was read in those meetings. And I said OK, that does it [era el colmo]. Perón rejected the agreement because he said that the unity that was achieved -- as always Perón's letters were very good, very well drafted, with a lot of preparation [fundamento] -- in synthesis it said that the agreement was nothing more than an intellectual, conceptual, on-paper type of agreement; that it was not...that unity had to be affective, heart-to-heart, it was a series of, a word, the unity of everyone...he saw we had been able to get an agreement among the Justicialists, the so-called neo-Peronists, the women -- Delia Parodi was there among others, the groups more or less of the left, whatever you call them, like Framini, or not the left but Framini, who was the contra? of Perón had also signed, Tecera del Franco, who was the first to call me, who was a good friend and continued to be a good friend, but he was the first who gave me the feeling that a call had come from Madrid to make him...he said I signed this, I agreed to all the work that has been done, I signed it, but I want to clarify that my signature is superseded by that which Perón disposes -- he was a neoPeronist, but that's what he said.

JM: When was this?

ASG: '65. It was before October. Here Iturbe goes over the history of the Mesa Analítica [reads from "su labor principal" to "JDP" -- it was Iturbe himself who brought it [the agreement] to Perón. It was in October.

ASG's Friend: Iturbe was from Buenos Aires?

ASG: No, from Jujuy. We were all agreed....

ASG: [Keeps reading] "...a Juan Domingo Perón, who though that it was first necessary to reach fundamental unity." I remember that when the letter was being read I was sitting beside Delia Parodi, a very simpática leader, and she said, I can't quite remember the words, but something like: "But what does the viejo want? Does he want us to hug and kiss?" Because we couldn't do any more than we did. He said we had to reach a fundamental unity, spoke of sentiments, the unity of hearts, what do I know. So what were we to do? We accepted the idea of Perón, naturally. What were we going to do? The idea was that we would just erase the unification project, its Carta Organica and everything, and the present Junta Nacional Coordinadora del Peronismo was constituted. Who was on it?

JM: What was the difference between the Junta Nacional Coordinadora del Peronismo and the Mesa Analítica?

ASG: The Mesa Analítica came before. They were practically the same, we were trying to forge unity.

[Break: ASG's friend talks about how hard it is to do detailed research in Argentina; there's no funding, etc. He says he has to go.]

ASG: [reads the list of members of the JCN -- Doc. #4, handwritten, goes on to read Doc 4.]

ASG: In your paper you also said that Jofré was the favorite [in the Mendoza elections]. I sincerely believe that before the elections of March [sic] the favorite was I, not Jofré. [holds up a copy of Primera Plana with his picture on the cover]. They put Jofré inside, but never on the cover. Before Isabel came to be against me, my impression is that I was the favorite, not Jofré.

[talks about some other letters and clippings he has]

ASG: [on the signatories to the declaration] Here is the definitive copy [of the Avellaneda Declaration] that I drafted with Cavalli. It was approved in the meeting, but we filled in the details in my office at about 3 in the morning after the meeting. We signed, Serú and Fernández, but with a lot of [?] we added the names of the rest of Junta Coordinadora Nacional del Peronismo. Many of them, like Cafiero, agreed with what had gone on at the meeting, but others hadn't been at the meeting, and we didn't know if they were going to agree or not. Olmos, for example, I don't think he was there, he was against, but we put him in there, and we published it in the daily papers. And none of them denied it, no one came out against it. At least ten days easily passed. Only after Perón sent the order to be against the Avellaneda Declaration did opposition begin to show itself; before everyone had been in favor of it. The same night as we wrote the Declaration we wrote a letter, signed by Fernandez and I, that we sent to all the national and provincial legislators, mayors, city council members, and Peronist leaders throughout the country. We sent the Avellaneda Declaration to all of them [reads part of the declaration].

JM: Is it true or not that Vandor once said, "hay que estar en contra de Perón para salvar a Perón"?

ASG: To me, it's a lie. I never, never heard him say such a thing, even in private, even off-the-record. So that him having said it seems to me almost impossible. I think it was an invention of opposition journalists. Moreover, I think that this is a historical phrase that belongs in another context, another era, maybe in Spain. I never heard Vandor say it and I don't think he did. [goes through some other clippings, including about his auto accident returning from Chile. Says Levingston promised that someone he recommended would be named president of Mendoza in 1970. Also document when MPM joined FREJULI, clipping about Perón in 1946 reading statement praising Yrigoyen]

JM: What was the relationship between Vandor and yourself, Frondizi, and the MID?

ASG: My relations with MID and Frondizi were good, and they continue to be good. Vandor didn't have much of a relationship with them. Here's the letter from Corvalán when he says that the Partido Tres Banderas at least, has never proposed a Peronism without Perón; what it proposed was an organized Peronism, which is different. And Corvalán Nanclares says it here clearly. And another thing I'd correct, and that I'd like to clarify: I never offered the gubernatorial candidacy to Corvalán Nanclares. The only one I offered it to was Dr. Enrique Querubini (?), and I later replaced him because against Corvalán he was going to lose....And here's what Corvalán says, with his signature: the Partido Tres Banderas has at no time proposed a Peronismo sin Perón. What we have proposed is to do away with the ineffective tactic of the blank vote, to renew the leadership cadres through the selection of the bases, thus ending all digitaciones.

JM: Digitaciones? Whose.

ASG: Perón's. And the delegates of Perón chose the candidates. This is the letter from Corvalán, and this is the response of Farmache (Perón's delegate around 1970).

JM: Would it therefore be correct to say that what you [ustedes] thought is that it was necessary to organize the movement...

ASG: ...de abjao hacia arriba is what we said, democratically

JM:... and thus turn Perón into he who would lay out the general guidelines...

ASG: No, no. He was the chief of the movement. But institutionalized chief. Chief elected by us and institutionalized.

JM: But he was in Madrid, and couldn't....it was you who had the knowledge to manage the tactics...

ASG: We wanted to follow Perón, the doctrines of Perón, the principles of Perón. But with the people chosen here by the bases, not by Perón's delegates.

ASG: Here's one supporting the military...in reality supporting Onganía. Not during Onganía's revolution, but during the struggles between Azules and Colorados. We in the Partido Tres Banderas supported the Azules against the Colorados, and we wrote a public statement to that effect. [shuffles through some more papers]

JM: Do you have any other commentary on the paper?

ASG: No, no; they're just matters of detail. You cited a source about Corvalán, I don't know which. But I never... Well, if Corvalán had asked me to support him, I would have done so directly, because Corvalán had more political capacity than Querubini. But when Querubini asked me I supported him. I only changed Querubini for myself because against Corvalán Querubini didn't have enough political clout. If it had been Corvalán, things would have been different.

[Small talk, end of interview]