

ANALYZING THE ARGENTINE POLITICAL SYSTEM

PARTIES AND POWER IN MODERN ARGENTINA (1930-1946). By ALBERTO CIRIA.
Translated by Carlos A. Astiz with Mary F. McCarthy. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974. Pp. 357. \$15.00.)
ARGENTINA AND THE FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY: CONFLICT AMONG POLITICAL ELITES, 1904-1955. By PETER H. SMITH. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1974. Pp. 215. \$12.50.)

A political crisis is most often viewed, at least in retrospect, as a decisive moment, a pivotal point, an unusually crucial intensification or concentration of events that feeds upon its own fury and then, exhausted, passes. No doubt part of humanity's ability to endure these occurrences comes from expectations that crises, like tropical storms, will be reasonably brief. Imagine, then, the incredible stamina of the Argentines who, if we Latin Americanists are to believe most of what we have written for one another in the past few decades, are about to enter the forty-fifth year of "the crisis of contemporary Argentina." By all the Anglo-Germanic standards which we find so useful to gain an objective understanding of Hispanic society, some resolution of this persistent crisis should have been reached long ago. That it has not stands as an optimistic testimony to human adaptive capabilities under stress and, better yet, as an excellent rationale for further study of the phenomenon. The problem-solving orientation of most social scientists makes the explanation of a persistent crisis a particularly legitimate focus of intellectual attention.

The two volumes under review here are intended to advance our understanding of the reasons for the failure of democracy in Argentina. Each has a crisis orientation. Alberto Ciria aims to "bring about a better understanding of the crisis within which we are living at the beginning of the 1970s" (p. 286) and to explore the consecutive crises of the *década infame* and the early Peronist years. Peter Smith, with a decade of theoretical and methodological sophistication in his favor, demonstrates that between 1904 and 1955 "political leaders and institutions met certain crises in certain ways with the ultimate, if indirect, effect of bringing about the demise of the system" (p. 89). Smith's cause is Ciria's effect.

When *Partidos y poder en la Argentina moderna* first appeared in 1964, it was instantly recognized as an exceptional contribution to the understanding of Argentine politics during an incredibly complicated era. At a time when most other Argentine works on this subject were still exercises in post-Perón catharsis and when most United States social scientists were waylaid by the question of how much Perón had to resemble Mussolini before he could be labeled a fascist and then deposited at an appropriate point on the traditional left-right political continuum, Ciria produced a book whose tone was relatively dispassionate and whose assertions were hypotheses to be tested with a wealth of descriptive data. This, as Carlos Astiz notes in his translator's foreword, is what separates the significant from the less-consequential accounts of the era's politics.

The rather literal Astiz-McCarthy translation fails to note that their English version is from the revised and expanded second (1968) Spanish edition which not only updates the 1964 original but also expands a three-page epilogue into a full concluding chapter. The text itself is divided into two parts. The first, four chapters in length, presents a chronological description of political events between the second Yrigoyen administration and Perón's 1946 electoral victory. The second, an additional six chapters, provides detailed analyses of the changing power capabilities of five groups of political actors: Political parties, the Church, the armed forces, economic interest groups, and the labor movement. Although some readers will possibly be disturbed by the enormous number of lengthy quotations in the text, very few will fail to be impressed by the author's organization and insight.

But in recent years Ciria has received sufficient praise for his effort; we need now to acknowledge a debt to the translators for providing our non-Spanish-reading students with this valuable source. How many undergraduate term papers on Perón have we read that either began or ended with Whitaker's pontifical: "The tragedy lies not in what happened to him but what he did to Argentina: in his gross misuse of a golden opportunity for service to the nation while he was in power, and in the heritage of economic ruin, moral decay, and political and social chaos that he left behind him when he fled?" (*Argentina*, p. 150). Given students' preference for books over journals as research sources, it is fortunate that Ciria's work is now available to demonstrate that Perón produced no anomalous despotism and that, in fact, the Argentine social, cultural, and political *coyuntura* produced Perón.

Only readers unfamiliar with Peter Smith's earlier studies will be startled by the manner in which he plies his historian's trade with a bag full of social science's most sophisticated methodological tools. For an analytical framework he employs the concept of sequential crises (of legitimacy, participation, and distribution) of political change to develop three related propositions: (1) Political crises can appear as the result of rapid socio-economic change but need not necessarily destroy the system; (2) elite reactions to one kind of crisis at one time, even its resolution, can give rise to another crisis at another time. Crises are interdependent; therefore, (3) the outcome of a crisis can influence the system's capability for dealing with subsequent crises.

Dividing the period between 1904 and 1955 into three phases, Smith proceeds to utilize a truly extraordinary data set to analyze his propositions. In Phase 1, from 1904 to 1930, he demonstrates, among other things, that "the Saenz Peña law of 1912 constituted an effective short-run response to a crisis of participation; but its unforeseen consequences created a crisis of legitimacy which eventually prompted the 1930 coup" (p. 90). This latter crisis involved primarily the Conservatives, who found that the structure of democracy was unsuited to the function of maintaining the aristocratic, i.e., legitimate, rules of Argentine politics. Phase 2, from 1930 to 1943, witnessed another crisis of legitimacy that was most strongly perceived by military officers contemptuous of fraudulent, inefficient civilian governments. There was, in addition, a distribution crisis generated by the rising expectations of a new urban proletariat alongside a concomitant participation crisis which centered upon working-class exclusion from political power. Phase 3, from 1946 to 1955, became a period of compounding crises. Perón met the distribution crisis of the 1930s with a reallocation of economic benefits in favor of

the working class. Given a stagnating economy, however, his very success provoked a backlash distribution crisis among other sectors of society. By separating political power from socio-economic power, Perón also exacerbated a legitimacy crisis among opponents unwilling to accept the normative basis for his claims to power.

What Smith underlines so successfully is the importance of elite response to political crises generated by socio-economic change. Analysis of attempts to manage these crises directs students away from "the pathological approach to Argentine politics" toward explanations that presume political activity "to reflect purposive and rational actions and reactions of elites with understandably conflicting outlooks and interests" (p. 111).

To appreciate adequately the intellectual contributions of Ciria and Smith, we need to note the source of the bulk of their data: The Argentine Congress' *Diario de sesiones*. Despite Weston Agor's frequent admonitions and Lee Fennell's meticulous research, only persons with institutional interests to protect could normally be expected to assert, as Chamber of Deputies President Ricardo Guardo did in 1948, that "the Argentine parliament is the faithful reflection of the people and the states. . . . In it resound all the needs of the nation, all the national concerns." Perhaps our lack of attention stems from an orientation toward political power. The most frequently adopted text for introductory courses in Latin American politics uses as its theoretical base the concepts of power contenders and power capabilities. Latin American legislatures, particularly the two chambers of the Argentine legislature, have little political clout, and so they are either ignored entirely or, as in Charles Anderson's oft-selected work, regarded primarily as surrogates for randomly selected samples of public opinion (*Politics and Economic Change in Latin America*, pp. 130-31).

Neither Ciria nor Smith have any interest whatever in the question of legislative power. In quite distinct fashion they each mine the annals of Argentine legislative behavior in search of data to explain political change in Argentina. The results are refreshingly complementary. Smith sat down at a desk in Berkeley during the summer of 1969 and did not stand up until he had thumbed through 250 unindexed volumes and recorded the vote for every single one of the 1,712 roll calls taken between 1904 and 1955. And that was probably the easy part: Lengthy appendices record the painstaking efforts to uncover biographical data on each of the 1,549 deputies, to delineate dimensions of legislative conflict, and then to present this massive file (the rotated factor matrices alone consume no fewer than fifty-three pages of Appendix C) in a form that is both rigorous and literate. Recognizing that other scholars may wish to use his data to contest or elaborate upon either his methods or his conclusions, Smith even provides us with the address of the organization housing the 330,000 bits of information used to construct his book.

Ciria's descriptive approach to the same type of data reflects the ten-year gap separating the two works. It pretends to no methodological precision and only occasionally employs sociological theory to relate interpretations of local politics to the broader context of political change. But the book is still the record of an acute mind carrying out an uncommonly thorough search for speeches, decrees, and debates to illuminate this tumultuous period of Argentine history. Ciria's effort captures the *flavor* of a political era in a manner denied Smith's more sophisticated study. If one's goal were to explain (or predict?) the failure of de-

mocracy in Argentina—to study the effects of socio-economic change upon the political system along with the crises change engenders and the elite responses that determine the nature of future crises—he or she would probably best be served by reading Smith. If one then wished to sample the emotional content of political change in Argentina from the broadest possible perspective, to witness the best and the worst of human actions and reactions that crises seem prone to elicit from us all, no better source than Ciria could be found.

LARS SCHOULTZ
Miami University