

promise of social justice. This declaration has been implemented by a series of concrete measures the Government is undertaking. They are: laws limiting the workday to eight hours (or less in certain cases, depending on the nature of the work); laws protecting workers against unjustified dismissal, guaranteeing a certain indemnification based on their monthly salary and the number of years of service. Regarding maternity, female workers are protected by law insuring the continued payment of their salaries, and are entitled to subsidies and paid vacation both before and after the delivery.

According to the Constitution, minors under age 14 are not allowed to work, minors under 16 cannot work at night, and unhealthy tasks cannot be fulfilled by women or men below 18. The law of professional association allows them to represent their respective professional classes, and to negotiate with the Government or their bosses about issues concerning the interests of the professions they represent. They can also sign collective-bargaining agreements. All workers have the right to 15 days of paid vacation a year. The minimum-wage law includes measures related to the feeding of workers and establishes what must be considered essential in different regions of the country. Work-related litigation must be solved through a collective arbitration committee and, in certain cases—especially in cases of unjustified dismissal and guarantees of employment, by the National Council for Work. . . .

Social Insurance. The problem of social security has benefited from the special attention it has received from the Brazilian government. As a result, there are special institutions meant to insure workers against the risks of handicap, old age and death. . . . Social security is also extended to all public employees, through the Institute of Pensions for the Public Employee, that sets pensions for retirement, death, and social assistance.

Indirect Methods of Protection. Besides the direct methods of protection to workers, the Brazilian Government is trying to improve the condition of workers through projects to build inexpensive houses, to which effect the social insurance institutions have been authorized to use part of their funds in the construction of houses for its members, who will reimburse them within 15 or 20 years. Attention has also been paid to the nutrition question, in the form of clauses included in the legal definition of minimum wage. Several measures have also been undertaken in the construction of hospitals and the campaign against tuberculosis in the working classes.

Technical and Professional Education. The Constitution establishes that technical and professional education is a duty of the state. This principle has been undertaken through the construction of new institutes for technical education in all states of the federation, as well as the Model Institute in Rio

de Janeiro. Technical instruction is administrated at three levels: the first one is aimed at training specialized workers; the second at training leaders; and the third level at training instructors.

Equality of Rights. Finally, it must be stressed that Brazilian legislation guarantees equality of rights to all workers, regardless of nationality, color or race. It does so while mandating that industry and commerce employ national workers for at least two thirds of their workforce. But in terms of social protection, foreign workers enjoy the same rights as Brazilians.

7. PERÓN APPEALS TO THE PEOPLE

On October 17, 1945, thousands of workers peacefully gathered in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. They were calling for the release of the most popular figure of the military regime, Colonel Juan Perón, who had been arrested by a rival government faction. As a result of this unexpected popular mobilization, Perón was indeed released, and the saga ended with a speech given from the balcony of the government house. To this day, this event symbolizes the birth of Peronism. "Saved" by his people, Peron would face his opponents, become a presidential candidate, and win elections in 1946, 1952, and (after eighteen years of exile) in 1974. For the opposition, however, October 17 meant something quite different. On that day, the middle classes of Buenos Aires felt their dearest neighborhoods "invaded" by a class of Argentines who had remained quite invisible until then. The echoes of Sarmiento's "civilization and barbarism" were at the center of their interpretation of this new Peronist reality. In a book of memoirs published in 1955, essayist Martínez Estrada (1895–1964) recalled his impressions of that day in a section titled "The Inhabitants of the Basement."

We had talked a lot about our people. The national anthem mentions them, but we did not know them. Perón revealed to us not the people, but rather an area of the people that seemed positively strange and foreign. On October 17, Perón poured into the central streets of Buenos Aires, a social sediment that no one would have recognized. It seemed like an invasion of people from another country, speaking another language, wearing exotic costumes. And still, they were part of the Argentine people, the people in the National Anthem. Because until then, we had lived in ignorance of a part of the family that made up that people—those low people, those miserable people. Even demagogue politicians had marginalized or forgotten them.

Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *¿Qué es esto? Catilinaria* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Lautaro, 1956), pp. 26–29. Excerpt translated by the editors.

And Perón had more than goodness and intelligence: he had the ability to make them visible and exhibit them without being ashamed of them—not as a people, but rather as a tremendous and aggressive force that endangered the very foundations of a society built with just a fraction of its human element (that being the chosen people that we had watched parade on national holidays, dressed in their Sunday best). These were the people that we had not taken into account, as I said, but still existed. Not a buried people, like the Inca or Aztec, a living people, yet also a dead people. No. It was a living people that was now on the move. And they were our ragged brothers, our miserable brothers—what could be called, to use a technical term, the *Lumpenproletariat*. They were also the *Mazorca*, since they came out of meat refrigerating plants like the others that came out of the meat salting plants. They were the same troops that had belonged to Rosas, and were now enrolled under Perón's flag, who was at the same time the successor of that older tyrant. Of the same species, and the legal representatives of those masses, they moved through the city, this time without ponchos, in the very bosom of the city without ponchos, but with a knife, the tool of hamstringers, slaughterers, and salters of beef jerky. The country was still a great breeding-ground and slaughterhouse of cattle, as it had been from Echeverría until Hudson. And those sinister demons of the plain that Sarmiento described in Facundo had not perished. They are alive this instant and dedicated to the same task, only this time under a roof, in much larger businesses than those of Rosas, Anchorena, Terrero y Urquiza. On October 17 they came out to ask about their captivity, to demand a place under the sun. And they appeared with their butcher's knives in their belts, threatening a *barrio norte* version of Saint Batholomew's massacre. We felt chills watching them parade in a true silent horde, carrying signs that threatened a terrible revenge.

He didn't just give that *infraproletariat* of poor workers a place in the sun. In many ways he placed them above the employee, the teacher, and even the professional. The liberal middle class and the bureaucracy were left behind and below them. He formed a new class, so to speak, intermediate between the superior class of potentates and their associates, and the middle class, properly speaking. He sketched for it a Peronist sociology, philosophy, and even religion, with its codes and doctrines. He took advantage of the cracks produced during centuries of misery and ignorance, and in them he introduced his cold chisel, reducing "his" people to impotence. How can we reproach the people that did not feel this as a loss of liberty and dignity when they had never had these things to begin with. In taking advantage of their good faith, others had preceded him a long time before.

This is the "obrerismo" [pro-worker attitude] of Perón—how different than Yrigoyen's electoralism, but at the same time how similar to Rosas' government of mulattoes and gauchos.

8. EVA PERÓN: ON WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE

The beginning of the feminist struggle to improve women's place in society dates from the late 1800s. Much as in western Europe, Latin American feminism was associated with urban contexts, and frequently with socialist or anarchist agendas. Although women's suffrage was not the first priority of feminist organizations in Latin America, it was a clearly articulated right at least since the early 1900s. It would take much longer, however, for actual laws to be enacted. In Argentina, the cradle of many important feminist organizations, women would have to wait until 1947 for the right to vote. Paradoxically, this achievement was not the result of long-standing feminist demands, but rather an initiative of the new Peronist government, which at the time was closely associated with the Catholic Church. The appointed leader of the Peronist version of this cause was Eva Perón—then only twenty-seven years old. Her campaign took full advantage of the melodramatic talents developed in her previous career as a radio actress. In one of her first independent political performances, although still a far cry from the radical image of the Evita of the late 1940s and early 1950s, she integrated women's suffrage into a context of traditional values—a context quite different from that put forward by the old leaders of the feminist cause.

Friends and companions,

Once again, I request your attention hoping to be the first Argentine woman to lead her companions, to champion their claims.

Once again, I demand your support, because my struggle—the struggle of all Argentine women—cannot be given up until victory is sure. I address all of you, then, with the deep conviction of speaking a common language, a language that is truthful, patriotic and, above all, profoundly feminine.

Women's anguishes have always been, and will always be mine. I live and breathe women's concerns. Their hopes are mine. They animate me; they are my impulse. They feed my belief in the goodness and justice of our mission. Everything the woman of my country hopes to obtain is part of my program of action. I could never step back or withdraw from the clear and straight road to what is dearest in my people.

I have told you about the conquest of female suffrage, an imminent achievement for our sex. I must reiterate my previous concepts. I must emphasize the need for the Legislature to promulgate this law so women can take the place they deserve in public institutions. A protector of civic faith, a testimony to national responsibility, a credit to public faith in the men that rule—the woman's vote will be the most powerful weapon ever brandished for the decisive conquest of the Argentine soul. It complements and verifies

Eva Perón, radio speech, February 26, 1947, Radio del Estado y Red Argentina de Radiodifusión. Excerpt translated by the editors.

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