

Labor

Peronist unions on the eve of elections

On October 5, the Justicialist party (PJ) will hold internal elections in four provinces, including Buenos Aires. Not long thereafter, General Confederation of Labor (CGT) representatives are expected to choose a new Directive Council. Since a single list of candidates is virtually certain to be presented in the CGT and is not out of the question in the PJ-Buenos Aires, the real action will take place in the behind-the-scenes negotiations leading up to these elections.

Peronist union leaders have enormous strength in both the CGT and in the PJ-Buenos Aires, but are not always able to exercise that strength in a concerted fashion.

At present, they are divided into three main groupings: (1) those who adhere to the traditional political style and strategies of the 62 Peronist Union Organizations; (2) those enrolled in the Peronist Renewal Union Movement (MSPR), which used to be called the Committee of 25; and (3) those called "ubaldinistas" for having thrown their full support behind the charismatic leader of the CGT, Saúl Ubaldini.

Should the negotiations leading up to the CGT and PJ elections reveal that any one of these currents is capable of imposing its political project (and/or style) over the others, Peronism's profile as a political opposition could be outlined for months — and perhaps years — to come.

"Peronistas de Perón"

The strong man among the traditional leaders of the 62 Peronist Union Organization, set up in 1957 as the "political arm of Peronist unionism," is Lorenzo Miguel, Secretary-General of the metalworkers' union (UOM). Miguel, currently allied with the "orthodox" sector of the party led by Justicialist 1st Vice-President Senator Vicente Saadi, had a decisive role in choosing the PJ candidates for president and Buenos Aires governor prior to the 1983 elections.

His prestige dropped considerably when these candidates were defeated, but he has since regained something of his former influence, thanks mainly to his continuing control of the powerful UOM and his formidable skill at behind-the-scenes negotiating.

Allied with Miguel are union leaders from the old "Negotiation and Labor Committee" grouping (CGyT), who seem as willing to take a soft line with the Radical government as they were with its military predecessor. This sub-grouping stresses peaceful and orderly relations with employers, and has always advocated participating in the Economic and Social Conference with employers' organizations and the government.

Miguel himself has also adopted a more conciliatory attitude toward the government, recently causing a stir by sending a telegram to Economy Minister Juan Sourrouille thanking him for facilitating the wage agreement his union reached in early July.

Should Miguel succeed in placing his supporters in strategic positions on the CGT Directive Council and in important party posts in Buenos Aires, Peronism as a political opposition would probably retain many of its current features (frequent use of strikes and street demonstrations and very

little attention to Congress), but be more willing than in the recent past to negotiate directly with the various branches of the executive. Any increase in the power of the traditional 62 leaders would, however, strongly alienate the MSPR.

Renewal in Peronist unionism

The MSPR is identified with the party's renewal wing, headed in Buenos Aires province by Antonio Cafiero. Though they have never formally withdrawn from the 62, MSPR leaders do not participate in its daily affairs and are not represented on its executive organ.

The political project and style of this grouping is profoundly different from that of Miguel and his followers. Many MSPR leaders hold ideas consistent with European social democracy. The traditional 62, on the other hand, use "social democrat" as an epithet.

The political "flavor" of these competing union sectors is also given by their respective positions on international and social issues. Orthodox politicians and 62 unionists were few and far between among the signers of a recent declaration — endorsed by several renewal politicians and MSPR representatives — condemning US support for the Nicaraguan *contras*.

Likewise, MSPR unionists tend to turn up in greater numbers than their 62 counterparts at marches advocating stronger measures against those who committed human rights violations during the 1976-83 military government.

The MSPR and their renewal-wing allies, on the other hand, stayed away from a recent Church-sponsored demonstration in support of the family at which anti-divorce figures from the 62 and the orthodox party wing were conspicuously present.

In criticizing the government's social and economic policy, the MSPR is as quick as the traditional 62 to disparage "formal" or procedural democracy in favor of the "real" or substantive version.

In practice, however, MSPR leaders have shown considerable respect for the procedural type, not only in the leading role they played in demanding democracy under the previous military government, but also in terms of the internal workings of their unions.

The leaders of the MSPR — unlike those of the traditional 62 or of "ubaldinismo" — speak the same language as the Labor Ministry's technical staff headed by "europeronist" Armando Caro Figueroa.

This is not to say that they share the views of the government team. In fact, the MSPR are usually regarded as taking a more "hard-line" stance than the 62 against the Radical government's social and economic policies. An even harder line, however, has been taken by union leaders loyal to CGT chief Saúl Ubaldini.

A syndicalist strategy

The first half of 1986 marked, with a succession of nationwide strikes, the crescendo of the CGT's predominance over the badly divided PJ as the main nucleus of opposition to

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Union Trad. 62	Est. Members	Key Leaders
UOM (Metalworkers)	287,000	Lorenzo Miguel
FATSA (Priv. Hospitals)	170,000	Carlos West Ocampo
COEMA (Municipal Employees)	135,000	Gerónimo Izzeta
FGPIC (Meat Packers)	65,000	Lesio Romero
FSUPE (State Oil Workers)	27,000	Diego Ibañez
FOEP (Plastics)	17,000	Jorge Triaca
MSPR		
UF (Railways)	142,000	J. Pedraza/Lorenzo Pepe
ATE (State Workers)	86,000	Victor De Genera
SMATA (Auto Workers)	54,000	José Rodríguez
STC (Taxi Drivers-Capital)	20,000	Ricardo García
SUET (Tobacco Employees)	15,000	Roberto Digón
SCRA (Rubber Workers)	10,000	Oswaldo Borda
Ubaldinistas		
AB (Bank Employees)	159,000	Juan José Zanola
UPCN (Civil Service)	133,000	Miguel Candore
UOCRA (Construction)	110,000	Juan Alejo Farias
UDA (Teachers)	90,000	Domingo Solimano
AOT (Textile Workers)	74,000	Pedro Goyeneche
UTEDyC (Sports & Civil Emp.)	60,000	Vicente De Leo
FATLyF (Light & Power)	58,000	Aldo Serrano
UTGRA (Restaurant Workers)	58,000	Juan Reyes
UTA (Transport Workers)	56,000	Juan Manuel Palacios
FTIA (Food Workers)	40,000	Luis Moran
FTOSN (Water Works)	17,000	Rubén Pereyra
FOCARA (Beer Workers)	2,500	Saúl Ubaldini
Non-Aligned		
CGEC (Commercial Employees)	420,000	Guerino Andreoni
CTERA (Teachers)	230,000	Wenceslao Arizcuren
FATRE (Rural Workers)	53,000	A. Rodríguez
FOECyT (Postal Workers)	42,000	Ramón Baldassini
FOETRA (Telephone Workers)	38,000	Julio Guillán
SGA (Printers-Greater Bs.As.)	19,000	Raimundo Ongaro

Notes: (1) This is not an exhaustive list. Unions under 50,000 were included only when their leaders were of national renown. The "key leader" of the union indicated is not necessarily its Secretary-General (e.g. UF, UOEP, FATLyF).

(2) Membership figures are taken from various sources and, in many cases, are unreliable. Estimates for the largest unions (CGEC, UOM, CTERA, FATSA) may differ by as much as a factor of two.

(3) The general orientations of the "non-aligned" unions are as follows: CGEC (mixed Radical/Peronist leaning MSPR); CTERA (mixed Radical/Left/Peronist, mainly MSPR), FATRE (unknown), FOECyT (Indep. Peronist), FOETRA (Peronist left, leaning MSPR), SGA (Left, with Social Christian outlook).

(4) In most unions some local section or affiliated local unions have a very different orientation than the national organization. In the large AB and FATSA unions, for example, the Federal Capital locals do not share the orientation of the parent organization.

(5) Information on the groupings to which the respective unions belong comes from periodical sources. Unions may move from grouping to grouping. In general the MSPR sector seems the most stable and the "ubaldinista" most fluid.

Radical government. A steady stream of mass mobilizations around the country at which the charismatic CGT leader was often the sole speaker allowed "ubaldinismo" to begin to crystalize as a third, independent union current.

Ubaldini enjoys good relations with both wings of the party. Perhaps in part to maintain them, he has pursued what

might be called a "syndicalist" strategy of opposition to government policy, stressing strikes, mass demonstrations and — occasionally — direct negotiation with the Ministry of Labor.

In the sphere of national-level union action, in which the CGT plays a decisive role, Ubaldini's charismatic leadership



Saul Ubaldini

tends to obscure the differences between the MSPR and 62 that appear so markedly in the political context.

No unionist from either current is likely to oppose Ubaldini as CGT Secretary-General at the normalizing Congress to be held later this year. The real battle will involve places on the list of candidates that will probably be the only one presented when the union central elects its 20-member Directive Council.

The strategy of the CGT leader has placed the union central squarely in the center of opposition to the Radical government's social and economic program. The CGT's role in channeling political opposition to the Radicals has overshadowed that of the Peronist national deputies, not least because the latter are divided into four competing factions with little in common besides a Peronist political identity.

Several union leaders serve as Peronist deputies, and perhaps another reason why Ubaldini favors extra-parliamentary channels of political opposition is that all of them identify either with the MSPR or with the traditional 62, reflecting the fact that "ubaldinismo" had just begun to take shape at the time of last November's congressional elections.



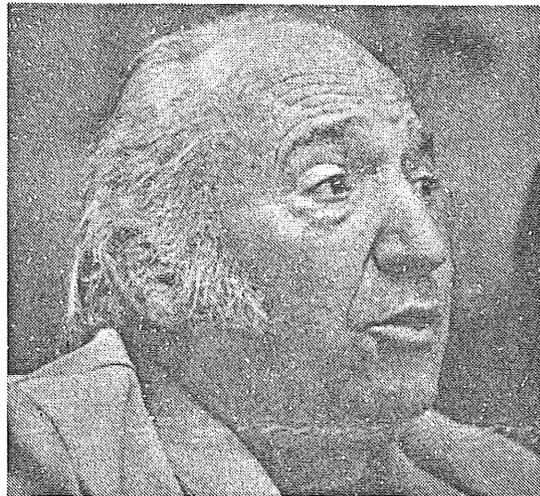
Roberto Digon

The CGT's 26-point proposal for broad changes in government policy, together with its invitation to the entire spectrum of political parties to participate in a long-postponed "National Unity Congress," also testify to its assumption of a broad oppositional role that the PJ, due to its internal conflicts, has been slow to undertake.

In late June, the "ubaldinistas" reached an agreement with the traditional leaders of the 62 that effectively gave them control over the body's Executive Board. But since the program and ideology of the "ubaldinistas" is less well defined than either of the other two union currents, the future orientation of the 62 is hard to predict.

One possible scenario is that the "ubaldinistas" who now control the 62 will step up their efforts to bring the MSPR back into active participation in the organization. Though initial overtures of this type were unsuccessful, it should be noted that most MSPR figures maintain excellent relations with the CGT chief.

Also Ubaldini himself was the outstanding leader of the MSPR grouping (then called the 25) when it emerged under the military government as an alternative to the more



Lorenzo Miguel

conciliatory Negotiation and Labor Committee current, led by Jorge Triaca.

If all three groupings unite once again under the banner of the 62 — which has traditionally had the right to nominate one-third of the Peronist candidates for national deputy seats — the core of opposition to government policies may begin to shift from the CGT to the Justicialist Party, assuming the October 5 elections take place (they have been postponed several times) and that they constitute a first step toward party unity.

Such a shift would probably result in a greater role for Congress as a vehicle for political opposition and a smaller one for strikes and demonstrations.

On the other hand, the attempt to bring the MSPR back into the 62 may not bear fruit. Even if it does, moreover, history may show that it led to nothing more than the formal unification of a Peronist unionism which, underneath, was still deeply divided in terms of political style, program and ideology.

—James McGuire—