

Preface

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, socialist parties, in one form or another, appeared throughout most of Latin America. Influenced by European examples, they sought to mobilize the working classes and to represent their interests in the political arena. Usually adopting a reformist posture, they enjoyed little real success in organizing the proletariat in pre-industrial societies or in achieving social betterments through the political process in countries with weak democratic-constitutional traditions. However, they did manage to introduce the potent idea of a socialist alternative to the prevailing capitalism of the period, to stimulate a greater public awareness and consideration of social problems, and to encourage the growth of labor unions.¹

Argentina's Socialist Party, established in 1895, was one of Latin America's first modern political parties. Its founders formulated a specific program, drew up detailed statutes for organization and membership, and maintained a stable structure and leadership. From 1896 the Socialists entered every national election for Congress and from 1916 every presidential election. Between 1896 and 1930 they registered an ever-increasing growth in members, voters, and officials elected to office. Throughout these years they were an important factor in the politics of the Argentine Republic. By 1930, moreover, the Argentine Socialist Party was the most successful socialist party in Latin America.

The emergence of modern political parties has been one of the most significant and, at the same time, least studied developments in twentieth-century Latin American history.² There are few detailed investigations of specific parties within specific historical contexts, and generalized essays on the overall nature and role of parties in Latin America suffer from this deficiency.³ Little scholarly attention has been paid to socialist parties in particular, although the Argentine party has been described briefly in some general works in English. These descriptions, however, fail to provide extensive information on party organization

and function within the larger framework of Argentine political history.⁴ Excessive partisanship and scholarly myopia frequently mar Argentine histories of the party.⁵

With these considerations in mind, the purpose of this study is to describe in detail the evolution of Argentina's Socialist Party between 1890 and 1930. Although the party persists into the 1970s, I have chosen to concentrate on its origins, its expansion during a difficult period of repression, and its participation in an eighteen-year era of uninterrupted civilian, democratic rule. Following electoral reform in 1912, Argentina embarked on an experiment in democracy with an expansion of the electorate and reasonably honest and free elections. In 1930 this experiment came to an end, replaced by endemic military interventions and fraudulent political practices. The 1912–1930 interval, therefore, provides a consistent and coherent span in which to gauge the Socialist Party's effectiveness under relatively normal, stable conditions of political competition.

Between 1912 and 1930 the Partido Socialista (PS) (Socialist Party) and the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) (Radical Party) were the two main competitors for political office in the federal capital of Buenos Aires. Accordingly, I have tried to present as much information as possible on the Radicals to compare and contrast them with the Socialists. In so doing I have focused especially on the principal arenas of combat: election campaigns and the national Congress.

In addition to describing Socialist interaction with other political parties, I have also considered party relations with groups representing special interests. Of major concern have been the party's contacts and influence with organized labor, particularly in the light of Socialist competition with anarchists, syndicalists, and Radicals for the political allegiance of the working classes. Also, I have looked at Socialist attitudes and actions with regard to wealthy landowning groups and industrial and commercial interests.

Although I have presented information on Socialist Party activities throughout Argentina, the major concentration has been on the federal capital. It was in the city of Buenos Aires that the party originated, organized, and enjoyed its greatest strength. Although Socialist activities in areas outside of Buenos Aires were important and interesting, limitations of time, space, and documentation necessitate the focus on the capital.

Considerable attention has been paid to the inner workings of the party itself. At the same time that the Socialists competed with other parties for votes and political office, they competed with each other to

represent the interests of Argentina's working classes and to implement socialism in the Argentine Republic. An understanding of internal party politics is crucial to an understanding of the party's actions and role on the larger national stage.

In this study I have compiled and presented as much factual information as possible. I have done so for a variety of reasons. First, because the basic political history of this period has been told only in broad outline in most secondary accounts. Second, because it is my belief that North American scholars should give the same careful, close, and detailed attention to political history in the Latin American setting as is given to the political histories of the United States and Europe. In so doing they will capture the nuances of political developments in the area and avoid some of the misconceptions that have plagued general studies based on inadequate monographic material. Third, because I believe that a concentrated focus on personalities, programs, elections, and activities within governmental institutions best describes the great complexity of Argentine political history. Fourth, because through detail I hope to transfer to the reader, particularly the North American reader, a sense of the flavor of politics in Argentina: its motion, its rhetoric, and its meaning. To this end I have frequently described political meetings, campaigns, and debates and have quoted often from newspapers, periodicals, and public records.

The bulk of this study is narrative description. However, I have attempted to analyze election results through the use of quantitative data and information on the occupational composition of the Buenos Aires electorate. I have also compiled information on the occupational status of Socialist Party leaders and members at large. Furthermore, although this study is basically a political history, I have included material on social and economic developments in the republic, developments that had a direct bearing on the politics of these years. Especially have I concentrated on the emergence of social problems and issues in Argentina and the response of political parties and politicians to these.

The material presented here should help shed light on some important questions of general interest to all students of Latin American politics and history. For example, what factors contributed to the relative success of Argentina's Socialist Party in this period when compared with the frustrations of similar parties elsewhere in the area? And, although relatively successful, why was the Argentine party unable to form a mass base and achieve executive power? How does the Argentine experience relate to the applicability and adaptability of socialism in Latin America in general? Finally, what is the relationship between

the historical development of Argentina's Socialist Party and that country's major political phenomena of the twentieth century, Juan Perón and Peronism?

In sum, I intend in this work to present a case study of a Latin American political party, stressing factual information and description. Although the major concentration has been on the Socialist Party, I have tried to depict the overall framework of Argentine political history in these years, focusing on the interaction of political parties in national elections and national government. In so doing, I hope to fill gaps in and add to the scarce literature available on Argentine political history during a period of party emergence, increased electoral activity, and growing citizen involvement in government.