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MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. S. Levitas, Editor of The New Leader

SUBJECT: THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN ARGENTINA

New York, April, 1958

From: Isay Klasse

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Note: This outline must needs be schematic and simplified; in no way it purports to exhaust the problem. For this reason important questions in the trade union, economic, educational, religious and military fields are only mentioned in passing or are altogether omitted. Only some basic data are included.

The present political situation

1o.) In the light of the last two elections (Constituent Convention, june 1957; national election, february 1958) it is evident that the 1955 Revolution has not succeeded in changing Argentina's political and social course. The "peronist" cast of thought - represented not only by the ex-dictator's followers but also by a large sector of the opposition to his regime - assembles today the indisputable majority of the working class, a large section of the middle class, almost all the intellectuals and professionals and part of the industrialists. This predominating mentality finds expression in a program which in the international field maintains an antiimperialist, nationalist ideology and therefore an indifferent and neutral attitude in the East-West struggle; moreover, many of its tendencies, the most powerful, frankly favour the policies of Russia and Asiatic nationalism. In the domestic field it advocates a plan of "economic independence", with the State playing the main role, a "national-socialistic" economy: state monopoly on foreign trade, nationalizations, etc. This "spirit", with important nuances, presides over the leadership of the most powerful traditional democratic parties (Unión Cívica Radical Intransigente (UCRI), Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo (UCRP), Partido Socialista (PS)). Thus are lain the objective economic and political basis for a social regime of the type we now see triumphant in Eastern Europe and all over Asia; whatever its differences, due to national characteristic, this regime finds expression in the common denomination of "popular democracy". The process leading to the advent of this regime began under Perón; and not only it has not been checked: under Frondizi, the future President, it will tend to gain in emphasis, having acquired a more acute and exalted self-consciousness thanks to the 1955 Revolution and its wavering and contradictory policies. This is what communists, trotskites, neo-fascists, UCRI followers, many socialists and even a large sector of the UCRP, call the "National Revolution".

2o.) As we have often stated the crisis of Argentine democracy is the crisis of its democratic political parties. Here and only here lies the knot and the secret of the crisis. It is fundamentally a crisis of those parties and only in second term an economic crisis and a structural crisis of the political and legal institutions. Given the country's economic, social and cultural conditions (2 million square miles of fertile land, less than 20 million inhabitants, a modern technological level, specially in agriculture but also in part in industry, with great facilities for intensive rationalization of the latter; a population deeply assimilated to European forms and spirit & nearer in this sense to the USA and Canada; a low illiteracy rate of only 3 per cent; complete absence of racial and religious conflicts; and a democratic conception and practice in daily life), considering these conditions then, the present economic crisis lacks the chronic and organic character it has in most of the Latin American countries, Egypt, the Middle East in general, China or India, where any solution demands extraordinary resources and plenty of time. Our economic crisis can be solved with relative easiness and in a short time, provided there is a lucid economic policy, free from the shibboleths in which the democratic and "Leftist" ideologies are now crystallized. This aim will not be achieved, however, until the structure and the methods of the democratic parties have been renewed. This process has already started, in part, as shown by two quite important facts: first, the fight among groups within the traditional parties, PS, Partido Demócrata Progresista (PDP) and Partido Conservador; second, the creation of two new democratic parties: Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC) and Partido Cívico Independiente (PCI).

From the beginning the FDC has become the fourth national party; in many places and in most of the interior it has replaced the PS as the third strongest group. If the old parties fail to reform, in a few years the FDC might become a ruling party because of its clear cut, democratic, pro-Western, non-confessional outlook, its program (half liberal, half socialist), the quality of its leaders (who are without a political past and proved themselves exceptionally capable during the post-revolutionary period) and the honest and modern methods it has employed. Whatever the immediate future, there is no doubt that the FDC will constitute the vanguard of Frondizi's opposition. Its only weak spot is the lack of a trade union team. But in this respect it is in the same position that Frondizi, since the unions, according to their trades, are controlled firstly by the peronists, secondly by the communists.

3o.) It can be said that Frondizi's administration will find itself in a precarious, difficult and even unstable position, notwithstanding its complete electoral triumph which gave him all the Senate seats and a two thirds majority in the House. The reasons which prompt this statement are in no way light. At the key centers of the economic life (oil production, electric power, iron and steel, renewal of the industrial plant, transport, foreign debt) Frondizi will have to face very serious problems for which his program is clearly incapable of providing a solution; the standard of living of the masses has fallen in a large scale and in a catastrophic way in the last three years; there is a yearly deficit of 400 million dls. in the balance of payment; inflation has reached enormous proportion and gold reserves are almost depleted. Frondizi's own political strength is very limited as can be seen by the fact that in the 1957 election, when he went alone, he received 1.800.000 votes; but in the presidential election he received around two and a half millions more votes mainly from those peronists who previously had cast blank ballots, plus the communists, some Nationalists, the trotskytes, etc., while the UCRP obtained more or less the same number of votes that in 1957: 2.300.000; the remaining balance (some 1,5 million) went to those parties which do not share Frondizi's program, with the exception of the PS which has similar goals and got around half a million votes. As we have already pointed out Frondizi is without trade union leaders, and his nearest political coworkers, the best known members of his own party, are with few exceptions, mediocre personalities. It is this situation which has already opened the door to a process which could be essentially similar to that of Guatemala under Arbenz, national differences notwithstanding.

Interpretation and perspectives

From the point of view just outlined, the freedoms recovered through the 1955 Revolution, become problematic, though for the time being they represent the only positive element in the national scene. As world experiences have amply proved, the development of a "national-socialistic" regime demands the gradual destruction of all democratic controls, and eventually the establishment of an authoritarian, one party system which, under the forms of a corporative regimentation, may purport to be the expression of the oppressed masses. The exploitation of workers and peasants, in order to secure the capital formation needed for industrialization purposes, does not tolerate any form of political freedom. The transition from a democratic to a totalitarian order is always performed under the banners of democracy, of "true democracy" (or its equivalents "popular democracy in Eastern Europe, "controlled democracy in Asia, etc.), and finds its way to the consciousness of the masses through that "National Revolution" which we have mentioned above. Frondizi is the "ideal" personality for such a transition. Even within the democratic ranks very few are capable of understanding the deep logic which rules that transformation. Frondizi, like Perón before, has behind him the vast majority of the country and represents therefore, if not its interests, at least its will, and depending on the dominant cast of thought, is the one and the other. It will be in the name of those interests and with the help of that false consciousness that Frondizi will justify the increasingly despotic nature of his policies, determined by the need of implementing his programs according to the will of the "majority". His opponents no longer will be simply his opponent, but the enemies of the Nation's interest, consciousness and will, and insignificant and frail minority, the representatives of unspeakable foreign interests, the sworn enemies of democracy, against whom everything will be permitted. (Frondizi's actions against members of his own Party, show that he will not hesitate to employ these methods. From 1951, when he was Vice-Presidential candidate together with his rival in last February election, Frondizi became sole master of his Party through a series of expulsions, arbitrary intervention of local parties, etc. As for his political ideas, a perusal of hi-

most important book "Petróleo y ~~esta~~ Política, published in 1954, will show that his basic political notions (the nature of the Western bloc, US foreign policy, conception of imperialism, the function of the State, etc.) are directly derived from the tenets of Soviet ideology).

There are many in Argentina who think that Frondizi will be able to avoid such a development through a clever policy of faithlessness to his electoral platform. No doubt it would be incorrect to disregard entirely this possibility. This, however, would not change substantially the terms of the problem. In that case his Administration would be faltering, contradictory, weak, and in a permanent state of crisis. It would remain the task of the truly democratic forces to change the prevailing mentality, already analysed, and to oppose the political and social forces that would immediately turn against him. To hope for Frondizi's conversion to the Western outlook, however, does not seem to us neither the most likely nor the most realistic hypothesis in order to lay the foundations for the full restoration of the democratic order in Argentina. At any rate, what is practical and indispensable is for us to be aware, and make others aware, of the nature and gravity of this crisis as well as of the ways and means required to overcome the crisis.

Consequently, it does not seem exaggerated to assert that the Frondizi Administration will depend upon the peronists or its former rivals. In this situation it is not altogether improbable that in the first stage Frondizi may attempt pursue a coalition policy with the UCRP, the PS and the FDP. Considering its paradoxical basis, it seems equally certain, however that such a policy would be condemned to failure in not too long a time. Both the economic difficulties and the distribution of the political forces already mentioned, lead us to surmise that Frondizi's will be a transition regime in which a final decision will be reached in the fight between democracy and totalitarianism.

In brief; the 1955 Revolution has only achieved a minimum of its aims and what is worse, it has lost power. Argentina's political fate in the near future appears under the sign of ambiguity. Today more than ever before, the possibility of a democratic recovery depends upon an educational campaign having the following aims: to show the nature and significance of that fight; to formulate the problems in their true terms, firmly and clearly and without any ideological concessions to those prejudices which prevail even over democratic minds; to give support to new political parties and to organize minority groups in various circles (intellectuals, professionals, union leaders, etc.).

Significance of the Argentine crisis for Latin America

It can be said, to sum up, that the original trait of the Argentine situation lies in the fact that, contrary to what happened in the most advanced European countries and in the USA, there the democratic forms fall into a crisis before becoming fully operative in the people's conscience and through the development of its institutions. In Latin America, it seems, the crisis of the traditional forms of democracy necessarily entails that of the system itself, and in the masses it expresses itself through a radical loss of faith in a principle which was never fully enforced, and through the impotence of political parties whose structures, outlook and tactics are likewise affected by the same deficiency.

Despite some peculiarities of its own, the Argentine crisis is but a particular form of the Latin American crisis, and the conclusions that can be drawn from it possess general value. For Latin America, the significance of the Argentine crisis must be found in the fact that the antidemocratic tendency (yesterday with Perón, today with Frondizi) has pursued and will surely continue to pursue the formation of a Power block which, professing to assume the defence of national sovereignties, would actually conspire against the unity of the democratic forces of the world.

The most elemental and sensible instinct of self-preservation advises us urgently to counter that action with a similar and vigorous coordination ~~front~~ of the democratic efforts. This coordination cannot be limited to the official level on which the governments function. Its success will depend upon whether it proves itself capable of establishing direct relations among the peoples themselves, eliminating their misunderstandings and false antagonisms, and bringing them to a point where they may put an end to the differences which divide them. We think that these relations must begin with the understanding and concerted action of the democratic elements. We believe that, until a democratic consciousness and action are promoted, it will be impossible fully to overcome the democratic crisis in any Latin American country and that the political unity of this continent will be permanently threatened. As the Argentine case shows, the defeat of the neofascist forces by itself will not mean a real recovery for

the crisis since it will then be necessary to face the communist tendencies, which the policies of the former indirectly foster. The fight against both totalitarian fronts must start right now, energetically and definitively, if we wish to put an end to both present and future evils.

The policy of the State Department

For all the above reasons, we believe that the State Department should proceed with extreme caution. An open, all-out opposition is out of the question, as it is unconditionally to grant full acceptance or economic aid. It is quite likely that Frondizi will try to resort to blackmail in the same way that Nasser. He announced long ago and again recently that his Administration will establish trade relations with any government that offers the most favourable terms, whatever their political regimes may be. Apart from this, too general, recommendation the problem of US relations with Argentina is essentially that of its relations with Latin America. The most obvious mistake here is not, we submit, as is liberal fashion would have it, that the US support Latin American dictatorships (though here the State Department would do well to correct some measures which lend strength to this notion) but the total absence of a true policy having definitive and concrete means and ends. Considering the gravity of the world situation in general and that of Latin America in particular, this lack of policy cannot be replaced simply by ~~the~~ technical assistance programs nor by loans and grants, however necessary and valuable this may be. A general analysis of US policies in the area falls outside the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the solution is neither all-out, unilateral intervention, nor the present indifferent attitude of almost absolute non-intervention. It must be recognized that, through its very presence in the Hemisphere, the US does exert a permanent, almost decisive influence on the lives of the Latin American nations. The question then is whether the US can afford to let that influence work in an uncontrolled erratic way, or whether it should channel it in order to achieve definite goals which may deserve the support and arouse the enthusiasm of Latin American democratic forces. To quote from an American source: "Democracy in Latin America is too often approached on the naive assumption that the phrases of a democratic formula will magically produce results. It is easily forgotten that the strength of democracy depends upon gradually influencing a large number of political, economic and cultural tendencies... The alternative courses of action open to United States policy are to use its position of power ~~and~~ to exercise strong pressure for rapid democratization or to work toward democratization by gradual means... The second course involves a continuity of ~~and~~ statesmanship over a long period of time and the slow development of accepted standards of political behavior..." (The Brookings Institution, Major Problems of United States Foreign Policy, Vol. 1949-1950, pp. 326-327).

The policies of American liberals and trade union leaders

Looking at the immediate future, Latin America must be considered of far less importance than Europe or the Middle East and there is no doubt that ~~from a political point of view~~ within a short term perspective the latter should be given preference. From a political point of view and in the long run Latin America becomes as important as any other area for the outcome of the world wide struggle against ~~the~~ Soviet imperialism. For this reason it is great mistake to ignore Latin America, to take it for granted or to view its development with undue optimism and independently of the world situation. Should Frondizi follow the course that is to be feared, this would rate as a serious defeat for the West and it could not but add strength to the negative elements in other underdeveloped countries in Latin America and elsewhere. A strong, democratic Latin American movement, on the other hand, capable of promoting together with the USA the social and economic progress of this area would greatly contribute to weaken the attraction which has for them the "popular democracy" type of regime. This must be done in a concerted action with American liberal elements first, because the Latin American democratic forces are too weak to do it alone, and second, because the present state of isolation and indifference on the part of American political and intellectual leaders encourages a similar attitude in the Republics of the South, leaves the field wide open to ~~the~~ antideocratic movements, and promotes the formation of a neutralist, anti-US block. We have already outlined above a course of action which we think may prevent this development. Here we like to add a brief comment on the attitude of American liberals. We believe that, with some exceptions, the small liberal minority which is at all familiar with Latin America (intellectuals, union leaders, mem-

of the Press) shows quite often a feeling of "guiltiness", at times almost a true complex, originated in the imperialist past of the US. This must be brought to an end. It is a mistake to believe that in order to strengthen Latin American democracy one must give support to nationalist movements, make ideological concessions to anti-yankee sentiments, blame the US for the existence of dictatorships which ~~basically~~ are basically fundamentally both cause and effect of the present political crisis in South America. One should not continue to support those forces which are at best outmoded and naive, at worst incompetent and corrupt and which in practice contribute to promote the feeling of indifference, neutrality and rancour towards US efforts for the defence of freedom in the world. In Argentina, specifically, those forces are completely discredited and will not be able to perform a positive function unless they go through a long process of reorganization. To speed up such a process and to oppose the more negative tendencies of the Frondizi Administration could be the aims of any American liberal group concerned with this problem: to that end one can only rely, except for some groups within the Armed Forces, on the new parties mentioned above, on some liberal non-partisan groups as well as on some conservative forces which could join an anticommunist democratic coalition if they can be convinced of the negative influence exerted by their reactionary propaganda.

Proposal for immediate action

In order to change the political climate and to achieve some of the above mentioned objectives it is essential and indispensable to publish at least one magazine having a double function: First, it should serve as a forum for the analysis and discussion of the most basic and pressing problems at the international, continental and national levels, such as the nature of the ~~most~~ East-West struggle, US relations with Latin America, the role of the OAS, intervention and non-intervention, foreign investments, etc. Second, it should become an instrument of coordination and eventually of organization for all the Latin American democratic elements and their counterparts in the US. Gradually this could lay the basis for the formation of an independent, non-partisan agency which could include the trade unions, the cultural organizations and the individuals, affiliated or not to a political party, which are ready to fight for those ideas and ideals. To assure its success it is essential that such a magazine should be truly independent and that it should not be entrusted to personalities, however well known, who are in practice totally incompetent and even self-defeating, as it happens today in Argentina at least with the Congress for Cultural Freedom and also with the tradeunion movement.

This proposal could be carried on in the following ways: 1o.) A magazine could be published in Buenos Aires, monthly or fortnightly, devoted to the most important concrete international problems but also to the analysis and discussion of domestic questions, particularly in the political field but also in the fields of economics, labour, higher education, etc. The magazine should be prepared for and addressed to all influential elites in all the democratic parties and groups, and to professors, students, military men, professionals, industrialists, etc. 2o.) If this succeeds, or independently, it could be possible to publish a more theoretical but also practical magazine for the Western Hemisphere, perhaps bilingual, for the purposes already mentioned. 3o.) Finally, both could be attempted at the same time.

Above all, we think that it is indispensable to start working vigorously towards these goals. Even then it will take several years of unremitting efforts to achieve any visible results. But there is still time and the way may well be the one outline in this paper. In any case the alternatives are too dangerous and ominous to indulge in rhetorical actions and stand idle by.