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Regionalism, populism and federalism in Argentina, 1916-1930.

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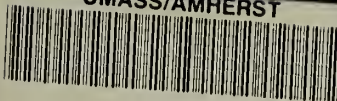
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REGIONALISM, POPULISM AND FEDERALISM
IN ARGENTINA, 1916-1930

A Dissertation Presented

By

Celso Rodríguez

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May

1974

History

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IN ARGENTINA, 1916-1930

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Regionalism, Populism and Federalism in

Argentina, 1916-1930 (May 1974)

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The enactment of the Saenz Peña Electoral Law of 1912 and the election four years later of Hipólito Yrigoyen, the Radical Party presidential candidate, constituted notable achievements in the long struggle for political reform in Argentina. The Radical Party success, however, represented only a partial victory for the reform movement. Yrigoyen's election in 1916 did not give his followers simultaneous control of the provincial governments as was to be the case with Perón's triumph thirty years later. Accordingly, the politics of the Yrigoyen administrations revolved in great part around intra-provincial power struggles and the relations between the national administration and provincial authorities.

Much of what has been published about the Radical Party and its dominance of Argentina from 1916 to 1930 has been written from the viewpoint of national politics. The present study directs attention to the provincial arena where the conflict between traditional and reform elements

and between rival factions of the latter was a continuing theme despite Radical dominance of the Casa Rosada.

In particular this study focuses on the two western provinces of Mendoza and San Juan and on the transformation of the Radical movement there from 1918 to 1930. As in no other Argentine provinces during that period, Radicalism in these two states displayed distinctive popular characteristics. These were evidenced both in the personal style of their undisputable leaders--José Néstor Lencinas and his son Carlos Washington, in Mendoza, and the brothers Federico and Aldo Cantoni, in San Juan--and in the principles of social justice on which they based their political action.

These leaders generated two movements known as Lencinism and Bloquism which produced a tremendous regional impact. Their social accomplishments surpassed the moderate approach of the Radical Party at the national level, and because of their populist principles and procedures, they distinguished Mendoza and San Juan from the rest of the country during these years. This study analyzes the populist characteristics, the authoritarian political style, and the emotional strength which these two movements forged within the patria chica from the time they assumed power until 1930. This work also evaluates the degree to which the expectations they raised were fulfilled, as well as their role as defenders of the federalist principles.

Since the policies of these regional leaders had great impact beyond the geographical boundaries of Mendoza and San Juan, their relevance in the larger scene is also analyzed. There they became involved in an almost permanent conflict with the national authorities and their political adversaries in Buenos Aires.

Because Lencinism and Bloquism were popular provincial movements which offered an alternative to the traditional rule of a local oligarchy, their reforms were a harbinger of the changes which took place throughout Argentina in the 1940's and 1950's. While Peronism was not consciously modeled after Lencinism or Bloquism, it shared the same fundamental characteristics of authoritarian political behavior and a strong preoccupation with the welfare of the masses. This study, therefore, while focusing on the regional politics of an earlier era, provides a basis for appraising the domestic roots of Peronism.

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INTRODUCTION

The enactment of the Saenz Peña Electoral Law of 1912 and the election four years later of Hipólito Yrigoyen, the Radical Party presidential candidate, constituted notable achievements in the long struggle for political reform in Argentina. The Radical Party success, however, represented only a partial victory for the reform movement. Yrigoyen's election in 1916 did not give his followers simultaneous control of the provincial governments as was to be the case with Perón's triumph thirty years later. Accordingly, the politics of the Yrigoyen administration revolved in great part around intra-provincial power struggles and the relations between the national administration and provincial authorities.

Much of what has been published about the Radical Party and its dominance of Argentina from 1916 to 1930 has been written from the viewpoint of national politics. It is the purpose of this study to direct attention to the provincial arena where the conflict between traditional and reform elements, and between rival factions of the latter was a continuing theme despite Radical dominance of the Casa Rosada.

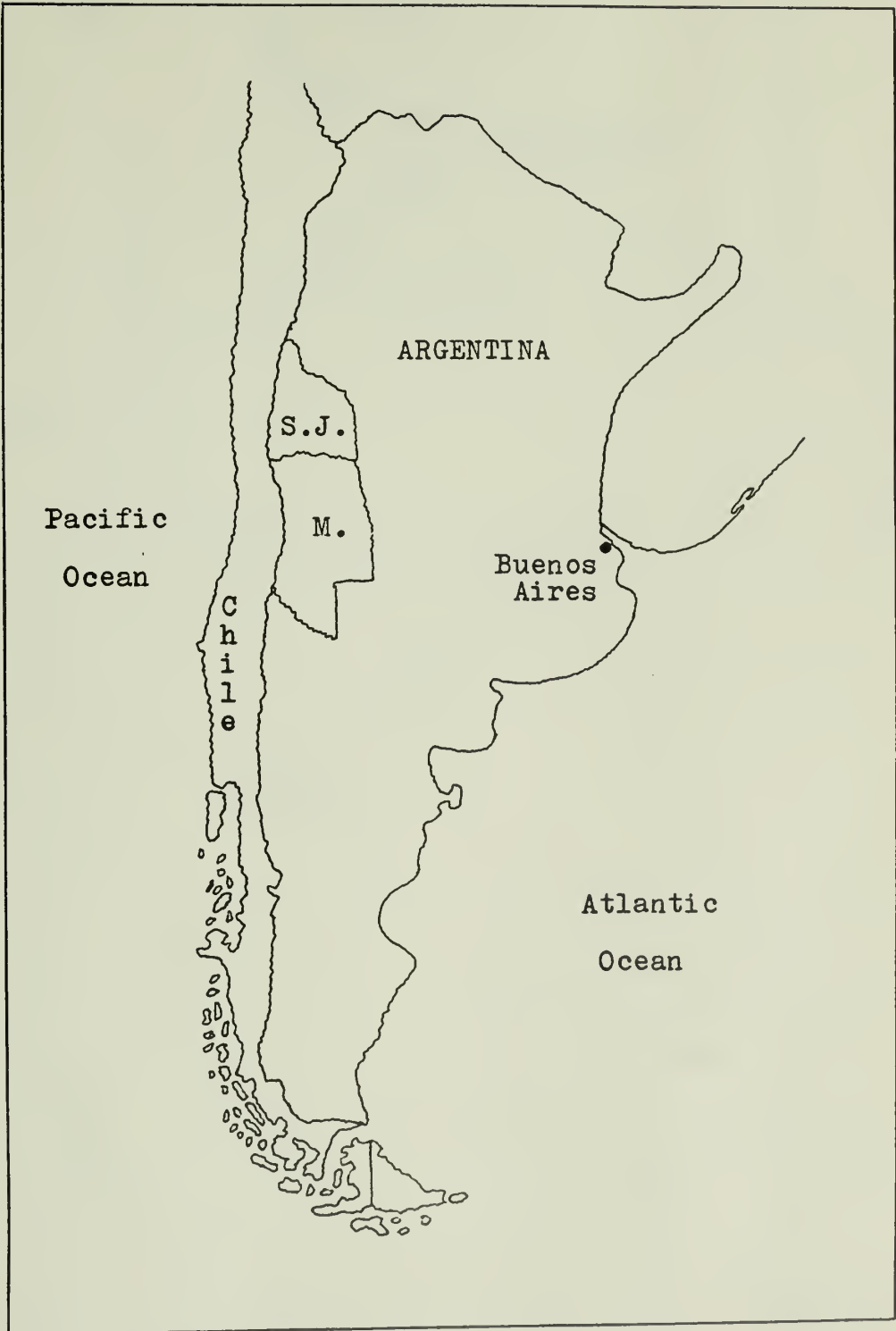
In particular this study will focus on the two western provinces of Mendoza and San Juan and on the transformation of the Radical movement there from 1918 to

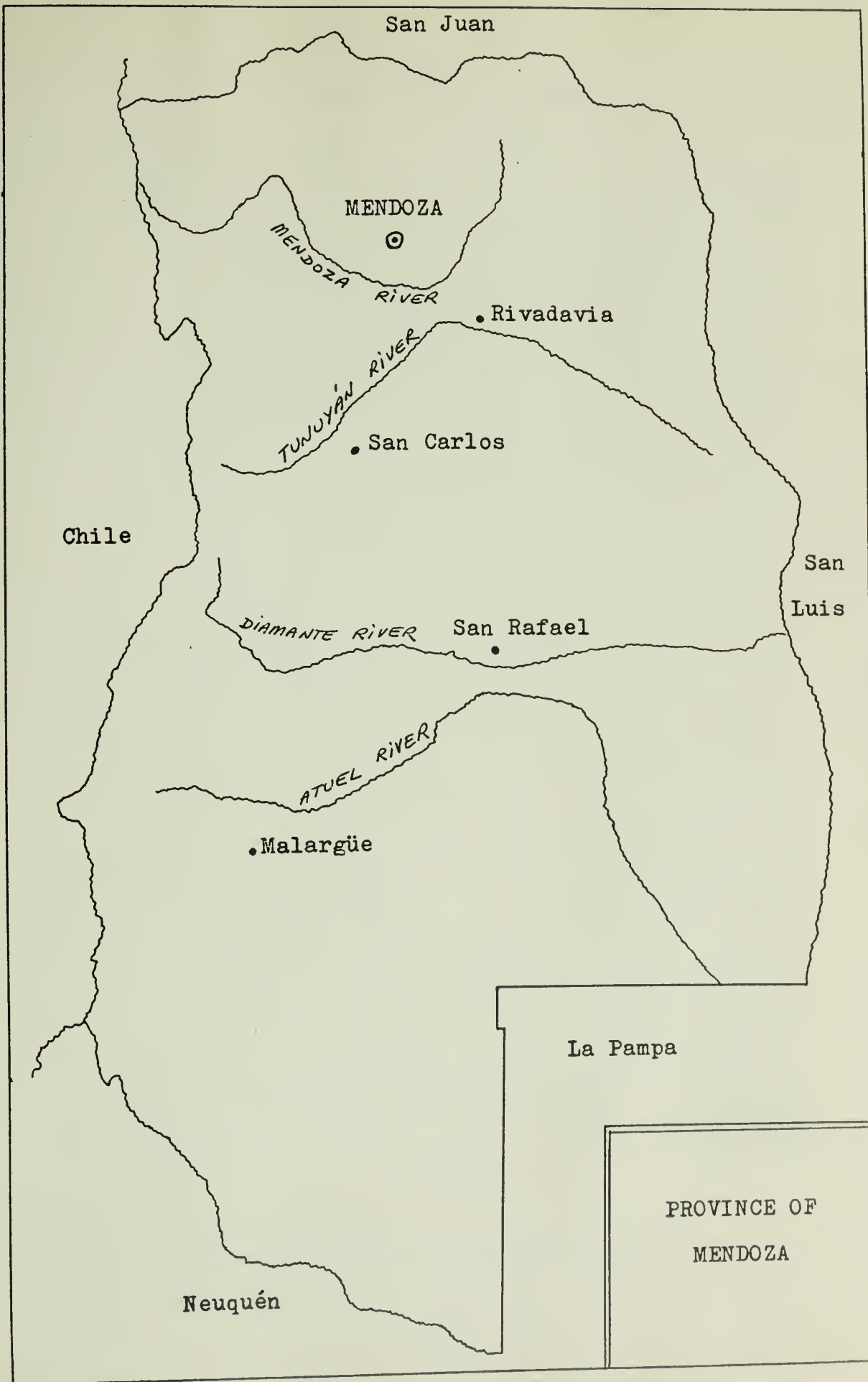
1930. As in no other Argentine province during that period, Radicalism in these two states displayed distinctive popular characteristics. These were evidenced both in the personal style of their undisputable leaders --José Néstor Lencinas and his son Carlos Washington, in Mendoza; and the brothers Federico and Aldo Cantoni, in San Juan--and in the principles of social justice on which they based their political action.

These leaders generated two movements known as Lencinism and Bloquism which produced a tremendous regional impact. Their social accomplishments surpassed the moderate approach of the Radical Party at the national level, and because of their populist principles and procedures, they distinguished Mendoza and San Juan from the rest of the country during these years. This study, which attempts neither a history of Lencinism and Bloquism nor a biography of their caudillos, will focus on the populist characteristics, the authoritarian political style, and the emotional strength which these two principal movements forged within the patria chica, from the time they took power until 1930. This work will also evaluate to what degree the expectations they raised were fulfilled.

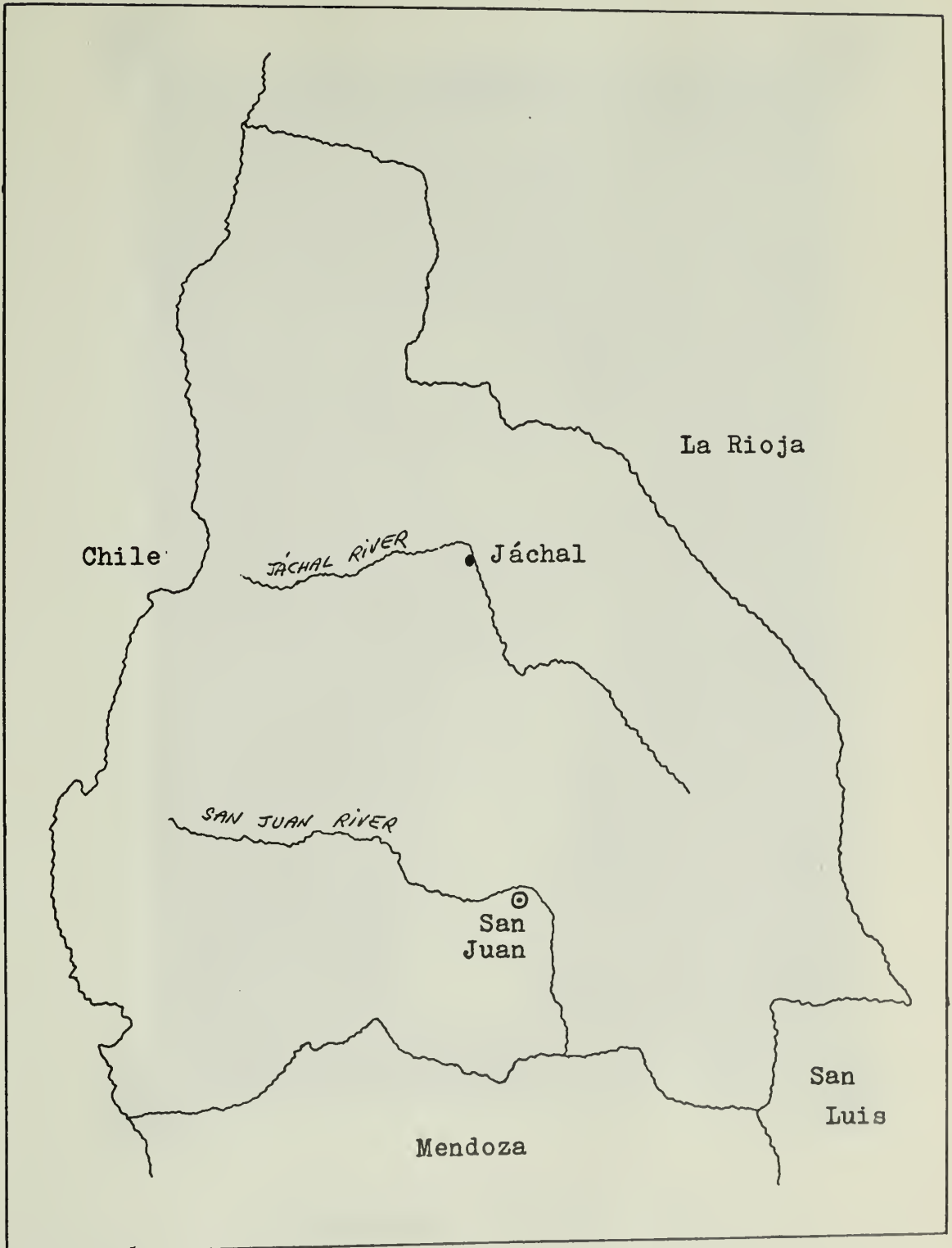
As their impact beyond their geographical boundaries was also significant, the role of Lencinism and Bloquism in the larger national scene will also be considered.

There they became involved in an almost permanent conflict with the national authorities and their political adversaries in Buenos Aires. Finally, in an overall view, the relevance of these movements will be analyzed in conjunction with the issue of federalism and with their historical significance as regional precursors of Peronism.





PROVINCE OF SAN JUAN

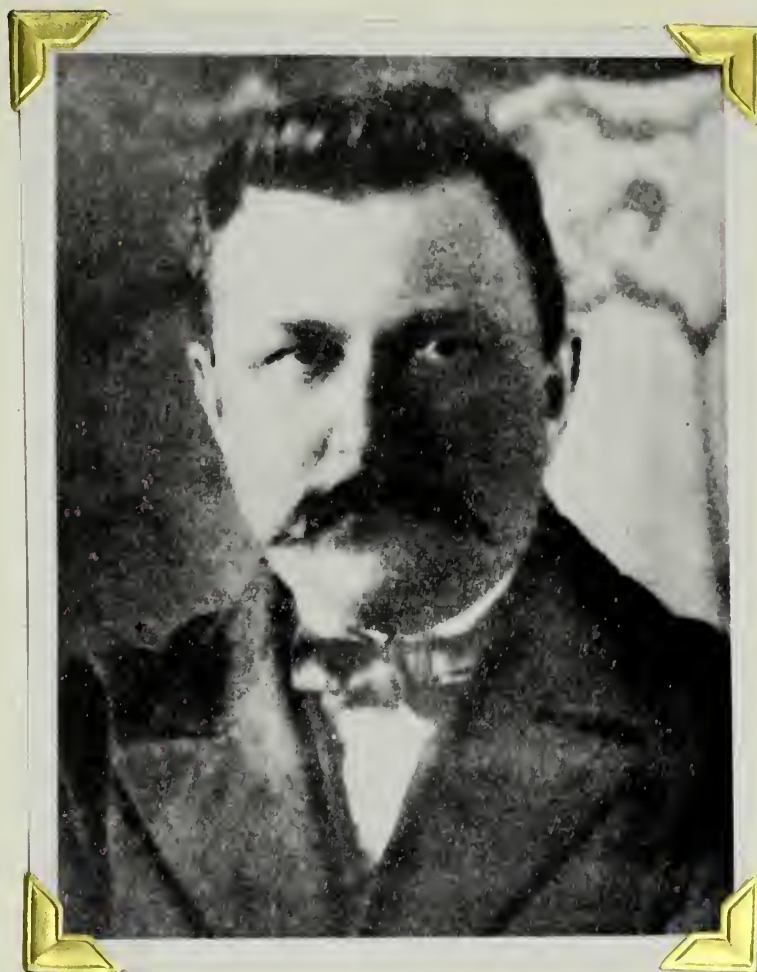




JOSÉ NÉSTOR LENCINAS. 1918



CARLOS WASHINGTON LENCINAS. 1922



FEDERICO CANTONI. 1923

C H A P T E R I
GENERAL FEATURES OF MENDOZA AND SAN JUAN
BEFORE THE RISE OF THE RADICAL PARTY

Physical Framework

The provinces of Mendoza and San Juan constitute, together with San Luis, a region known as Cuyo, located in western Argentina, in the central part of the country on a north-south axis. Mendoza has always been the most important of the three provinces, followed by San Juan and then San Luis.¹

The area of the province of Mendoza is 58,239 sq. mi., similar to the size of the state of Michigan. From the physical and economic viewpoint it can be divided into four main regions: the mountains, the eastern plains, the fluvial oases and an area called Payunia.

The region of the mountains, part of the cordillera of the Andes, covers the western side from north to south. Because of its natural characteristics, it has a very sparse population and it is potentially rich in mineral resources.

On the eastern side of the province, from the border with San Juan in the north to that of La Pampa, in the south, is the region of the plains, which borders on the west with the fluvial oases. This semi-desert plains area has very little

¹The general information for this topic was taken from Francisco de Aparicio and Horacio A. Difrieri, La Argentina. Suma de geografía (9 vols., Buenos Aires, 1963), Vols. I, II, IV, VII and VIII; and Miguel Marzo and Osvaldo Inchauspe, Geografía de Mendoza (2 vols., Mendoza, 1967).

rainfall and very few human clusters of importance because of the scarcity of water. Housing reflects the poverty of the whole environment, and land communications are poorly developed. Land tracts are not as much divided as they are in the fluvial oases, but even the largest extensions cannot be compared with the latifundia of Buenos Aires province, because of their inferior agronomic value.

The most important region of Mendoza is the fluvial oases. Here as in San Juan, water has been the fundamental factor for the attraction and settlement of people. There is no cultivation in either province which does not depend on artificial irrigation. Because of it, men established roots on the borders of the rivers and the whole life of the two states is conditioned by the availability and improvement of hydrographical resources. This absolute dependence on artificially distributed water has created exemplary working habits in the people of the region. While in the Humid Pampa the fields are watered by generous rainfalls, the agricultural life on the west depends entirely upon human labor, which has to provide the irrigation that nature denies. In this region land ownership is greatly divided, a pattern which began developing late in the nineteenth century. Because of this Mendoza deserves to be called the country of the small landowner.

There are two important oases, one in the north, formed by the Mendoza and Tunuyán rivers; and the other in the south, formed by the Diamante and Atuel rivers. In the northern oasis the Mendoza river is the most useful for the province and its

area of influence embraces the largest population. Together with the Tunuyán, it forms an oasis where most of the economic, cultural and administrative activities of the province take place, and the largest number of intensively cultivated crops exists.² The southern oasis has the same characteristics although in lesser scope, and its main urban center is the city of San Rafael.

Payunia is the remaining region of Mendoza, and is located south of the oasis formed by the Diamante and Atuel rivers. It is a semi-desert area sparsely populated; its main center is Malargüe and this region still must be considered as a promise for the future. It differs ecologically from the rest of the province because it represents a penetration of Patagonia into Southern Cuyo, with its volcanic geological structure and saline and gypseous soil. Rainfall in the province is always insufficient, especially in wintertime. Hail and frost are constant threats to the crops and there are no departments free from these severe natural calamities.³

The province of San Juan has an area of 33,257 sq. mi., comparable in size to the State of Maine. It is more

²The capital city, Mendoza, is located in the proximity of the Mendoza river, at 2,467 feet above sea level.

³The provinces of Mendoza and San Juan are politically divided into districts called departamentos. They are the equivalent of counties in the United States. The cordillera influences air currents moving from the west. This gives rise to a phenomenon of the region, the famous Zonda, which blows periodically in San Juan and Mendoza.

mountainous and arid than Mendoza but shares with it most of its physical characteristics. San Juan can be divided into three regions. One is the western part, which covers one third of its territory. It contains the high mountains of the cordillera, the parallel ranges of the pre-cordillera and between them, the productive but not very populated valleys of Rodeo, Iglesia, Calingasta and Barreal.

The central region is under the influence of two fluvial oases. The one in the north centers around Jáchal and is irrigated by the river of the same name. Its trade with Chile was important for many years, but toward the end of the nineteenth century the area suffered from lack of adequate development and communications. In comparison to other sections of the province, Jáchal remained in a state of near stagnation. In the south is located the most important economic, social and administrative center of the province. Here is San Juan's capital, also called San Juan, and the departments surrounding it are intensively cultivated. This entire area belongs to the oasis formed by the San Juan river, the most important and the only one which can be compared in significance with the four principal rivers of Mendoza.

Eastern San Juan, the third region of the province, is an area less mountainous than the others. While its northern section enjoys a sub-tropical climate and is artificially irrigated, the southern part is arid and mostly uninhabited.

San Juan has a mild climate during winter, but summer is very hot and dry, and the low humidity allows for permanent

clear skies and a radiant sun; its annual rainfall averages less than four inches, quite insufficient and only half of what Mendoza gets. This type of climate, providing enough water is available through artificial irrigation, is ideal for the development of viticulture.

The physical characteristics of Mendoza and San Juan described above existed during the early decades of this century. But irrigation development and land cultivation were much less significant than at present. The only important areas in Mendoza centered then in the northern oasis; the southern one, focusing on San Rafael was insignificant, but began a rapid development during the 1920's. In San Juan the center of activities was in the areas around the capital and Jáchal. By 1917 land communications in both provinces consisted only of dirty roads or mere cart paths, and the means of transportation depended entirely on the use of animals.⁴

What influence did the particular geography of these provinces exert on their inhabitants? What kind of habits and customs were shaped when instead of huge extensions of land the campesino had to concentrate on a few acres and was forced to irrigate them artificially? In colonial times the Spaniards settled on the edges of the rivers and slowly evolved from a society of farmers to viticulture. Over the centuries this transformation has created an industrious community. Hence,

⁴The population of Mendoza in 1914 was 277,500; in 1972 it reached one million. San Juan had a population of 119,200 in 1914, and 388,000 in 1970.

the man working the land in Cuyo could not be compared with the gaucho who was typical of the Humid Pampa.

As life in these provinces flourished in the oases, the geographic and economic conditions developed an environment conducive to social cooperation. The average campesino was not an expert horseman as was the gaucho; he preferred the mule to the horse because the former was easier to handle in the rugged geography of the mountains and was a very valuable aid during harvest time, when thousands of mules were used to pull the carts filled with grapes. The paisano of Mendoza and San Juan, the native as well as the immigrant, was rooted to the land he worked; moreover, he tended to be a family man living in an established community.⁵ The aridity of the land posed a challenge that could only be overcome with hard work. In Mendoza and San Juan this challenge was accepted.

A civilizing factor of prime significance for both provinces was the building of the railroad lines through the desert. Upon the completion of this communication with the east, Cuyo experienced a thrust for progress. In 1875 the railroad reached Mercedes, in San Luis province, and in 1885 the Ferrocarril Andino began its services between San Juan and Mendoza and Buenos Aires.⁶

⁵Jorge I. Segura, Danzas folklóricas y tradicionales de Mendoza. Panorama de cuatro siglos (Mendoza, 1971), unpublished.

⁶Until 1910 San Juan was connected by railroad only to Mendoza, making the northern province greatly dependent on the southern neighbor. The opening that year of the San Juan-

Almost at the same time the conquest of the desert took place under the command of General Roca. In 1879 the campaign headed by Lt. Col. Napoleón Uriburu freed all southern Mendoza of Indians for the first time.

Economic development to 1916

The economy of Mendoza and San Juan was, and still is, basically founded upon the wine industry. Especially since the 1880's, it has been their most important source of public and private wealth. The agricultural-industrial backbone of the entire grape-wine economic complex was constituted by the viñateros, the owners and keepers of the vineyards, and by the bodegueros, the owners of the wine-making establishments.

The viñateros were the largest group, ranging from the small proprietor who worked a limited number of acres, to the large landowner whose vineyards represented a substantial capital investment and who had them worked by contratistas.⁷ Most of the viñateros cultivated the land to sell their production because they did not own a bodega. The average bodeguero did not own a vineyard; he made wine from grapes which he bought from the viñateros. An important variation was the combination of the two mentioned groups, that is, the

Serrezuela line, in the northwest of Córdoba, provided San Juan with a new means of communication and trade, especially with northern Argentina, so the province became less dependent on the traditional hegemony of Mendoza.

⁷They are named so because of the contract they sign when arranging the working rules with the landowner.

viñatero with bodega, or the reciprocal, the bodeguero who processed the grapes from his own vineyards and those he bought from other viñateros.

As the final decision regarding the seasonal price for the grapes depended on the bodeguero, the viñatero was always subordinated to the fluctuations of the market. His bargaining position vis-à-vis the bodeguero was very limited because once the grapes reach the proper stage of maturity they have to be gathered within a short time. Any delay deteriorates the product and forces the viñatero to dispose hastily of it.⁸

As the industry became more developed, its importance to the economic vitality of the province increased. Fiscal receipts depended to a very large extent on the wine industry, forcing the provincial governments, in reality, to become a subordinate partner of the bodegueros and viñateros.

The protection of the wine interests, like that of sugar in northern Argentina, was an essential factor in the consolidation of the industry. But in spite of the tariff barrier, it experienced serious crises as a result of fluctuations in consumption, adverse climatic conditions, credit abuses, and the adulteration of wines, all of which handicapped its development and impaired its reputation. The shifts in prices quoted for wine at the bodega suggest the

⁸ Another important factor which denoted the supremacy of the bodeguero was that he paid in four quarterly installments for the grapes he bought at harvest time; but starting each July he was able to sell the regular wine from the harvest. Therefore, he could advantageously finance most of his operations while taking the whole year to pay off the viñatero.

magnitude of the problem:

Year	Price per liter	Year	Price	Year	Price
1900	5 cents	1910	17 cents	1914	10 cents
1901	6	1911	17	1915	6
1902	8	1912	20	1916	7
1903	12	1913	16	1917	10

Source: Provincia de Mendoza, Sumario estadístico. 1936 (Mendoza, 1937), p. 177.

The steps taken to remedy the crises affecting Mendoza and San Juan at the beginning of the century, and again from 1914 to 1918, took into consideration the interests of the large landowners and the wine-makers, usually referred to as industrialists. Control of the executive and legislative branches of the provincial governments was in the hands of people directly or indirectly linked with those interests. They used their power to enact legislation whose main objective was to defend the patrimony of the bodegueros and viñateros by revaluating the product. To accomplish this, in 1914, a large number of acres with vineyards were uprooted and more than 7,242,000 gallons of wine, valued at 2,193,000 pesos were thrown away.⁹

As the measures taken proved ineffective, in December 1916, Law No. 703 was enacted, rekindling the hopes for a solution to the problems of the depressed industry. The law encouraged the creation of cooperatives, but only one was formed, the so-called Cooperativa Vitivinícola. The policy of

⁹ Leopoldo Suárez, La industria vitivinícola (Mendoza, 1922), p. 28. The legislation enacted authorized the building of regional bodegas to allow the legion of viñateros to make wine from their own production, but not a single regional bodega was built.

elimination of grapes continued with such intensity that those destroyed during 1916-1917 were valued at 3,753,000 pesos and in the season 1917-1918 amounted to 7,648,000 pesos.¹⁰

The figures given above are indirect evidence that another victim of these crises was the man whose work depended on the prosperity of the vineyards and the bodegas. In 1908, for example, a gatherer earned ten cents for each basket of grapes. Thus, a man working with help from others could earn from 8 to 9 pesos per day. In 1916, his wages were less than half that amount because of the much smaller harvest, which sunk the worker in a deep misery. The destruction of the grapes, which were never gathered but destroyed at the vine itself, left thousands of workers idle and countless families impoverished. No legislation was enacted to solve this problem.

As water was the vital element for the economic development of Mendoza and San Juan, its distribution was a matter of paramount importance. To secure a satisfactory apportionment of water for all the viñateros, a system of local juntas was set up for the administration of its distribution. Moreover, to avoid undesirable manipulations of any nature the juntas were granted financial autonomy in order to meet their ordinary expenses.

On paper, the legislation concerning all the irrigational

¹⁰Ibid. The tremendous magnitude of this figure appears more vividly when it is compared with the total fiscal receipts for the province during 1915, which amounted to 7,547,000 pesos.

matters was entirely non-political and technically-oriented. In reality, however, the handling of the distribution of water became on several occasions an electoral tool, popularly known as the torniquete del agua, the water tourniquet. It meant a precious reward for the supporters of the influential groups and an arbitrary punishment imposed upon the political adversaries.¹¹

Provincial Currency

The issue of provincial money was a problem that affected Mendoza and San Juan, as well as other provinces. Part of the financial support for public works, and especially for irrigation purposes, was obtained by issuing provincial scripts, or letras de tesorería. The first issue was made in 1892 in order to finance the building of a dam and intakes in the Mendoza river. Although other public works were funded through the years by the same means, financial difficulties and lack of scruples in the enforcement of the laws transformed the letras into ordinary income for the provincial treasury.

As the letras were issued in small values they soon circulated as regular currency within the provincial boundary. The national government took the position that the circulation of the letras as currency violated Article 108 of the national constitution which placed the right to issue currency exclusively in the hands of the federal authorities.

¹¹ Another facet of the favoritisms which the necessity of water made possible were the concessions granted to irrigate thousands of acres in isolated areas. These concessions paved the way for land speculation and abusive enrichment.

In defense of the provincial policy, the commercial and industrial interests of Mendoza, grouped in the Bolsa Vitivinícola y Comercial, informed Governor Emilio Civit in 1908 about their great financial requirements for carrying on agricultural works, and the need to fulfill their credit obligations. They asked Civit, in the name "of the superior ideal of preserving and protecting the public and private well-being," to continue the issuance of letras, as he was authorized to do by the provincial legislation. Responding favorably to this statement, the governor affirmed in January 1909, that it was the duty of the province to participate with its financial resources and its credit to promote the activities of its commerce and industry.¹²

Although rebuffed by a presidential order demanding the immediate withdrawal of the letras, Civit stated weeks later in a note to the Ministry of Hacienda, that the letras were a very valuable auxiliary element to the national currency. The governor's position was that the amount of currency circulating in Mendoza was insufficient to cover the needs of its commerce and industry. He affirmed that the public circulated the letras without any impediment; that they were not subject to any discount or depreciation; that the province received the letras for tax payment purposes, and that the business community in general was accepting them because of their certain and easy

¹²Provincia de Mendoza, Las letras de tesorería ante la constitución y leyes de la nación (Mendoza, 1909), pp. 25-28.

convertibility. Furthermore, with respect to the legal aspect of the problem, he stated that

the fact that the letras are issued also in small values, but not inferior to one peso, does not affect at all their legal standing, because it is not denied that it is an indisputable right of the provinces to issue bonds backed by their own credit.¹³

Despite this defense of the use of letras, the customary lack of responsibility on the part of the provincial governments resulted in many cases of non-compliance with the very conditions imposed by the provincial laws authorizing their issuance.¹⁴

The Work in the Vineyards and the Impact of Immigration

The initial economic pattern of scattered small properties worked by their owners with the help of relatives was substantially transformed through the years with the emergence of a system in which thousands of families took care of the vines on lands owned by others.¹⁵ Most of the work in the vineyards was done, and still is done, by the contratistas. But the term contratista, in fact, does not involve one person

¹³Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁴As an example, on January 1st, 1912, there were circulating in Mendoza 820,274 pesos in letras, which ought to have been withdrawn two years before. Mario Arenas, Estudio histórico y crítico sobre las finanzas de la provincia de Mendoza en 1912 (Buenos Aires, 1913), p. 61.

¹⁵The growing number of acres of vineyards are an indication of the expansion which took place in the fluvial oases. In Mendoza there were 16,000 in 1890; 112,000 in 1910, and 149,000 in 1916. In San Juan they increased from 20,000 in 1890 to 65,000 in 1915. This growth also led to a large expansion in the number of bodegas.

but many, that is, the head of the family and by extension, his whole family.

This agricultural system brought a permanent change in the paternalistic relationship which had prevailed for many decades between the patrones and their workers. With the arrival of the immigrants in large number and the new systems of agricultural-industrial exploitation, the traditional pattern gradually vanished. European immigrants were a major factor contributing to the progress and modernization of Mendoza, although in much smaller scale to that of San Juan.

Until the 1880's most of the economic activity centered on the extensive alfalfares where cattle graze before being exported to Chile. This declined as most of the immigrants were attracted to work in the vineyards, for which very favorable climatic conditions existed. The flow of immigrants into Mendoza became significant by the middle 1880's and remained strong until the beginning of World War I, as the following table indicates:¹⁶

Year	Number	Year	Number	Year	Number
1900	1,183	1906	7,372	1912	15,914
1901	4,160	1907	9,107	1913	16,138
1902	1,521	1908	12,068	1914	4,063
1903	757	1909	9,618	1915	739
1904	1,255	1910	14,095	1916	646
1905	1,953	1911	11,767	1917	439

Source: Mendoza, Sumario estadístico, 1936, p. 25.

¹⁶ Within a few years Mendoza and San Juan were placed out of competition in the nation's livestock market. This situation not only evolved from the changes they experienced in their traditional agricultural activities, but also because of the fast-growing development of the Humid Pampa and the improved means of transportation in the littoral.

European techniques began replacing the rudimentary exploitation of the vines in Mendoza and San Juan, and after 1885 the agrarian and industrial transformation became more evident with the end of the primitive transportation of wine by carts to Córdoba, Tucumán and the littoral. The immigrant farmer began working the lands on a small scale, simply with the help of his family and some salaried peons. As the lands became more divided the family constituted an important part of the rural labor force. At the same time, the foreign-born merchants, who were generally called turcos, dotted all areas of Mendoza with their personal and laborious trading style.

The national censuses indicate the extraordinary influence of immigration in Mendoza, as well as the lesser significance it had in the development of San Juan:

Mendoza					
Census	Natives	%	Foreign-born*	%	Total
1869	59,269	99.1	6,144	.9	65,413
1895	100,231	86.3	15,911	13.7	116,142
1914	189,181	68.2	88,354	31.8	277,535
San Juan					
1869	58,007	96.2	2,312	3.8	60,319
1895	78,929	93.7	5,322	6.3	84,251
1914	102,830	86.3	16,422	13.7	119,252

(*) The figures for the 1869 census require additional clarification, because at that time the number of Europeans was insignificant:

	Mendoza	San Juan
Chileans	5,774	2,059
From bordering countries	29	18
Other nations	<u>341</u>	<u>235</u>
	<u>6,144</u>	<u>2,312</u>

The foreign-born community, especially those from Italy, made the largest contribution to the agrarian and industrial prosperity of Mendoza and San Juan. In the former province, in 1910, 60 per cent of the people working in the vineyards were Italians, 30 per cent French, and the remaining 10 per cent from other nationalities. Many of them were acquainted with the wine culture in their native lands, and all brought with them their skills in commerce and industry and their hard-working habits. Through a constant process of capitalization, many of the immigrants set up the vigorous foundation of the grape industry, which in less than fifty years would radically change that region in the Argentine west.¹⁷ Especially in Mendoza, many immigrants acquired land

¹⁷ Benito Marianetti, El racimo y su aventura. La cuestión vitivinícola (Buenos Aires, 1965), p. 19. Apart from the large foreign contribution, Mendoza attracted migrants from other provinces. According to the censuses of 1895 and 1914, people from San Juan and San Luis, in that order, were the largest domestic groups migrating to Mendoza, Zulma L. Recchini de Lattes and Alfredo E. Lattes, Migraciones en la Argentina. Estudio de las migraciones internas e internacionales basado en datos censales, 1869-1960 (Buenos Aires, 1969), pp. 47-48, 291.

to expand their operations or to become owners instead of mere contratistas. It was a slow but uninterrupted process, which in less than a century placed the ownership of most of the land in the hands of the immigrants or their descendents.¹⁸

This impressive shift in Mendozaan land ownership from the creole to non-creole sectors was made possible after the arrival of the railroad, which facilitated the transformation of pasture lands into valuable vineyards. This process was less evident in San Juan, where the native creole upper class continued to own a larger proportion of land than its counterpart in Mendoza. In 1914, the natives owning real estate

¹⁸The transfer of land from the native upper class to European immigrants is revealed in a recent study of land registers showing owners of irrigated lands in selected areas in the fluvial oases. The study compares land ownership in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the situation as of 1960. Although this latter date is beyond the period of the present work, the information submitted below indicates the transformation that was taking place in the ownership of land:

Area Influenced by the River	First Ownership Register		1960 Register	
	Creole	Non- Creole	Creole	Non- Creole
	%	%	%	%
Mendoza	100	0	18	82
Tunuyán	86	14	5	95
Diamante	32	68	1	99
Atuel	17	83	3	97

Luis Campoy, Grupos culturales criollo y no-criollo. Disponibilidad para el cambio y niveles de movilización y desarrollo (Mendoza, 1971), pp. 45-62. Unpublished. Mr. Campoy was in 1972 the chairman of the Institute of Sociology at the National University of Cuyo, in Mendoza.

in this province were 67.9 per cent, while in San Juan they were 87.4 per cent.¹⁹

To acquire small parcels of land was relatively easy, if money or credit was available, because an acre of vines with irrigation rights brought a very high price, making it profitable for owners to sell off such parcels.²⁰ The large majority of the immigrants, however, were not so fortunate as to become captains of industry or big landowners. Most of them and their families had to work all their lives on lands which were not theirs.

Social Structure

The social configuration of Mendoza and San Juan in the early decades of the century presented the classical pyramidal composition. The upper class consisted of the traditional,

¹⁹Tercer censo nacional, 1917, IV, 44-49.

²⁰The following figures give the approximate value of a hectare of land--equivalent to two acres and a half--around 1910, in a few selected departments of Mendoza:

Department	Vineyards	Alfalfaes	Uncultivated Land	
			With Water	Without Water
	\$	\$	\$	\$
Guaymallén	4,000	900/1,000	200/500	not given
Junín	2,500	1,200	300/500	not given
Rivadavia	3,000/5,000	400/1,000	200	5/10
San Rafael	2,500/3,000	400/600	150/400	2/10

Provincia de Mendoza, Su vida, su trabajo, su progreso, n.p. n.d. It was a special publication in homage to Governor Emilio Civit, c. 1910.

creole elements, whose family roots could be traced to colonial times or the era of the wars for independence. With their economic strength derived from land ownership, they monopolized the political control in both provinces. Even when they began to sell off their lands to immigrants, they were still able to retain their upper class status within the society. They continued to constitute an elite which supplanted prestige based on landowning with that derived from the historical luster of the family name, control of the higher bureaucratic positions and professional credentials. In this way the social glamour and the political power which had been exclusive assets of the native upper class, persisted into the twentieth century.

Abelardo Arias, the noted novelist who was born in San Rafael, Mendoza, has portrayed the arrogance and frustrations experienced by the native creole upper class, when it had to face the painful reality of seeing the gringo²¹ gradually taking possession of its lands. Arias' fiction projects a vivid picture of the contempt felt by the traditional groups toward the immigrants. These creoles were extremely proud that the lands taken from the Indians never had had other owners but those bearing the traditional blood; they even hated to put a wire fence around the fields because it was a thing of gringos.²²

²¹The name "gringo" in Argentina is given to an Italian immigrant.

²²Abelardo Arias, Álamos talados (Buenos Aires, 1942). All the symbolism connoted in these attitudes and the creole disdain for working in the vineyards is also evidenced in the words Arias assigns to a creole: "Los criollos no somos muy

The middle class consisted of creole elements engaged in professional activities and small-scale commercial occupations; small landowners and contratistas, mostly immigrants; and the foreign-born merchants who practically dominated their field in Mendoza.

During the times of large immigration, the average foreign-born did not mix socially with the natives; and so, for example, one Italian married another Italian. Non-creole merchants and industrialists who prospered in their business, however, married women from the creole upper class. The lower segments were mostly composed of creoles. In general, they displayed less ambition and less willingness to accept the discipline of continuous labor than the average immigrant worker.

Social Conditions

The living conditions of the popular sectors early in the century revealed a situation of general poverty, which was reflected in the nature of their occupations as well as in their habits of life.

In his report to Joaquín V. González, then Minister of the Interior, Juan Bialet Massé affirmed that the popular segments in Mendoza were as far apart from the leading class as they were during colonial times; that the leaders of the

guapos pa' estos menesteres, eso di' andar cortando racimitos son cosas para los gringos y las mujeres. Ahora, lidiar con los toros, jinetear potros, trenzar tientos de cuero crudo, marcar animales, eso son cosas di' hombre." Ibid., p. 157.

society only took an interest in the people to use it as a "political masquerade," but that they never showed concern for their social betterment.

Bialet Massé considered alarming the debasement of the working class, vitiated by drunkenness, gambling and lewdness, which was partially mirrored in the large number of illegitimate births and arrests of drunken people.²³ Especially on Sundays many stayed until midnight in taverns, which explained the large absenteeism of workers on Mondays. He also compared certain social attitudes among the lower classes, stating that

To save money is a principle which does not penetrate the mind of the native worker, and so, while the Italian and the European in general work hard and enjoy soon a relative well-being, and many of them even rise socially and economically, the creole stands still amidst the poverty surrounding him.

On the social question, Bialet Massé observed that the policy of employers was merely "to pay the smallest wage possible and to make the laborer work as much as he can." The wage of a temporary worker, a bracero, was 1,30 pesos per day, without meals, which was very low. Among the municipal workers, carters of sanitation crews earned 1,50 per day and garbage burners 1,40. Servant girls, a very important occupational source for the creole lower class, earned from 12 to 20 pesos

²³In 1910, for every 1,000 born alive in Mendoza, 263 were out of wedlock. In San Juan the figure was 440. Alejandro E. Bunge, Una nueva Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1940), p. 168.

per month.²⁴

Recollecting conditions in his native city, Raúl Aguirre Molina asserted that by the turn of the century housing for the poor in Mendoza lacked the essential sanitary facilities; that their earnings were very low and that they did not receive any assistance from the government in case of need. When these serious grievances became more noticeable, remarked Aguirre Molina, the lower classes began their protest, and eventually rebelled by adhering to Lencinism, and less than two decades later, to Peronism.²⁵

No legislation aimed specifically to benefit the workers had been enacted in Mendoza. The only piece of social legislation was Law No. 371, of October 1906, which declared Sunday a holiday, but it was effective only in a few urban areas. No other law of this nature was enacted until 1918. The constitution of Mendoza, as reformed in 1910 and later in 1916, specifically authorized the legislature to pass laws regulating the work of women and children and the sanitary conditions in industrial establishments. But no legislation was enacted on the basis of this new authority.²⁶

²⁴Juan Biale Massé, El estado de las clases obreras argentinas a comienzos de siglo (Córdoba, 1969), pp. 555-583. The original appeared in 1904. The 1969 edition was published by the National University of Córdoba.

²⁵Raúl Aguirre Molina, Mendoza del 900 (Buenos Aires, 1966), pp. 14-15.

²⁶In July 1916, the Radical minority introduced in the provincial legislature two bills establishing a maximum of eight hours for the working day and the so-called "English Saturday," meaning that normal work would cease at noontime on Saturdays. But these bills did not get legislative approval. La Prensa, July 24, 1916.

In the more primitive scene of San Juan, by 1900 society was considered to be simply the traditional group of leading families of the oligarchy, who through the years had disputed among themselves the attainment of political power. The rest of the people, the small merchants, the artisans, the workers, the servants and the poor peones, although they were part of the community performed a permanently passive role. Many people in the lower groups were called the rabble, the chinos; being mostly illiterates, they were totally subordinated to the will of the patronos.²⁷

Living conditions for the lower classes were similar to those mentioned for Mendoza, that is, very poor housing, low income and few prospects for any tangible material improvement. Biallet Massé's report stated that there was in San Juan a general depression, with the cost of living so high that in proportion wine was cheap, which explained the drinking habit of the people. Most distressing, however, were the general working conditions, which demanded excessive hours of labor for an insignificant wage, to the extent that for some workers alcoholism became an escape from the daily misery. A policeman earned 40 pesos per month, but as he was paid in letras, his net salary was only 35,40, and 40 per cent of the police force was illiterate. It was customary for women of the lower class to give away their children, which was evident in the large

²⁷ Salvador A. Doncel, "San Juan desde el punto de vista social," Censo agrícola. Estadísticas e informaciones de la provincia de San Juan (Buenos Aires, 1934), 116.

number of chinitas working as servants for a salary of 8 to 12 pesos per month.²⁸

Popular Education and Civic Culture

According to the 1914 national census, the illiteracy rate among children of school age was 38.1 per cent in Mendoza and 29.8 per cent in San Juan. Equally unsatisfactory was the school attendance record: in Mendoza 49.4 per cent of all the children of school age did not attend classes, and in San Juan it was 45.3 per cent.²⁹

The participation of the family in the rural chores affected the non-attendance or the late attendance of children in school, especially during harvest time. In other circumstances, the negligence of their parents because of their low cultural understanding, plus the indifference of the State, contributed to the number of school drop-outs and the illiteracy rate. The traditional poverty of many schools in the countryside explained why in most cases a child was considered literate who did not attend school for more than two or three years.

The level of civic culture in both provinces was low. The main source of information on public affairs for the ordinary individual was the partisan political rally. Only the literate could read newspapers and they were limited, with

²⁸Bialet Massé, El estado de las clases, pp. 585-615.

²⁹Tercer censo nacional, III, 584-591.

the exception of Los Andes in Mendoza, to a few modest sheets. This explains to a large degree the historical justification of the rule by the few. When the freedom of suffrage was made effective by the Saenz Peña Law, however, the role of the political caudillos became paramount in the process of guiding the masses into political action.

The voter registration lists, or padrones, of Mendoza and San Juan emphasize the significance of the number of illiterate citizens, as shown in these examples:

	1904	1916
	%	%
Mendoza	42.3	42.5
San Juan	49.7	45.6

Source: Rodolfo Rivarola, la crisis política argentina. Orígenes, causas, soluciones (Buenos Aires, 1931), p. 28.

What kind of political process and electoral contests could be held when almost half of the electorate was illiterate? Were there any means by which the masses could comprehend the issues of the day if almost half of them could not read and write? The relationships between the ballot box, the rate of illiteracy, and the social conditions of the popular sectors were extremely significant during the period under consideration in this work.

In a society with its majority confined to the lower echelon, limited in its possibilities for economic improvement, poorly and deficiently housed, scarcely protected to avoid illness, without official aid to check the abuses of employers or the misfortunes of life, with a high rate of illiteracy,

and without the material and intellectual means to overcome the unpretentious cultural circle in which they lived, it was not necessary for this majority to understand ideological theories about class conflicts.

Within the submissiveness which characterized them, they were class-oriented simply by nature, by emotion, by sentiment. Amidst the material limitations surrounding them, they could realize that there were some groups in the society who lived much better, and who enjoyed the privileges that power yielded to them. This contrast developed in the popular sectors a psychology of resentment.

Before the Saenz Peña Law was enacted, there was no possibility for the masses to effectively reflect in the polls their distrust of the ruling class. The electoral system did not offer guarantees to the electorate to express freely its political choice. This shameful reality was voiced in Congress by Indalecio Gómez, the Minister of the Interior,

The civic spirit is dead; our democracy is non-existent; people do not vote. In spite of the fact that constitutional powers exist, that there are governments in the provinces and in the nation, that there are congress and legislatures filled with the most distinguished men, the people feel a deception about congress...why? because it was not chosen through honest elections but by a system corrupted and disfigured.³⁰

After the enactment of the electoral reform--especially in Mendoza, where the principles of the federal law were incorporated into the provincial constitution in 1916--the

³⁰ Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados, Diario de sesiones (hereafter referred as Diputados), 1911, III, 148.

conservatives found it more difficult to generate wide electoral support from the popular groups, nor could their leaders communicate persuasively with them. On the other hand, the popular sectors gained political strength when they became conscious of the value of their vote, freely cast. By 1917, they were ready to channel their sympathy to the party and the candidates who opposed the views of the traditional landowner-industrialists political power.

The Political Scene. Mendoza:

From Oligarchic to Contested Politics

The governments of Mendoza after 1862 followed the liberal traditions of the times, with their leadership in the hands of a few, cultured, propertied men, who constituted the oligarchy of that province.³¹ Although many of its members were related by economic interests or family connections, they did not constitute a cohesive group. Personal interests put distance among many of them, and eventually the divergences within the ruling groups paved the way for political antagonisms which survived for many decades.

³¹The economic power they represented is stressed by the fact that in the 1870's one per cent of all proprietors --54 out of a total of 5,203--possessed 26 per cent of the lands under cultivation. José Luis Masini Calderón, Mendoza hace cien años (Buenos Aires, 1967), p. 46.

Standard reference works on the political developments in both provinces are: Jorge M. Scalvini, Historia de Mendoza (Mendoza, 1965); Carmen Peñaloza de Varese and Héctor D. Arias, Historia de San Juan (Mendoza, 1966); and Edmundo Correas, "Historia de Mendoza," and Juan Rómulo Fernández, "San Juan, 1862-1930," in Historia de las provincias y los pueblos, Vol. IV of Historia argentina contemporánea (Buenos Aires, 1967), pp. 469-502 and 503-544, respectively.

The basic split among Mendozan conservatives was between the followers of Emilio Civit, who was enrolled in the Roquismo,³² and those of Benito Villanueva, who enjoyed high political and economic influence in Buenos Aires. Both clashed pertinaciously. In spite of the animosities that pulled these groups apart, all their members were participants in the oligarchical trenza, manipulated by the Villanueva and Civit circles, which for many years were the Capulets and Montagues of the Mendozan elite.³³ Basically, until 1917, their intra-oligarchical frictions were evidenced in the bitterness with which they fought for the high national and provincial positions.

Besides these dominant groups, another future major contender in the provincial political arena was José Néstor Lencinas. He was born in 1859 in the village of San Carlos, sixty miles south of the capital. After graduating from the University of Córdoba in 1880, this young lawyer began his professional career in Mendoza and became actively involved in the political disputes of the day.

³²Roquismo was a political current led by General Julio Argentino Roca, representative of the liberal forces which in the 1880's shaped the so-called Argentine oligarchy, politically and socially elitist but economically progressive.

³³Trenza is a term commonly used in the political jargon denoting the weaving process of a braid, with the connotation of irregular dealings, suspicious accommodation and labyrinthine intrigue, in which politicians often indulged.

His first biographer stated that Lencinas became known in time as the defender of "any gaucho who was harassed by the judges," and asserted that he obtained the release from jail of more than 4,000 under prosecution, without charging them any fee.³⁴ At a place and time when a professional degree was a certain indication of social status, Lencinas' crusade as the "lawyer of the poor" became a very important factor adding to his personal prestige.

The revolution of July 1890, in Buenos Aires, attracted little attention in Mendoza, but did provide the opportunity to create a provincial arm of the Civic Union. Its initial group was composed of individuals who until then had sympathized with different political sectors, including some who had had affinity with Roquismo and Juarismo,³⁵ as well as others who had opposed both groups. With such diverse origins, factions began to take shape within the Civic Union; on one side were those who were more accommodating to the traditional political groups, and on the other side--led by Lencinas--were those more critical of the policy of agreements within the elite.

At the opening of this century the Radical faction with the closest ideological ties to the conservative wing

³⁴Julio Nieto Riesco, Lencinas, I (Buenos Aires, 1926), p. 39. There is no explanation of how Nieto Riesco arrived at this high figure.

³⁵Name given to the groups supporting the personalist rule of Miguel Juárez Celman, another prominent member of the Argentine oligarchy in the 1880's.

commanded by Civit, founded the Partidos Unidos, which became the political front that controlled provincial affairs with an iron hand, from 1901 to 1910. Political decisions continued subject to the agreements reached among the leading members of these groups. The legislature was the stage from which they exerted their influence; for the deputies constituted half of the electors of the Electoral College who selected the governors, and they also took part in the appointment of national Senators.

Reflecting on the political reality of those days, a keen Mendozan writer considered shameful the "criminal indifference of the governments toward anything which is not immediately quotable in hectares of vineyards or in cattle reproducers." He deplored the fact that there was no other alternative but to rely on the efficacy of an elite which was able to impose its image upon the malleable sentiment of the masses. "No man rises here," he added, "because he gains the ballots of his constituents by virtue of a program and an ideal of which he has to render account to the people."³⁶

A reaction took place among some conservatives after Rufino Ortega was elected governor in 1910, by the choice of Civit, the outgoing governor. Ortega not only broke his political ties with the Civitists, but formed a new political force, the Partido Popular, in order to open an alternative

³⁶Julio Leónidas Aguirre, Cocina criolla y salsa india (Mendoza, 1902), p. 12, 281.

to the authoritarianism of those controlling the province since 1901. This rejection of the men and procedures which characterized an era in Mendozaan politics, therefore, brought other groups to power from 1910 to 1917. They were also part of the elite, but dissatisfied with the heavy-hand with which Civit and his political associates ruled.

The election for governor held in December 1913, brought a healthy change in the political situation. Besides the two conservative segments, the Partido Popular and the Concentración Cívica, the Radicals participated for the first time in a gubernatorial election.³⁷ Although there was more electoral freedom than in the past, irregular procedures still prevailed in this encounter. But the success of Francisco S. Álvarez, the Partido Popular candidate, indicated that within the traditional conservative groups there was room to attempt some kind of political reform.³⁸

During his term, however, Álvarez had to meet one of the most serious crises in the history of the wine industry, the eventual solution to which was to pour wine into trenches and

³⁷In the three-cornered contest, Benito Villanueva's candidate garnered the largest number of votes: Partido Popular, candidate: Francisco S. Álvarez, 11,597 votes; Concentración Cívica, supported by Emilio Civit, 8,644; and Unión Cívica Radical, candidate: José Néstor Lencinas, 6,733. La Prensa, December 15, 1913.

³⁸The National Deputy Lucio Funes asserted that Mendoza was joining those provinces that were in favor of institutional renovation and political integrity. And in a direct reference to Civitism, he added that his province "was no longer a fief, no longer the island of an obscure personage who until yesterday ruled omnipotently." Diputados, 1914, I, 371.

destroy grapes in the vineyards in order to reevaluate the products. A grave social problem confronted the province, with such massive poverty and unemployment that the government had to set up, in the public square, the so-called ollas populares--popular kitchens--to feed the poor people.³⁹

But since the men who governed Mendoza from 1910 to 1917 reacted only mildly against the traditional ruling pattern, the Radicals, by 1917, were in good position to use the most important weapons they had in their hands: the guarantees of a secret ballot and the strength of their growing number of supporters. Their resounding success in the presidential election of April 1, 1916, in which they polled 14,900 votes against 10,500 of the conservatives, greatly enhanced their possibilities to capture control of the provincial affairs.

Fully aware of the seriousness of this challenge in the election for the governorship scheduled at the end of 1917, the antagonistic groups of Civit and Villanueva were forced to forego their traditional enmity. They decided to confront together the common enemy, in order to defend their paramount political leadership in the province. Thus, during this second stage of the primacy of the oligarchy, from 1910 to 1917, a confrontation began to take shape not between the hostile groups of the same social and economic class, but between occasionally united liberals and the Radicals. The

³⁹For this Álvarez was given the unpopular nickname of Pancho Hambre.

growing ascendancy of the latter, at the national as well as the provincial level, gradually changed the political atmosphere by challenging the hegemonic rule of the oligarchy, and promising to regenerate the virtue of the ballot box.

Until 1917, as has been mentioned, political power in Mendoza rested mostly in the hands of Villanueva and Civit. As leaders of the oligarchy, what kind of men were they? About Villanueva it has been stated that "he was a master at carrying on unethical electoral schemes. He bought all he could using any means available: money, influence, promises, and pandering to the human ambitions and vanities."⁴⁰ His ideas and actions were the epitome of what the term Régimen came to symbolize.⁴¹

But Emilio Civit left his name more indissolubly linked with the regional history of the period. A few references about him as a public servant will reveal the controversial historical judgments he stirs up. A penetrating observer of the recent Mendozan past acknowledged that Civit had been "a representative of the first magnitude of our enlightened despotism and the rising progressive bourgeoisie," and a contemporary of Don Emilio stated that "he knew how to handle to perfection the political puppets, and he had at his finger tips the weakness and frailties of his friends and

⁴⁰Carlos Ibarguren, La historia que he vivido (Buenos Aires, 1955), p. 135.

⁴¹Régimen is the term applied by the anti-conservatives to the governments which ruled until the ascent to power of the Radical Party.

enemies."⁴² While Edmundo Correas has considered Civit not just a statesman, but a great statesman, Ricardo Rojas expressed the view that although he modernized the city and urbanized the countryside, "his heart was more that of a municipal councilman than of a statesman."⁴³

More recently, one of his critics praised his qualities as a performer and admitted that this "born organizer" had sometimes the dexterity of a visionary. But he insisted that Civit lacked the heartiness of the caudillo who knows how to reach his people; he was not touched by ethical considerations or scruples of conscience, and in order to get what he desired, he "accepted as valid all the trickeries and ruses in which he was an expert."⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Edmundo Correas, examining the oligarchical regime in Mendoza, in which figures like Civit flourished, has stated in explanation that

it could not have been otherwise in a society with neither a democratic nor a republican experience; accustomed to be ruled by fear; lacking education; plagued by prejudices inherited in colonial times; divided in a rigid social strata, and so limited by the number and the quality of its leaders that only a small group was relatively prepared to govern the rest and take care of the administration of the common interests.⁴⁵

⁴²Benito Marianetti, Problemas de Cuyo (Mendoza, 1948), p. 188; and Lucio Funes, Anécdotas mendocinas (Mendoza, 1936), p. 137.

⁴³Correas, "Historia de Mendoza," pp. 490-491; and Ricardo Rojas, Las provincias, Vol. XVII of Obras (Buenos Aires, 1927), p. 225.

⁴⁴Dardo Olgún, Dos políticos y dos políticas (Mendoza, 1956), pp. 9-39.

⁴⁵Correas, "Historia de Mendoza," pp. 493-494.

As acknowledged by this interpretation, the series of progressive rulers could only have governed in a very stratified society, although it was precisely with the family governments that the distortion of the republican and representative system began. Since the candidates were selected by the governors, the popular verdict did not represent the conscious will of the electorate, and as explained by a contemporary politician, the people "was excluded by evil means from the ballot box, or was led to it as a docile flock."⁴⁶

The existence of a backward society justified the fact that the control of public affairs was in the hands of an aristocratic minority, protected by claims of ancestry and wealth. However, when the common man began to wave a new and popular political flag, he judged quite differently the role of those who had held power for almost sixty years. The Radicals admitted that some members of the elite had rendered valuable services by promoting the industrial progress of the province. But they considered that by monopolizing the high public positions, the elite had built up a regime whose major concern was to serve the interests of those within its own circle.

By 1917 the new voice of the popular sectors was beginning to be heard more every day through the growing

⁴⁶José E. Aguilar, Mendoza en los años 1900 a 1916 (Mendoza, 1957), p. 41.

number of street meetings carried out by the Radicals and the Socialists. There, the common man was told that while he was isolated from the mainstream of progress, the official machinery had been the vehicle to enrich the traditional landowners and many industrialists with money and social prestige. Three decades later, the history of Mendoza and San Juan, as well as that of the nation, would prove that the masses would prefer rulers with fewer virtues, perhaps, than those who enjoyed the higher public positions until 1916, but with a greater responsiveness to the political needs of the lower segments.

An idea of how the popular sectors judged the Mendozaan past was given by a Radical newspaper which in 1917 analyzed the "fifty years of the Régimen in Mendoza," voicing in this way its partisan views:

...these are the men, genuine representative of the old regime, who ruled Mendoza by the design of the Villanuevas and Civits during the time when the bayonet was the only law and a great electoral tool of the Roquism.....

...the people of Mendoza must search into their memories and try not to forget the innumerable dubious dealings in which these oligarchs have participated, taking advantage of their official positions...and disposing of the legislators at their own will. During thirty years Elías Villanueva had the monopoly of the slaughterhouse; then came Civit's streetcar company; the central market owned by Civit and Villanueva, as well as their gaslight company; the concern for paving the streets in which almost everybody had his share; the Provincial Bank where eight million pesos were withdrawn by fourteen members of this oligarchical family, and up to now not even the interest on this huge amount has been paid....⁴⁷

⁴⁷La Palabra (Mendoza), September 14, 1917.

The high honor of family traditions, of cultural ancestry, and economic supremacy, were distinctive values of the conservatives who in Mendoza had to face first political discord within their own ranks, and later the challenge of a Radicalism rising vigorously. On the other hand, the values of the common man were forged almost entirely by the material conditions in which he lived and by his lack of faith in a system in which he felt himself an alien.

The Political Scene. San Juan:

A More Endurable Oligarchy

Political life in San Juan resembled that of Mendoza in the closeness of its oligarchical structure. But the economic and social conditions in the land of Sarmiento were much more modest and primitive than in wealthier Mendoza.

The provincial governments since the 1860's "were all a true image of the política criolla," as demonstrated in their domestic practices as well as in their passive solidarity with the different governments at Buenos Aires. The Radical revolutions of 1890, 1893 and 1905 did not have any echo in the provincial domain; the spirit and strength displayed in other parts of the country by the romantic Radical movement went little noticed in San Juan, and offered no challenge to the solid power of the conservative *Concentración Cívica*.⁴⁸

⁴⁸José P. Barreiro, La provincia de San Juan. Su transformación política social (San Juan, 1928), pp. 18-20.

The political disputes of this group made up of "patricians, the traditional elements and the bodegueros,"⁴⁹ were in essence personal feuds, and the rivalries among them did not improve either the civic qualities of the ruling oligarchy or the political education of the common man.

The Radicals constituted an association of men with heterogeneous political backgrounds, and their lack of doctrinal coherence fostered personal discords that widened in time. While the movement was gaining strength in other areas of the country, in San Juan it became assimilated to the prevalent mediocrity of the political scene. Thus, instead of becoming a new force, it was simply an addition to the old provincial structure, "with all the vices of the past reflected in the new movement."⁵⁰

Their participation in the April 1916 presidential election proved unsuccessful for they were defeated by the Civic Concentration by 9,170 to 7,572 votes. Another setback for the Radicals was the 1917 election for governor in which the conservatives were able to keep their political preeminence by electing Amador Izasa by 8,658 votes against 7,595 of the Radicals.⁵¹

Then, early in 1918, when they had to select their candidates for national deputies, the frictions which had

⁴⁹Varese and Arias, Historia de San Juan, p. 428.

⁵⁰Barreiro, La provincia de San Juan, p. 20.

⁵¹Varese and Arias, Historia de San Juan, p. 429; La Prensa, January 12, 1917.

plagued the Radicals reached a climax. A few young members decided to challenge the leadership of the party by forming the Intransigent Radical faction, under the command of an energetic young physician named Federico Cantoni. For the first time the Radicals of San Juan were promising a truly political alternative to the permanent succession of conservative rulers.

The economic, social and political conditions in Mendoza and San Juan were paving the way for the accession of new leaders and new policies, which were already taking shape by 1916. By then, Mendoza was on the threshold of experiencing a reaction against a political way of life and a transformation of the traditional social framework. San Juan would follow, years later, in the same steps of the Mendozaan populism.

The time had arrived for Mendoza to test the reality of the promises and the values of the new popular force, the Radicals, against a Régimen symbolized by the provincial oligarchy. The next chapter will analyze the repercussion of the "political regeneration" carried out by the national government on the Mendozaan situation, and the kind of leadership which emerged in that province under the banner of the Radical Party.

C H A P T E R I I

HIPÓLITO YRIGOYEN, JOSÉ NÉSTOR LENCINAS,
AND THE QUEST FOR POLITICAL REGENERATION IN MENDOZA

Yrigoyen and the Radical Party. The "causa."

The Radical Party had long regarded effective suffrage as the instrument that could terminate fraudulent government at the provincial as well as national level. With the enactment of the Saenz Peña Law in 1912, a new chapter opened in Argentina's political history; traditional ruling groups now had to face the electoral challenge of those who had been seeking for decades to test their strength in honestly conducted polls. To Yrigoyen and his closest followers, however, the confrontation between Radicals and entrenched groups was not simply a political contest between "outs" and "ins"; rather, it was a crusade in which they represented forces of good, the "Causa," arrayed against an evil oligarchy, the "Régimen."

Yrigoyen, the supreme leader of the Causa, carried on his mission and that of his party in favor of political reform, with a religious devotion. He was convinced, beyond any doubt, of his own capacity to carry out a profound civic transformation. Likewise, he believed that the Radical movement, under his aegis, was the only channel through which Argentine political customs could be changed and improved.

Throughout his public statements, Yrigoyen unequivocally displayed the messianic sense he attached to his political role and that of his party. As an illustration, in his original

refusal to become a presidential candidate, in March 1916, he evinced the intensity of his political faith and his self-confidence. He asserted that his creed was to vindicate the honor of his country, adding, in his characteristically obscure and enigmatic language

I am convinced that I would govern exemplarily, but a government is only a tangible reality, while in my apostolate it is the single thought, a spirituality which will last through the times, closing a cycle of infinite projections.¹

In like manner, in his first administrative message to Congress, in June 1917, Yrigoyen reiterated the basic principles of his political thought: to restore the legitimacy of the representatives of the people. Not to accomplish this would destroy the highest hopes, because instead of opening an era of "historical remembrances and everlasting examples," the Radicals would become a victim of the malady they were trying to correct.²

But in the uphill road to achieve this objective, the electoral success of the Radicals at the national level in 1916, was only half a victory. They did not muster a majority in Congress and most of the provincial governments were still

¹Hipólito Yrigoyen, Pueblo y gobierno, Vol. I, Part II (Buenos Aires, 1953), p. 414. This reads in Spanish as follows: "Tengo la convicción de que haría un gobierno ejemplar, pero un gobierno no es nada más que una realidad tangible, mientras que en mi apostolado es un pensamiento único, una espiritualidad que perdurará a través de los tiempos, cerrando un ciclo de proyecciones infinitas."

²Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 87-88.

in the hands of the Régimen.³ Yrigoyen, however, interpreted his own election to be a mandate from the people--he referred to it as a plebiscite--to purify those provincial governments he considered unrepresentative. If any came to power by an irregular process, the national government had the right and the duty to remove them and to arrange for the proper election of a new one.

This was the basis of the regeneration--Yrigoyen's political program of civic restoration--carried out from Buenos Aires through numerous federal interventions. Its fundamental aim, at least in theory, was to replace minority provincial governments by others more genuinely representative.

The Constitution and Federal Intervention

The constitutional norms which regulate the relationship between the federal authorities and the provinces in Argentina, have placed in the hands of the latter the administration of their own affairs, on the condition that their constitutions must conform to the basic principles adopted by the national constitution. As stated by its Article 5,

Each province shall adopt for itself a constitution under the republican, representative system, in accordance with the principles, declarations, and guarantees of the national constitution, ensuring its administration of justice, municipal government, and elementary education. Under these conditions, the Federal Government guarantees to each province the enjoyment and exercise of its institutions.

³In Congress, the Chamber of Deputies was formed by 45 Radicals and 70 members from other parties; the Speaker was a conservative. The Senate was made up of 25 conservatives, 4 Radicals and 1 Socialist. Eleven provinces out of 14 were ruled by the Régimen.

The national authorities, nevertheless, have the right to intervene in the provinces if an anomaly takes place, seriously impairing the stability of their established governments. Article 6 of the national constitution states that

The Federal Government may intervene in the territory of a province in order to guarantee the republican form of government or to repeal foreign invasions, and at the request of its constituted authorities, to support or reestablish them, should they have been deposed by sedition or invasion from another province.

Constitutional theories, however, have not always been matched by constitutional practices. A considerable gap exists between the written clauses of the topic of intervention or their interpretations by the students of constitutional law, and the political abuses committed many times by the national governments and lawmakers, under the guise of resorting to a constitutional right. The interventions were political measures aimed at redressing an assumed constitutional violation. But on many occasions they were undertaken merely to obtain political gains, or to serve the interests of a specific group in an intra-party confrontation.

The difficulty of establishing limits to the use of the intervention power lay basically in the ambiguity of the national constitution itself. Under the assumption that the republican system of government was seriously threatened or annulled, the national government needed only to appeal to Article 6 of the constitution to become the arbiter of any provincial conflict. But what specific situations constituted

a threat to the republican system of government? The interpretation of that constitutional norm has been, throughout the years, as wide and vague as demanded by the political circumstances and the diverse interests involved. Especially in the twentieth century, mere partisan rivalries often placed the provincial branches of government on a collision course, creating an impasse whose solution ultimately rested upon the political convenience of the central authority. Most often, the opposition parties in the provinces sought intervention to displace a political adversary from power. Besides, the lack of faith in the fair enforcement of the provincial legal norms moved individuals as well as a large variety of pressure groups to demand intervention from the national authorities.⁴

Soon after taking office, Yrigoyen began to implement his promises to regenerate politically the provincial governments which, in his opinion, did not legitimately represent the people. The thought that constituted the avowed cornerstone of his regeneration policy was expressed to Marcelino Ugarte, the conservative governor of the Buenos Aires province early in 1917: "The provincial rights to self-government--autonomías--belong to the people and are for the people, and not for the governments."⁵ Upon this principle

⁴From 1862 until October 1916, there were 58 federal interventions in the provinces, 27 ordered by decree and 31 enacted by Congress.

⁵Yrigoyen, Pueblo y gobierno, Vol. II, Part I, p. 131.

Yrigoyen set in motion partisan machinery to eliminate the local political oligarchies.

The "Causa" and the "Régimen" in Mendoza

José Néstor Lencinas was Yrigoyen's right hand in Mendoza. A fellow partyman from early times, he had known Leandro N. Alem and had assimilated his mystic partisan fervor. Under the national leadership of Yrigoyen, he led the uprising in Mendoza in the ill-fated revolution of 1905, and after 1906 he was the chairman of the provincial committee of the Radical Party. According to Manuel Gálvez, Lencinas was the most important of the Radical caudillos after Yrigoyen.⁶

The personality of the Mendozan leader resembled that of the president in his strong partisan feelings and in his

⁶Manuel Gálvez, Vida de Hipólito Yrigoyen. El hombre del misterio (Buenos Aires, 1939), p. 357.

In April 1916, Lencinas was elected National Deputy. He obtained 14,958 votes against 10,524 for the conservative Lucio Funes, and 1,072 for the Socialist Ramón Morey. This circumstance put him closer to the most important political center of the nation and helped him to plan the political action in his province for the immediate future, with the whole support of Yrigoyen. His first biographer stated that as National Deputy he introduced several important bills (Nieto Riesco, Lencinas, I, p. 175). Many years later, Dardo Olgún repeated the same statement (Lencinas, p. 249). In fact, Lencinas played an insignificant role as National Deputy, he did not take part in any committee, scarcely attended half of the meetings during the two years of his mandate, and took part in only one debate, affecting the political situation of his province. He only introduced one bill, concerning national guidelines for the wine industry, but it was never reported out of committee.

almost religious belief that the Radical movement was destined to shape a new political era. Lencinas, just like the old leader from Balvanera, had a sense of predestination in the mission he was determined to accomplish. Besides their resoluteness in their quest for justice and political decency, they also shared an unwillingness to compromise their viewpoints.⁷

Letters which each of them wrote to Pedro C. Molina, the party leader from Córdoba, reveal the close similarity of their thoughts on the missionary role of the Radical Party. Yrigoyen, in the first letter of his famous polemic with Molina, said in September 1909 that

never before has a popular movement occupied the scene with greater qualities, more generosity or more intense sacrifices. It will be a historical institution of never ending radiations, ever so resplendent because its action is eminently national, carried out with the utmost selfishness and inspired by the most generous purposes and the noblest sentiments.⁸

Similar fervor was conveyed in the words of Lencinas to Molina, in 1908,

...I search for freedom and justice, and there I stand and nobody will move me, even if hell freezes over. And because these ideals are those of the party, its life is for me so sacred and symbolic, that I love it so much; and before it men are insignificant, and are dignified when they serve it with their action or their thoughts.⁹

⁷Lencinas was very influenced by theosophic thoughts. He believed profoundly that every person had a marked destiny.

⁸Yrigoyen, Pueblo y gobierno, Vol. I, Part I, p. 126.

⁹Homenaje de La Nueva Provincia (Bahía Blanca, 1928), p. 83. Special issue of the newspaper La Nueva Provincia, on occasion of the 50th anniversary of the city of Bahía Blanca, Argentina.

Mendoza had been ruled since 1914 by the Popular Party, a conservative group which disclaimed its association with the Régimen by opposing the Civitists. Nevertheless, in anticipation of the election for governor scheduled for January 1918, the Mendozan Radicals acted to prevent it from being held under the control of what they considered a fraudulent administration. In May 1917 they appealed to Buenos Aires for federal intervention,¹⁰ accusing the provincial government of interfering in the electoral process, and complaining of the abject subordination of both the legislature and the judiciary to the will of Governor Francisco S. Álvarez. Their petition bitterly criticized the role of the police in harassing the Radicals throughout the province. It also denounced, among many other things, the decay in public education, the considerable arrears in teachers' salaries, and the misuse of public funds for the benefit of those within the governor's circle.

A few days later Yrigoyen appointed Diego Saavedra National Commissioner, to investigate the Radical accusations in Mendoza.¹¹ Several weeks later, Saavedra delivered his report to the President. In summary, his conclusions were: (1) that the republican system of government was being properly observed in Mendoza; the three branches were

¹⁰Yrigoyen, Pueblo y gobierno, Vol. II, Part I, pp. 322-327.

¹¹The decree was dated May 10, 1917. It can be assumed that the President had high confidence in his commissioner. A few days before, Saavedra had ended his mission as Federal Commissioner in Entre Ríos. There, the provincial conflict was resolved in favor of the Radicals with the election of the two National Senators from that party.

functioning according to the constitution and the laws; (2) that the government had not been engaging in electoral fraud, as demonstrated by the fact that the two most important elections of 1916 were won by the opposition; (3) that the participation of public employees in partisan activities was proven only in isolated cases; (4) that the charges against the administrative functioning of the government were groundless; and (5) that the accusations made to the President, although sincerely felt, ought to be considered the result of obfuscation derived from political passions and the Radicals' belief in the lack of fair play by the government.¹²

What had been organized as a stepping stone for federal intervention backfired, contrary to the President's and Lencinas' expectations. Yrigoyen forbade disclosure of Saavedra's findings, but this provided the conservatives with heavy political ammunition. In July, the Chamber of Deputies inquired about Saavedra's mission, without success. But the inquiry touched off a heated debate between Lencinas and Rafael M. Aguirre, another National Deputy from Mendoza, and chairman of its Popular Party. Aguirre stated that the

¹²Saavedra submitted his report to the President early in July 1917, but it was not published until the end of November, when it was made available unofficially (La Prensa, November 27 and 28, 1917). On December 14, the Chamber of Deputies approved a petition requesting from the President the release of the findings. Eventually it was made available by the government and published in Diputados, 1917, VII, 177-192.

government had opened all the records, so Saavedra had been able to investigate them properly. Lencinas, on the other hand, accused the commissioner of having been too lenient and of lacking the required political acuteness to realize what was being done in the comités of the populares, and to notice the repressive behavior of the police.¹³ Aguirre rejected these charges, and without revealing his source, he added that he knew that the coming provincial election would take place under federal intervention. He also lashed out against the Radicals in Mendoza, with the exception of Lencinas, whom he considered the only authentic Radical. Aguirre, a non-Radical, thus gave expression to the view that Lencinas in Mendoza symbolized the values and principles for which Yrigoyen stood at the national level.¹⁴

Oligarchy versus Populism. The 1918 Election

After Yrigoyen's victory in Mendoza in the 1916 presidential election, it became apparent to the provincial conservative groups that the 1918 election for governor would turn into a fiasco unless they could consolidate their strength. Besides, they were aware that a federal intervention was in the making.

¹³A comité is the headquarters of a political party in a ward, where political activities are performed at the rank and file level.

¹⁴Diputados, 1917, II, 508-517. Manuel Gálvez stated a similar viewpoint about the unique position of the President within his party. "Hipólito Yrigoyen is one thing, and the Radicals, another. He is a moralist by temperament...he has ambitions for moral perfection; but many of his supporters, especially those not disciplined in ascetism, have only ambition for power and public favors." Vida de Hipólito Yrigoyen, p. 276.

This Radical threat was considered so serious that Civit and Villanueva decided to forget their embittered political rivalry, over a quarter of a century old. At the end of October 1917, the two conservative factions cemented a new political alliance in a convention presided over by Benito Villanueva which named Emilio Civit the candidate for governor of the newly formed Conservative Party. It was a rewarding moment for Civit, because he was able to gain the support of politicians who until then had been his permanent political foes. This conservative "family compact," however, was not painless. Governor Álvarez became openly opposed to Civit, deepening the division of loyalties plaguing the anti-Radical camp.

In the Radical sector, the undisputable leadership of Lencinas spared them the painful, labyrinthic maneuvers of the conservatives. Lencinas' arrival from Buenos Aires to organize the campaign clearly demonstrated his popularity. A large number of humble people gave him an enthusiastic welcome, replete with bands and banners, showing that in his patria chica Lencinas was also a candidate for political canonization.

As a candidate Lencinas possessed traits of physique and personality that appealed to the average man. Lencinas was tall, with the appearance of a distinguished and aristocratic man. His dark brown hair was touched with gray at the temples, contrasting with his neatly-trimmed silver-gray handle bar moustache and goatee. His face was oval with a high forehead,

high prominent cheek-bones and a straight nose. His dark brown eyes were wide and deeply-set giving him a soulful, trusting, sympathetic, yet somehow melancholy expression. As Benito Marianetti recalls him, Lencinas had an imposing figure, resembling an apostle, radiating warmth and respect. He kept himself at a certain distance from those he addressed, allowing his personality to symbolize authority and hierarchy. In his slowly delivered political speeches he was wont to assail the upper classes while extolling the values and rights of the workingmen. His words were filled with energy and reassurance, his discourse was that of a true believer. He was called by some a gaucho, although despite a rural upbringing in his native San Carlos, he neither dressed nor lived as a gaucho. But calling him gaucho was a recognition of his personal courage and generous sentiments.¹⁵ For his supporters the word "gaucho" signified the most noble quality, and was pronounced by them with the greatest affection. Calling him "el gaucho Lencinas," meant that he was like them, that he was one of them. To his opponents, however, this expression, in its political sense, was associated with the lower sectors, the vulgar populace, a kind of Radical canaille.

On November 24, 1917, only a few weeks before the

¹⁵Benito Marianetti, En la verde lejanía del recuerdo (Buenos Aires, 1967), pp. 162-163.

election, Yrigoyen finally intervened by decree in the executive branch of Mendoza's government, appointing a loyal Radical, Eufrasio Loza, as commissioner.¹⁶ The reasons given in the decree indicated that the President, despite the Saavedra report, extended full credit to the charges made by the Radicals in their May petition.

Governor Álvarez protested at once to Yrigoyen, reminding him of the conclusions of Saavedra's investigation. Why had not the President taken into consideration the unbiased opinion of a commissioner whom he himself had appointed, asked Álvarez, instead of accepting at face value the impassioned voices from the comités?¹⁷ Yrigoyen simply ignored this plea, leaving in Loza's hands the implementation of his policy of political regeneration.

The popular welcome given by the Radicals to Loza when he arrived at Mendoza, left no doubts that he was considered an ally and not an impartial arbiter.¹⁸ The following day, El Régimen, the official spokesman for the conservatives, spitefully branded those who greeted Loza so warmly as descamisados. La Palabra, a Radical newspaper replied stating that "these shirtless are the real people, angrily protesting

¹⁶Loza was the first Radical governor of Córdoba (1916-1917).

¹⁷La Prensa, November 27, 1917.

¹⁸No member of the government was at the railroad station to greet Loza. The official feelings toward the intervention were also evidenced when the changeover took place: Governor Álvarez was absent, and the Police Commissioner transferred the power to Loza.

against the Régimen and an epoch."¹⁹

Behind the Radicals' fervor was nurtured the feeling that the intervention would enhance the possibilities of their victory at the polls. This expectation was reflected in a fiery bulletin issued by the Radical Provincial Committee, warning those who labeled the Radicals as an ignorant rabble, that they soon would have to submit themselves to the verdict of the people; that

The pseudo conservative aristocracy, farcical and ridiculous, which has built up its fame and fortune protected by corrupted governments, has been lowered from its muddy pedestal, has lost the government, the arbitrary use of power and its chances to abuse the public purse, and now reveals to the people the real skeleton of its moral and civic structure.²⁰

As was expected, Loza began at once the replacement of personnel, intervening in the municipality of the capital, a juicy provider of jobs, and suspending the members of the Irrigation Board without following the constitutional formalities. These actions deepened the antagonisms between Radicals and conservatives, and confirmed the suspicions of of the anti-Radicals about the partisan nature of the intervention.²¹

¹⁹El Régimen, November 29, 1917; and La Palabra, November 30, 1917. This journalistic exchange reveals an early use of the term that Perón's adversaries applied to his followers almost three decades later.

²⁰La Palabra, November 26, 1917.

²¹Loza filled many vacancies with people he brought from Córdoba, whose number was estimated at 300. This fact

Early in December the Radical convention chose Lencinas as their candidate for governor, and Delfín Álvarez to share the ticket with him. The candidate for deputy-governor had a reputation of being a humble, hard-working man, who had served the party with loyalty.

This was perhaps the sweetest political hour for Lencinas. The possibility of molding a society on the basis of the equality and justice he had dreamed of now seemed opening before him. It was a time when the political horizon was still free from the chagrin of the days ahead. Lencinas represented hope for a sector of the people who enthusiastically followed and trusted him; it was as if all his promises were already fulfilled. What was the quality of this leader and what force moved that people? In the eyes of the Radicals

The name Lencinas means a whole life devoted to sacrifices and civic pride. He represents thirty years of intense laboring and constant, bold-daring struggle. He symbolizes the best and most sincere ideals of the people who have slept in the public square and in the street, who had been hungry and castigated by the police, the rude armed branch of the oligarchy....²²

provoked this caustic reaction, among many others, from his opponents:

Son los Lozistas, son cordobeses
que a un Néstor tienen por capitán
son rojos, negros, son radichetas,
son la langosta que hace gambetas
y al presupuesto se tragarán.
Son los Lozistas, son cordobeses,
que a un Néstor tienen por capitán.

La Tarde, January 8, 1918.

²²La Palabra, September 3, 1917.

These were the Radical voices of Mendoza, portraying an image of Lencinas almost bigger than life, at a moment when the party was on the threshold of taking power. They echoed, almost with religious fervor and in spite of their vagueness, the simple aspirations of the humble people.

Lencinas' supporters extolled the virtues of their leader as a blameless idol. Carlos M. Puebla, one of his closest political friends, and professional partner, asserted that Lencinas' daily contacts with the impoverished masses made him an apostle; that in his humanitarian concern for the social betterment of the people, he asked for no other compensation than moral reward. In the nation, added Puebla, no man after Alem had been devoted to this task with greater perseverance than Lencinas.²³ The untiring efforts of the Mendozan caudillo at spreading the Radical creed, through many years of travelling all around the province, gained for him the solid and emotional adherence of the lower sectors. In general, both urban proletariat and the rural workers supported Lencinas, although a small number followed the ably-led Socialist Party. The conservatives' strength focused in the industrial and business groups, and most of the professional and propertied class.

In so far as the development of the wine industry, however, the differences between the Radicals and conservatives were more rhetorical than substantial. In Mendoza the influence

²³Ibid.

of the grape and wine industry transcended class and party lines. And as the general welfare depended fundamentally on those interests, they were in a special way, everybody's patrimony.

This was illustrated in the response of both conservatives and Radicals to a problem which arose a few months before the election, a time when politicians ordinarily seek to emphasize their differences. Yrigoyen's budget for 1918 called for an increased tax on wine. As could be expected, Mendozan conservatives raised their voices in protest. But Lencinas also complained. In a petition to the President opposing the tax increase, he praised the industrial progress of the province which, he noted, was achieved through the hard work of its people and the confidence of those who invested in its future. He pointed out the example of the irrigation works and the fact that the large number of landowners was a safeguard against the evils of latifundia. Being neither a viñatero nor a bodeguero, Lencinas defended the wealth of the province as something that should be preserved and improved, for the benefit of all.²⁴

There was in Lencinas' crusade a deep compassion for the poor and the exploited. But he never advocated the collectivization of lands and bodegas. In a Socialist fashion, he proposed setting up cooperatives to solve the problems of the more dependent economic groups, especially the viñateros. His purpose was to achieve social justice for all the workers,

²⁴Ibid., September 8, 1917.

under the prevailing economic framework, by means of a reasonable income and decent living and working conditions.

The intense electoral campaign provided the major confrontation between the Régimen and the Causa in Mendoza. Its tone was rough and partisan vehemency contributed to hardening the opposing positions. Even items of dress lent themselves to partisan use. Illustrative of this was the popularization of the expression chusma de alpargata--the rabble of alpargata--given to the Lencinists.²⁵ The alpargata was the traditional footwear of the poor, especially in rural areas. It was made of canvas and a rope sole. The alpargata was an important social indicator, no person of the middle or upper class wore it. The association of the alpargata with lower class status was absolute. Hence, the derogatory sense with which it was used against Lencinas' followers--the rabble. That expression gained extraordinary currency and became, in fact, an unofficial denomination of the Lencinists.

In the bitter exchanges between partisan newspapers, La Palabra in turn assailed the conservatives as the chusma with frock coat, a privileged caste which had monopolized power as a birthright. The Civitists rejoined pointing out that when they were referring to the chusma, they did not include the "real" worker, but that

²⁵The coinage of this term was attributed to the conservative leader Julio César Raffo de la Reta, when he was addressing a campaign rally. But there is no certainty over the authorship of this expression.

The shirtless, the stinkers, are the arrogant and roughshods of the suburb who for a handful of money are sold to Lencinism, the only refuge, on the other hand, for that kind of men....when we see that figure of the suburb, with his hat tipped to one side, high heels, long hair, spitting through the eyetooth and using the most coarse language, it should be known that our reprobations are against that kind of men.²⁶

These harsh adjectives were symbols of the conflict between the upper groups and the popular sectors. As stated by the political scientist Murray Edelman, political symbols "bring out in concentrated form those particular meanings and emotions which the members of a group create and reinforce in each other."²⁷ The political symbols of Lencinism fittingly served its popular consolidation. Among its propaganda devices were a small alpargata used as a lapel badge; thousands of Lencinas's pictures, massively distributed throughout the province; as well as white alpargatas with blue ribbons, and gourds--mates--with a heart engraved on it bearing the face of the "gaucho Lencinas." These propaganda materials, small and unimportant by themselves, served to provide the Lencinists with visible symbols of their political identification.

The educational limitations of a large part of the electorate did not allow it to comprehend the rationale of some of the issues in dispute. It seems likely, however, that the Mendozan masses read their own meaning into the

²⁶ El Régimen, December 1, 1917.

²⁷ Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana, Ill., 1967), p. 11.

election, and responded to symbols that simplified the contest. In line with their populist orientation, the Lencinists propagandized appealing political clichés, so in a simple and uncritical way, their followers could grant full faith and credit to the opinions of their leaders. In consequence, any negative remark, vaguely stated against the conservatives, served the propaganda purposes of the Lencinists more effectively than any other concrete reference they could have made about their adversaries. Very often they referred to the conservatives as "the thieves and bribers of Mendoza," without providing an additional explanation for these accusations.

This kind of political language did not convey a meaning by itself, but it was a part of the desires and interests of the people for whom it had been written or spoken. Furthermore, its purposes not only were to chastise the local adversary, but to project the love-and-hate political views at the national level as well, placing Lencinas in the local scene as the political surrogate of Yrigoyen. Regardless of their credibility, the Lencinists invectives against their opponents were absorbed by the masses through a constant repetition in rallies and in the partisan press. By exploiting the simple and deceptive technique of "good guys versus bad guys" the Lencinists effectively convinced their large homespun constituency that they could never expect anything positive

from the gansos, the geese.²⁸ Moreover, the aggressiveness of the political language attests to the complete freedom of expression, and for the press which existed throughout Argentina.

During the campaign the Radicals displayed a new political technique, aimed at reaching out directly to the masses. It consisted of the provision of social services, free of charge. In the capital and all the departments, doctors and lawyers made themselves available, and in some places advice was given on agricultural and industrial matters. Hardly any other grass roots-oriented, partisan measure, could have been more effective in gaining the sympathy and adherence of the "chusma de alpargata."

But in the structure of the political parties the comité was still playing the most important role in the communication process between the politicians and their followers. It was the main center of activity during the political campaigns and especially on election days, because it was customary for the average voter to go to the comité first to pick up the ballot, and then to the voting place. The traditional low reputation of the comité resulted from being the visible symbol of the highly questionable electoral practices of all political parties, with the exception of the Socialists. Especially for the Lencinists, the comité represented an effective center of socialization. For many workers and peasants it assumed the

²⁸A popular, derogatory term applied to the conservatives in the province of Mendoza.

role of a boliche--the suburban bar, which in fact was the traditional social club of the poor--where at election times the game of taba and drinking of wine became a popular pastime.

The comité was also a center of social protection for its members; a place where they could talk with the "doctor"--the leader of the comité or the local area--and other influential people; and where the rewards for political patronage were usually dispensed. It also served as a stepping-stone for the local leaders to build up their electoral backing. Thus, because of their important electoral role, the voices from the comités were often heard in connection with the handling of public matters or provision of jobs.

Because it engaged in politics at grass roots level, the comité was an open door institution. To become a member did not demand any personal or professional requirement, as was necessary to belong to a social club or a trade union. Jorge Calle explained it succinctly: "a national flag and four chairs are enough to 'institutionalize' any room at any provincial town."²⁹ This is why the comité earned high political and social relevance as an institutional phenomenon of an era. There the humble people found a familiar

²⁹Jorge Calle, Los iluminados (Buenos Aires, 1922), p. 159. Calle, a son of the founder of Los Andes, was co-director of that newspaper when Lencinas was governor of Mendoza.

setting for their unpretentious relationships, even as the landowners and the bodegueros found theirs at the Jockey Club.

But the role of the comité was bitterly criticized for not improving either civically or socially the personal quality of its members or the prestige of the party. This kind of criticism was made more acrimoniously by the middle and upper classes, although the conservatives also depended politically on the comités to reach their followers. A contemporary Mendozan asserted that the comités were "the gathering place of the lower class."³⁰ If one disregards any pejorative intention in this remark, it was a correct one because the upper segments socialized in exceedingly more refined settings. The Jockey Club, the Club de Gimnasia y Esgrima, and the Círculo Italiano, were the institutions where the more aristocratic and wealthy members of the provincial elite socialized, and where gambling and drinking were also a regular pastime.

Although at quite different levels, the Lencinist comité and the Jockey Club fulfilled an important social and political function. The fact that one was considered a place of populacheras customs, while the other was reputed the most distinguished institution of the province, reflected the socio-economic extremes of the times, as was evident in many

³⁰ Luis Reyna Almandos, La demagogia radical y la tiranía, 1916-1919 (Buenos Aires, 1920), p. 101.

other activities.³¹

During the final weeks of the campaign, a succession of small, irritating episodes increasingly alienated the opposing groups. Isolated incidents paved the way for the hardening of positions, and the electoral rhetoric was replete with phrases and words of class conflict. On many occasions the anti-Radical press referred to the Lencinist propaganda as Maximalista and to Lencinas as the Soviet of Mendoza. By the final days of the campaign there was hardly an event or attitude that did not carry out with it partisan overtones.

An example of the aggressive rivalry between the conservative and populist sectors, was the decision of the Federal Commissioner to celebrate New Year's Eve with a social gathering. For the traditional groups it meant that their social setting would be open to the personal representative of Yrigoyen and his cohorts, which by extension, meant the friends of Lencinas and his hated chusma. How dare the interventor mingle the Mendoza society with elements so alien to the provincial elite? It was true that the popular sectors already had invaded the traditional San Martín's Avenue, but it was unacceptable for

³¹In the capital, for example, some confiterías were symbols of the social, economic and political divisions of the society. The "Colón" and "La Cosechera," were strongholds of the conservatives; "Los 20 Billares" and "El Barquinazo," were places traditionally Lencinists.

the cultivated people to have the Radicals share their refined social environment. The sharp-tongued protest of the conservative newspaper indicated their indignation

No, the mob which has invaded Mendoza will not be accepted beyond the vicinity of the government house, the municipalities and the police precincts in the countryside. They will not enter the homes and the elegant rooms to scare the people with their howls of montonera and the suburb.³²

These words exemplified the social values of a segment of the society. Through them can be sensed the basic issue between the forces clashing in the election of the Summer of 1918. The cultured group was proud of the traditions their families represented. In spite of their internal differences, all of them were branches of the same trunk, upon which the provincial grandeur was built. The men had handled public business as a family monopoly, preoccupied with their own progress, their lands and their production. Likewise, the women of the elitist group were all considered dignified representatives of those distinguished women who contributed financially to San Martín's military campaign. At the opposite end of the social spectrum was the chusma, populachera and suburban, without tradition, dignity or history.

The partisan newspapers and the street rallies served mostly to further the resentment toward political adversaries. El Régimen usually pictured the Lencinists as a drunk mob. Its

³²El Régimen, December 28, 1917.

typical reference to a Radical rally was to call it a parade of clowns,

...totally drunk shouting their outrageous cries, striking upon kerosene cans the rhythm of candomberos, while at the same time throwing stones at the walls and the electricity poles.³³

With similar acrimony, Yrigoyen was called "a second class, coarse politician, backstage manipulator, exalted by the barbarian drive of his party followers...."³⁴ The Lencinists, using the same aggressive language, referred to Civit as the old and crooked politician.³⁵

A manifesto of the Conservative Party labeled as fallacies the populist promises of the Radicals. It denounced as deceitful their campaigning for higher salaries for the workers and the peasants, and contended that the Radicals flattered the humble people solely to gain their vote; that the simple solutions which they demagogically proposed were only deluding the workers and public opinion. The manifesto added that salaries could not be raised capriciously by a ruler, nor public works become a reality

³³Ibid., December 6, 1917.

³⁴Ibid., December 22, 1917.

³⁵La Palabra, December 27, 1917. Many times the campaign resembled a huge political payada--a popular, literary duel between two guitar players--, acute and cutting. At a Radical rally in San Carlos, it was said in praise of Lencinas that he was a gaucho whose silver spurs, with sonorous wheels, were like the song of the land; while Civit, on the other hand, was like an untamed horse to whom Lencinas, as a good gaucho, would give the spurs and tame him. This oratory received the conservatives' reply a few days later: when the creole has blood in his veins nobody can tame him, much less a "gaucho de feria con botas de cartón y lazo de piola." El Régimen, January 16, 1918.

just because a decree was issued; and that the cost of consumer goods could not be decreased by a mere administrative order. Schools, highways, trade, and the fruits of the land, stated the conservatives, were not the work of charlatans but of superior men, educated and experienced.³⁶

Both sides eyed the election as if it were a decision destined to shape the provincial future for many years to come. Manuel Ceretti, a conservative leader, said at a rally that the voters would have to decide between the Conservative Party, that is, "the intellect, the cultured elements," or the Radical Party, "the incompetence, the abuse and the impudence."³⁷

A series of partisan complaints and rebukes stepped up the political tension, and personal incidents received a significance out of all proportion. Thus, a large number of telegrams was sent to Yrigoyen and the Minister of the Interior, denouncing attacks against Conservative rallies and comités. Radical followers were often pictured as the incarnation of those who accompanied Facundo Quiroga and El Chacho.³⁸

The most serious incident of the boisterous pre-election weeks occurred in the capital, after a conservative rally. Partisan effervescence and excessive police zeal resulted in a tumult, in which the Police Commissioner, Comandante Espeleta,

³⁶El Régimen, December 18, 1917.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Toward the end of the campaign, at the request of the conservatives, the President ordered Loza not to provide identification certificates from the military authorities, allowing citizens who did not have a libreta, to vote.

had a physical encounter with the Civits.³⁹ The Radicals, nevertheless, were not to be blamed for creating an arbitrary, abusive security force. The police rules had been set up by the governments of the Régimen to maintain their authority; because of the intervention, the political positions were now reversed, and the conservatives became victims of the abusive system they had created.

The episode gave rise to the exchange of a number of telegrams between Buenos Aires and Mendoza. It was one more event in which deep class animosities flared as election day approached. A large group of women in the upper social stratum telegraphed the President denouncing the police brutality and the assaults against their carriages, from which, they said, all they were doing was showing their patriotism by throwing flowers at the national flag. Another group of women, who called themselves Radicals, also expressed their views to Yrigoyen, rebuffing the statement of the rival feminine group. Yrigoyen replied to the pro-conservative damas, taking the edge off their criticism by interpreting their reaction as an expression of their sensitive feelings. These had been also the feelings of the people who opposed the Régimen, added Yrigoyen, with the notable difference "that the reason for your agitation does not have any foundation in this era of full guarantees,

³⁹ Such was the agitation provoked by this incident that Espeleta resigned. At the same time, a group of members of the Jockey Club, of Mendoza, demanded his expulsion from that institution.

while the evils that disturbed Argentina during long years caused a real distress."⁴⁰

The election which was held on Sunday, January 20, 1918, was free from serious disturbance. This was the first direct election of a governor since the adoption of the constitutional reform of 1916.⁴¹ Lencinas won by a margin larger than expected by the Radicals; he carried the capital and all the departments, except one.⁴²

The triumph of Lencinas over Civit was as significant --within the provincial scope--as Yrigoyen's national success had been in April 1916. In their post-electoral analysis, the conservatives declared that the major cause for their defeat was the feeble nature of the coalition between Civitists and Populares. In its appraisal, the conservative newspaper La Tarde criticized the unwillingness of the cultivated groups to get actively involved in a political campaign, while the Lencinists carried on uninterrupted electoral agitation. The

⁴⁰La Nación, January 13, 1918; La Palabra, January 13, 1918; and La Prensa, January 17, 1918. The term damas and mujeres were, and still are, symbols of the social status of women. Those in the upper class are generally referred as damas.

⁴¹The only problem arose after the election, when the Conservative Party requested that the ballot boxes be deposited in the Banco de la Nación, an indication that they trusted the national government more than that of the intervention. Loza did not heed this petition, and the conservatives, in turn, complained to the President. Yrigoyen at once censured Loza for not satisfying the wishes of the Civitists, no matter how unfounded their claim could have been.

⁴²La Prensa, January 6, 1922. Lencinas polled 18,300 votes against 12,695 for Civit.

conservative elements, "lovers of the causerie of the club," mistakenly believed that by campaigning for a few weeks they could offset the Radical propaganda, vigorously waged for many months.⁴³ The conservative candidate, moreover, was somewhat outmoded in an election with such heavy populist overtones and where almost half of the electorate was illiterate. Civit was neither a caudillo nor a ruler with demagogic inclinations, affirmed a historian admirer of Don Emilio; the people respected Civit but did not understand him.⁴⁴

Before the election Benito Villanueva had declared that all the conservatives had forgotten their hatreds and were now patriotically united to avoid the takeover of Mendoza by the Radicals. On the same occasion, Civit had asserted that in spite of having been Villanueva's foe for three decades, the time had come for them to shake hands and prevent the province falling into one man's rule.⁴⁵ In spite of their brave words, the election returns brought Civit and Villanueva to realize how short-lived was the unity they had forged, and in March Civit resigned as chairman of the Conservative Party.

⁴³La Tarde, February 6, 1918.

⁴⁴Edmundo Correas, "Discurso del Presidente de la Junta de Estudios Históricos, el 22 de mayo de 1966," Revista de la Junta de Estudios Históricos de Mendoza, VI, Segunda Época (Mendoza, 1970), 631.

⁴⁵La Prensa, January 8, 1918.

The conservative coalition, thus, did not survive electoral defeat. And indeed, not until the 1930's, under another leadership and different circumstances, was it possible to repair their political apparatus. But no matter how effective the conservative coalition might have been, their system in 1918 was unable to withstand the Radical tide. For to a majority of the people of Mendoza at least at this crucial time, the Radical Party was the party of hope and the repository of their confidence.⁴⁶

⁴⁶The electorate ratified its position when the election for National Deputies was held early in March 1918. The Radicals obtained 17,850 votes against 4,582 for the Conservatives and 2,033 for the Socialists. Popular support for the government was demonstrated again in the election held on May 12, 1918, to elect a National Deputy replacing Lencinas. The Radical candidate, Francisco Rubilar, running unopposed, obtained 18,856 votes against 3,989 blanks. Only 40 per cent of the registered voters cast their ballots. These figures reflect the decline of the conservatives after the January election.

C H A P T E R I I I

THE FIRST RADICAL GOVERNMENT OF MENDOZA

The accession of Lencinas to the governorship of Mendoza represented, in terms of personalities, a sharp break with the past. But to what extent did the entry of Mendozan Radicalism to power mark a departure from the policies and practices of the Régimen? In what ways did Governor Lencinas live up to the expectations of those who voted for him?

This chapter will examine Lencinas' performance in office by focusing on three distinct facets: his role as a pioneer provincial ruler committed to enacting a program of social legislation; his treatment of constitutional limitations, especially in such fields as municipal and water administration, fiscal matters and public education; and thirdly, his relations with other branches of government and the controversies these gave rise to. For at stake in the conduct of his administration was not only Lencinas' personal power and prestige but that of the provincial Radical Party and even the political autonomy of the province.

The Promises are Fulfilled

From the day of his inauguration, on March 6, 1918, it was clear that Lencinas' administration represented a departure from the practices of the past. On that day he inaugurated a policy of maintaining close contact with the masses: the government house opened its doors to the people, and a popular

banquet was jubilantly held at a public park.¹ There was a proud feeling among the Lencinists--as the Radicals came to be known--because for the first time the poor were being honored by a provincial ruler. La Montaña characterized thus the special joy of the lower classes:

That is why people rejoices with such hearty enthusiasm for all that represents a triumph of the people, of the humble; without...aristocratic exclusions and without demeaning it because it comes from the lower sectors.²

Lencinas' appeals to the emotions and class feelings of the humble people were denounced as demagoguery by conservative elements. The opposition was especially critical of the government for spending 5,000 pesos in the inaugural celebration. The Lencinists retorted, in turn, recalling the thousands spent in champagne by the conservatives in their exclusive gatherings, while

¹The governor appointed Carlos M. Puebla as Minister of Government, Eduardo Teisaire as Minister of Industries and Public Works, and Dardo Corvalán Mendilaharsu as Minister of Hacienda. Teisaire played an extremely important role in Lencinas' government. He had been secretary of Emilio Civit until the end of 1915, and had been associated with the conservatives for 17 years. Recently, he had supported Lencinas enthusiastically, including assisting in the financial needs of the campaign. A skilled journalist, Teisaire founded Los Debates, in Mendoza, in 1890, and had been a correspondent for Los Andes, of Mendoza, and La Prensa, of Buenos Aires. Immediately after Lencinas took office, Teisaire established La Montaña, a mouthpiece of the provincial government during 1918 and 1919. As another example of his untiring energies, Teisaire put out a Buenos Aires edition of La Montaña, in 1919. It was the only case in Argentina where a provincial paper was simultaneously published in the Federal Capital.

²La Montaña, April 6, 1918.

the people "were in their miserable huts, forgotten, as old trash."³

Another indication of the new political winds sweeping Mendoza was Lencinas' decree proclaiming May 1, the traditional day of the working class, as a provincial holiday. Besides, on several occasions the government organized popular festivals, collecting funds to buy clothing and blankets for the poor. In the departments, there was sporadic official distribution of food and clothing, followed by popular dancing sponsored by the local authorities. In these as in other instances, Lencinas was showing his concern for the underdog. He was not the only leader fostering these sentiments, but he was the first in Mendoza to demonstrate such interest from the highest position. This earned for Lencinas the unabated loyalty of the common man, in spite of the fact that the governor's accomplishments were often short of what he had promised.

A novel, populist measure of the governor was his proposal for the building of a monument to the worker.⁴ No precedent for such an action existed either at the national or at the provincial level. The proposal identified "the workers" with "the people," and sought to give public

³Ibid.

⁴A four-man committee, including a labor union leader, was to be in charge of the project. The estimated cost of the monument was 10,000 pesos, which were to be raised through public contributions.

recognition to those social segments that had been neglected in the past. "We have to mold in the bronze," declared La Montaña, "the character, the pride, the courage, the nobility of the worker, which is the nobility, the courage, the pride, and the character of the people."⁵

Perhaps no other phrase illustrated the symbolic meaning of the proposed monument than the title of an editorial in La Montaña: "La dignificación del pueblo." Comparing Lencinas' attitude with that of previous governments, the editorial argued that the inclusion of a worker in official committees uplifted the labor groups from the low, fixed status to which they had been relegated. If the provincial aristocracy considered the worker worthy only of being manipulated at the elections or serving in the army, Lencinas was placing him in the respectable position he deserved in the society.⁶ Thus, it would seem reasonable to expect, from a government so given to expressing its worker sympathies, that once announced, the proposed monument would have become a reality. This was not the case.⁷ Nevertheless, the proposal had given an opportunity to sharpen the oratory of class conflict and to reaffirm the government's social theories.

⁵La Montaña, May 3, 1918.

⁶Ibid., May 4, 1918.

⁷The Chairman of the Federación Obrera refused to serve on the committee, alleging that the working class needed other kind of measures, that would benefit it more directly. A public bid for the monument was announced in July 1918, and as of early 1919 nothing was yet decided. The whole project, finally, passed into oblivion.

Lencinas' accomplishments in the sphere of social legislation were the real foundation of his political and personal prestige. In July 1918, at the initiative of the Executive, the first Pension Act for public employees was enacted (Law No. 717).⁸ Eight months were to lapse before the employees started their financial participation and it was not until October 1919 that the first retirement benefit was paid, but the law significantly marked the initiation of a welfare system for the public servants of the province.

The principal achievement of the government in its endeavor for the social betterment of the lower sectors was the law establishing a maximum 8-hour working day and a minimum wage. The principle underlying this law had been included in Article 45 of the 1916 constitution, but no legislation had been enacted to enforce it. The workers continued to be subject to the will of the patrones who, unrestrained by any legislation, arbitrarily determined working schedules and paid small salaries. Conservative Governor Francisco Álvarez had himself taken the initiative to obtain labor legislation but without success.⁹

⁸Los Andes, November 23, 1918, published an extensive article based on mathematical analysis, to demonstrate that the financial arrangement of this bill was entirely inadequate for it to be self-supporting.

⁹In September 1916, Álvarez proposed to create a General Department of Labor, but its functions should be only to verify the enforcement of the national law on Workmen's Compensation and the provincial law on Sunday

Álvarez' proposal rested in the legislature until Lencinas, with the able support of Radical legislator Manuel A. Zuloaga, revived it and improved it significantly. In September 1918 the Senate approved the first part of the amended measure. Known as Law No. 731, it created an agency empowered to verify compliance with labor legislation and to gather pertinent statistical information. The second part, embodied in Law No. 732, established an 8-hour maximum working day for both public and private employees and workers; it also provided for a minimum wage of 2,50 pesos a day for state personnel, and 2 pesos for non-public workers; with time and a half for overtime. This law became effective on November 1, 1918, making Mendoza the first Argentine province to enact wages and hours legislation.¹⁰

holiday. It should also advise the government about the type of legislation required to implement Article 45 of the constitution. But no action was taken by the legislature. Almost a year later, in August 1917, Álvarez introduced another bill, more comprehensive than the previous one, in which the 8-hour clause was included for state personnel. In case of overtime, the payment would be raised 35 per cent. But the project stated that the length of the working day in non-public establishments was to be determined by the patrón.

¹⁰One of the most difficult problems was to set up the way the 8-hour rule could be applied to rural workers. It was agreed that they should work an average of 8 hours a day over the whole year. The arrangement established a peak of 11 hours a day during harvest time, and a maximum of 5 hours at the time when the work was less demanding. The 50-cent difference was justified by the fact that many private workers, especially in rural areas, received some extra benefits. The so-called English Saturday became effective in Mendoza in April 1919. In Buenos Aires it began in September 1918.

The sources for the information provided on this topic were the numerical files of provincial legislation, in the Archives of the Legislature of the Province of Mendoza.

Naturally enough provincial employers attacked the new laws as wasteful and unnecessary. Through the columns of La Opinión, their unofficial spokesman, they argued that when outdoor work was done without physical effort, as happened during a good part of the year in rural areas, there was no need to authorize the peons to loaf at the expense of the patrón. It was also contended that workers who earned 30 to 40 pesos per month were satisfied with their income and never complained or questioned the number of hours they worked. But now, because of the law, argued La Opinión, "these peons whose wages were sufficient for their regular needs if they did not use them to get drunk," began insolently demanding the minimum wage. Los Andes also shared the view that there was no real benefit for the worker, because the increased salary and the reduced hours would be offset by a higher cost of living and higher taxes. In essence, asserted Los Andes, it was token social justice by the government, with electoral strings attached.¹¹

For the workers, however, the benefits of the minimum wage law were beyond dispute. The wage of a bodega worker, for example, increased 150 per cent, from 80 cents daily to 2 pesos.¹²

¹¹La Opinión, February 10, 14, 19, and 28, 1919; Los Andes, March 18, and May 21, 1919.

¹²Manuel A. Zuloaga, Salario mínimo. Informe presentado al Poder Ejecutivo Provincial (Mendoza, 1927), p. 113.

Faulty Practices Nullify Avowed Principles

The vigorous thrust of the Lencinists in the field of social legislation was not matched by comparable zeal when it came to upholding constitutional clauses on matters concerning the reinstatement of municipal autonomy; returning the administration of water to its own users; the proper funding of the school system, and the handling of fiscal affairs.

One of the electoral commitments of the Radicals had been to return the municipalities to constitutional rule. But in his inaugural address, in June 1918, Lencinas argued for a delay in holding elections, pointing to the need for a new law granting universal male suffrage. The governor purposely ignored the legislation in force, because it only granted the right to vote in municipal elections to the proprietors or those paying a business franchise tax. In September Lencinas submitted to the legislature a bill regulating all aspects of the municipal structure, including the electoral franchise reform. Allowing the masses to participate in the local election was a step forward in the democratization of political life. The fact that Lencinas had received his strongest support from the propertyless sector and that the proposal would pave the way for an increased control of the municipalities by the Radicals, was not an unimportant consideration.¹³

¹³The Socialist Federation of Mendoza--the Socialist Party--had made the same proposal to the legislature in September 1917, to no avail.

Whatever the merits of the bill, the failure of the legislature to take action meant that, as at the end of 1918, Lencinas still maintained under intervention thirteen out of Mendoza's seventeen municipalities. This in spite of the fact that Article 207 of the provincial constitution stated that once a municipality was intervened, a new election should be called within 30 days. When in February 1919 a federal commissioner arrived at Mendoza, the municipal reform project was still awaiting to be included in the legislative agenda.

Lencinas' arbitrary decision not to respect the municipal legislation in force, and the legislature failure to set up new rules, benefited the Radicals because the municipalities intervened by the governor were under his absolute control. If elections were held, the Radicals would risk losing the control of some departments and in all of them the opposition would acquire a voice in the municipal councils.

Governor Lencinas treatment of the laws concerning the election of irrigation authorities was similar to his handling of municipal elections. The provincial constitution stated explicitly that on the first Sunday of each November, elections should take place to choose the local authorities in charge of administering the distribution of water. However, during the first days of his governorship, in March 1918, Lencinas appointed ex-officio new authorities in all the

province. He explained his action by the need to curtail the abuses committed by previous administrations. When the time arrived, in accordance with the constitutional mandate, to hold the elections, November 1918, he issued a decree suspending them. This time the justification for his decision was the lack of legislation regulating all matters concerning irrigation, as the constitution required. The opposition protested; they agreed that such a law was not enacted, but declared that the enforcement of the 1916 constitution did not suspend or revoke any previous legislation. Law No. 322, of 1905, they contended, was still in force and should have been applied to hold the November elections. The government's violation appeared even more flagrant in view of Article 187 of the provincial constitution which stated explicitly that under no circumstances should laws regarding irrigation deprive the interested parties of their right to elect the authorities and to administer their own budget.

In the area of elementary education, the first Radical government in Mendoza gave lip service more than real support to the school system. Lencinas appointed Enrique Julio as Director of the Provincial School Board.¹⁴ This was an autonomous agency which, under provisions of the provincial charter, was entitled to receive 20 per cent of the general revenues and, in addition, the receipts from the inheritance

¹⁴Julio was an active party-member who lived in Bahía Blanca, where in 1898 he had founded the newspaper La Nueva Provincia.

tax. But Julio faced a permanent acute financial deficit because, as in so many aspects of national and provincial life, the gap between law and practice was substantial. The authorities were always behind in transferring funds from general revenues, and failed completely to turn over the inheritance tax funds. Given the fact that the inheritance tax had gone into effect in 1910 and that numerous estates had been probated since then, it is obvious that important sums were being denied to the school system. The School Board, thereupon, paid the teachers with considerable delay. This endemic Argentine malady was present in Mendoza many years before Lencinas became governor and, unfortunately, continued many years after him.¹⁵

In his first message to the legislature, Lencinas outlined his firm intention to improve public education throughout the province by opening new schools and libraries.¹⁶ The governor also expressed his determination to normalize the payment of teachers' salaries and to increase the number of those certified. In accord with these principles, when a conference on illiteracy took place in late June 1918 in Buenos Aires between Yrigoyen and the National Board of

¹⁵The weak political power of the teachers as such, explains to a large extent this chronic and corrupt practice, so much generalized, both in time and space.

¹⁶The governor noted that out of 67,000 children of school age, only 44,000 were registered in schools. To provide a basic education for those 23,000 not attending class at all, Lencinas estimated that 200 new schools were needed. Mensaje de S.E. el Señor Gobernador de la Provincia Dr. José Néstor Lencinas (Mendoza, 1918), p. 27.

Education. Lencinas identified himself with the aims of the conference. In a telegram to the President he expressed his desire to take steps to ameliorate the alarming illiteracy problem in his province. Therefore, he proposed to Yrigoyen an accord between Mendoza and the Federal Government, whereby the latter would take over the financial burden of 50 provincial schools and the province would move to set up 100 new schools in rural areas by March 1919.

The Minister of Justice and Public Education replied to Lencinas rejecting such a proposal. Nevertheless, he promised that if the governor would indicate the location of the proposed 100 rural schools, the National Board of Education would start installing them immediately. Lencinas set aside the minister's offer, and kept insisting on his original scheme. His efforts attracted the attention of Congress. Deputies Carlos Gallegos Moyano and Aníbal Cabrera, both Radicals from Mendoza, reassured their colleagues that from 1919 on, the provincial executive would strengthen the finances of the School Board, which would make it possible to expand the number of schools. Nevertheless, Luis Agote, a conservative Deputy from Buenos Aires, wondered how Mendoza would set up a large number of new schools within a few months if it could not maintain those already established.¹⁷

Two months later Lencinas was able to persuade the national government to accept his offer. In consequence, the

¹⁷Diputados, 1918, III, 194-201.

Mendozan School Board alleviated its own financial problems by transferring 50 provincial schools to the nation. Lencinas, however, as Agote predicted, did not fulfill his part of the agreement. As shown by the following table, the number of schools did not increase; there was simply a transfer of responsibilities.

Number of Schools in Mendoza			
	1917	1918	1919
Provincial	208	154	156
Private	26	25	22
National	43	93	93
Annexed to National	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
Total:	<u>280</u>	<u>275</u>	<u>274</u>

Source: Consejo Nacional de Educación, Educación común en la capital, provincias y territorios nacionales (Buenos Aires, 1921), p. 262.

The fact is that the School Board by mid-1918 already was indebted to the amount of \$ 2,698,000, equal to approximately one third of the provincial budget.¹⁸ With such an enormous deficit, how could Lencinas and Julio have made their offer to the Federal Government? It seems that not even the largest amount of wishful thinking would have made this deal possible.

Lencinas' failure to carry out his promises in the sphere of primary education was accompanied by a dismal observance by

¹⁸Provincia de Mendoza, Dirección General de Escuelas, Gestión económica y financiera. La obra del Sr. Enrique Julio al frente del gobierno escolar (Mendoza, 1920), p. 46.

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his administration of constitutional procedures governing fiscal management. Government officials found it more expedient to bypass legal requirements than to accept the norms of fiscal responsibility.

The pressing financial needs led the government to follow the methods they had repudiated in the past. The last budget approved by the legislature was in 1916. The following year, the same budget was extended by decree, with additions voted in cabinet agreements. These supplementary modifications were made in violation of the constitution, which empowered the legislature alone to approve fiscal expenses and revenues. But this procedure had been used for so many years that time had "institutionalized" the malpractice.

The 1918 budget--again the same as that of 1916--was also extended by decree. That of 1919, which should have been submitted in August 1918, was promised by the executive but never sent to the legislature.

The problem of the letras continued to be handled in an irregular way. Exactly as happened under the Régimen, the first Radical government found in the issuance of letras a valuable financial resource. By a decree of November 1918, Lencinas authorized the issuance of four million pesos in letras, using as a legal basis three laws enacted during

Civit's second term.¹⁹

The opposition raised serious objections to this decree. They claimed that it rested on laws which had been enacted under different circumstances and for different needs; that the letras were issued in small values--a practice already followed under the Régimen--so they could circulate as currency; and of course, that legislative approval was lacking. The national government demanded an explanation, but once Lencinas expounded the financial difficulties of the province, it took no steps to force a reversal.

The issuance of letras, nonetheless, was a denial of the electoral promises made by the Radicals when they were in opposition and coined the slogan "No más letras de tesorería." With an ironical bent, Los Andes remarked that Lencinas' decree appeared to be handwritten by Civit.²⁰

¹⁹These laws were:

Law No.	Year	Amount	Original Purposes of the Law
389	1907	2,000,000	Irrigation works.
437	1908	1,000,000	Agricultural promotion.
438	1908	1,000,000	Industrial promotion.

An example of the arbitrary procedures used by the Mendozaan governments to obtain more revenue was given by Law No. 437. It authorized the issuance of "Internal Debt Bonds," not the letras, that were in fact emitted.

²⁰Los Andes, November 15, 1918. But Lencinas was not the only Radical governor from the cadre of early reformers who put aside a principle in exchange for a pragmatic solution. Juan Bautista Bascary in Tucumán, and Joaquín Castellanos in Salta, also resorted to this kind of financial relief.

In spite of the fact that the letras specified on their face that they were legally acceptable for the payment of provincial taxes, the government ordered that the property tax be paid half in letras and half in national currency. When the feared depreciation of these values began to take place, the letras were exchanged at a 7 per cent discount.

The Several Roads to Federal Intervention

After so many years spent in relentless opposition to the Régimen, it was not to be expected that Lencinas would bring a spirit of compromise into the governor's office. Utterly convinced that he was supporting the right causes, Lencinas displayed remarkable tenacity in any political struggle he undertook. But in five instances it appears that he exceeded the reasonable limits, and found himself in conflict with Yrigoyen, the very man he politically admired. These major cases involved the intervention of the Compañía Vitivinícola de Mendoza; the rejection of four provincial deputies from the opposition; the deportation of journalists; the enactment of dietas, or salaries for the legislators, and the role therein of Deputy Governor Delfín Álvarez; and Lencinas' decision to suspend the members of the Judicial Power.

In 1916 Law No. 703 was enacted with the hope of putting an end to the serious crisis in the viti-viniculture industry. Its purposes were to bring prices and production to reasonable levels. The mechanism to accomplish this was to be the creation

of cooperatives. But this remedy proved to be only slightly effective, for only one cooperative was formed, the Compañía Vitivinícola, and the centralization it created appeared to be more harmful than beneficial. As the bodegueros wished to turn the market entirely free again, they had already asked Interventor Loza to repeal Law No. 703.

Three weeks after his inauguration, and having heard the opinions and suggestions of both sides, Lencinas took over the management of the Compañía in order to liquidate it. The decree he issued charged that it did not fulfill the aims for which it was created, and accused the members of the board of financial and technical irregularities. However, the lawyers of the Compañía, Mario Arenas and Melitón Arroyo, conspicuous members of the Conservative Party, appealed to the provincial Supreme Court alleging that the decree was simply a despoilment of their patrimony, and in April the court ruled the decree unconstitutional.²¹

This decision of the provincial Supreme Court touched off

²¹The industrial interests of Mendoza had also challenged the constitutionality of the financial rules set up in Law 703. The taxes were levied not only on the members of the Compañía Vitivinícola but on all trading wine. In November 1918, the National Supreme Court declared that financial levy unconstitutional, under the assumption that it curtailed the principle of freedom of commerce. The large viñateros and bodegueros rejoiced at this decision. The Supreme Court, by striking at the financial support of the Compañía Vitivinícola, in fact, killed it. It was a step toward returning to a system of free trade, the one preferred by the largest industrial interests. As they stated in their petition to the Supreme Court, the ills of the industry were due to the abusive governmental intervention, which through artificial means pretended to destroy the law of supply and demand.

a violent campaign against its members by the pro-government press, especially La Montaña. Lencinas, moreover, appealed the decision to the National Supreme Court, but it declined to hear the case. The governor, so convinced of the righteousness of his position, ignored the opinion of the court, and denied the assistance of the police to return the Compañía to its former authorities. Supported by the law but without the means to make it effective, the Compañía Vitivinícola found itself at a dead end, and requested from President Yrigoyen a federal intervention.

The second provincial dispute to reach the doorstep of the national authorities began with the election held on April 28, 1918, to renew part of the provincial Chamber of Deputies. The Radicals won the eight seats for the majority while the conservatives obtained the four vacancies for the minority.²² The opposition, however, successfully obstructed the chamber's scheduled meetings, by not attending them. With this maneuver they prevented the incorporation of the newly elected deputies, which would give the Radicals the control of the chamber. Frustrated after six attempts to hold a session, the Radicals met without a quorum; they first accepted the credentials of their eight new deputies, and then asked the conservatives to participate and swear in their four new members. The conservatives declined, stating that the chamber

²²The four conservatives were Mario Arenas, José V. Auriol, Agustín de la Reta and Fernando Lavoisier.

had been illegally constituted. The Radicals interpreted this refusal as an implicit resignation of their seats and, accordingly, accepted them. The acceptance of resignations that the conservatives did not even submit, prompted the four legislators to request the National Congress to authorize the federal intervention of the province.

The discussion of this issue in Buenos Aires stimulated almost the same partisan feelings it had produced on the local scene. In the Senate, the conservative Joaquín V. González scorned the "guilty intentions of the majority," for its resort to the tactic of the "tacit" resignation. Senator Civit criticized the attitude of the Lencinists and assailed Yrigoyen's policy of intervention by referring specifically to the cases of several other provinces intervened by the Federal Government. The Senate approved a motion to intervene in Mendoza, but in the Chamber of Deputies the Radicals mustered the necessary support to set it aside.²³ This action gave Lencinas some temporary leverage, but weakened his image in Buenos Aires.

During these years Argentine journalism exhibited virtues and defects which greatly influenced the political mind of the common man. Free from any censorship, both the Radicals

²³Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores, Diario de sesiones, 1918, III, 509-531 (Hereafter referred as Senadores). Senator Joaquín V. González, from La Rioja, had been a member of the cabinet under President Roca. He was a leading authority in Constitutional Law and a literary man. Through his inspiration, in 1905, was created the National University of La Plata.

and their opposition found in the written word their most important partisan instrument. However, criticism of political foes was often made without inhibitions, and many times degenerated into abusive, almost vituperative language.

The combative hostility against the government shown by the conservative paper La Tarde, official organ of the Popular Party, and its scornful treatment of the private life of the governor's family, moved Lencinas to order the deportation to San Luis of its two directors. Other journalists suffered the same fate and for similar reasons. This arbitrary treatment of newsmen, despite the excesses committed by them, provoked an immediate reaction from the anti-Radical press, nationally as well as in Mendoza.²⁴

The rough treatment accorded to a correspondent from the widely read Buenos Aires newspaper Crítica, in December 1918, created even more hard feelings. The porteño daily had been strongly anti-Lencinist, and it was not surprising that the arrival in Mendoza of César Orozco, its special correspondent, would be met with suspicion. What was perhaps not expected was his arrest by the police. Even after his release by Judge

²⁴ An indication of the strong official feelings was revealed when street demonstrators supporting the government and enjoying police benevolence, after breaking windows of La Tarde, paraded in front of the government house, receiving the solid support of the governor and the police commissioner. These incidents intensified inter-party friction and precipitated very unfavorable comments in Buenos Aires. There, the Círculo de la Prensa complained to Yrigoyen; Benito Villanueva pleaded for the deported newsmen to the President, and there were frequent critical comments from La Nación and La Prensa.

Jorge Vera Vallejo in response to a habeas corpus proceeding, he was rearrested. This time he was held for a short time and allowed to leave through the backdoor of the police building, only to be met by a group of thugs who beat him up.

The episode had other aspects which revealed the arbitrariness of the Mendoza governor. Police Commissioner Quellet, who had obeyed the judicial order to release Orozco was replaced by Roberto J. Rincci, the Mayor of Maipú, an energetic party-member, far more experienced in the arbitrary handling of political adversaries. More significant yet, Judge Vera Vallejo, who issued that order, was himself ousted from office. The complaints against the governor grew louder, and the deportation of newsmen became another hot issue in the already strained relations between Mendoza and Buenos Aires.

But further troubles for the government were already brewing, troubles which eventually would disrupt the unity of Mendoza's Radicalism. In the 1916 provincial legislative period the Radicals had successfully opposed a bill to establish a salary for lawmakers. In August 1918, however, the Radicals sponsored a bill assigning a stipend to the legislators. This represented an annual budget increase of 264,000 pesos. Lencinas was absent from the province at that time for health reasons, and Delfín Álvarez, serving as acting governor, opposed the proposal alleging the precarious situation of the provincial treasury. He notified the

legislators that if the bill were approved he would veto it, and this he did on September 16, over the opposition of two cabinet ministers, Puebla and Teisaire.²⁵ The crisis summoned Lencinas back to Mendoza, where at once he expressed his confidence in the two ministers and asked for Álvarez resignation. Thus, another major conflict began to take shape.

Álvarez found himself attacked by most of his fellow party-members and the Lencinist newspapers. In his defense, he declared that Lencinas, before leaving the province, had given him full freedom of action, and that the governor was supporting Puebla and Teisaire out of friendship rather than out of concern for the issue involved.²⁶

The dietas issue brought to the surface serious personal splits within the official party. The basic animosities lay between Álvarez, now considered a traitor by the Lencinists, and Teisaire, who counted on the complete support of the

²⁵In opposition to Álvarez, Ministers Puebla and Teisaire resigned. The legislature rejected Álvarez' veto on a technicality and the dietas became effective, retroactive to September 1, 1918.

²⁶Los Andes, September 20, 1918, suggested that Álvarez' error was to believe that it was the proper time to expel the false apostles from the temple. La Epoca, September 22, 1918, protecting Lencinas' image, approached the conflict as a dispute solely affecting Alvarez and the legislature. Dardo Olgúin, in his biography of Lencinas, contends that the discrepancy over the dietas was only a smokescreen for the political ambitions of Alvarez; that he counted upon the poor health of the governor, or upon the possibility that Lencinas would fill the seat of Emilio Civit in the Senate, when Civit ended his term in 1919, Lencinas, p. 297. José Hipólito Lencinas, a son of the governor, coincides somewhat with Olgúin, believing that Álvarez was so simple-minded that the power went to his head. Personal interview, Mendoza, June 26, 1972.

governor. Like a contagious patient, Álvarez was isolated by his former political friends. He remained absent from the Senate for a month in order to cool off the tensions, but when he returned to preside over the meetings, no quorum was obtained.

The Radical split deepened when Álvarez was expelled from the party. In a stormy session of the provincial committee, held on September 29, Lencinas' wishes were overwhelmingly supported and Álvarez was ousted. But a group of Radicals sided with him and formed a new political organization, the Intransigent Radical Party.²⁷

A few weeks later Álvarez sought protection in the house of a prominent bodeguero, accusing the police of harassing him. In Buenos Aires, meanwhile, Puebla attempted to gain the support of the Federal Government for the ouster of Álvarez from the government, which the deputy governor refused to leave. But Yrigoyen declined to intervene in the provincial conflict. As a result, the Lencinists had to find their own solution to the stalemate. To this end, in the session of October 17, provincial Radical Senators sponsored a bill suspending Álvarez as deputy governor and ordering that he be examined psychiatrically. They contended that the

²⁷ Among those defecting from the Lencinists were Aníbal Cabrera, a National Deputy; Bautista Gargantini and Jesús Romero. Soon thereafter they too were expelled from the Radical Party. Most of the dissenters declared their total adherence to President Yrigoyen. This marked the formal opening in Mendoza of the breach that years later divided the Radicals in Personalists and anti-Personalists.

fact of "vetoing the dietas and denouncing imaginary harassments," indicated that his mental abilities were impaired. The Senate found the project plausible and approved it.²⁸

The public reaction was immediate. While Los Andes termed this action "the most impudent and unscrupulous" in the history of the legislature, La Prensa deplored the fact that a party with popular roots could acquiesce in using such flimsy procedures.²⁹ In December more fuel was added to the fire. The provincial Supreme Court, by a unanimous vote, ruled unconstitutional the October decision of the Senate suspending the deputy governor.

Adding to the poignant intra-party strife afflicting the Radicals was the relative punctuality with which the legislator's salaries were paid, except to those who deserted the party. This raised the protests of the opposition. They contrasted this prompt payment with the delays in paying the salaries of modest public employees, the financial plight of the hospitals, and the perennial tardiness with the teachers' salaries.

When early in December Álvarez sent a third public message to Yrigoyen, reiterating his request for personal guarantees, Lencinas rebuffed the suspended deputy governor at once. He informed the President that his government made

²⁸Legislatura de Mendoza, Senadores, 1918, 274-289.

²⁹Los Andes, October 18, 1918; La Prensa, October 19, 1918.

no distinction between the most important and the most modest man, and that as far as Álvarez was concerned, he should be cast into oblivion, because of his ill-services to the party.³⁰ Each for his own reason, both Lencinas and Álvarez sought Yrigoyen's assistance to bail them out of the stalemate.

The opposition to the Mendoza government became more incensed. But the attacks against Minister Teisaire were more venomous than those against the governor. Among the things that antagonized the opponents and even many Radicals against the minister, was his heavy hand in several grandiose projects he conceived. The most important had been the railroad line from Algarrobal to Mendoza, for which several million pesos were approved by a cabinet agreement, without legislative consent. Unfortunately for Lencinas, Teisaire's schemes created increasing animosities against the minister, including a severe criticism for his nepotistic inclinations. Many Radicals complained that Teisaire abused his high favor with Lencinas; that only the minister's friends could communicate with the governor, while the rest were not welcomed at the government house. The split within the Radical Party widened, to the extent that the two main groups had in common only their loyal acceptance of Lencinas'

³⁰La Época, December 4, 1918. Yrigoyen did not participate directly in the controversy, but the possibility of a federal intervention cast a large shadow.

leadership. The opposition press in Mendoza, banteringly, referred to Teisaire as the "Prime Minister."

Thus, in an unforeseen chain reaction, what had begun in August as a purely local controversy, became by the end of 1918 a major threat to the institutional stability of Mendoza and to the unity of the Radical Party.

While this conflict was exclusively a dispute within the Radical family, another clash, this time between the government and the Judicial Power confronted Lencinas and conservatives again. Immediately after taking office, the Radicals began questioning on ethical grounds the appointments made in the past to the Judiciary. As happened at the national level, the Radical government of Mendoza controlled the Executive, but the judicial branch continued mostly in the hands of appointees named during the Régimen, appointees generally opposed to the Radical creed. The governor, however, had a very significant advantage over the President, because the provincial constitution established a special body, the Judiciary Review Board, to decide on matters pertaining to the conduct of the judges, except those from the Supreme Court.³¹

The first legislative assault on the Judiciary was a request for a general investigation, introduced by Deputy

³¹This board, the Jurado de Enjuiciamiento, was formed by the five members of the Supreme Court, five senators and five deputies. The governor only needed a legislative majority to get the ten votes required, and legally dismiss any judge blocking official decisions. The ten legislators were Lencinists, none from the opposition.

Carlos Washington Lencinas, son of the governor. At this time he did not make specific charges against any magistrate, but in September the campaign to tarnish the Judiciary focused on two Supreme Court judges, Arturo Funes and Gregorio Vargas. Deputies approved their impeachment, but the Senate, where the Lencinists were still a minority, rejected the charges.

The coup de grâce against the Judiciary was given by a decree of December 18, which declared all its members subject to new appointment. Lencinas proceeded to replace three judges from the Supreme Court, four from other lower courts, and declared vacant the judgeship of Jorge Vera Vallejo. The stated reason for this daring overhaul was the lack of legislation regulating the Judicial Power, as called for in the 1916 provincial constitution. The same justification that was previously given by the government for not holding elections for municipal and water authorities was offered here.

The fact that no law was enacted as required by the provincial charter, however, need not have prevented the Judiciary from continuing to function according to the legal rules set up before 1916. Lencinas' action was considered by the opposition as an unconstitutional, dictatorial move, one motivated by revenge against the court's decisions in the cases of the Compañía Vitivinícola and the suspension of the deputy governor. Reacting against the maneuver of the Executive, several ex-members of the courts petitioned to

Buenos Aires for a federal intervention.³²

This new confrontation added to the burdens besetting the governor, and deepened the hostility between those defending and attacking the government. A public letter from the Radical Senator from Entre Ríos, Leopoldo Melo, to two former members of the provincial Supreme Court, added more heat to the controversy. He condemned the excesses of "those ruling that province, calling themselves Radicals." The ex-judges replied to Melo that a word of solidarity from an authority of such moral and intellectual caliber constituted a gravestone for the Mendoza government.³³

Lencinas could not ignore being criticized from Buenos Aires by such an influential member of the already divided Radical Party. He sent a very extensive telegram to the Senator, which clearly reflected the populist position of the governor,

[Melo's pretensions] won't be able to overcome my convictions and integrity, which I have shaped through a lifetime of deprivations, sufferings and afflictions, which you neither know nor understand; because you have been only a Radical at the happy times, the times of triumph, when all the work was done and was easier to become a hero [Radical de la mesa servida y de la gloria barata]

...I am telling you, clear and loud, with all the fervor of my convictions and my sense of justice:

³² A feeling of uncertainty surrounded the judicial circles. It was feared that all the legal decisions sanctioned after December 18, could eventually be questioned in view of the apparent unconstitutionality of Lencinas' decree.

³³ La Prensa, December 22, 1918.

you will never be President of the Argentine Nation. I repeat it, and reaffirm it, you will never be President.³⁴

Melo replied to Lencinas in an indirect way, in a communication to the Intransigent Radicals of Mendoza. Referring to the governor's telegram, Melo boasted of his seniority in the party and his numerous contributions, of all kinds, he said, at the service of the "causa." He reaffirmed that the Mendozan leader "did not have the soul of a Radical," and concluded that Lencinas' actions in the government not only were a contradiction of what the party always stood for, but reflected the image of the worst specimen of the Régimen.³⁵

Apart from the personal antipathies which increased with this biting controversy, the whole issue revealed the emergence of two tendencies within the Radical Party at the national level. One, legalistic, was closer to the more powerful, traditional segments. The other, more personalist and popularly inclined, used words and actions which revived some of the symbolic characteristics of nineteenth century caudillismo in the handling of public affairs.

Buenos Aires Becomes the Arbiter for the Second Time

The subordination of the Judiciary was not the only reason that moved the opposition to demand a federal intervention. But

³⁴Los Andes, December 24, 1918.

³⁵Ibid., December 27, 1918.

it was the last straw, the event that tipped the scales against the highly controversial governor. The National Senate had approved in September an intervention in Mendoza in view of the arbitrary elimination of four provincial deputies, but the bill had died in the Chamber of Deputies. By December, pressure demanding intervention had mounted considerably.

The opposition in Mendoza believed that Lencinas had trampled on the constitution. His uncompromising decisions and lopsided interpretations of the nature and scope of his rule, they claimed, made impossible a political accommodation without the assistance of the national government. The Lencinists, on the other side, also needed federal help to retrieve a situation which had grown more entangled and adverse for them. Since neither political sector was prepared to reverse its position, there was no room left for an acceptable solution within the province.

Yrigoyen himself was reluctant to intervene. He had, it will be recalled, sent Loza in November 1917, to accomplish the institutional regeneration of Mendoza. Now, a year later, the necessity of sending a new intervention was embarrassing for it was an indication of the disarray affecting what once promised to be a showcase province for the Causa.

To save it or to damn it, there was hardly any other solution available but to intervene in the province. Yrigoyen discussed this matter with his cabinet and decided to send the

intervention. However, there was disagreement as to the scope: should the reorganization of the provincial authorities affect just the legislature or should it also include the Judiciary? The cabinet discussed this matter obstinately. The Minister of the Interior, Rosendo Gómez, and the Minister of Justice and Public Education, José Santos Salinas, enthusiastically defended Lencinas' position in favor of intervening at both the legislature and judicial branches. The rest insisted on reorganizing only the legislature.

Congress was scheduled to convene on December 26, to start a special period. Two days before, to avoid having to request congressional approval, Yrigoyen issued a decree intervening in Mendoza and appointing Elpidio González as interventor. The decree did not specify the branches of the government subject to the federal reorganization. Its purpose was vaguely stated: to restore the "functional normalcy" in the province. Yrigoyen's interpretation of the Mendoza situation was spelled out more clearly by La Época, his semi-official spokesman. The National Executive did not question the legitimacy of Lencinas' rule as a democratically elected governor of his province. But it was essential that any government should function within the constitutional boundaries. Lencinas had exceeded his legal powers, claimed La Época, and therefore he had subverted the republican

system of government.³⁶

Congressional opposition criticized the decree intervening Mendoza on several grounds: for having been issued only 48 hours before Congress was scheduled to convene, for its ambiguity regarding the branches subject to intervention, and because the interventor appointed was not a guarantee of impartiality, since Carlos Washington Lencinas and other Radical leaders from Mendoza had campaigned actively in behalf of Elpidio González in a recent election in the province of Córdoba.

As it turned out, González never served as interventor. Tomás de Veyga, head of the Bank of the Province of Buenos Aires³⁷ was appointed to replace González when Yrigoyen decided to name him Buenos Aires Police Chief early in 1919.

The definition of the intervention's scope was made by Yrigoyen only after exploring the issue with Lencinas. Horacio Oyhanarte, Yrigoyen's troubleshooter in Mendoza, visited that province twice during December. He asked Lencinas to decide on three alternatives, in order to negotiate the task of the intervention. They were: to resign as governor, to allow the admission of the four legislators of the opposition, or to intervene only in the legislature. In a letter to the President, dated January 1, 1919, Lencinas

³⁶La Época, December 26, 1918.

³⁷De Veyga had been a federal judge, professor at the Law School and National Deputy of the Radical Party.

discarded the idea of his resignation. If he were to do it, he told Yrigoyen, he would scrap thirty years of struggle against the oligarchy of Civit and Villanueva. Furthermore, he assured the President that he would win the elections again, against all the other parties combined, and that his political success would also enhance the stature of the national government. The governor did not consent to the incorporation of the four conservative deputies-elect, because he feared that together with the Radical dissidents, they could cripple his projects in the legislature. He did consent to the intervention in the legislature, although he also would have preferred the inclusion of the Judiciary.³⁸

Lencinas greeted this intervention without the fanfare and high hopes with which he had welcomed Interventor Loza fourteen months before.³⁹ In his decree transferring the Executive Power to de Veyga, on February 17, 1919, Lencinas reasserted his unyielding belief in the rectitude of his rule. He stated with indomitable confidence, that he would prove to the nation that without any help from other powers, he would be supported by the will of the people, in free elections, as an unqualified popular ratification of his

³⁸A copy of Lencinas' letter was made available by his youngest son, Horacio Antulio Lencinas, in Mendoza.

³⁹The train in which de Veyga traveled arrived at Mendoza early in the morning. Minister Puebla was at the station to greet the commissioner. But since de Veyga was still in bed, Puebla ordered a police officer to give de Veyga the official welcome and left the station. Los Andes, February 18, 1919.

performance as governor.⁴⁰

In his 300 days in office, Lencinas had been able to consolidate his popularity with the common man. The Lencinists used every opportunity to enhance the figure of their leader.⁴¹ But the massive support from the electorate could not shield him from the frustrations of troublesome, unresolved problems, many of them created by his own arbitrariness. The province turned momentarily to the Federal Commissioner. His decisions were anxiously awaited by all segments, each one in search of lasting solutions, but also seeking to avenge its grievances.

For Lencinas, it looked like November 1917 again, but the clouds had already replaced the glory of the morning sun.

⁴⁰Ministerio del Interior, Memoria del Ministerio del Interior, 1918-1919 (Buenos Aires, 1919), p. 139.

⁴¹In December 1917, at the height of the political campaign, the Radical Party had condemned the participation of public employees, as such, in politics. But a year later it reversed its position, and the rules were changed to authorize public servants to support the government. Accordingly, on January 20, 1919, there was a public celebration of the anniversary of the election held a year before. All government offices were emptied, while the personnel attended the party's festivities at the Odeón Theatre, in Mendoza.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND STAGE OF THE POPULIST EXPERIMENT

A New Federal Interlude

Interventor de Veyga delt with the Mendoza crisis by adhering strictly to constitutional rules and applying them with complete personal independence. In a few days he settled the two most pressing issues: first, he ruled that Álvarez should be reinstated as deputy governor, and second, he ordered that the judges arbitrarily suspended by Lencinas should also be reinstated. With these two decisions de Veyga seemingly accomplished the most important part of his mission, but in fact, this marked only the beginning of his problems. Unobjectionable from the legal viewpoint, these decisions left the political impasse as entangled as before, and in addition provoked the immediate ill-will of the Lencinists.

Given the rift between the two Radical factions, what kind of rapprochement would have been possible between Lencinas and Álvarez? And after the drastic, authoritarian measure taken against members of the Judiciary, what type of workable relationship would be possible now between that power and the executive? De Veyga had been sent to Mendoza restore legal order and harmony between the branches of the provincial government, but paradoxically, his decisions

hardened even more the antagonistic positions of the Lencinists and their opponents, and led to a political dead end.

Fearful that the return of the governor would toughen his attitude toward the opposition, several groups petitioned Buenos Aires for the continuance in office of the commissioner. The Partido Autonomista asserted that the only possible "functional regularity" was to break up the Lencinist apparatus before holding any election.¹ The Intransigent Radicals, the Socialists, and the Progressive Democrats requested that the executive power be also intervened, so a new election for governor could be held and thus, effectively stop Lencinas' arbitrariness.² The Centro de Bodegueros, in the name of the well-being of the province and especially of its industry and commerce, pleaded that de Veyga remain in power for the longest time possible.³ Voicing the same view, Los Andes appealed to the patriotism of the commissioner, observing with foreboding that if Lencinas had earlier dared to accuse some of his old Radical friends of being insane and traitors, his return to office would revive the autocracy of the "Fraile Aldao."⁴ This newspaper, however, in a display of commitment to

¹Los Andes, March 10, 1919.

²La Prensa, March 8, 9, and 10, 1919.

³Los Andes, March 8, 1919.

⁴Ibid., March 13, 1919. This newspaper referred to the caudillo Félix Aldao, fervid supporter of Juan Manuel de Rosas, who ruled Mendoza despotically during part of the decades of 1830 and 1840.

principle amidst stormy partisanship, believed that the proper step was to let the people decide freely about Lencinas. If his party would win again, said Los Andes, it would mean that he represented the aspirations of the people.⁵

Delfín Álvarez pressured Lencinas with the proposal that he would resign if the governor would do the same. But his gesture was in vain; to the Lencinists their old caudillo embodied the movement itself and his political stature was beyond any compromise. Meanwhile, the Radicals did not remain idle. Lencinas and Teisaire, openly at odds with the interventor, traveled throughout the province recruiting adherents to petition Yrigoyen for de Veyga's immediate replacement. Lencinas believed that de Veyga's purpose was to damage him politically, although he thought that his prestige was above any maneuver attempted at the national level against him and his government.

Their confrontation led Lencinas and de Veyga to discuss the stalemate of Mendozan affairs with the President, but not in the presence of each other. According to Delfor del Valle, an Yrigoyenist Senator for the Federal Capital and a close political friend of the President, Yrigoyen censured Lencinas personally for the mishandling of his government and the stained image it attached to the reform efforts of the party. Such was the deadlock between the governor and de Veyga, explained del Valle, that on March 27, in an effort to

⁵Los Andes, March 13, 1919.

maintain institutional order in Mendoza, Yrigoyen forced Lencinas to resign. The President himself dictated the words to Lencinas, who "touched and with tears in his eyes," wrote

I place in your hands my irrevocable resignation as Governor of the Province of Mendoza, thus the Federal Government would have in their hands all the necessary elements to resolve in a sovereign and democratic manner what to do with the powers of this province.⁶

Del Valle said that Yrigoyen never considered this note an official document, and that Lencinas remained on friendly terms with the President. Beyond the anecdotal value of this episode, what is clear is that the solution to the Mendozaan dilemma rested in the hands of the President again, as it had in the times of the Régimen.

The Minister of the Interior, Rosendo Gómez, vainly tried to effect a reconciliation between de Veyga and Lencinas. Gómez told the interventor that Lencinas was an old friend and political colleague, highly respected in the party. De Veyga replied that he did not view their relationship at that level, because he had gone to Mendoza as a judge of an institutional conflict and not as a fellow party member.⁷

⁶Senadores, 1929, I, 537-539. A photocopy of Lencinas' letter appears on p. 539. Dardo Olguín, although citing his source as Del Valle's words in Congress that day, September 25, 1929 (Lencinas, pp. 439-440), quoted his speech fragmentarily, excluding from a long paragraph the Senator's account of how Yrigoyen dictated Lencinas' resignation to him. Instead, Olguín states that Lencinas left the presidential office and wrote his note in a small adjacent room.

⁷Los Andes, April 4, 1919.

In spite of the long friendship between Yrigoyen and Lencinas, it can be inferred that at this juncture, the President, displeased with the troubled government of the Mendozan caudillo, favored the position of the commissioner.⁸ The calculated presidential inertia, however, deepened the pessimism of those who wanted the interventor to return to Mendoza. They were afraid that Yrigoyen's decision would take personal interests into consideration above those of the institutions involved.

At this point, de Veyga resigned on April 5 alleging that the Lencinists were openly questioning his impartiality.⁹ Minister Gómez and the Governor of Mendoza urged the President to accept the resignation, but Yrigoyen rejected it contending that the mission of institutional justice that should be carried out in Mendoza could not be stalled by any personal reservation. Nevertheless, de Veyga insisted, and Yrigoyen then

⁸Conservative National Deputy Manuel Láinez affirmed in his newspaper El Diario, of Buenos Aires, that two or three governors like Lencinas would be enough to bring back to Argentina the barbarism of several decades ago, April 5, 1919. The Intransigent Radicals told de Veyga that they viewed "with horror" the possibility that Lencinas would return to office. La Prensa, April 10, 1919.

⁹Senator Benito Villanueva, defending de Veyga's position, affirmed that when he had decided to issue a decree reinstating the four conservative provincial deputies rejected by the Lencinists in 1918, he was recalled to Buenos Aires, and never returned to Mendoza. Senadores, 1920, I, 669.

accepted his decision.¹⁰

The President appointed Perfecto Araya the new head of the federal mission. He had been a Radical legislator for Santa Fe from 1914 to 1918, and was now a member of the Consejo Supremo de Guerra y Marina. The instructions given to Araya were more explicit than those issued to de Veyga: he was to call for elections to renew the entire legislature, and then reinstate the governor. Accordingly, early in May 1919, the second interventor dissolved the legislative branch and set the election date for June 22.¹¹ The partisan alignment of the future legislature was especially important because it had to elect a National Senator to replace Emilio Civit, whose term ended in April 1919.

The refusal of the Federal Government to order a new election for the governorship led the discontented opposition to renew their demands. Among them, the Intransigent Radicals petitioned Araya to replace all the high ranking personnel of the administration, including the police, in order to insure impartiality. They reaffirmed that they would prefer to be governed by an interventor until the end of Lencinas' term,

¹⁰ A virulent anti-Yrigoyenist newspaper said that when de Veyga's mission in Mendoza was over, he had told some friends: "I am poor, the only fortune I will leave to my sons is the integrity of my name. If I would have returned to Mendoza, I would have lost it." La Fronda, November 9, 1919. De Veyga had died in Buenos Aires the day before.

¹¹ The provincial conservative deputies that had been elected in previous elections, protested in vain against Araya's decision, alleging that their credentials had been approved at the appropriate time, and that their terms only could be revoked by the procedure determined by the provincial constitution.

rather than see him reinstated in office.

Using the justification that his government was a temporary one, and limited by specific instructions, Araya denied police assistance in order to enforce returning the Compañía Vitivinícola to its original authorities, as had been ordered by the provincial Supreme Court. The attorneys of the Compañía, invoking Article 45 of the national constitution, solicited the impeachment of the President for failing to take the necessary steps for the enforcement of the Supreme Court decision. Without delay Yrigoyen disapproved Araya's handling of the case and ordered him to comply with the legal resolution. The commissioner obeyed reluctantly. But the provincial bureaucratic machinery, mostly in Lencinists' hands, was averse to seeing the Compañía defeat one of Lencinas' dearest accomplishments, and at once began clogging the administrative paperwork of the Compañía to water down the presidential order as much as possible. The bodegueros requested that the President end these irritating measures, but Yrigoyen let them know that the solution to these annoyances was a matter to be handled exclusively by the province. Therefore, the situation remained unchanged during Araya's brief interlude.

As election time drew closer, the polarization of the diverse political sectors into Lencinism and anti-Lencinism heightened. Conservatives, Socialists, and Radical Intransigents emphasized their common cause against the government and minimized the traditional differences

separating them.¹² The Lencinists also carried on intensive political activity, they supported workers on strike, and especially the contratistas against owners of the vineyards.

In the last days of the campaign, as reported daily by the newspapers, opposition voices increasingly complained against the partisan attitude of the intervention, specifically its indifference to the violence waged in the streets by the Lencinists before the eyes of a passive police; the organization of gangs to intimidate the opposition; the threats against some industrialists, and the hardships encountered by opposition groups trying to carry out their propaganda because of the aggressiveness of the followers of the governor.¹³

Given an electoral climate that did not offer any hope for the opposition, the Autonomists finally decided to abstain from the election, alleging a total lack of guarantees. This

¹²The solidarity among the anti-Lencinist groups was evident at a rally held in the capital in May 1919. In the so-called Alameda there was a meeting of the Intransigent Radicals at 4:00 P.M. Half an hour later a conservative rally took place in another location of the Alameda. When they were over, people from the two rallies marched together to the house of Delfín Alvarez to show him their support. Los Andes, May 29, 1919.

¹³The Socialist National Deputy Augusto Bunge, who took part in the campaign with his colleague Federico Pinedo, depicted the Lencinists as the dregs of society. Bunge stated that while a Socialist rally was in progress in Luján, a suburb of Mendoza,

...desfilaron tres veces en torno de la plaza una serie de carros llenos de pobres diablos, del más lastimoso aspecto, muchos de los cuales se tambaleaban en forma alarmante a cada oscilación del carro, y que con voces vacilantes gritaban "Viva el gaucho Lencinas!"

Los Andes, June 16, 1919.

decision climaxed the gradual weakening of the conservatives since their defeat of January 1918, and it was taken in spite of the fact that they still had some very capable and indeed courageous leaders, such as those agitated times demanded.

The Lencinists won the election of June 22 by a generous margin. They took the capital and every one of the departments, and as a result they gained the majority in both chambers of the legislature, for the first time in the Senate. The Intransigent Radicals won the seats for the minority.¹⁴

Lencinas in Power Again. The Social Sphere

After five months under two federal commissioners, Lencinas was back in the saddle of the province by the will of a large majority, just as he had predicted. In an interview with Los Andes, a few days before taking office, Lencinas declared his intention to pursue a government of moderation. He acknowledged that at difficult times during his early government he had to apply harsh measures in order "to protect the authority of the ruler and the image of the party." But now, he said, the time had come for tolerance, not violence.¹⁵

The governor's opening message to the legislature on July 26,

¹⁴The election returns showed 15,097 votes for the Radical Party against 6,459 for the Intransigent Radicals. Ibid., July 17, 1919. This Mendozaan newspaper reacted resignedly to this electoral evidence: "The people have decided, and this is the government they want. So, let it be." July 14, 1919. La Nación, July 21, 1919, less enthusiastic about the virtues of the principle of the majority rule, asserted that what had been chosen was Lencinas' legislature, not Mendoza's one.

¹⁵Los Andes, July 18, 1919.

1919, the day he reassumed office, was brief and almost exclusively political. Lencinas regretted that the unity and discipline of the Radical Party in older times had been replaced by divisions, both in Mendoza and the rest of the country. Locally, he condemned those who owed their positions to the party but were now sabotaging it--a direct reference to Álvarez--and he especially criticized de Veyga for having reversed his decision on the Judicial Power. There was no social or economic reference of any kind with respect to the state of the province. The exception was a general outline for a new legal structure to deal with important aspects of industrial relations, including the creation of labor courts.

The labor legislation that Lencinas planned to propose put emphasis on conciliation and the significant role of the State in resolving social conflicts. He would propose the organization of unions of workers as well of employers, with the purpose being to create among them a harmonious relationship. Likewise, he favored legislation establishing conciliatory procedures and final compulsory arbitration, as a healthy solution for major conflicts between labor and management. The governor planned to submit legislation to prevent the formation of latifundia in order to protect the rural worker and the small landowner, and other measures to regulate rural rents. To look after the proper enforcement of these laws Lencinas proposed the creation of a new type

of court, created especially to deal with labor disputes.¹⁶

In his message the governor recognized the difficulties in the way of implementing these initiatives. But having established the 8-hour day and the minimum wage in advance of the rest of the nation, his faith in his high purposes was reassured. The governor's outline reflected his basic thoughts on the role which the government should play in ensuring social justice for the working man. He perceived the function of the State as that of a supreme arbiter balancing the interests in conflict.

Even though Lencinas now enjoyed a comfortable majority in both houses of the legislature, these innovative ideas were never transformed into specific proposals for legislative action. The governor needed an essentially united party and a well disciplined body of legislators. He did not have either of them during the second part of his government, for the bitter intra-party split found in the legislative chambers another forum where the rivalries intensified.

Similar principles to those set forth by Lencinas in 1919 were to become, many years later, the standard labor rules of modern nations. But Lencinas had in mind a paternalistic structure, functioning to a large extent through the personal leadership of an enlightened individual, and not the highly bureaucratic, impersonal organization

¹⁶ Provincia de Mendoza, Mensaje del Gobernador Dr. José Néstor Lencinas a la Honorable Legislatura (Mendoza, 1919).

characteristic of modern states.

Besieged by the serious problems he had to face since coming back to office, Lencinas' advanced scheme of labor legislation remained just a blueprint for the future. But his towering accomplishments--the 8-hour day and the minimum wage--already gained for him a secure and privileged place among the early social reformers of Argentina, regardless of his actions and attitudes in other spheres of government.

Lencinas was genuinely cognizant of the necessities and aspirations of the humble people. As an individual and as a public servant he promoted their spiritual and material well-being. His firm convictions and the leadership he enjoyed for many years in his province before he reached the governorship, instilled in him a devoted concern for the elevation of the masses.¹⁷

In the party jargon he was called an apostle, like Yrigoyen, and he displayed a paternalistic disposition toward the large number of economically less fortunate people, like a shepherd who must take care of his flock. This paternalism was born of his conviction that he really

¹⁷To Lencinas is attributed the statement that "the mountains are ascended in alpargatas," connoting that the heights are only reachable by the humble people. Gabriel del Mazo, El Radicalismo. Ensayo sobre su historia y doctrina, Vol. I (Buenos Aires, 1957), p. 169; and Arturo Jauretche, El medio pelo en la sociedad argentina (Buenos Aires, 1967), p. 172.

understood and interpreted the yearnings of the lower classes. Lencinas voiced this thought in a manifesto which well may be the consummate populist expression of his government:

...we do not belong to these governments which live in an ivory tower, where the voice of the poor never reaches; but we authentically belong to the people. Therefore, we feel that the majesty of our rule is enhanced when we speak directly to the common man. Ours is a government which rejoices with the happiness of the masses, because we share their sorrows, because we are the people themselves.¹⁸

On practical grounds, however, Lencinas' actions to improve the daily living conditions of the poor were not as revolutionary as his social legislation. The conditions of poverty affecting large sectors of the rural and urban population were not significantly altered during the Lencinas administration.

Housing was a major indicator of the social decay afflicting the lower class; in the capital there were a good number of conventillos which only had two bathrooms to serve almost two hundred persons. Many houses were in fact wretched places without a toilet. In areas beyond the wooden pavement, the general conditions resembled an Ottoman city, with the not uncommon sight in the streets of a number of invalids and needy people, many of them

¹⁸Unión Cívica Radical, El Comité Departamental de San Carlos ofrece a sus correligionarios la recopilación de algunos documentos políticos de actualidad (Mendoza, 1919), p. 11.

mendicant children.¹⁹ This was to a large extent a direct responsibility of the municipal authorities. But beyond what specifically concerned the municipal governments, the province did not take any radical measures to alleviate the distressing pauperism in which the lower classes lived. The Lencinist press, nonetheless, often accused the well-to-do sectors of profiting from this situation. La Montaña upbraided Benito Villanueva for being one of the most prominent among the legion of conservatives owing conventillos.²⁰

At this time the Radicals, while championing political equality, did not envision that the role of the State might be extended to include serving as a relief agency for the most needy, and reducing social and economic disparities by changing the fiscal structure and realigning the priorities of the province. The upper class segments

¹⁹"The beggar is an institution in this city," expressed Los Andes, December 7, 1919, in one of its many editorials denouncing the shameful living conditions of the poor. Water contamination was very common because of the large number of cesspools; and the constant dust in the streets and garbage left on the sidewalks attested to the unhealthy climate in the popular barrios of Mendoza. Furthermore, Lencinas was criticized for sponsoring a monument to the worker while endemic ills, like goiter, continued to be an insurmountable problem throughout the province.

²⁰An illustration of the social and economic abyss dividing the provincial society was given by two notices published on the same page in Los Andes, on November 3, 1918. While one reiterated a complaint about the considerable number of conventillos without a single toilet, the other, a few lines down, announced that that afternoon a "five o'clock tea" would take place in the Jockey Club, with a selected musical program as entertainment.

financed and administered a few charitable associations, which performed an extremely useful service to the community, especially for the most impoverished. It was a self-imposed moral obligation, inspired by humanitarian principles, but it was carried out within the elitist framework of the traditional society of Mendoza.²¹

The provincial budget, while a good source of employment for the lower segments, did not provide strong direct assistance for the poor. Moreover, the fiscal structure was not engineered to create a social revolution, but oriented to serve the needs of the bureaucracy-ridden provincial apparatus. The most important social service was hospital assistance, free of charge to the people, but always inadequate. Outside the capital there were only two hospitals in all the province, both located within forty miles of the capital.

²¹ An example of the aristocratic-minded approach which characterized the upper segments was given by Josefina Civit de Ortega, daughter of Emilio Civit, when she referred to a kindergarten created in Mendoza in 1908 by Law No. 474, during her father's second term as governor. Mrs. Ortega stated that it was a model in its class, the best in Argentina and perhaps in South America--a viewpoint also expressed by Theodore Roosevelt, she added, when he visited Mendoza. What filled Mrs. Ortega with pride was that a jury at the Ghent Exhibition, in Belgium, awarded the first prize to the kindergarten for its architectural merits. Thus, while the conservative government of Mendoza had created an institution whose highest pride was having aroused the European curiosity for its architectural values, many dwellings of the poor people of the city did not even have a toilet. Josefina Civit de Ortega, "Una vida al servicio de la Nación," Revista de la Junta de Estudios Históricos de Mendoza, Segunda Época, No. 6, II (Mendoza, 1970), 622.

Old Longings and New Controversies.

The Political Scene

Lencinas' hopes to further the enactment of progressive social legislation were rendered fruitless by the resurgence of old political problems and the appearance of new ones. Four of these problems became major political issues in the province: the impeachment of Deputy Governor Álvarez; the teachers' strike and its aftermath; the election of Teisaire as National Senator by the legislature; and the appointment by the National Chamber of Deputies of a committee to investigate the enforcement of individual rights in Mendoza. These issues renewed the wrangle between Lencinists and anti-Lencinists, and brought the already strained relationship between Lencinas and Yrigoyen to its lowest ebb.

The issue of ousting the deputy governor was first on the agenda of the reinstated government. The Lencinists were determined that the number two authority in the province should be a man of their confidence. Having failed to persuade Álvarez to resign and, later, to get rid of him by charges of insanity, the new Lencinist majority in the legislature was finally able to carry out Lencinas' resolution to eject from office his undesirable deputy governor.

On July 30, only four days after Lencinas reassumed power, a petition was introduced to the legislature requesting Álvarez' impeachment, charging him with having

improperly fulfilled his official duties. The intense political rivalry aroused by this maneuver was clearly indicated by the political weight of Álvarez' defenders: National Senator Leopoldo Melo and National Deputies Juan Luis Ferrarotti, Miguel Laurencena, Carlos A. Becú and Aníbal Cabrera, all Radicals.

The legislature observed the constitutional formalities step by step--although the defense was pressed by arbitrarily set time limitations--and on September 13, the Senate removed Álvarez as deputy governor, finding him guilty of having illegally replaced the secretary of the chamber. As the Lencinists had a large majority in that body, this ruse proved to be a good justification.²²

The adverse publicity created by this political manipulation of the Lencinists occurred when labor agitation was riding a high crest in Mendoza. At a time when organized resistance by workingmen against social and economic inequalities was very often branded as the work of Maximalists--the term given to the Marxists--, Lencinas' approach to labor conflicts was markedly paternalistic. This became more evident in the latter half of 1919, a period of social and political confrontations. A qualified observer of Mendozan life said of this attitude of Lencinas that

²²Meanwhile, feeling his safety endangered in Mendoza, Álvarez moved to Buenos Aires. There, one more time, he demanded of the President a federal intervention in his province. Ricardo Báez, an old-time Radical who was the acting chairman of the Senate, formally became the number two man in the province.

His patriachal and justicialista conceptions could not tolerate the fact that a few "gringos" were organizing the bodega or printing shop workers against him. He was the only one who could resolve these problems and he did not admit any intermediaries.²³

During the de Veyga and Araya interventions, the propertied sectors resented the open Lencinist support given to strikers who demanded, among other things, the enforcement of the 8-hour day and the minimum wage. But it was the teachers' strike which provoked the major social and political reverberation during Lencinas' rule. It began in April 1919 when a small number of teachers founded an association aimed at correcting deficiencies in the school system. The organizers of this group were leftist in outlook; but regardless of their political orientation, their complaint about inefficiencies was a legitimate one.²⁴

²³ Marianetti, En la verde lejanía del recuerdo, p. 166.

²⁴ This group--bound by secrecy, like a lodge--was seeking to end the delay in the payment of teachers' salaries and the rents of the school buildings; to press for the regularization of the federal subsidy; to replace the existing anarchy of methods and programs; and to erase political favoritisms. The existence of these inefficiencies was later confirmed by Eduardo Luzuriaga, acting Director of the School Board during Araya's intervention, in May 1919. Luzuriaga stated that in order to collect their salaries, the teachers had to discount them at a provincial financial institution. As regards the accounting records of the Board, Luzuriaga reported that the last entries recorded were from 1917. La Prensa, July 20, 1919. Among the leaders of Idea were Florencia Fossatti, a highly regarded Mendozan educator, and Angélica Mendoza, who in those years helped to establish the Communist Party in Mendoza. Years later she left the party, received a doctorate at Columbia University, and in the late 1950's taught at the National University of Cuyo.

These teachers divulged their purposes in a publication called Idea. Enrique Julio, the Director of the Provincial School Board, a very capable man but, according to the Mendozaan historian Jorge A. Segura, an intolerant and authoritarian one,²⁵ interpreted the creation of the association as a revolt against the school authorities, and a source of indiscipline among the provincial teachers. Therefore, he suspended the teachers who organized it. This marked the beginning of a long conflict: the provincial teachers decided to strike and requested Lencinas to replace Julio.

The significance of this confrontation went far beyond a simple labor dispute. The fact that the teachers clashed with the government immediately politicized the conflict. The opposition, unexpectedly, had found an ally. This situation, however, posed a contradiction: while the organizers of the strike were ideologically on the left, the traditional anti-Lencinists were conservatives. Another incongruity of this alliance was that in order to reinforce their bargaining position, the teachers sought the support of the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA), but this anarchist-led trade union central was anathema to the industrialists, businessmen, and the well-to-do in general, who sympathized with the strike mainly because it embarrassed the government.

²⁵Jorge I. Segura, Historia de Mendoza, p. 769. Unpublished.

Lencinas believed that, above any other consideration, his authority was at stake. Accordingly, he adopted an inflexible position which propelled the conflict, contrary to his intention, beyond the bounds of the province and created still another fissure in his relationship with President Yrigoyen. Lencinas would not accept any solution based on displacing those whom he regarded as his trusted political associates. No one in his home had imposed any policies on him, he said, and the same policy should be applied in the government.²⁶

When de Veyga was appointed interventor, early in 1919, he reinstated the teachers who had been expelled; and since he was appointing his own assistants, he removed Julio from the School Board. This situation continued under Interventor Araya. But when Lencinas came back to office, in July 1919, he reappointed Julio as Director of the School Board.

To compensate for the loss of school classes created by the strike, the teachers taught pupils at their own houses. This situation induced the opposition to urge a federal intervention, since the provincial government could not guarantee primary education, as required in Article 5 of the national constitution. There were

²⁶Los Andes, July 25, 1919. One of the tactics of the Lencinists was to promote the creation of a new trade union for teachers, to counteract Maestros Unidos, which was the established organization, and which had declared the strike. Thus, the so-called Unión Mendocina de Maestros was born, grouping those backing Lencinas.

stoppages of mercantile activities in support of teachers --a general strike lasted eight days--and the police reacted against the strikers with vigorous repression. The opposition blamed Lencinas for the climate of social disorder than ensued, alleging that his stubbornness in supporting Julio had caused the teachers' strike, truly exotic for Mendoza, it was asserted,²⁷ and a damaging paralysis of general activities.

The response of the Lencinists was a bill, introduced in the legislature by Senator Manuel Molina, prohibiting all provincial personnel from becoming members of any trade union. This proposal was based on the alleged need to protect the highest interests of the community against the despicable intentions of the Maximalists.²⁸ But the bill never reached the floor of the Senate.

La Nación accused the government of Mendoza of following a two-faced policy in regard to the rights of the workers. As far as the major sources of wealth were concerned--the vines, the bodegas, commerce in general--the government thought that trade-unionism was an inevitable phenomenon and a positive tool to achieve social progress, even if the unions resorted to violence. But the government, on the other hand, under siege by the teachers, considered the strike as politically-motivated and as an unacceptable

²⁷Los Andes, August 13, 1919.

²⁸Ibid., August 23, 1919.

anarchical threat.²⁹

Early in August the government partly eased public tension by ordering an investigation into the accounting office of the School Board, to verify the presumed irregularities that Luzuriaga had denounced, and Julio then stepped down temporarily. When the administrative investigation ended at the beginning of September, declaring Julio free from any wrongdoing, he was reinstated by the governor. This in turn touched off a new strike and a further deterioration of the authority invested in the School Board. Police repression intensified and many teachers were fired.³⁰

The atmosphere of the provincial capital continued to be disturbed: the FORA arranged a one-day general strike for the last day of September; the encounters between policemen and strikers and the claims of police mistreatment continued unabated. The government dealt harshly with the labor segments that sided with the strikers, alleging that their only interest was to upset the social order.³¹

²⁹La Nación, August 24, 1919.

³⁰La Época, September 9, 1919, reported that the Mendoza government had denied charges that the teachers could not meet freely. It also defended the procedures of the police as being directed only against those engaging in subversive activities and as being designed to guarantee the rights of the teachers who wished to work.

³¹Late in September 1919, England experienced its greatest labor conflict, involving 500,000 railway workers. Lloyd George's government faced the strike sternly, and

The importance of the strike and the widespread commotion it provoked were echoed in Buenos Aires. University students in the Federal Capital organized a number of rallies in support of the teachers and there was a proposal to the Federación Universitaria Argentina to declare a national student strike if Yrigoyen failed to intervene in Mendoza.³² Any effort of the President to reconcile the parties needed the acquiescence of Lencinas. The latter had promised to discuss the problem with Yrigoyen, but remained in Mendoza, preoccupied with the school conflict and the heated Radical dispute over the election of a National Senator. To add to Lencinas' difficulties, National Deputy Bunge informed Yrigoyen that the deportation of many workers from Mendoza "savagely forsaken in the desert by the police," had been proved beyond any doubt.³³ To neutralize the adverse effects of these incidents, the Radical legislators of Mendoza declared that public opinion in Buenos Aires was

used all means at hand to maintain public order, believing that the workers were used by extremists for sinister purposes. In Mendoza, Lencinas had followed the same pattern toward the strikes besetting his province, and he felt reassured by Lloyd George's actions. In a press interview, Minister Puebla remarked that "public opinion will judge whether a government which deals with its labor problems by applying the same policy as the most advanced nation in the world can be labelled barbaric." La Nación, November 2, 1919.

³²La Prensa, October 8, 1919.

³³La Fronda, October 10, 1919.

being misled by the biased information of La Nación and La Prensa, and that the people of the province were enjoining their rights as they never did before.³⁴

By October 1919, six months after the teachers had made the first challenge to the school administration, the conflict had spread widely into other provincial activities and even became a preoccupation of the national government. For those at one end of the political spectrum this complicated episode was simply a subversion engineered by undesirable Reds. For those at the other end, the only possible remedy was a federal intervention in the three branches of government.

With the passage of time, the original issues of the strike became enmeshed with the political positions of the people involved in it. This was exemplified at a rally held in Mendoza on October 16 in support of the strikers. Among the guests were Julio V. González and Gabriel del Mazo, for the Federación Universitaria Argentina and Luis H. Sommariva, president of the Federación Universitaria de La

³⁴Los Andes, October 11, 1919. In open dissidence from the thoughts of the legislative majority, Luis María Calle, co-director of this newspaper, denounced the abuses of the government, not to the provincial or national authorities, but to La Prensa, which he regarded as the only barrier in Argentina against the growing authoritarianism of the Radical governments. Calle asserted that, in his presence and that of Deputy Bunge, a speaker at a Radical rally had advised the police to set fire to the printing shop of Los Andes, and to "enlazar los conservadores." La Prensa, October 13, 1919.

Plata.³⁵ When González was addressing the people, he was heckled by someone in the crowd, to whom he replied:

A voice from the people in this audience has said "¡Viva el gaucho Lencinas!" We are not going to utter words wishing the death of any person.... We do not repudiate the gaucho because of his condition, we love the gaucho who lives in his hut devoted to the affection of his wife and children, living a simple and honest life. But we do not want the gaucho who comes from the cities with the police saber to attack our institutions, to curtail our freedom....

Further assailing Lencinism, González echoed Juan Bautista Alberdi, stating that it was necessary to be alert in order to prevent universal suffrage from being transformed into universal ignorance. Otherwise, he said, the minority will rule where the majority is imbecile.³⁶

In spite of the local storms and the pressures from Buenos Aires, Lencinas remained intractable. He thought it was his legitimate privilege as a ruler to select his subordinates. He maintained this inflexible position until, finally, the conflict lost its steam. The support of the workers in behalf of the teachers weakened in a few weeks because of the financial attrition inflicted upon the

³⁵This politically-inspired participation of leaders from university students organizations, anticipated the similar collision which took place mostly in Buenos Aires, in 1945.

³⁶Los Andes, October 17, 1919. To quell the agitation, the Radical legislators proposed that Lencinas name Julio mayor of the capital and appoint to the School Board an educator from outside the province, as Yrigoyen had suggested to the governor. But Lencinas was able to convince the legislators to put aside this proposal.

working man. Moreover, the unwavering police repression against many labor leaders diminished their strength and muted their protest. New teachers replaced those who were ousted, and by the end of November the school year closed, placing a peaceful lid on the once boisterous provincial dispute. The sectors disaffected with the governor did not forget the incidents and the arbitrary treatment they had to put up with. But the period of convulsion ended, its energies exhausted by the wear and tear of a conflict enlarged out of proportion by interests other than those originally sponsored by the Idea group.

Sustained by a strongly personalist and profoundly ethical perception of politics, Lencinas fully repaid the political loyalty of his supporters with unreserved solidarity. "I am indebted to my friends and their aspirations," he said in his 1918 Inaugural Message, "and it will be a cowardice to abandon them at the sweet hour of triumph."³⁷ The loyalty of Lencinas to Julio was exemplary, though by defending Julio's position the governor was protecting above all, what he considered a privilege of his function and position as a ruler. He did not close the door to discussion of the teachers' grievances, but he kept an unyielding position when he thought that being forced to discard an important collaborator meant to question his authority.

³⁷Mensaje de S.E. el Señor Gobernador, June 1918, p. 5.

Perhaps the mountain of criticisms and problems generated by this conflict, in Mendoza and elsewhere, could have been avoided if Lencinas had been more receptive to those claims of the teachers that related to well-known deficiencies. The government did not take effective steps to alleviate the financial straits of the School Board, and thus continued to ignore the provisions of the constitution on this matter. In fact, even without reference to the impassioned accusations of the opposition, it is clear that the government did not live up to its own promising statements on popular education. Julio himself stated that politics had downgraded the social function of the teachers and that the financial branch of the government did not work in earnest for the betterment of the school system.³⁸

To the preoccupations of the government in getting Delfín Álvarez out of the official family, and the complications of the teachers' strike, was added another hot political issue: the election of a National Senator to replace Civit. Minister Puebla was one of the candidates, but Yrigoyen was adamantly against the idea that high ranking officials be appointed to the National Senate, as had been customary under the Régimen. With Puebla out of the contest, and with Lencinas' support, Teisaire's friends mustered the necessary strength to nominate him, although

³⁸Julio, Gestión económica y financiera, p. 23.

his candidacy was vehemently opposed by some party leaders.

The two government factions in the legislature, pro and anti-Teisaire, collided in a debate that revealed the intrigues of the badly divided Radicals. Especially sour for the majority were the words of Senator Emilio Quellet, who had been Police Commissioner in Mendoza in 1918, under Lencinas. He expressed his profound disenchantment with the governor for favoring Teisaire's "camarilla nefasta," and he censured Teisaire for his policies of hate and disrepute for the old-timers of the party.³⁹

In spite of the hardy opposition, the majority of the Lencinists decided to adhere to party discipline, and early in November Teisaire was elected National Senator. This was a rare case, in which the successor of a conservative Senator would be his former secretary and fellow-partisan of years ago, who now was enrolled in the leading anti-conservative party. It was up to the National Senate to approve his credentials, but already his election

³⁹ Quellet accused him of concocting from La Montaña the ambitions of National Deputy Francisco Rubilar for the governorship of the province, with the sole intent of planting doubts in Lencinas' mind about the loyalty of Rubilar. In his long and heated speech, Quellet echoed the charges of Machiavellianism which had been made before against Teisaire, for his self-interest in the manipulation of provincial affairs through personal influence and subterfuge, without the knowledge of the governor. Provincia de Mendoza, Senadores, 1919, II, 5-19. Another legal barrier raised against Teisaire's election was that he had filed for bankruptcy, and the case was still pending in the provincial courts. This disqualified him from becoming a National Senator.

by the provincial legislature had shattered what remained of party unity.⁴⁰

The opposition to Lencinas realized that in spite of the cool relationship between the governor and the President, Yrigoyen would avoid taking any decisive action contrary to Lencinas' interests. Therefore, they turned to the National Congress. The Radicals who disliked the Mendozan government, which they considered wicked and irresponsible, took up the issue of Lencinas rule in the Chamber of Deputies. In November 1919, Deputies Víctor Molina, José P. Tamborini and Carlos F. Melo, among others, proposed to set up an investigating committee to examine how constitutional rights were enforced in Mendoza. As the Yrigoyenists deputies did not object to the proposal, it was easily approved.⁴¹

This measure satisfied conservatives and Socialists because they could gain a foot in the provincial structure

⁴⁰In August 1920 the National Senate rejected Teisaire's credentials by an uncontested decision of the conservatives and Socialists. The Radical Senators did not attend the session. Senadores, I, 673-675.

⁴¹Diputados, 1919, VI, 383-412. Julio César Raffo de la Reta, a conservative Deputy from Mendoza pronounced the most critical words against Lencinas: "That province is under a tyranny," he stated, which ought to be destroyed "por razones de cultura y humanidad." The committee was formed by Miguel Aráoz (Tucumán), José A. González (Santa Fe), and Valentín Vergara (Buenos Aires), Radical Yrigoyenists; the conservative Manuel Bermúdez (Corrientes), and the Socialist Enrique Dickmann (Federal Capital).

without any interference from the national Executive. The Radicals, in spite of the fact that in theory they accepted the investigation of a government of their own party, were themselves becoming somewhat disillusioned with Lencinas' rule and, in any event, they were safeguarded by holding the majority of the committee.

On previous occasions Lencinas had publicly demonstrated his combative spirit. He exhibited it again when confronted with the chamber decision. To general astonishment, on November 23 he issued a decree denying any right to that committee to conduct any investigation. After stating constitutional objections, he made a political attack against the National Chamber of Deputies, which was illustrative of Lencinas' character and convictions and, at the same time, would have greatly satisfied Yrigoyen. If a branch of Congress had the legal power to investigate Mendoza or any other province, asserted Lencinas, then the province should have the same power to investigate how the representatives of the people were fulfilling their obligations. It should have the right to inquire into the causes that made them transgress the constitutional mandate--by their indulgence in sterile political debates--while a large number of bills on important matters concerning the welfare of the nation were

condemned to the files.⁴²

Following up this step, Lencinas six days later sent a copy of his decree of November 23 to all the governors and interventors in other provinces, and invited them to express their political solidarity with his position. With this action he seemed to be moving onto the national political stage as the champion of provincial autonomy. This unprecedented move by Lencinas indicates how firm and strong-willed he was concerning the issue of federalism. On the other hand, it demonstrates that Lencinas failed to realize that each province would view its own relationship vis-à-vis the Federal Government according to its own particular interests and circumstances.

Contrary to Lencinas' hopes, only a handful of governors and interventors replied, while some merely acknowledged receiving Lencinas' note. The replies did not support the position of the governor. They discerned that the problem was simply a dispute between Mendoza and a chamber of National Congress, whose solution was not under the jurisdiction of the other provinces. Among those who replied to Lencinas, the governors of Córdoba and Entre Ríos added that the chamber had the right to make the inquiry, though without arrogating executive functions.⁴³

⁴²Provincia de Mendoza, Boletín Oficial, December 24, 1919, pp. 5184-5185.

⁴³La Prensa, December 4, 1919.

The governor of Corrientes stated that those who ruled with an open door should not make any objection to a congressional committee seeking information.⁴⁴

Apart from this new clash between Lencinas and his opponents, his blatant decree refusing to acknowledge the validity of the congressional committee raised a constitutional question. Did the chambers of Congress have the right to order an investigation of sovereign provinces? This issue was discussed in the leading newspapers. Senator Joaquín V. González affirmed that when the executive powers --the federal and the provincial--linked their interests and joined together politically, then it was proper to resort to a congressional investigation.⁴⁵

Dissenting from this view, Juan A. González Calderón, another authority on Constitutional Law, stated that neither the Executive Power nor Congress was legally empowered to conduct that inquiry.⁴⁶ La Prensa supported this interpretation. Though disapproving of the tone of Lencinas' decree, that paper maintained that the provincial governments were not constitutionally responsible to any chamber of Congress. La Nación carped at Lencinas' dual criteria for not having vindicated the principles of federalism when Yrigoyen had

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵La Prensa, December 2, 1919.

⁴⁶La Nación, December 5, 1919.

appointed Diego Saavedra in 1917 to study the situation in Mendoza, ruled then by an anti-Radical government.

Branding this a double-edge-knife policy, La Nación contended that Lencinas' sole interest was to sanction any procedure against non-Radical governments, and disavow as illegitimate any measure taken against Radical rulers.⁴⁷

The stern decree of the governor provoked the paralysis of the still-born committee. In fact, after Lencinas' reaction, what possibilities had they of carrying out their mission? It is reasonable to believe that even if Lencinas had not been so fiercely opposed to that committee, the institutional situation in Mendoza would not have changed at all, as was demonstrated in 1917 during Saavedra's mission.

Those still wishing to see the end of Lencinism had only the possibility that Congress might approve a federal intervention. But this was quite unlikely, since neither the Yrigoyenist legislators nor the President was inclined to behead the Mendozan caudillo politically.

Los Andes, the most important anti-Lencinist bastion in Mendoza, stated its opposition to a new intervention. It did not justify its position in the name of federalism or out of respect for a government democratically elected. Los Andes declared that the arbitrary and intolerant policy

⁴⁷La Prensa, December 14, 1919; and La Nación, November 29, 1919.

of Lencinism was steadily eroding the Radical Party. It was necessary only to let them rule for a time to witness the party's irretrievable collapse. A federal intervention, it said, would stop the otherwise inevitable process of party decomposition and it would reaffirm the predominance of Lencinism.⁴⁸

Constitutional Duties, Fiscal Responsibility and Industrial Policy. An Uneven Performance

The political developments described above were only part of the picture of the populist government of Lencinas. His performance of constitutional duties with regard to the municipal system and the local irrigation authorities, as well as his handling of public finances, was almost as unsatisfactory as during his first year in office. His policy toward all aspects of the wine industry, however, was an enlightened one, and resulted in the enactment of highly promising legislation, aimed at curbing the domineering position of the large bodegueros, while protecting the interests of the considerable number of small viñateros.

During the second part of his term, municipal autonomy continued to be a dead letter in spite of specific constitutional clauses and the fact that for five months the province was in the hands of two federal commissioners.

⁴⁸Los Andes, December 6, 1919.

By December 1919, eleven departments out of seventeen were still under the direct control of the governor.

Only with regard to the election of water authorities did Lencinas reverse in 1919 his position of 1918. As no law was yet enacted on general rules for the administration of water, Lencinas called for elections in November 1919 under the system established by Law 322, of 1905. Now, ironically, the governor followed the legal procedure which the opposition recommended be observed a year before, and which Lencinas then rejected by suspending the elections.

The inefficiency of fiscal administration increased after Lencinas reassumed office. In his opening message of July 1919 not a single word was said about the state of Mendoza's economy. From then on, the financial reports were not made public and some of the new expenditures continued to be authorized by cabinet agreements, ignoring the required legislative approval.⁴⁹

In November 1919, the 1920 budget was submitted by the Executive. Total expenses were estimated at 12,163,000 pesos, significantly higher than the 9,913,000 spent in 1918. This increase was due to a general rise in wages and salaries and the expansion of the police force. To meet these expenses several taxes were to be raised, especially

⁴⁹To find a solution to the permanent financial deficit, a special tax on wine--two cents per liter--became effective on October 1919, with the revenue specifically allocated to pay salaries and other debts from previous years.

on wine, properties and licenses. This provoked a strong campaign against the government proposal by the whole business and industrial sectors. As the legislature did not take any action, Lencinas issued a decree, once again, enforcing the 1920 figures of the 1916 budget.

In the financial sphere, the Achilles' heel of the government was the Provincial Bank, which Lencinas had promised to transform into a mixed institution, modeled after the Bank of the Province of Buenos Aires. But the bank remained in provincial hands and, as in the past, it served as a tool for political favoritism.⁵⁰ The letras continued to be undervalued, adding a burden to most wage-earners, because only federal and railway personnel received their wages in "nacionales."⁵¹

The wine industry benefited from this situation. As most of its sales were made outside the province, almost all its receipts were in pesos, while it paid wages and local expenses with letras. But the industry was concerned with its economic outlook. Every sector, for its own reason, was dissatisfied with the policy of prices and production, and although all of them referred to the

⁵⁰Its director, Francisco Muñiz, had to resign under charges of corruption and inefficiency leveled against him by a group of Lencinist legislators.

⁵¹The thirst for pesos was evident in signs in the windows of the stores: "Se necesitan nacionales"; and the banks set up separate accounts for their customers, one in pesos, another in letras.

"crisis" of the industry, the phrase meant quite a different thing to each one. The core of the viti-viniculture problem was to determine whether the industry should be regulated, and if so, by whom. The government favored a mild intervention, intended basically to defend the interests of the small viñateros. The larger producers and bodegueros, on the other hand, had in the past preferred their own kind of regulation, as had been embodied in the Compañía Vitivinícola, created in 1916 by Law No. 703 when the industry was in a serious crisis. But as prospects improved in 1919, they reversed their position and vigorously advocated a policy of total reliance on the principle of supply and demand.

More than any other factor, the climatic condition in 1919 helped to bring an end to the crisis which had been affecting the industry since 1914. Hail and rain were responsible for damage to a large number of vineyards. This meant a heavy loss for some viñateros, but at the same time it significantly raised the prices for grapes and wine. The large surpluses of wine, which for four years had kept prices at a very low level, were greatly diminished in a short time. Sales of wine in markets outside the province rose from 340 million litter in 1918 to 413 million in 1919.⁵² With the promise of an industrial bonanza in sight, the bodegueros insisted on

⁵²Provincia de Mendoza, Estadísticas de la Provincia de Mendoza, 1930/31 (Mendoza, 1932), p. 169. The Banco de la Nación reported the rise in prices and shipments, concluding that the improved situation had cast aside any fears of overproduction. Memoria del Banco de la Nación Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1920), pp. 3-4.

their preference for a free market.

Upon his return to office, Lencinas tried to avoid the previous unfortunate experience when some of the production was destroyed. He sought legislation to shield the viñateros from the losses produced by natural calamities and from the greediness of the bodegueros. In this endeavor, Lencinas profited from the assistance of his new Minister of Industries, Leopoldo Suárez, who had first-hand knowledge of all facets of the industry.⁵³

In September the government proposed that the legislature set up compulsory insurance for the viñateros against hail and other natural disasters; determine a minimum price for grapes, and sponsor the construction of regional bodegas--or use existing ones--to facilitate the viñateros without bodega to process their own production. The bodegueros disapproved of the creation of regional bodegas, which, of course, was contrary to their interests. They contended that the capacity of the bodegas greatly surpassed the demand of the national consumption of wine. What they asked, appealing to the obvious, was the reason to build new bodegas when those already established exceeded the needs.

This viewpoint of the bodegueros was technically acceptable; but the intention of the government did not focus

⁵³Minister Puebla was the only original member remaining in Lencinas' cabinet after reassuming office in July 1919. Suárez had been Superintendent of Irrigation during the first part of Lencinas' government.

on the capacity of the bodegas available, but aimed essentially at the protection of the viñateros from being forced to sell their production at a very low price. The principles outlined by the Executive were enacted in November 1919.⁵⁴ This legislation represented a positive step in normalizing the relationship between the highly conflictive industrial interests. It provided a shelter for the small producers, without suffocating the large industrial groups. If these laws were properly enforced, the added taxation they imposed would be worthwhile, and all segments related to the wine industry would prosper.

The End of the First Populist Experiment

The response of the Lencinists to growing criticism by the press was to exclude it from official sources of information, as happened with Los Andes, La Prensa, and La Nación.⁵⁵ This attitude indicated how Lencinas' well developed sense of self-righteousness became more acute as

⁵⁴Law No. 758 authorized the building of new bodegas, the purchase of existing ones, and the setting up of cooperatives, as well as other complementary measures, to be financed by an additional tax on grapes and wine. Law No. 759 instituted compulsory insurance covering hail and other of nature's risks, to be financed by a tax on the official price of the grapes. The minimum price for grapes was later determined at 8 pesos per 100 kilos, the same price requested by the viñateros.

⁵⁵Artificial conflicts were also created between the newspapers and the people selling them, with the purpose of paralyzing their distribution. On several occasions the windows of Los Andes were the targets of politically-motivated vandals.

problems grew more troublesome for him. This was noticeable in the answers he gave to a correspondent from La Nación in November 1919, a time at which he was pressed by issues threatening his survival as governor of Mendoza. In a "David versus Goliath" fashion, he complained that he had been a victim of the big press--meaning La Prensa and La Nación--of Congress, and even of some members of Yrigoyen's cabinet; all were trying to tarnish his government. He said that the accusations of his use of political repression against his opponents were all lies spread by the misinformed correspondents of the large newspapers. Questioned about the certainty of the rumors about a new intervention in Mendoza, he exclaimed: "You will see me dead before that!"--adding his confidence that the President would not consent to the intervention. "I trust him, I am his friend, I have known him for thirty years," said Lencinas, "but if Don Hipólito trips my horse, it will be different...."⁵⁶

The succession of conflicts crippled Lencinas' dreams for a progressive government. His own party was badly split

⁵⁶Interview with Ernesto Escobar Bavio, correspondent of La Nación, sent especially from Buenos Aires. La Nación, November 14, 1919. Yrigoyen tipped Lencinas' horse. A traditional but unimportant ceremony provided him with an official occasion to show his disapproval of Lencinas. It is customary in Argentina for the President to be the godfather--by proxy--of any seventh male child born in a family. As there was such a case in Mendoza in January 1920, Yrigoyen named the National Deputy Francisco Rubilar as his representative, instead of appointing Lencinas, as he had done before. El Intransigente, January 10, 1920.

into three factions, one entirely loyal to the governor, another under the leadership of Ricardo Báez, the President of the Senate, and the third under the guidance of National Deputy Francisco Rubilar, firmly loyal to Yrigoyen. The Lencinists were especially concerned that in view of the failing health of the governor, there should be a possibility for Báez to fill in Lencinas' position. Báez sided with the anti-Teisaire group, and this attitude seriously strained his relationship with Lencinas.

To prevent further political erosion, the group most closely supporting the governor, which controlled the party, ordered its reorganization. The committee in charge of the arrangements was headed by Carlos Washington Lencinas, and it immediately revoked the terms of all provincial party authorities. The Rubilarista faction, closer to Yrigoyen than to the governor, ignored the reorganization. This situation made more significant than ever the fundamental question whether the Radicals and Lencinists were becoming two separate political entities.

The excellent relationship of earlier times between Yrigoyen and Lencinas had been steadily declining. Disturbed by the wandering course of the Mendoza government, Yrigoyen asked the governor to see him in Buenos Aires, but Lencinas sent instead his Minister Puebla. The minister returned to Mendoza carrying a strong complaint from the President because of the arbitrary

manner in which Lencinas ruled the province. Yrigoyen had told Puebla that the situation of Mendoza was uncertain, and it had to be settled.⁵⁷ The governor, always zealous of his political independence, interpreted the presidential admonition as an intrusion into provincial affairs.

Consequently, on January 3, 1920, he sent a long letter to Yrigoyen, in terms clearly inferring the end of a long political friendship. To the presidential threat "to settle" his government, Lencinas replied that he was afraid of no one, including Yrigoyen. He reminded the President that he has been his loyal friend but warned him not to take any "Machiavellian action" against the government of Mendoza.⁵⁸

In thus defying the President, Lencinas may have had a presentment that his poor health would prevent any actual clash. At any rate, less than three weeks later the impetuous governor, long a victim of uremia, was dead.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Yrigoyen's opinions were referred in Lencinas' reply to the President. See footnote No. 58.

⁵⁸Senadores, 1929, I, 369-370. The nine-year old letter was read in the National Senate by Carlos Washington Lencinas. On that occasion the Yrigoyenist Senator Delfor del Valle recalled that Yrigoyen had told Puebla that he would not allow Lencinas to remain as governor one single day if the charges of corruption, and the beatings and deportation of political adversaries, were as bad as was feared. In order "to defend the austere and puritan reputation of Dr. José Néstor Lencinas," Carlos Washington replied to del Valle that Yrigoyen had never been a sincere friend of his father. Ibid., 538, 542.

⁵⁹When on January 18 his illness became critical, Yrigoyen sent three doctors from Buenos Aires, but the governor died on the 20th while they were en route to Mendoza. Lencinas' term would have expired on March 6, 1921.

The burial of the controversial governor was an imposing demonstration of the popular affection he enjoyed. The eulogies were filled with understandable panegyrics, as demanded by the occasion. But half a century later, some of those concepts have retained their historical substance. The provincial Senator Ricardo M. Encina, for example, said that with Lencinas had disappeared the last popular caudillo, who represented at the same time the strong personalism of the pre-constitutional era and the university education characteristic of a modern statesman. The Senator equated Lencinas' acumen with the instinctive feelings of Facundo, of knowing how to read men's hearts.⁶⁰ Los Andes, softened its criticism of Lencinas' errors by blaming the circle around him, and enhanced what it considered his major virtue: his unalterable love for the lower classes, to whose well-being he had devoted his life.⁶¹

The eulogies and criticisms with which the national press reacted had in common an almost unanimous recognition of the fact that Lencinas had been a ruler loved and revered by the popular sectors. La Razón, an evening Buenos Aires newspaper, declared that for his correligionarios he had been a father, a protector, and a friend; and that Lencinas had governed more with his heart than with his brain. "His

⁶⁰Los Andes, January 22, 1920.

⁶¹Ibid., January 21, 1920.

ascent to power," it added, "more than an evolution, symbolized a revolution."⁶²

But La Fronda, the arch-anti Yrigoyenist Buenos Aires daily founded in 1919, stated that Lencinas had governed above the constitution and the law and that his professed affection for the people was nothing but the exploitation "of the bad popular instincts, in a class war, and permanently flattering the lowest passions of the people," in what La Fronda called "an outrageous excess of caciquism."⁶³ Crítica said that Lencinas' death should be regretted as that of any human being, but it shouldn't be lamented because he had been such a dismal ruler. If Lencinas would have been a bit more talented, asserted Crítica, this aggressive Don Quixote of the interior --"tierra adentro"--would have been a great governor. But he failed because of his disdain for legal norms, his despotic selfishness, his queer mixture of culture and barbarism and his scorn for other people's rights.⁶⁴

With more sober words and more moderate discernment, La Nación viewed Lencinas as a ruler with authentically distinctive characteristics, who displayed a careless frankness, sometimes indelicate, other times naive and

⁶²La Razón, January 20, 1920, 5th edition.

⁶³La Fronda, January 21, 1920.

⁶⁴Crítica, January 21, 1920. Further appraising Lencinas' personality, this newspaper said that he was a "gaucho levantado en montonera electoral contra el poblado, del que aduló a lo peor de su pueblo, en perjuicio de las élites más calificadas."

picturesque, typical of the so-called men of the interior. La Nación credited him for the sincerity of his purposes and his good intentions, but pointed out his lack of proper judgment in selecting his collaborators.⁶⁵

Reflecting the chilled relationship which existed between the President and Lencinas, La Época stated that the historical appraisal of the Mendozan caudillo and his government should not be made by his contemporaries. But La Época admitted that the old Cuyano leader had been, politically speaking, a product of the people, because of the grass roots qualities of his personality and the faith with which the masses went hand in hand with him.⁶⁶

Perhaps nothing reveals better the extent to which Lencinas was a controversial figure in his times, than the attitude taken by the National Chamber of Deputies, of which he had been a member, the day following his death. When Manuel Cáceres, Radical Deputy from Santiago del Estero, proposed the customary homage of standing up in memory of Lencinas, the conservative Matías Sánchez Sorondo expressed his disapproval and requested that the decision of the chamber be manifested individually. To accept this homage, Sánchez Sorondo said, would be to disown his past criticisms and repudiation of Lencinas' rule. The Yrigoyenist Vergara

⁶⁵La Nación, January 21, 1920.

⁶⁶La Época, January 22, 1920.

insisted that the proposal was simply to pay respect to Lencinas as a former member of the body, irrespective of any judgment on his virtues and defects as a ruler of his province. Deputy Luis Agote reasserted the conservative opinion. He rejected paying homage to Lencinas because, in his words, "there are tombs which only deserve silence." The motion was turned down by 31 votes of the conservatives and Socialists, to 29 of the Radicals.⁶⁷

This was the only instance to that date in which a chamber of Congress refused to pay the traditional respect to one of his ex-members, when he died. But even if the motion had been approved, the fact that it was debated violated one of the time-honored parliamentary norms.⁶⁸

The death of the populist leader prevented a final showdown with Yrigoyen and ended a government which for the first time had confronted the provincial oligarchy head on. Lencinas was revered by his supporters as a virtuous man, and denounced by his adversaries as a despot and a

⁶⁷Diputados, 1919, VII, 215-220 (January, 1920).

⁶⁸Lencinas had been involved already in a similar incident, although not as serious as that mentioned above. A few days after the election held in Mendoza in January 1918, in which he was elected governor, Lencinas asked the National Chamber of Deputies to allow him to be absent for five sessions, alleging health reasons. As the request was denied by the majority of his peers, the chamber voted again for the second and third time, with identical results. There was no precedent for this extreme discourtesy, since these requests were traditionally approved regardless of the motives invoked. Diputados, 1917, VIII, 435 (January, 1918).

demagogue. He had been blessed and cursed with an intensity which during the period of the Radical national governments, was only surpassed by the admiration and hatred for Hipólito Yrigoyen at the national level, and for Federico Cantoni in the province of San Juan.

A general appraisal of Lencinas' performance--the objective of the next chapter--will measure the historical relevance of his leadership and the impact of the movement he had begotten.

CHAPTER V

LENCINAS AND LENCINISM. AN APPRAISAL

Lencinas, and Yrigoyen through his own political weight, were the pillars of Mendozaan Radicalism. The significance of their political philosophy and the circumstances they had to face in the government, are of utmost importance in understanding why they were the epitome of the Radical movement, and in discerning the causes that led to their estrangement.

Yrigoyen and Lencinas ascribed to themselves the high moral qualities demanded of true leaders. They became the political guides of the popular sectors, which led to their indisputable leadership in their spheres of influence. Likewise, their followers placed them on such a high level of civic integrity, that they were not only considered the leading heads of the party, but the "apostles" of the movement. Both attained their high public positions after many years of proclaiming from the opposition the shibboleths of "reparation," and rigidly defending its principles in the government.

The Mendozaan scholar Andrés Roig has stated that Yrigoyen provided the Radical movement with an ideology which made a dogma of the need for all citizens to participate in public affairs, through free suffrage. This awoke the faith of the people in themselves, assigning to the concept "people" a dimension unknown until then. Yrigoyen laid down the basis of

what Roig calls a solidarista neoliberalism, which intended to replace the exclusionist liberalism of the oligarchy.¹ Lencinas shared the political creed of Yrigoyen and embraced the tenets of social liberalism, seeking to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth within the capitalistic framework of provincial society.

Both Radical leaders demanded the same devotion and loyalty from their collaborators which they felt for the Causa. But this created a predicament which added a heavy burden to their governments. In 1917 the Socialist leader Juan B. Justo warned Yrigoyen about the obstacles ahead on this matter. He said that he believed in the virtues and honesty of the President, but he alone could not govern Argentina, and, unavoidably, he would be surrounded by men not as honest as he was.² The historical experience of the governments of Yrigoyen and Lencinas substantiated Justo's views. Both were accompanied by several mediocre collaborators and, in the case of the governor, by some individuals of questionable honesty.

Both men had to share the virulence of the opposition, which did not offer them any truce, and which many times intruded into their private lives. This served, nonetheless, to consolidate the ties between them and their followers; and in spite of the difficulties and frustrations they

¹Andrés Roig, Los krausistas argentinos (Puebla, México, 1969), 173, 235.

²Diputados, 1917, I, 338.

encountered in office, they maintained their political and personal prestige. Lencinas often travelled throughout the province, and his close relationship with his constituents laid the foundation for a loyalty which in time became his best political support. Yrigoyen, on the contrary, was more aloof than Lencinas--a fact which makes more remarkable the dimension of Yrigoyen's leadership.³

Yrigoyen and Lencinas were introvert personalities. Perhaps the years they spent as active conspirators impressed upon their characters a sense of reserve and confidentiality. Yrigoyen had a calm temperament, less impassioned than that of the Mendozan leader. But both maintained an uncompromising stand on what they regarded as the basic principles of the party. Yrigoyen's statements on this matter could have been signed by Lencinas without hesitation, and vice versa.

The different attitudes taken by Yrigoyen and Lencinas in government were imposed, to a large degree, by their dissimilar levels and the circumstances in which they performed. One author claims that Yrigoyen relinquished his ideals for political reform from the moment he became President, for in spite of having "all the power in his

³In the words of one of his opponents, Yrigoyen was the exceptional case "del tribuno mudo, del apóstol sin doctrina, de la elocuencia sin palabras." Julio A. Costa, El presidente. Hombres y partido (Buenos Aires, 1913), p. 105.

hands," he allowed the Régimen to survive.⁴ This interpretation--shared by other authors--does not resist historical scrutiny. Yrigoyen did not have all the power in his hands; in fact, not even the full control of his own Radical Party. He might have erred in his tactical political approach to the Régimen, but he was hampered by a society loath to accept political reform, especially when it was being implemented by unorthodox constitutional means.

Lencinas could control the province with a heavy hand and abuse legal norms if he chose, not only because he enjoyed wide support within the province, but also because of the benevolence of the national executive. Yrigoyen, on the other hand, did not have the protection of a higher authority as a recourse to solve his problems, but instead saw his actions continuously blocked by powerful legal and political barriers.

These men were friends who respected each other. However, they had to break up their friendship when both persisted in their intransigent viewpoints, zealous in matters they thought belonged to their own jurisdiction. As they were leaders with a profound sense of authority, they reached a point beyond which they were unable to conciliate their positions. Of the two leaders, perhaps Lencinas should have been more flexible, in view of the implications his policies had for the federal government.

⁴Olguín, Lencinas, pp. 307-309.

But the Mendozan caudillo preferred to sever his friendship with Yrigoyen rather than compromise on issues in a way he regarded as unacceptable.

By placing themselves on a level above ordinary rulers and attributing to their leadership the highest moral value, Yrigoyen and Lencinas somewhat removed themselves from the social reality in which they had to experience their ideals. It was neither possible to transform overnight the political customs of the people, nor to eliminate in a short time the imbalances and privileges which over the decades helped to create--from the social and economic viewpoint--two very dissimilar societies within the province.

The two Radical leaders viewed the role of the party as one of exceptional nature, destined to regenerate Argentine political life; and saw themselves as the ones chosen to carry out this high purpose. This stern disposition of mind might explain why the Lencinists felt that their most bitter opponents were pathological, as reflected, for example, in their attitude toward Delfín Álvarez: only a man out of his senses could have opposed their good government.

If according to their own evaluation only the Radicals embodied all the civic virtues, then by extension, they were the only men of principle and the only ones who deserved to govern. Those who left the party, because of disagreement with the government, or dissented from the Lencinist rule, were considered traitors. This was precisely, Lencinas' reaction when Interventor de Veyga was trying, in Buenos

Aires, to gain presidential backing for his decisions. Lencinas believed that the real interest of de Veyga was to harm him, by opening a crack in his old friendship with the President. In Lencinas' eyes this action was tantamount to treason.

In another situation, but one in which Lencinas took a similarly inflexible stand, he expressed his disbelief when some tramway operators who were on strike had been harassing the policemen placed in all vehicles to insure normal service. Lencinas considered the behavior of the workers as being directed against him, and he found it incomprehensible. He could not believe, he said, that the workers could attack a police force who respected them. Instead, they were creating difficulties for a government "well known for his emotional solidarity with the people." Lencinas concluded that those confronting the government were only provokers, alien to the real interests of the workingmen.⁵

Lencinas felt a strong self-confidence in his political power. He said of the conservatives that he alone could have won the elections against them all.⁶ This expression of paternalistic superiority reveals Lencinas' self-assurance of being the leader of the majority of the people of Mendoza. The governor portrayed himself in the

⁵Unión Cívica Radical, El Comité Departamental, p. 13.

⁶La Nación, November 14, 1919.

provincial arena as the representative of good against evil. "I have fought for thirty years against the group who possessed this province," he said, "and I'll always defeat them!" He professed the highest faith in his aims and defended his actions obstinately. This is why he left no room for compromising in the serious conflicts in which he was involved. The only political alternative in the province was to be with him or against him. But to rout him out, he said, was impossible, even by killing him, as he told a porteño correspondent: "If I am protected, I do not know by whom, but someone protects me, a mysterious force!"⁷

Lencinas was convinced that his political decisions were rational and totally justified. Therefore, he reacted harshly against his critics, especially when they questioned his intentions. When he refuted the accusations of police harassment of former Deputy Governor Álvarez, Lencinas wrote to Yrigoyen as if, instead of being a ruler at the service of the law, he were the patrón of the province: "...I would be severe in punishing those who in this way attempt to cast shadows over the good faith and correctness of my government."⁸

Few Radical leaders of his time commanded such admiration from their followers as did Lencinas. For his longings in favor of social justice, he was compared with

⁷Ibid.

⁸La Prensa, December 5, 1918.

the Uruguayan statesman José Batlle y Ordóñez.⁹ Lencinas himself felt elated when he compared some of his accomplishments and decisions with those of the statesmen from countries more advanced than Argentina.

Lencinism proclaimed itself to be a movement authentically representative of the people. According to this viewpoint, the term "people" embraced a strong political and social connotation: the underdogs, the chusma de alpargata, the descamisados, that is, the lower classes, in opposition to the oligarchs, the landowners, the bodegueros and the social elite. As the people had been exploited by an unjust political and economic system, Lencinism--more than national Radicalism--considered itself the liberating movement which through free suffrage and social action would eliminate the inequities of provincial society. Moreover, within the political context, the expression "people" conveyed the particular notion that it was unpolluted by the greediness of the superior classes.

"People" then, represented a pure and noble human segment, which even erring was not at fault, because the humble sectors could make mistakes out of ignorance, but

⁹Sometimes the tribute of praise approached hyperbolic symbolism, as when it was said of him that: "Parece una resurrección del héroe de Cervantes, pero esta vez salido de las páginas de la fábula para repetir en la vida real las aventuras quijotesacas en defensa de los desvalidos, de los humildes, de los que lloran sus infortunios en el tugurio sin pan ni calor, y sus desesperanzas en las tinieblas de su noche moral." Homenaje de la Municipalidad de la Capital al Doctor José Néstor Lencinas (Mendoza, 1928), p. 6 From a decree naming a street in the provincial capital after Lencinas.

not through bad faith. This provided the term "people" with an aura of infallibility. If any action could be justified in the name of the people, it received its legitimacy regardless of the intrinsic merits of the issue itself. Just because they had been traditionally exploited by the upper groups, "people" meant virtue; and the exploiters became not mere adversaries, but anti-people. To be one of them was a negative condition, and thus in the mind of the popular segments the issues lost their normal complexities, and were transformed into simpler situations in which the alternative was to be for or against the people.¹⁰

The relevance of that term derived from the political transformation provoked by the Saenz Peña Law in Argentine civic life. But in Mendoza, under Lencinas, its social connotation was enhanced, because moving beyond Yrigoyen's goals, the Mendozan caudillo attempted a social transformation in which the symbolic values of the term "people" surpassed the restrictive meaning of Radical regeneration.

A Mendozan sociologist asserted that the liaison between a leader and the masses is based on a personal relationship, since the popular sectors are involved in primary interactions, where the functional takes a

¹⁰The folkloric fervor for this interpretation of the word "people" has increased in Argentina through the years. In this topic, for example, Olguín refers to the election held in Mendoza on June 22, 1919, as a coalition of conservatives and Radical Intransigents "que se volvieron a coaligar en la lucha contra el pueblo [Lencinism] ." Lencinas, p. 494.

secondary importance. This process develops the most favorable conditions for the ascent of a caudillo, because besides the intrinsic qualities required to become one, there exists a large social group in need of a leader.¹¹ For Lencinas' followers his ascent to power represented the achievement of their political freedom. "The day has finally arrived,"--stated "One of alpargata," in La Montaña, celebrating the Radical electoral success of January 1918--for those "without an illustrious name but with noble feelings, serving unselfishly the needs of the people."¹²

¹¹Luis Campoy contends that the creole group in Argentina has permanently created the ascendancy of new popular leaders. Once the masses identified with the caudillo, they remained most loyal to him, even after the caudillos die, as was the case of Lencinas; or after they escaped, as happened with Rosas and Juan D. Perón. "Grupo cultural criollo bajo," Investigaciones en Sociología (Mendoza), IV (January-June, 1965), 49-51.

¹²La Montaña, April 20, 1918. "Uno de alpargata" was the pen name of Juan Draghi Lucero, then a young and fervent Lencinist, who years later became a distinguished local historian. In the Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Mendoza are preserved many letters written to José Néstor Lencinas by humble people who, the best they could, requested a favor from the governor, to solve a personal problem or a petty political dispute. The tone of these letters indicates that Lencinas commanded the highest respect and confidence as an arbiter, and that loyalty to the party was also a matter of fundamental importance. The following excerpts are typical examples: "Teniendo en cuenta que nosotros como radicales hemos trabajado mucho para obtener el escito de su triunfo, decearía saber si su excelencia podría hacer algo para que un señor que me deve una cuenta hace cuatro años me pagara, por que yo soy pobre y con nueveijos...." (May 10, 1918); "...por haber sido uno de los que se sacrificaron luchando por la noble causa del Partido Radical." (November 4, 1918); "...decirme cuando podré ablar a S.E. aunque tenga que hirme de a pies de esta no me importa." (November 20, 1918). Another man was asking for a free railroad ticket to San Juan, if not, he asked Lencinas "...me preste el dinero necesario, que yo en pudiendolo haré la devolución." (November, 1918). Carpeta 25-I. Epoca independiente.

At the same time, the political ascent of the common man and the agitation of the social question intensified the polarization of Mendoza's societal groups. On the one hand was the oligarchy; on the other, the sectors with lesser income, the "people." The Lencinist literature voiced the resentment of the lower classes. La Montaña assailed the "señores del régimen" that ignoring "Juan Pueblo" had been contented with just luring the people with wine on election day.¹³ On the opposite side, the propertied elements expressed their indignation at the socio-political changes experienced in the society through Lencinas' actions in favor of the workingmen. Before the Radicals came to power, La Opinión lamented, the policy of the rulers was to gain the favor of the patrón, of the owners, of those who "handled" workers and, therefore, had the ballots in their hands. Now, it said, the situation was just the opposite, because the workers were taught to hate the patrón and were incited to be undisciplined, and even to declare strikes.¹⁴

Those supporting Lencinas believed that the decisions he took on important issues were indicative of his strong character and will power. But those who judged him from the opposition denied him these qualities and asserted that he was simply arrogant; that Lencinas' firmness was not such,

¹³La Montaña, April 19, 1918.

¹⁴La Opinión, March 11, 1919.

but mere stubbornness denoting an "alarming disturbance of his moral equilibrium."¹⁵ The fact was that his political and personal preeminence was such that as stated in a contemporary comment, "Lencinas is the whole party: he speaks in its name, and he handles its business at the same time that he does that of the province, absorbing all the functions."¹⁶

The Radical leader was closely identified with the common man, upon whom he exerted an extraordinary influence. Because of Lencinas' sympathetic concern for the lower class, the conservatives reflected upon him the same negative image they had of those popular segments, largely illiterate and socially inferior. On the same wavelength of criticism, an interested observer remarked that Lencinas "impressed one as a barbarian, capable of any violent action,"¹⁷ and another stigmatized him as "the caudillo of the illiterate masses."¹⁸

One of the criticisms most often leveled against Lencinas was his strong reliance on the forces of the

¹⁵La Prensa, December 8, 1918.

¹⁶Ibid., April 19, 1919. Upon Lencinas fell the accusations of being a "Soviet mendocino," a Maximalist; and his policies were compared with those applied in Russia, aimed at destroying the capitalist regime. But neither Lencinas' ideas nor actions justified these charges.

¹⁷Gálvez, Vida de Hipólito Yrigoyen, p. 416.

¹⁸Mariano G. Bosch, Historia del Partido Radical (Buenos Aires, 1931), p. 192.

comité. Cruz Vera, the President of the Partido Autonomista, and a partisan viewer, said that the rank and file of the administration was made of "elements of the comité, incompetent, unethical and most of them illiterate."¹⁹ Regardless of the possible overtones of Lencinophobia in this statement, the fact was that the Radicals engaged in widespread political patronage which accentuated the traditional shortcomings of the provincial bureaucracy: administrative disorder, slowness, and dependence on some kind of influence.

Those more fiercely opposed to the Lencinists claimed that the masses had been made fanatical by propaganda, so they would irrationally follow their idol. For them, Lencinism was just a mass of misguided men, "ragged, drunk, starving, and with their feet scarcely covered by humble alpargatas,"²⁰ or just "illiterates and drunks."²¹ Lencinas' more mordacious contemporary critics placed a significant weight on the more aggressive and disruptive elements of the lower class, which massively supported Lencinism, and often compared them with the chusma that applauded Rosas in the 1840's.²²

¹⁹La Nación, October 27, 1919.

²⁰La Tarde, September 24, 1919.

²¹Ibid., July 28, 1919.

²²Sharing the conservative viewpoint, the Anarchists of Mendoza also joined the anti-Lencinist choir, and

The Radicals constantly and intensively disseminated their own propaganda. Thousands of Lencinas' pictures covered the walls of the buildings of the capital, and even the municipal vehicles; and in the most distant ranchos, or mean dwellings, of the province, the peasants exhibited with pride the picture of the "gaucho Lencinas," also popularly known among his supporters as "el viejito de la buena suerte." This was sincere popular veneration, but doubtless, it had been amply stimulated by a vigorous and persuasive propaganda by the Lencinists.

A team of journalists from La Voz del Interior, a well-known newspaper of the city of Córdoba, which was sympathetic toward the Radicals, was sent to Mendoza at the end of 1919 to analyze the provincial situation. They reported that the Lencinists were very active, with their rallies well-attended and preceded by intensive propaganda. They also confirmed the diligent participation of provincial employees in the activities of the Radical Party. In their long report, the newsmen of Córdoba emphasized the unequivocal popularity of Lencinas, but they felt that the propaganda of the party was excessively personalist. They observed that because such

referred to the Radical government as one of "caudillaje, matonería y barbarie." Pensamiento Nuevo (Mendoza), January 1, 1920. A by-weekly publication of the Anarchists of Mendoza. The Lencinist leaders were also criticized for merely paying lip service to their rejection of "oligarchical" way of living. While they flattered the poor, they were dressed by the best tailors of Buenos Aires; and while they shouted ";viva la alpargata!" their footwear was made of patent leather or other refined foreign materials. El Intransigente, December 30, 1919.

propaganda centered wholly around Lencinas, it was contrary to the impersonal spirit upon which Radicalism was founded, and a threat to the progress and cohesion of the party.²³

In spite of the popular support for Lencinism, personal ambitions and internal disputes impaired its possibilities of governing efficiently. It had to endure the displacement of important assistants of the governor, such as Francisco Muñiz, as manager of the Provincial Bank, and Emilio Quellet, as Police Commissioner; the acerbity of old timers like Ricardo Báez and Francisco Rubilar, and their old political friends, against Teisaire; and the desertion from the party of men like Jesús Romero and Antenor Pereyra, who had accompanied Lencinas during the 1905 revolution and the ensuing exile in Chile.

It is generally contended that the responsibility for Lencinas' mistakes belongs, to a large extent, to his inner circle of collaborators, in which Teisaire appears to have been the devil himself. In fact, his negative influence eventually cast a long shadow on the prestige of the governor. However, the general acceptance of this interpretation begs the question. Taking into consideration his personal qualities and commanding authority, how could Lencinas have been so dominated by a few politicians of

²³Los Andes, December 28, 1919. The newsmen from Córdoba cited as examples the incessant proclamation of Lencinas as the supreme and only leader of Mendoza Radicalism; the plethora of worship for the trilogy "Alem, Yrigoyen, Lencinas"; and the exaggerated repetition of the popular expression, "¡Viva el gaucho Lencinas!"

lesser stature? Did Lencinas know exactly what was going on in his government? Did he know how to appraise men as well as the majority contended? Whatever the answer might be, it would hardly favor Lencinas' image in this matter. Instead, it would cast a doubt over the generalized interpretation that he controlled the government with a strong hand but, at the same time, was unaware that the people around him, and especially Teisaire, were the real masters of the show, running it from backstage.

Political principles and practices under Lencinism followed divergent lines on many occasions. The Radicals engaged in political favoritism of the same nature that they had criticized before in the governments of the oligarchy. A decree of July 1918, for example, forbade public employees to recommend any person for a provincial job, under the penalty of losing their own jobs after the second violation. Regardless of its good intentions, this decree was contrary to the kind of favoritism inherent in the human condition, and essential at that time to the building of the electoral clientele. The fact was that the Radicals--as well as the conservatives when they were in power--implemented very generously the policy of political patronage.

The Lencinists justified many of their actions, like not holding elections for municipal and water authorities, by their belief that their stand was coherent with the

principles of Radical political regeneration and in observance of the provincial constitution. Did Lencinas apply a double standard on these occasions? In reality, the Lencinists made twisted interpretations of the constitutional rules in order to fit their political purposes. But when the conservatives were in power and distorted the laws, the Radicals had claimed that it had been done to perpetuate the oligarchical power of a minority. From the practical viewpoint, and setting aside their avowed intentions, the Lencinist conduct produced the same negative effect as the conservative policy of older times. To manipulate elections for municipal and water authorities in order to impose specific candidates, or not to hold them to avoid the risk of losing power, were both procedures which did not honor the rulers who indulged them.

The Lencinists proudly waved the flag of their concern for the underprivileged, and the enactment of legislation which brought social justice for the forgotten majority. But in spite of the tremendous strides their actions represented--labeled "conquests sans-culotte style" by an unsympathetic newspaper--they senselessly delayed the payment of teachers' and other public servants' wages.²⁴

²⁴Los Andes, September 13, 1919. The magnitude of the financial plight affecting them is given by the growing number of salaries discounted at the Banco de Préstamos y Ahorros, a provincial public institution:

Ironically, when the Radicals requested federal intervention from Yrigoyen in May 1917, one of their complaints was that the Mendoza government kept the teachers' salaries in arrears.²⁵

The Judicial Power fell victim under Lencinism of the legal institution called Judiciary Review Board--created for self-serving purposes by the conservatives when they were in power. Thus, as it was under the Régimen, party adherence continued to be an essential requisite for an appointment to the Judiciary.

In like manner, a significant gap existed between the promises for better elementary education and the limitations and conflicts which plagued the system. The provincial schools decreased both in number and quality; and when the teachers raised their protest on well-founded grievances, they were labeled subversives by the government, and their movement harshly dealt with by the police.

It was precisely the police who played a major role in sustaining the sometimes sever policies of the Executive. The Lencinas administration did not improve the traditional

Wages and Salaries	1917		1918	
	Number	\$	Number	\$
Public personnel	1,606	237,300	1,872	261,300
Teachers	158	20,300	1,669	191,300

Ibid., July 9, 1919. Thus, in order to get cash, the teachers and other employees paid interest for a loan, or advance, of the salary they have already earned, but which was paid by the province with a promisory note.

²⁵Yrigoyen, Pueblo y gobierno, Vol. II., Part I, p. 326.

behavior of this institution. The police had been in the past a political arm of the government, and continued to be so under the Radicals. The people were aware of their arbitrary means; and they especially feared them in the rural areas, reflecting in this way the apprehensions of the humble people about the symbols of authority.²⁶

The deportation of newsmen and workers and the authoritarian handling of labor conflicts reaffirmed the undisguised political role of the police. It was more evident during the electoral campaigns, when the heavy hand of the uniformed authority set the climate by intimidating the opponents, or remaining passively at the sidelines when Lencinist groups provoked the people rallying for their adversaries.

The government justified the police behavior as a necessity to counteract the excesses in which all political groups were engaged. "Savage behavior is not a monopoly of ruthless policemen," asserted José E. Aguilar, a high-ranking official in Lencinas' government, "but it is also found in the uncontrolled multitudes," subscribing to the theory that strong governments were not a creation of fate

²⁶A report of a political delegate of the Department Santa Rosa to Interventor Loza, after the January 1918 election, pointed out this characteristic of the rural inhabitants, "humble people that, facing the specter of hunger, accept the job they are given, aware of the sacrifices ahead, because they curse the patrón who is unjust and arbitrary, and believe that most of the time the authority is an accomplice of the abuses committed against them." Archivo Histórico de Mendoza, Carpeta No. 25 H, Epoca Independiente.

but a consequence of the characteristics of the people.²⁷ Certainly, in dissonance with the customary provincial tranquillity, it was common for an adult male to carry a weapon. The gun was not only a source of personal protection, but for the most aggressive individuals it was also a symbol of political machismo. Regardless of the extent to which the police behavior was justifiable, its apparatus served the purposes of the Lencinists, as in previous governments it had served the interests of the Régimen. In this regard, Lencinism proved to be no different from the conservatives.

Early in the century, a student of Argentine society asserted that the creole anarchy and its symbol, caudillismo, were coherent characteristics of the Argentine historical complexion.²⁸ Almost fifteen years later, Los Andes analyzed the social reality of Mendoza and Argentina and shared Ayarragaray's viewpoint. This newspaper believed that the transition between electoral methods so different as those applied before and after 1912, had been too abrupt to be properly grasped by the citizen at the bottom of the social structure. The common man was unable to appraise the real impact of the Saenz Peña Law and the suddenly acquired significance of his ballot. The law had moved on paper farther and faster than the political customs. The masses

²⁷La Nación, November 20, 1919.

²⁸Lucas Ayarragaray, La anarquía argentina (Buenos Aires, 1905), p. 135.

were then free from frauds and violence when casting their votes, but within them there still subsisted the wicked, unreformed political attitudes of the past.²⁹

On the positive side, Lencinas initiated a process of socio-economic changes which paved the way for evolution toward a more just society. But those changes did not alter or destroy the traditional framework of the provincial economy. One of Lencinas' biographers contends that Lencinism sapped the foundations of political privilege and deeply modified the social and economic structure of Mendoza. The revolutionary spirit of that movement, he said, led them to cut up root and branch of the oligarchy, at all its sources of power.³⁰ This interpretation appears to be inspired more by populist fervor than by the Mendozaan reality. Lencinas did bring a new class consciousness to the lower segments, and enacted social benefits which would have been unattainable under an oligarchical government. The Lencinists romanticized the idea of an equalitarian society, and when they gained political power, materialized their aspirations by implementing novel social legislation without disturbing the economic structure of the propertied class. At no time did they advocate outright collectivization or expropriation of private property. Lencinism was a political

²⁹Los Andes, April 21, 1919.

³⁰Olguín, Lencinas, pp. 307-309.

and social revaluation of the lower classes, in line with its liberal-solidarista philosophy, but it did not attempt to find a substitute for the capitalistic basis of the society.

Lencinas' policy in regard to the wine industry was firmly oriented to curtail the too-powerful interests of the large bodegueros. The governor was committed to the principle that it was a fundamental duty of the government to regulate the basic source of provincial wealth, in order to ensure its normal development by avoiding the chaos of the price structure, the maladies of overproduction, and to correct the disproportionate power of the large industrialists. His intervention in the Cooperativa Vitivinícola in March 1918, as well as the legislation enacted in November 1919, attest to the seriousness and determination with which Lencinas was resolved to block the unchallenged influence of the industrial sector in provincial affairs. Traditionally, the large bodegueros had been politically associated with the conservatives, and their liaison became more cohesive when they confronted a Radical government. Lencinas deserves full credit for the political courage and the forthright determination with which he pursued the defense of important sectors who had always been at the mercy of the bodegueros.

This struggle has been condensed in a populist expression, "alpargatas versus casks--bordalesas," which

conveys a strong political message of good versus evil.³¹ But from a broader viewpoint, in which all the interests involved were part of a complex economic problem which could not be solved by simply relying on a "black versus white" interpretation, Lencinas' policy proved to be beneficial for the whole industry. The bodegueros had to pay better salaries, provide better working conditions, and compensate the viñateros with a fair price. In contrast with the free rein the bodegueros enjoyed before Lencinas, the new rules imposed upon them specific obligations. However, they were not crippled in their activities, and the major problems affecting the industry were not caused by the government's decisions. Time has proven Lencinas' right in his belief that the government should establish a minimum price for grapes before harvest begins. Today, with a wine industry far more orderly than that of 1919, the government continues determining each year the minimum price for the product.

Summing up this evaluation, it can be stated that from the political viewpoint, time has granted historical credence to the evaluation made by Los Andes the day after Lencinas' death. It affirmed that his crusade for political regeneration, waged relentlessly during long years in the opposition, surpassed whatever he accomplished in the government.³² From the social viewpoint, on the contrary,

³¹Ibid., p. 310.

³²Los Andes, January 21, 1920.

it was in his first year in office that Lencinas achieved a landmark by becoming the pioneer social legislator of his time. But beyond the benefits derived from the laws, it was even more important to have given the masses dignity and self-confidence. With leaders like Lencinas they began their long way toward the accomplishment of their most significant "silent victory"--in the expression of Sergio Bagú³³--, the self-recognition of their status in the society. A hard-fought social recognition which was not fully achieved in Mendoza, or anywhere else in Argentina, until the 1940's.

Neither savior nor tyrant, Lencinas fought for the principles of political reform more as a caudillo than a statesman; and he gave hope to the traditionally forgotten sectors of Mendozan society. A study of his performance as leader and reformer will necessarily show the peaks and valleys of his successes and failures. But in spite of his numerous shortcomings, Lencinas emerges with a historically enhanced image. The political, social, and economic goals of Mendozan Radicalism assumed a very distinctive orientation in Lencinas' hands. His strongly personalized rule affected provincial political life from its roots on up; his social innovations opened a new era of expectations for the common man; and his economic aspirations favored a social liberalism which proved easier to outline on paper than to implement in action.

³³Sergio Bagú, La sociedad de masas en su historia (Córdoba, 1961), p. 70.

C H A P T E R VI
THE SECOND LENCINIST EXPERIENCE.
ITS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PHASES

The death of the Mendozan caudillo ended a cycle of populist government, but its impact upon the masses paved the way for the continuation of Lencinism well into the 1920's. This political force found a new leader in the late caudillo's son, Carlos Washington, who on assuming command of the party placed it under the spiritual guidance of his father. Under the young Lencinas, the movement known as Lencinism would gain a stature of its own as a regional force, while simultaneously becoming a branch of the anti-Personalist faction of the Radical Party.

Carlos Washington's historical significance rests in the depth of his popularity as provincial caudillo, and in the role he played in the agitated national politics during Yrigoyen's short-lived second presidential term. This chapter and the next will focus on the relevance of Carlos Washington Lencinas as a provincial populist leader, and his endeavors and accomplishments as such.

The death of José Néstor Lencinas was succeeded by a tremendous scramble for power within the divided Radical movement. Ricardo Báez, the acting chairman of the Senate and a former protege of the old Lencinas, succeeded to the governorship inasmuch as the post of deputy governor was

vacant. Báez was an old Radical, a companion of Lencinas since the early days when Radicalism was founded in Mendoza, but he had been somewhat at odds with the former governor because of the recent party disputes.

Although Báez was not endowed with statesmanlike qualities, he was known for his forthright honesty. He reshuffled the administration and reported about alleged anomalies which had taken place during Lencinas' government. Moreover, he stated that the provincial personnel was overstaffed and plagued with incompetents.¹ Báez' actions led to an open confrontation with the Radicals loyal to José Néstor Lencinas who now were entrusting the leadership of the party to Carlos Washington.²

The provincial constitution prescribed that a new election for governor should be called within thirty days, and accordingly, Báez announced the date of April 4, 1920. But it soon became apparent that Báez wished to

¹Provincia de Mendoza, Memoria administrativa de los cuatro meses del gobierno del Sr. Ricardo Báez (Mendoza, 1920), pp. 18, 26.

²On March 7, 1920, during Báez' rule, the election for National Deputies took place. This contest was held at a time when the faction-ridden Radicals were entangled trying to assert their supremacy within the party. The electoral returns were: UCR (pro-Yrigoyenist, candidates: Francisco Rubilar and Emilio Quellet) 12,833 votes; UCR (Lencinist, candidate: Carlos Washington Lencinas) 7,319; Socialists 2,791; Conservatives 2,554. Rubilar, Quellet and Lencinas were elected. La Prensa, March 13, 1920.

remain as governor beyond the time limit determined by the constitution. He began an intensive propaganda campaign, praising his own leadership and seeking support from the business and industrial sectors. Alleging the need to maintain social order, Báez postponed the election until July 4. This action touched off a constitutional conflict that would end only when the central government again placed Mendoza under its authority.

Báez had rightfully assumed office, since he was president of the Senate at Lencinas' death. But his term as Senator would end on May 31, 1920, which meant that after that day he would automatically cease as governor. The postponement of the election until July revealed that Báez intended to continue in office beyond May 31. Sensing the approaching storm, Báez closed the legislature on May 18, and requested federal intervention as the only means to hold a new clean electoral contest.

The president of the provincial Supreme Court, however, announced in a message to the Ministry of the Interior, that as of midnight of May 31 he would assume charge of the government, in accordance with the constitution; and that he would then request the appointment of a federal commissioner. But Báez stated that he would refuse to deliver the government to the Supreme Court. In Buenos Aires, national deputies from Mendoza also asked for intervention from the Federal

Government. Thus, although everyone petitioned according to his own convenience, all the sectors demanded that Buenos Aires decide how to settle Mendoza's political quandary. In fact, the provincial constitution provided the means to restore political life to normalcy, but local, personal rivalries demonstrated one more time that federalism, the cherished symbol of provincial autonomy, was not such a vital principle for the men of the interior. Judging these self-seeking requests for the arbitration of Buenos Aires, La Prensa observed that they indicated "a degeneration of democratic life and an atrophy of civic virtues."³

Buenos Aires was again master of the Mendoza situation when Congress enacted in August 1920 the intervention law. It stated that the federal commissioner should comply with the constitution and laws of Mendoza. This provision was important because, according to the provincial charter, elections for governor should be held on the first Sunday of January 1921.

Yrigoyen appointed Eudoro Vargas Gómez, a Radical leader from the province of Corrientes, to serve as commissioner. His rule had two salient characteristics: he carried out intensive negotiations trying to unite the Radical factions, and he seriously neglected the

³Ibid., June 13, 1920.

administrative business of the province. The difficult and thorny negotiations held in Mendoza and Buenos Aires to forge Radical unity are indicated by the length of the intervention. Whereas Commissioner Loza, who had arrived in Mendoza in November 1917, stayed in power less than four months; and de Veyga and Araya interventions lasted a bit more than seven months, Vargas Gómez ruled Mendoza until early February 1922, that is, for seventeen months.

The achievement of Radical unification was especially important not only to ensure the preeminence of the party in the province, but also to strengthen it for the coming presidential election. As the chances of the Radicals getting the governorship were excellent, the struggle over the candidacies became a major stumbling block in solidifying the party. The repeated failures to achieve the desired unity forced the commissioner twice to postpone the elections. Los Andes summed up the intra-partisan fight by asserting that "there is not a single Radical who looks at the situation with the same viewpoint."⁴

As the elections approached, a self-labeled "unionist" sector proclaimed Rufino Ortega, a loyal supporter of Yrigoyen, its candidate for governor. At the

⁴Los Andes, May 19, 1921. As an indication of the prevailing intolerance, National Deputy Emilio Quellet was assassinated over political differences.

same time, another Radical convention chose Carlos Washington Lencinas as its candidate. The Lencinists tried to enhance their position by appealing to the popularized expression "El muerto manda," symbolizing that José Néstor Lencinas was guiding them and commanding that the future of the movement be placed in his son's hands. Since Lencinas was the candidate who could muster the largest electoral support, Ortega's candidacy was withdrawn. Lencinas was already a household name with a considerable following. But Carlos Washington's popularity was not only an inherited one. He had personal qualities for leading the Radicals, now officially transformed into the Unión Cívica Radical Lencinista.

Carlos Washington had been learning politics as a companion to his father ever since his return to Mendoza in 1913, as a brand new lawyer graduated from the University of Buenos Aires. Born in Department Rivadavia on November 13, 1888, he was one of the youngest political figures of the province, especially when compared with the leading politicians of the times. However, he had already acquired substantial political experience by serving in responsible positions within the party, and as provincial deputy from 1917 to 1920. He had also been part of the bureaucratic machine during his father's governorship, serving as attorney for the Provincial Bank and the School Board, and as a member of the Irrigation Council. In 1920 he had been elected National Deputy, in the first electoral

contest held after his father's death.⁵

To assure success in the forthcoming election, the Lencinists sought to balance the popular image of Carlos Washington with a candidate for deputy governor agreeable to the moderate sectors. Because of the arbitrariness of José Néstor Lencinas when he was in office, the reputation of Lencinism had been stained in the eyes of the non-Lencinist electorate. Hence, it was important for Carlos Washington to appeal to the different sectors and especially to dispel the charges of "Bolsheviks" applied to them by the conservatives. He was able to recruit the support of Bautista Gargantini, Jr., son of one of the largest bodegueros of Mendoza. In this way the ticket presented a facade more palatable to those less responsive toward Lencinism.⁶

The Lencinist program as approved by the party convention expressed moderate goals, with emphasis on

⁵As a National Deputy, Carlos Washington's performance was as inconspicuous as that of his father. He introduced only two pieces of legislation, one of them a bill that his father had unsuccessfully sponsored in 1916 for a national wine industry statute.

⁶Lencinas and Gargantini received the acquiescence of Buenos Aires, but in Mendoza the other Radical sectors were reluctant to endorse them openly. Gargantini had joined the Radicals, but later he sided with the dissidents who formed the Intransigent Radical Party in 1918, when José Néstor Lencinas purged Delfín Álvarez from the deputy governorship. José Hipólito Lencinas recalls that Carlos Washington exhorted Gargantini: "acompañeme por una corazonada." Personal interview, Mendoza, June 22, 1972.

social services and the efficiency of the bureaucracy. The principal points of the program referred to granting a pension for the aged, the spread of health services throughout the province, improvement of the financial system by transforming the Provincial Bank into a semi-private one, self-government for the municipalities, reasonable prices for grapes and wine, irrigation works, modernization of the school system, and normalization of the financial conditions of the school teachers.⁷

The conservatives, adopting a new party name, Partido Liberal, to replace that of Partido Autonomista, selected Mario Arenas and José V. Auriol as their candidates in October 1921. A party statement characterized the differences between the Liberals and the Lencinists in class terms. In the Liberal Party, it said, were to be found the majority of the provincial leaders, the most capable, the most traditional, and those with the highest interests to protect. In contrast, the statement viewed the Lencinists as men who in order to get votes "flatter the people, teach hatred for the patrón, and abusing their [the people's] ignorance, misguide them to believe that they had the right to take property without paying for it."⁸

⁷La Prensa, July 31, 1921.

⁸Los Andes, November 10, 1921.

Since the conservatives had limited hopes for success, they used the Mendozaan electoral confrontation chiefly as a platform from which to attack Yrigoyen. At the party convention in Mendoza, Matías Sánchez Sorondo sounded this note when he exclaimed: "...for the salvation of our fatherland, the least I can say is: Delenda Yrigoyen! Let us destroy Yrigoyen and his Radical government!"⁹

The election held on Sunday, December 18, 1921 confirmed the overwhelming popularity of Lencinas, despite the opposition of other Radical factions and the lukewarm attitude of the national leadership.¹⁰ Carlos Washington thus entered the governorship with a broad base of support, a support he did not hesitate to associate with his father. "Voting for me," he said, "my followers not only have thought of the 'gauchito' [little gaucho], as they call me, but of my father who made so many sacrifices for the Radical cause."¹¹

On February 4, 1922, Carlos Washington assumed the governorship of Mendoza. Only 33 years old, he received

⁹Ibid., October 17, 1921.

¹⁰The UCR Lencinista won in the capital and in every department by a wide margin. The total electoral returns were: UCR Lencinist 13,207 votes; Liberal Party 6,085; UCR (Tabanerista, another Radical faction) 5,083; and Socialist Party 1,905. La Prensa, December 28, 1921.

¹¹La Prensa, January 6, 1922. As soon as he was elected, Carlos Washington sent a congratulatory telegram to Yrigoyen, telling the President that the election returns had confirmed "your prestige as interpreter of the dearest aspirations of the people." Ibid., December 19, 1921.

that day expressions of the same warmth and solidarity from the common people that had been given his father four years before. The crowd broke the police lines and erupted into the government house, as if to symbolize the fact that the people were again in power.¹²

Lencinas' political success was rooted in the popularity he enjoyed among the masses. In fact, many contemporary observers believe that he had greater appeal among the humble than his father. His personal qualities, especially his frank and open manner, contributed to their devotion. But Lencinas was a practical politician who worked hard to win their support. Taking advantage of the swift development of the automobile, he travelled tirelessly throughout the province, carefully organizing his political tours to reach every possible corner. He disciplined his mind as well as his body to the hard scheduled he imposed upon himself. When he needed to recoup his energies he used to sleep for half an hour at

¹²His mother, Fidela Peacock de Lencinas, placed the sash upon him. That day was also a cherished one for the Radicals, because it marked another anniversary of the 1905 Revolution. Thus, in a telegram to Yrigoyen, Lencinas complimented him for that landmark "in the history of the glorious party which embodies in you the highest aspirations of the people." La Época, February 7, 1922. Lencinas appointed as his collaborators many who had also served under his father. Among them, Carlos M. Puebla returned to the Ministry of Government; Leopoldo Suárez was entrusted with the Ministry of Industry and Public Works; and Jorge Céspedes became Minister of Hacienda. But in May Céspedes was elected National Senator by the legislature, and was replaced by Clodomiro Soto.

any place, and then he was up again with new vigor.

While the conservatives opened their comités only at election times, asserted a Mendozaan writer, Carlos Washington was in contact with the gauchaje all year round.¹³ His sharp memory was also of great assistance in his communications with the people. He could trace the members of a family as if it were his own; hence, the proverbially large number of godchildren he had all over the province. Benito Marianetti recalls the fact that many children born in Mendoza used to bear the names José Néstor or Carlos Washington.¹⁴

Lencinas was a good-looking man, of average height; he had the appearance of an excited, lively man, with a long broad face with wide deep-set eyes and full lips, and with hair combed straight back off his high forehead. Although he sometimes dressed in gaucho apparel, he had the pose of a typical urban caudillo. The fact that he was a fairly young governor contributed to build up his remarkable political following. Moreover, the memory of his father was very vivid and helped to capitalize the appeal evoked by his name, especially in the rural areas. His vitality also denoted new blood in handling the business of the State. His father died at almost 61 years of age; Carlos Washington became governor at half that age. While José Néstor Lencinas

¹³Interview with Carlos Alberto Arroyo, Buenos Aires, May 13, 1972. Mr. Arroyo is a member of one of the so-called traditional families of Mendoza.

¹⁴Marianetti, Las luchas sociales en Mendoza, p. 63.

had been a respected, poised figure, in the patriarchal style of late nineteenth century, Carlos Washington represented modernity, both in his physical appearance and his proverbial dynamism. His brother Rafael Néstor recalled Carlos Washington's expression that "I'll be the governor of Mendoza because I do not take a siesta," implying his drive to communicate with people as much as possible.¹⁵

A Mendozan historian who in the 1930's played a prominent political role in conservative politics, recognizes Carlos Washington's interest in public works, but laments that as a leader--"el más popular de todos"--he wasted his enormous prestige by attracting and catering to the masses "in his own way, without attempting either to educate or to improve their ideas and sentiments."¹⁶ Likewise, Adolfo Vicchi credits the younger Lencinas for his extraordinary ability to establish a warm rapport with the people all over the province.¹⁷

Carlos Washington's political action was based upon a personalist influence, getting directly involved with the people, enjoying being with them, sharing the good moments

¹⁵Personal interview with Rafael Néstor Lencinas, Mendoza, June 29, 1972.

¹⁶Edmundo Correas, "Historia de Mendoza," IV, pp. 500-501.

¹⁷Luis Alberto Romero, interview with Adolfo Vicchi, former Governor of Mendoza (1941-1943), Buenos Aires, August 5, 1971. Columbia University, Oral History Program.

and helping them in the bad ones. His personality enabled him to attract the goodwill and affection of the popular sectors. If their veneration for Carlos Washington was like a religious experience, it was because those who had very few material things to protect found in him a protector of greater values, their dignity, a sense of equality as human beings, and a friend who never closed the door to a man in distress.¹⁸ His father had plowed the same field,

¹⁸ Carlos Alberto Arroyo, who won the 1972 Literary Award of the Fondo Nacional de las Artes (a Federal Government council for the endowment of the arts), has written four novels focusing on the Lencinist experience. They are: Odio entre hermanos (Buenos Aires, 1957); Políticos enloquecidos (Buenos Aires, 1959); El interventor federal (Buenos Aires, 1960); and La furia de los vencidos (Buenos Aires, 1961). In El interventor federal, pp. 128-129, he presents an image of Carlos Washington Lencinas which in his own view (personal interview, May 9, 1972), reflects the true sentiments between Lencinas and the common people:

Los criollos veneraban al caudillo: su fotografía veíase junto a la imagen del santo de la devoción femenina, sujeto en la quinchá, homenajeado con un ramillete de humildes flores silvestres.... Toda esa masa profesaba una fe y la unía un sentimiento.... Estaban dominados por un fanatismo semejante al de los creyentes de una religión. Veían en el caudillo a un nuevo redentor, pero de carne y hueso, a su alcance, al que oían...él gobernaría para ellos; él quitaría a los ricos y daría a los pobres. Y se codeaba, y comía y chupaba con sus iguales los paisanos. No los rehuía, no los miraba con soberbia. Vivía para ellos, se sacrificaba por ellos...

- A mí no me van a comprar por más que me engatusen. Yo soy criollo, ; yo soy gaucho como ustedes!....
- Los ricos dicen que yo los persigo, que los quiero empobrecer. ; Sí, es cierto! Es para que ustedes tengan un poco más y ellos un poco menos....
- ...ellos son todos parientes y van al mismo club social. Son oligarcas y ricos. ; No son como nosotros! Nosotros somos iguales a ustedes....

but Carlos Washington did not have to rely upon José Néstor's memory to enjoy the fondness of the workers and the campesinos.¹⁹

The political style of Carlos Washington made it possible for him to build up his personal image. A sympathetic newspaper stated that a visit to the government house provided a valuable psychological dissection of the way he dealt with all kind of visitors. The waiting rooms were always crowded, especially with lower class people. He was the ultimate arbiter even in matters which should have been resolved at lower levels, because the people were only satisfied with his words.²⁰

During the rule of José Néstor Lencinas only Carlos Washington of his several sons, had been a part of the inner circle of government. But when Carlos Washington became governor, his brothers José Hipólito and Rafael Néstor entered the political arena and played significant roles.²¹

¹⁹Personal interview with Benito Marianetti. Mendoza, June 21, 1972. Marianetti noted that Yrigoyen, in contrast with Lencinas, was essentially reserved and aloof, having almost no communication with the masses.

²⁰La Palabra, May 16, 1923.

²¹José Hipólito was born in Mendoza in 1892, and graduated as a lawyer from the Law School at the University of Buenos Aires. He served for a brief period as secretary to his father when José Néstor Lencinas assumed the governorship in 1918. José Hipólito had a strong voice in party and government affairs. Early in the 1920's he was appointed prosecutor, and later named attorney for the Provincial Bank. In 1923 he was elected National Deputy and appointed legal adviser of the Promotional Committee in charge of the activities of the former Cooperativa Vitivinícola.

The diversity of the personalities, values, and characters of the three brothers was highly influential in molding public opinion about their actions and motivations. Carlos Washington enjoyed an immense popularity, almost unrelated to his successes and failures in office. His authority was never questioned and his decisions seldom challenged. José Hipólito acted from the beginning as a shrewd politician, expeditious in resolving problems in a pragmatic and utilitarian way, respected because of his power, but not loved.²² Rafael Néstor was in many respects like Carlos Washington, a warm, open-minded person, but he lacked the maturity of a leader and the self-discipline required to serve efficiently in the party and the government. Of the three brothers, only Carlos Washington had the charisma of José Néstor Lencinas, and his ascendancy overshadowed the political significance of his brothers.

Rafael Néstor was born in 1896 and died in August 1972. When Carlos Washington assumed office he also became an influential figure, was elected provincial deputy and in 1924 was chosen Speaker of the provincial Chamber of Deputies, and appointed representative of the legislature to the Caja Obrera de Pensión a la Vejez e Invalidez. In 1928 he graduated from the Medical School at the University of Buenos Aires, although he never practiced medicine. There is a fourth son of José Néstor Lencinas, Horacio Antulio, born in Mendoza in 1917, a lawyer, and a daughter, María Irene.

²²Through the initiative of José Hipólito Lencinas the Círculo de Armas, a socio-political institution was created in 1923. It performed for the Lencinists the role that the Jockey Club performed for the conservatives.

Carlos Washington was an affable man, instilled with the personalistic inclination typical of the leading caudillos from the interior. He was well adjusted to perform under any circumstances, be it a meeting with the president of the republic or a criollo dinner with humble supporters in a rancho far away in the countryside. He was an intuitive leader, not a thinker, whose university background enabled him to add stature to his populist movement. However, as a Mendozan writer has pointed out, he was not a doctrinaire and did not proclaim his educational status to the masses. On the contrary, he preferred to be considered another "criollo gaucho" like them.²³ As a politician, he embodied the typical "dotor" of political life; he devoted all his energies to the party, for in the party were his friends, his interests, his problems, everything in his life.

Every time Carlos Washington arrived from Buenos Aires, it was a happy, colorful occasion for his legion of partisans to demonstrate their affection for him. The capital was prepared for the event in advance. Bands, petards, flags, pictures of both Lencinas, carts filled with people coming from the departments filling the streets with a gaudy spirit of holiday.²⁴

²³Dardo Olguín, "...y en el medio de mi pecho, Carlos Washington Lencinas," Todo es Historia (April, 1969), 33.

²⁴On one occasion, in August 1923, Carlos Washington was taken from the train, lifted in the arms of his supporters and carried into the streets of Mendoza. Like a civic procession, they usually paraded from the Pacific Railway Station to the Círculo de Armas. Los Andes, August 13, 1923.

During the long months of intra-Radical political maneuverings and on the arduous campaign trail, Carlos Washington's abilities to prevail as the indisputable party leader and upon the electorate's choice, were proven beyond doubt. But how did the "gauchito" perform as a governor? What reforms resulted from his political, social and economic actions?

The Populist Performance.

Political and Constitutional Affairs

The main characteristic of Lencinist politics was its personalism and in this regard Carlos Washington continued his father's approach, although with a tone less moralizing and less stern than that of the late leader.²⁵ Carlos Washington served as the political umbrella of his movement protecting and promoting its candidates. Verticality, discipline and loyalty to the party and its leadership were basic features of Lencinism. Members were warned, as on the occasion of the 1923 congressional elections, that:

²⁵The propaganda of the party had a strong personalist accent. For example, it was customary to name the comités after prominent men in the party. This was especially so with the Lencinists, who profusely displayed the iconography and revered anniversaries of the movement. Besides the numerous comités simply named José Néstor Lencinas or Carlos Washington Lencinas, there were other baptized as "Gran Gaucho Lencinas," "Nuestro Gran Jefe Lencinas," "Gaucho Lencinas," "Ocho horas," "4 de febrero," "Pensión a la Vejez," "Defensa Obrera Gaucho Lencinas," and many others with similar exaltations.

The Lencinist who substitutes even only one of our candidates, is a traitor to the party. The Lencinists must vote for the whole list, or not at all. This is party discipline.²⁶

Carlos Washington was inclined to reward his political friends by welcoming them onto the official payroll. As he frankly put it in his June 1922 inaugural message to the legislature, "I have sought to provide the friends who shared with me the hours of sacrifice with the public rewards, according to strict partisan merits...."²⁷ While at the highest level he sought the collaboration of those who had performed under his father, in the lower echelons he promoted, or at least tolerated, the active interference of the petty bosses of the comités to carry on some of the business of the government. On many occasions this attitude led to the public exposure of despicable parochial interests, creating situations which impaired the adequate functioning of the provincial government.

The so-called "política de comité," which granted higher relevance to party affiliation than to any other qualification, was responsible for placing very mediocre

²⁶El Látigo (Mendoza), March 2, 1923. The author recalls how many years later the same electoral technique was used. The political campaign for the April 1954 congressional election in the Federal Capital, was carried out by the officialist party as a simple presidential mandate. The personal merits of every candidate were not only ignored by the propaganda, but as far as the election was concerned it was totally irrelevant. On this occasion the tactic was based on a poster of President Perón with only this statement: "Support Perón by voting his candidates."

²⁷Provincia de Mendoza, Mensaje del Gobernador Dr. Carlos Washington Lencinas, 1922, n. p. (Hereafter cited as Mensaje del Gobernador.)

elements in bureaucratic positions. Sometimes, the voices from the comités were capable of blocking appointees who in their eyes were not real party loyalists.²⁸ Through the day-by-day maneuvers, there arose a cadre of Lencinist leaders, caudillos of lesser stature who in the folkloric nature of such a personalist regime played a role much larger than their capabilities warranted.²⁹ The Mendoza historian Juan Draghi Lucero believes that one of the negative aspects of Lencinism was its exclusion of the other sectors of Mendoza. Guided sometimes by a spirit of political revenge, it fostered the creation of a provincial group of favorites. Marianetti has observed that many of Lencinists' followers were motivated to participate in public life not by political reasons, "but for the purpose of resolving their own problems."³⁰

This type of local leader had a tremendous influence at popular level, and was therefore, very useful in gathering mass support for the party. The highest Lencinist officials were aware of the mediocre caliber of many of these local

²⁸ Such was the case in July 1922, when the Senate rejected Lencinas' appointment of Ramón O'Donnell as judge and Samuel de Rosas as prosecutor. Neither was a member of the party nor a Lencinist.

²⁹ Among them, the case of Tomás A. Lima is one of the more interesting. Known throughout Mendoza as "One-eyed Lima," he was given municipal positions from which he became engaged in many partisan affairs. He was widely known for his skillfulness in handling dubious situations and through the years his name has grown to become a legend of unenvied reputation.

³⁰ Personal interview with Juan Draghi Lucero, June 14, 1972, and with Benito Marianetti, June 21, 1972. Mendoza.

party politicians, but tolerated and even patronized them because of their rapport with the rank and file. Antulio Lencinas, the youngest brother of Carlos Washington, ascribed this tolerance to the need to fill party positions with the people it could get. The party, despite its wide political base, exercised power with loyal but poorly-disciplined and inadequately-trained local leaders, a situation that forced Lencinism to commit mistakes.³¹

From a historical perspective, however, it seems questionable whether the price paid for admitting such elements within Lencinism was not too high, for the time came when the movement had to prove before the public opinion the honesty of its leaders and the efficiency of its procedures in the government. On the other hand, it appears doubtful that a party with such grass roots strength could have been politically effective without the assistance of minor leaders who were socially and economically close to the masses. This seems to be a normal pattern for populist regimes. Theoretically, they are the most democratic because they claim to derive their power straight from the people, that is, the largely underprivileged majority. In an underdeveloped society, like that of Mendoza in the 1920's, if the majority were to rule, it had to be a government where the "one-eyed Limas" would play an important role, since

³¹Personal interview with Antulio Lencinas, June 17, 1972.

they were more representative of the majority than was any of the leaders from other parties.

Los Andes, which originally welcomed Lencinas as a promising young ruler, urged him after several months in office, to draw a line separating the business of the government from that of the comité.³² Assimilating the politics of the State with those of the party, noted Los Andes on another occasion, was like making a small hole in a rice bag. The loss of the grains would be hardly noticeable, but it would be unceasing, and although it would take time, it would end by emptying the bag.³³

In the legislature the strength of the Lencinist majority gave rise to abuses, especially in the treatment of opponents. This was the case when in 1923 the credentials of the conservative-inclined provincial Senator-elect Julio César Raffo de la Reta was impugned on the basis of anonymous charges. The Lencinist Senators did not find this procedure objectionable. Instead, they extended full credit to the accusation, and by rejecting his credentials penalized a man who had been highly esteemed in Mendoza public life.

A year later, in May 1924, the provincial Chamber

³²Los Andes, December 20, 1922. This newspaper had strongly censured José Néstor Lencinas. But with respect to Carlos Washington, it adopted a conciliatory position, encouraging him to carry out a positive government. It criticized the governor often, but did so with moderation.

³³Ibid., March 5, 1923.

of Deputies took a similar action against conservative Deputy-elect Joaquín Méndez Calzada. He had been an unrelenting critic of Lencinism and a legal dispute he had with Deputy Governor Gargantini served as a justification to reject his admission to the provincial Chamber of Deputies. This act against Méndez Calzada had its roots in the vituperative criticisms he directed against Lencinism from El Censor, the official publication of the Liberal Party, of which he was the director.³⁴

There were also instances in which political adversaries were subject to rough treatment by unruly Lencinist party zealots. In December 1922, for example, Gregorio Caro, owner of the opposition paper La Censura, was physically assaulted; on another occasion shots

³⁴For example, the report made by this newspaper of a huge Lencinist political celebration is a testimony of its intemperance. Few lines could be found to match the savageness of this report. El Censor (Mendoza), January 12, 1924, included these excerpts:

...alguna cuchipanda populachera organizada por empleados públicos...que sienten la necesidad de emborracharse en presencia y compañía del Sr. Lencinas, y dar de paso rienda suelta a su ululante salvajismo indígena, entre alaridos a la memoria desdichada y nefasta de ese gaucho bárbaro y torpe que se llamó José Néstor Lencinas....

...entre el refusilo de las dagas, el vaso de vino y la chillona gritería de un par de cientos de vagos ebrios, es donde el gobernador Lencinas se encuentra a sus anchas....

...esa fiesta memorable, mitad bacanal dionisiaca y mitad cuchipanda de burdel arrabalero, es una afrenta para Mendoza. En ella este gobierno de melena y taco punteagudo tiene su más significativa expresión y su exacto retrato.

All the individuals who were interviewed by the author, from all political sides, attested that Carlos Washington never drank with excess.

were fired against the leading provincial conservative, Deputy Mario Arenas; and the Liberal and Socialist parties often denounced the arbitrary police decisions to prohibit opposition rallies.

While the Lencinists engaged in this kind of aggressive action against their opponents, they fanned the support of the people by extolling the virtues of their maximum leader. They tried to assign to the late José Néstor Lencinas a place in destiny even before history could pass a judgment on his merits. Hence, the pro-monument fervor of the Lencinists was displayed again in June 1922 when the Central Committee approved raising a statue in homage of the deceased caudillo, in a prominent place in the capital. Another panegyric attempt was a decree of March 1924 entrusting former Minister of Hacienda Dardo Corvalán Mendilaharsu, with the task of writing a biography of José Néstor Lencinas.³⁵ These two resolutions, although they never materialized, were evidence of the personalist nature that was the lifeline of Lencinism. Critical of these self-serving projects, La Prensa stated that "yesterday's statue and today's biography, of the same origin, reveal a social and political climate that saddens the spirit."³⁶

³⁵La Libertad (Mendoza), April 4, 1924.

³⁶La Prensa, April 1, 1924.

A comprehensive view of the behavior of the opposition during Carlos Washington's rule, indicates that it did not have a very significant influence in the political situation of the province. The conservatives had been in a defensive position since 1918, when José Néstor Lencinas defeated Civit. The populist tide had buried their chances to become the party preferred by the electorate. The Mendoza Socialist Party, although small in size, was dogmatic and aggressive, and therefore, presented a distinctive facet in provincial politics. As was its traditional posture, the Socialists adopted a moralizing position. They preached against alcoholism, the civic degradation which was represented in the comités, and the ill-effects of illiteracy. With a strong admonishing voice, the party newspaper, El Socialista, alerted the people stating:

Citizens: you must not go to the comités, which are centers for corruption and barbarism, and where the old politicians offer you wine just to degrade you.... You must not go to the taverns, where you drink poison, because poison is what the bodegueros produce and what the bolicheros sell....³⁷

The Socialist press was implacable against the government of Carlos Washington. Once it published the words of an hypothetical former supporter of Lencinas who stated that a good Lencinist "is one who knows how to steal, how to bribe--coimear--, and be a blind servant of the governor."³⁸

³⁷El Socialista, March 13, 1924.

³⁸Ibid., August 15, 1924.

The Socialists admitted that for the ignorant masses, who comprised most of the electorate, the social and popular postulates of Lencinism resembled Socialism. But "between a Socialism like ours," they said,

which does not open comités or gambling houses, and advises [people] to drink water; and a "Socialism" like the Lencinist, which provides free and abundant alcohol during the long electoral campaigns, the ignorant masses prefer the "Lencinist Socialism."³⁹

Mario Bravo, the Socialist Senator for the Federal Capital, after a tour of Mendoza province in March 1923, expressed the harshly critical views that typified Socialist attitudes toward the provincial political leadership. Noting the dreadful housing of the poor, the inadequate salaries, the long hours of the bodega worker, the high illiteracy rate, the widespread incidence of diseases like typhus and syphilis, Bravo accused both the Conservative and Radical parties of responsibility for the decline of civic spirit and the debasement of the voter. "Alcohol is the base of the organization of the political parties," he stated, "and gambling is a propaganda device tolerated in order to keep the comités alive."⁴⁰

³⁹Ibid., May 1, 1926.

⁴⁰Los Andes, March 28, 1923. In the next issue Los Andes editorially rebuked Senator Bravo affirming that Mendoza's social ills were not imputable only to its domestic politics, and that "all the parties everywhere in the nation behave alike." Ibid., March 29, 1923.

Benito Marianetti, then a Socialist Party leader, acknowledged that their political preachings were sectarian and, therefore, limited in effectiveness.⁴¹ As the polls repeatedly indicated, the masses preferred to be ruled by a gaucho of flesh and bones rather than by rigid ideological principles of the proletarian cause.

Besides the inter-party collision, the sharp dissensions between Radical factions, which had been a feature of political life since 1918, and especially after the death of José Néstor Lencinas, were also manifested in the legislature. The governor had to appeal directly to party members to overcome their antagonisms, so as to be able to block the anti-Lencinists.⁴² In his 1922 message, Carlos Washington stated his desire to reorganize the Radicals under his principles and hegemony. A party union promoted from the highest level, he said, was auspicious when carried out with justice and equity.

⁴¹Personal interview, June 21, 1972. The Lencinists used to refer to Socialism as "cosa de gringos," while the Socialists termed Lencinism as "la política criolla." Marianetti claims that no other party was engaged in a permanent civic enlightening campaign deeper than the Socialists.

The Socialist position, although well inspired, failed to consider human nature as it is. The gambling casino built by the Lencinists in 1924, in the city of Mendoza, is still functioning in the same building, and opening its doors six days a week.

⁴²Related to this matter, José Hipólito Lencinas affirmed that undated resignations were never requested in advance from any legislator. Personal interview, June 23, 1972.

But such a solution was not possible. In spite of the fact that Lencinas was beyond question the leader of the majority of the Radicals of Mendoza, he had to face the permanent opposition of the Yrigoyenist Radicals. This alienation, begun during the government of José Néstor Lencinas, had become more acute under Carlos Washington. His relationship with Yrigoyen, in spite of their early mutual acceptance, and the congratulatory telegrams sent by Lencinas to the President, soon faded away, since the Personalist Radicals of Mendoza considered the Lencinists as deviationists from the party.

The channel of political alliances followed a logical path; the final break between Carlos Washington and Yrigoyen was a corollary of the situation in the province, where Lencinists and Yrigoyenists were at each other's throats. The accession of Alvear to the presidency in October 1922, and the further detachment between Personalists and anti-Personalists, placed Lencinas squarely in the anti-Yrigoyen sector.

In the Mendoza scene Carlos Washington also sought the shelter of a friendly Judiciary, taking advantage of the so-called Jurado de Enjuiciamiento, a Judiciary Review Board for members of the judicial system. To this end the majority in both branches of the legislature appointed only Lencinists as their representatives to the Board, as they did when José Néstor Lencinas was governor. Once again the opposition raised its protest in vain. The

Lencinists restated their viewpoint that the Board was a political body, and as such, it was logical for the ruling party to fill in the membership with its own men. When the provincial charter called for minority representation, they claimed, it did so explicitly, as in the provisions dealing with the electoral system.

The seriousness of the situation lay in the fact that the Lencinists controlled the legislature, and consequently, the Executive could control the Judiciary by using the Review Board to remove, legally, the judges it wanted to eliminate. Traditionally, this had been a provincial fact of life. Until 1918 there had been "conservative" judges; with the Lencinists in power, it was the turn for "Radical" judges.⁴³

The most resounding case involving the Board was the impeachment of Judge Jorge Vera Vallejo.⁴⁴ This judge had been suspended by a decree of José Néstor Lencinas in December 1918, but he had been reinstated by Interventor de Veyga in February 1919. In August 1923 he was accused

⁴³This situation demonstrated the relevance of the words of Agustín Álvarez, a noted Mendozan thinker (1857-1914), who wrote that "We have enough talent to know the vital role of Justice, but enough weakness in our character so as to fail to put it into effect." Manual de patología política (Buenos Aires, 1947), p. 18. Originally published in 1899.

⁴⁴Besides the wide coverage given in the daily press from August 1923 to January 1924, this case is reported in detail in Jorge Vera Vallejo, Mi magistratura, 2d revised edition (Mendoza, 1966), pp. 96-205.

of having illegally arranged a transference of funds. Whatever the reason, he was charged before the Review Board with "desconcepto público"--dishonorable conduct--in his performance as a judge. Neither in the constitution nor the laws was mentioned such a juridical offense. Joaquín Sayanca, president of the Supreme Court, described this term as simply an impudent invention of the Lencinists.⁴⁵

Whether to embarrass Vera Vallejo or simply to test his endurance, a final decision by the Board was delayed beyond the time-limit determined by the constitution. Finally, Vera Vallejo was removed as a judge by the ten votes of the Lencinists against four cast by the members of the Supreme Court in the Board.⁴⁶

Apart from the legal charges brought against one member of the Judiciary, the Lencinists harassed other members whom they considered representatives of the Régimen. These were vaguely charged with delaying the administration of justice in order to serve the interests of the upper class, that is, purposely discriminating against the welfare of the people. "We want an honest system of justice, fairly distributed to the rich as to the poor," stated one of the slogans raised by the Lencinists.⁴⁷

⁴⁵La Prensa, September 4, 1923.

⁴⁶The Mendoza Bar Association reacted at once demanding that Congress vote for a federal intervention of Mendoza.

⁴⁷Los Andes, October 14, 1923.

But, did the removal of Vera Vallejo reform the prevailing system of quick justice for the rich, unfair and belated for the poor? Did the prestige of Lencinism increase by focusing the alleged ills of the Judicial Power upon a single judge? Was it plain coincidence that the deposed judge was the same one who had criticized the arbitrary actions taken by José Néstor Lencinas against a porteño journalist? If the official action was well inspired, it did not bear the fruits which Lencinism hoped for. If the Lencinist move was essentially politically motivated, it backfired. For in Buenos Aires, where the anti-Lencinist forces--Yrigoyenists, Socialists and conservatives--were looking for an opportunity to purge Mendoza of the Lencinist rule, this episode received adverse publicity.

If in the realm of the Judiciary Carlos Washington revived the high-handed methods of his father, at least he improved on José Néstor Lencinas' record of performance as regards the normalization of municipal institutions. After several years in which departmental self-government was a dead principle, elections were held in July 1922 in which the Lencinists succeeded in gaining the majority in the capital and all the departments, except one. This normalization represented a considerable advance over the de facto status in which the municipalities had been kept during the first Radical government and the federal interventions. However, in subsequent elections, in the very few instances where non-Lencinists gained control

either of a municipal council or a mayoralty, the Lencinists resorted, in traditional political behavior, to the governor's constitutional power to intervene in the departments.

Thus, Lencinism was apparently not content with controlling the affairs of most provincial bodies, but insisted on unanimity. This was best exemplified in the conflict involving Las Heras, a department bordering the capital from the north, whose mayor, Roberto Zapata, was a non-Lencinist. He was pressed by the governor to resign, without success, whereupon the Lencinist majority in the departmental council suspended him in December 1923. The provincial Supreme Court voided this resolution but when Zapata tried to reassume office, he was blocked by the police. Zapata at once asked the National Congress to enact a federal intervention in Mendoza, contending that the provincial government was violating Article 5 of the national constitution, which guaranteed the autonomy of the municipal system. Lencinas then issued a decree reinstating Zapata, which was legally superfluous, since what was needed was simply to enforce the ruling of the provincial Supreme Court.

Why was a minor situation like this not allowed by Lencinas to be resolved by a subsequent election? To what extent could his government be politically damaged by tolerating one mayor from the opposition when he enjoyed

such overwhelming support in the rest of the province? Why did Lencinas allow an almost trivial situation to grow so uncontrolled that a mayor of a provincial department would demand a federal intervention from National Congress? La Prensa stated that the governor was only satisfied with unanimities, as had been the case under the Régimen; "he admits unconditional friends," it said, "but not adversaries."⁴⁸ As could be expected, this issue was seized upon by the anti-Lencinist National Deputies from Mendoza to request appointment of an investigating committee to report on the alleged political maneuvers ordered or consented to by the governor.⁴⁹

With respect to the election of local irrigation authorities--a constitutional provision of major importance in Mendoza--the law was obeyed under the rule of the young Lencinas, but its results were diluted by administrative decisions taken a posteriori. After assuming office, Lencinas appointed new irrigation authorities until November 1922, when elections were held as prescribed by the constitution.⁵⁰ But the road ahead for the new authorities was not smooth. In some cases,

⁴⁸La Prensa, September 25, 1923.

⁴⁹Diputados, 1923, V, 607-615; VI, 460-464; VII, 50-53. This petition was sent to the committee, but no further action was taken on this specific proposal.

⁵⁰Although according to the constitution the elections should have been taking place each November, the last election had been held in November 1919.

their assumption of office was delayed, in other instances the Superintendent of Irrigation replaced them by his own fiat, without the legal consent of the Irrigation Council. Marianetti states that the Superintendency abused its powers and entered into many "maniobras escandalosas" concerning the transference of "water rights," which were illegally sold independently of the lands.⁵¹

This marked the return to the familiar abuses known as "el torniquete del agua," always useful to harass a landowner or contratista opposed to the government, and as a vehicle for personal revenges. Favoritism, or lack of it, in the irrigation shifts, was enough to alter the value of the lands. But it would be unfair to blame the Lencinists exclusively for this situation. Water was life, and therefore, its importance transcended party lines.

The Populist Performance. The Social Sphere

Lencinism was not only a political force sustained by a numerically significant popular base, it was also a pioneer regional social movement. For it was in the social sphere, with its concern for the underdogs, where it made the largest impact. Under the rule of José Néstor and Carlos Washington Lencinas the first significant social legislation in all of Argentina was enacted, and under their leadership the Cuyan masses acquired a new sense of

⁵¹Marianetti, Problemas de Cuyo, pp. 188-189.

dignity and self-recognition.

In their quest for social justice the Lencinists did not arouse the kind of dogmatic class consciousness which the Socialist instilled into their political action. Lencinism, in comparison, was inorganic, devoid of a well-founded ideology, and its methods, to a large extent, resembled that of the traditional "política criolla." While the Lencinists praised themselves for what they thought were their towering social accomplishments, their adversaries branded them as simple political opportunists. What, then, were the true social achievements of the scion of the old Lencinas? Was Carlos Washington a sincere social reformer or just a demagogue?

Carlos Washington inherited the luster which his father had acquired as crusader for the lower groups. José Néstor Lencinas was always hailed in public memory for his legislation on the 8-hour day, the minimum wage, and retirement benefits for public servants. With the same spirit, Carlos Washington kept the door of the government house, and his own, open to the workers and campesinos with whom he liked to evoke his father's memory.

As of 1922 the social conditions in Mendoza had improved substantially. Carlos Washington was spared the hard post-war times of his father, when strikes and disorders plagued not only Mendoza, but the whole country. In his inaugural message he announced that in the immediate future he would submit to the legislature "social

legislation based on modern principles."⁵² In December he did send a message to the legislature that proposed the creation of the so-called Caja Obrera de Pensión a la Vejez e Invalidez, which would provide pensions for the aged and the invalid, establishing a monthly payment of fifty pesos for any person 65 years old or over. Lencinas' initiative sought to help those unable to earn their own subsistence. In his message he referred to the natural lack of provision of the worker, who with his reduced resources was neither inclined nor prepared to accumulate savings, "nor to think of a distant future, because he has enough preoccupations with the present."⁵³ In this message, the governor remarked that with this legislation Mendoza would continue to be the leader in this field among all the other provinces, and he praised the innovative social accomplishments of his father, "the first who as a ruler rooted in the great Radical movement, was able to instill it with a social content, its real character and purposes, beyond the single political objectives."⁵⁴

The pension plan for the aged enacted in 1923 represented a giant stride in the arduous task of

⁵²Mensaje del Gobernador, 1922, n. p.

⁵³Provincia de Mendoza, Ministerio de Industrias y Obras Públicas, Mensajes y proyectos de leyes. Pensión a la vejez e invalidez (Mendoza, 1922), p. 34.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 35.

providing social benefits for workers and the retired, and enhanced the popularity of Lencinas' name in Mendoza as well as in the nation.

In his second annual message, in June 1923, Lencinas anticipated the enactment of other social measures, such as life and unemployment insurance, and maternity benefits. But these ideas were never formally introduced to the legislature.⁵⁵ Thus, in spite of the promises outlined in the annual messages, the only major social legislation enacted under Carlos Washington's term was the pension for the aged.⁵⁶

The enforcement of existing social laws was also at issue. Complaints of lack of proper implementation during Carlos Washington's rule were numerous and continuous. The government, it is true, did not set up effective machinery for enforcement, although it greatly improved the Departamento Provincial del Trabajo from the neglected status in which it was received in 1922.⁵⁷ No doubt, the novelty of the social legislation conspired against its enforcement. It is hard to imagine how a simple worker

⁵⁵Mensaje del Gobernador, 1923, n. p.

⁵⁶Félix Luna stated that Lencinas enacted "good social laws in principle," but that they were technically unapplicable. Yrigoyen, p. 385. In fact, Carlos Washington only promulgated one social law of importance.

⁵⁷In his 1922 message, the governor stated that there were 1,255 demands paralyzed, and that inspections were not made, even in the capital. Mensaje del Gobernador, 1922, n. p.

who depended on his job for family sustenance, could have ordered his employer to adhere strictly to the 8-hour rule, or have demanded the minimum wage, or even threatened to complain to the authorities, without having any protection at all for his job. The price for these daring social innovations was paid in the abuses which took long years to root out.

The failure of the social legislation to produce immediate significant changes should be placed in proper historical perspective. For the laws fulfilled the all important function of cracking a system which had fought very hard to block them. They opened up for the first time the possibility of altering the traditional one-sided relationship between workers and patrones, even though full observance of that legislation was not possible because of inadequate governmental control and, more important yet, because of the prevailing mentality of the patrones coupled with the lack of adequate protection for the workers.

The slowness of the State in implementing social legislation perhaps may also be attributed to the fact that the government viewed the improvement of the most needed sectors with an exclusively political criterion, rather than as a change required by the incessant social

evolution of mankind.⁵⁸ Outside the Lencinist circles the belief prevailed that the populist governments had enacted this type of demagogically-inspired legislation, solely or for the most part, to retain power for their own benefit. In defense of the Lencinist position, the best argument perhaps is offered by the conservatives themselves. When they returned to office, from 1932 to 1943, they did not repeal the basic social laws enacted by the Lencinists --with the exception of the minimum wage, ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1929--but rather improved them by bringing them up to date.

In similar fashion, the Lencinists themselves brought to light the shortcomings of Carlos Washington's rule in this area. At a party convention held in December 1924, they approved a "minimum program" which postulated, among other goals, the 8-hour rule.⁵⁹ This indicates the extent to which the 1918 law was still unenforced. Moreover, not until 1926, under the Lencinist government of Alejandro Orfila (1926-1928), was a raise in policemen's salaries granted, the first since 1916;⁶⁰ and not until that year were

⁵⁸This was Los Andes' view, November 18, 1923. El Socialista, January 17, 1924, called the pension law for the aged, "a major mythification" made by Lencinism, because it was only inspired by electoral purposes.

⁵⁹La Prensa, December 15, 1924.

⁶⁰Provincia de Mendoza, Recopilación de leyes, 1926-1937, I (Mendoza, 1938), p. 93.

minimum wages raised from 2,00 and 2,50 pesos per day, to 4,00 and 4,80, respectively. This was the first time they were increased since they were enacted by José Néstor Lencinas in 1918.⁶¹ In 1927 also there was established, for the first time, a minimum wage and a Sunday holiday for people in domestic service.⁶² Therefore, with the exception of the old-age pension, Carlos Washington failed to introduce to the legislature the new social programs he had promised. In view of the high objectives for social betterment which Lencinism ostensibly represented, it might have been expected that he would, at least, have sponsored a raise of the minimum wage.⁶³

⁶¹This minimum wage was enacted by Law No. 922. In October 1929 this law was ruled unconstitutional by the National Supreme Court, which stated that the provinces could not enact such legislation because the power to do it was delegated to the national government. The case was Viñedos y Bodegas Arizú v. Mendoza. Santos Primo Amadeo, Argentine Constitutional Law (New York, 1943), p. 151.

⁶²It is worthwhile to note that in Governor Orfila's message to the legislature proposing these benefits for the large number of people working as servants, he stated that these workers "could have been playing the role of humble slaves for life, as it was in older times, when they were transferred with the property where they worked." Mendoza, Recopilación de leyes, p. 176.

⁶³José Hipólito Lencinas erroneously stated that Carlos Washington raised the minimum wage from 2,50 to 4,80. Carlos Washington Lencinas. Misión y futuro de una época (Mendoza, 1963), p. 116. As was mentioned, the raise was enacted by Law No. 922, of 1926, under the government of Alejandro Orfila.

The Lencinist administration, however, should be credited for providing one of the most important tangible benefits for the lower classes in the field of public health. Two new hospitals were inaugurated, one in the capital, the other in San Rafael.⁶⁴ Likewise, public works received a preferential attention from the government, including important irrigation projects, so essential to Mendoza's prosperity.

But in the sphere of popular education the reality was a pale reflection of what was promised. In February 1922, when Carlos Washington took office, the condition of the school system was insolvent and inefficient. An education bill to replace that of 1887 was still to be enacted; the School Board continued deficit-ridden, and a large number of children of school age remained permanently absent from the classroom, increasing the appalling number of illiterate adults.⁶⁵

Lencinas' messages to the legislature to remedy this situation, were little more than words. In June 1922 he promised that emergency taxation laws would resolve the school deficits. The following year, the governor reported that primary education was maintained "within the regular

⁶⁴The latter, whose construction had begun in 1910, greatly benefited the population of the whole southern region of the province, which before had depended exclusively on the capital for any major medical problem.

⁶⁵Juan Agustín Moyano, who was Director of the School Board, stated that only 36 per cent of all the children who should do so were attending school. La Prensa, June 27, 1922.

norms set up by the government, which keeps its daily vigil for its efficient operation," a naive and uncritical statement, to say the least.⁶⁶ In the 1924 message the governor ceased to make any comment on the financial status of the School Board.

The administrative disorder of the school system was a consequence of the lack of proper observance of the procedures already established. Ever since 1897 a provincial law required that the municipal governments contribute 1 per cent of their revenue to the school fund. But this obligation had remained unfulfilled since the first years of the century. The provincial constitution in its Article 212 also had assigned 20 per cent of the provincial revenue to the School Board, with the specific warning that these funds could not be diverted for other purposes. But a law to implement this constitutional principle was never enacted during the Lencinist governments. In 1922 so-called emergency laws aimed at putting an end to the traditional arrears in teachers' salaries. These did not work as planned, however, judging from the data: in March 1922 the salaries were behind eight months; in December, ten; in April 1923, five; in November, six; in March 1924, five.⁶⁷ The publication of the *Federacion de Maestros de*

⁶⁶ Mensaje del Gobernador, 1922, n.p., and 1923, n.p.

⁶⁷ The revenue from Law No. 779, one of the emergency laws, should have been allocated to eliminate the School Board deficit. When these laws expired, but not the deficits, the province borrowed 500,000 pesos from a Buenos

Mendoza said in August 1924, that in some departments the salaries from 1918 and 1919 were still unpaid.⁶⁸

The National Board of Education was to some extent made the scapegoat for the persistence of the deficits. National Law No. 2737, (1890), granted financial assistance to the provincial School Boards if at least ten per cent of the provincial budget was allocated to primary education. Mendoza, therefore, received a yearly grant. But early in the 1920's the payment of the national subvention was delayed by the National Board of Education because it considered that Mendoza had breached the agreement by paying its teachers with letras, whose value was less than that of pesos. Mendozan officials, including the governor, pleaded before the National Board and even to President Alvear, to obtain the remittance of the grant.

Meanwhile, in response to constant complaints by the large number of its unpaid teachers and suppliers, the School Board placed the blame on the national government for failing to fulfill its financial obligation. The Mendozan authorities affirmed that the letras were accepted at par--which was not entirely true in all cases--and that "the insignificant fluctuations are due

Aires firm for the same purpose. Eventually, in 1926, the bodegueros set up a loan to the province for 1,345,000 pesos just to bring the teachers' salaries up to date!

⁶⁸Palanca (Mendoza), August 30, 1924.

exclusively to speculators."⁶⁹ But the fact was that the National Board of Education did not object to the payment of the salaries with letras--it had been customary in Mendoza since the governments of the Régimen--but that the salaries were paid in a currency undervalued with respect to the peso. The temporary suspension of the federal grant, moreover, could not have been responsible for the widespread failure of the Board to pay its bills, for it amounted to less than 10 per cent of the total outlays of the School Board.⁷⁰

As to educational achievements, Lencinas' accomplishments were also meager. Abrahán J. Jofré, Regional Inspector in Cuyo of the National Board of Education, said in March 1924 that of 70,000 children of school age, only 60 per cent were registered, and only two thirds of those attended classes.⁷¹ This indicated that more than half of

⁶⁹Los Andes, January 25, 1923. Telegram of the governor to the Minister of Interior.

⁷⁰These are the figures:

Year	Total outlays School Board	Federal grant	% covered by the grant
1922	\$ 2,998,177	\$ 270,000	9.0
1923	3,143,840	270,000	8.6
1924	3,589,922	270,000	7.5

Provincia de Mendoza, Síntesis de la Dirección General de Estadísticas, 1930-1931 (Mendoza, 1932), p. 100. (For the total outlay of the School Board only).

⁷¹Los Andes, May 17, 1924.

the children did not receive even the least acceptable level of education.

The Provincial School Board admitted the sad reality of the statistics, but said it did not have any direct responsibility for them. The Board stated that the situation was not the result of the scarcity of schools or of indifference by the government, as Jofré had reported. Instead, it was the consequence of the "innate malice and ignorance of a part of the population, which in its drive for money and its over-preoccupation for material well-being, forgets the duties it has toward its children."⁷²

In a government devoted in principle to satisfying the needs of the masses, one of its main priorities should have been to provide an education to thousands of underprivileged children. Those of the well-to-do sectors had the means to attain satisfactory educational levels, preparing them to be the future "men of property," well-endowed to enjoy the fruits of life. In order to diminish the social and economic gap of the future generation, what better program could have been offered by Lencinism to the children of the "chusma de alpargata," than a first rate primary

⁷²Ibid., May 22, 1924. La Prensa, May 30, 1924, reacted against this opinion, stating that there were no grounds to believe that the inhabitants of Mendoza had a larger "innate malice and ignorance" than the rest of the population of the country.

education?

Confidence, loyalty and affection from the masses continued to be the bountiful harvest of Carlos Washington for his endeavors in their behalf. Nevertheless, his political success did not always represent a triumph of civic virtues. And for all the proclaimed purposes of achieving a better social justice, the social innovations of his government were less significant than those of José Néstor Lencinas.

C H A P T E R VII

THE SECOND LENCINIST EXPERIENCE.

THE ECONOMIC PHASE. AN APPRAISAL OF C.W.LENCINAS' RULE

The Populist Performance. Economy and Finances

If the political and social phases of the government of Carlos Washington Lencinas may be characterized as an evolution marked by plateaux and regressions, what does an examination of his economic and fiscal policies, measured against his avowed populist stand, reveal?

At the time Carlos Washington assumed office, the financial situation was desperate, the result in large part of the inefficient administration of Federal Commissioner Vargas Gómez. Confronted thus with an immediate crisis, Lencinas suspended payments on salaries and debts incurred prior to 1922, until revenues could be provided to meet these obligations. Toward that end, the legislature in May 1922 enacted the so-called emergency laws.¹

Although the revenue from these taxes was generous, the old debts were not entirely cancelled. There were

¹These laws were: No. 776, imposing a special tax on tobacco, cigarettes, beer, and a few more items; Nos. 777 and 778, authorizing three million pesos in bonds for school buildings, and No. 779, taxing wines and grapes, earmarking 60 per cent of the revenue to pay debts from previous years, and 40 per cent to finance the regular expenses of the current year.

always some salaries left in arrears and, of course, the teachers continued to be the cinderellas of the Mendozaan administration. Likewise, two serious malpractices were continued by the government, that of applying funds for other purposes than those for which they were approved, and that of resorting to "emergency" laws to finance regular expenses, which in theory should already have been covered by permanent revenue. Moreover, the legislature failed to enact budget laws except for 1924. In response, in what had become a normal procedure in Mendoza, the governor resorted to cabinet agreements as a backdoor solution for keeping his government functioning.

Another grave anomaly was the lack of a Tribunal de Cuentas, an agency indispensable for verifying public expenses and forcing the Executive Power to keep its financial operations on a sound basis. Under the terms of the 1916 provincial constitution this tribunal should have been created by law before the first of January, 1918. In fact, the legislation providing for it was not enacted until May 1922 (Article 11 of Law 779). This could have been a belated solution, but the governor never implemented Article 11 in spite his assertion in his first annual message to the legislature, in June 1922, that without any doubt, the Tribunal de Cuentas would be "the most adequate

institutions to carry out an efficient control."²

Complementing this objectionable handling of financial matters was the failure of the Lencinist government to release proper and complete statements on the provincial debt. Thus, there was no way to verify the real financial needs, or the extent to which the taxes imposed corresponded to real requirements. Creditors filled the government house, and the administration was accused of applying a "política de aparcería," that is, using favoritism as a guideline to make the payments.³ Neither these procedures nor the practice of using emergency revenues to meet normal expenditures were originated by Lencinism. What is significant, however, is that in matters as important as these, they performed no better than the conservatives.⁴

The wine industry, naturally, continued as the

²Mensaje del Gobernador, 1922, n.p. There was a General Accounting Office in Mendoza, which had the right to verify the payments to be made, but it was a mere bureaucratic office and lost all its strength as a firm watchdog. This was so because the Executive Power could override any objection. José Leguida (h.), "La ley de contabilidad y contaduría general de la Provincia de Mendoza. Organización general," Revista de Ciencias Económicas, XXVI (1926), 346.

³Los Andes, February 7, 1923.

⁴During the second Lencinist administration financial disorder continued uncontrolled. The provincial debt to the nation was also in arrears. As of the end of 1924 no payments of principal or interest on the External Public Debt of 1909 had been made since 1921. Corporación de Tenedores de Títulos y Acciones, Memoria del primer semestre del ejercicio de 1924-1925 (Buenos Aires, n.d.), p. 20. This is a publication of the Bolsa de Comercio de Buenos Aires.

economic lifeblood of the province. When Lencinas took office harvest perspectives were gloomy, mainly because of the uncertainties of the consumer market in the Littoral and the lack of proper coordination of the industrial activities within the province. But well-timed measures taken by the governor improved the situation in only a few weeks.

A permanent source of dissatisfaction on the part of viñateros and bodegueros, however, stemmed from the financial burden imposed by Laws 758 and 759 (enacted in 1919 under the sponsorship of José Néstor Lencinas)⁵ which set up compulsory insurance against hail damages and provided funds for the construction of regional bodegas.⁶ The growers and processors claimed that the only part of these laws to be fully implemented was the collection of taxes; as far as reimbursement for hail damages was concerned, these were not paid on time--except when payments were expedited by the use of interested middlemen--; furthermore, not a single regional bodega had been built.

The discontent of these sectors was channeled into action with the initiation of an intense campaign known as the deroguista movement, aimed at repealing Laws 758 and 759. Minister of Industries Suárez energetically defended

⁵See note 54, p. 143.

⁶Specifically because of the industrial situation in 1922 La Prensa sent Rodolfo Luque as special correspondent to Mendoza, to analyze and report on the general conditions. His articles appeared in November 2, 8, 13, 19, 21, 23, 27, and December 2, 6, 10 and 15, 1922.

these laws on the grounds that "they had fulfilled and continue fulfilling the high purposes" for which they were created.⁷ In his view, without some kind of support, the price of grapes would decline and therefore, the economic value of the lands would be lowered. He affirmed the government's intention to protect the viñateros without bodegas in view of the significance of their interests.⁸

Minister Suárez contended that he could not favor an industrial policy guided solely by the principle of supply and demand, for in that case the viñatero would not have any protection from an intentionally-provoked decrease in the price of grapes. Contrary to what was generally possible with grains the grapes could not be stored or preserved for a period of time. They had to be gathered at the proper time or they would be entirely lost within a few days.⁹

⁷Los Andes, August 14, 1922.

⁸Suárez provided the following statistics:

	Number	Hectares	%
Viñateros without bodega	3,768	40,657	56.9
Viñateros/bodegueros	1,349	30,812	43.1
Bodegueros without vineyards	375		
	<u>5,492</u>	<u>71,469</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Ibid., September 17, 1922. Thousands of contratistas aided the viñateros.

⁹Ibid., September 22, 1922. Suárez reaffirmed his stand in the Ministry's annual report, stating that Laws

Suárez' efforts to assure a reasonable protection for the viñateros was strongly supported by Los Andes. This newspaper insisted time after time that any industrial law which did not protect the viñatero from the bodeguero was worthless; that the 1919 legislation needed to be reformed, not repealed, and that the new course followed by the government was purely a "bodeguero solution."¹⁰

The deroguista forces engaged Minister Suárez in a heated controversy throughout Mendoza during a good part of the second half of 1922.¹¹ They insisted that the price of the grapes should not be determined a priori, but instead, be left to market forces. Before a committee of the provincial Senate, the bodeguero sector reiterated the views of their group: total repeal of the laws regulating the industry, the worthlessness of building any regional bodega, and the uselessness of the State insurance against hail. The bodegueros' position was summed up with the

758 and 759 "...bear my signature," and that they were the "saviors of the industry." Memoria presentada a la Honorable Legislatura por el Ministerio de Industrias y Obras Públicas, Ing. Leopoldo Suárez (Buenos Aires, 1924), p. 25. Suárez' viewpoints were explained in great detail in his works La industria vitivinícola en Mendoza en 1922 (Mendoza, 1922), and La acción del estado en la industria vitivinícola (Mendoza, 1922).

¹⁰Los Andes, March 5, 1923.

¹¹The deroguista forces were: Sociedad Agraria e Industrial (a strong bodeguero voice), Centro de Viñateros, Unión Comercial e Industrial, and Centro de Almaceneros Minoristas.

statement that each viñatero "should be able to protect himself."¹²

The compulsory insurance against hail established by Law 759 was a heavy burden for the viñateros and became an ideal target for the bodegueros to attack. During 1920 and 1921 the revenue of Law 759 amounted to \$ 11,052,000--an enormous sum--while the indemnifications paid until the end of July 1922 did not exceed \$ 5,390,000. The industrial sectors were especially critical of the administrative expenses of the Comisión de Fomento, the agency supervising the two laws, which amounted to \$ 3,044,000.¹³ Taking into consideration that not all the compensations to the viñateros were paid, and that not a single regional bodega was built, the opposition was amply justified in asking the government what it did with the funds. Although many viñateros abused the system by exaggerating their losses, it was apparent that the government wasted in an unnecessary bureaucracy funds that were an important part of the provincial wealth.¹⁴

An answer to the controversy was worked out in direct

¹²Los Andes, August 5, 1922.

¹³Ibid., August 15, 1922.

¹⁴Lencinas stated that 4,775 hectares reported as destroyed by hail, were not. This amounted to an illicit claim made by the viñateros for \$ 1,710,000. Mensaje del Gobernador, June 1922, n. p.

discussions between the governor and the bodegueros. Accordingly, as Lencinas yielded to bodeguero pressure, the legislature repealed most of the laws regulating the wine industry.¹⁵

José Néstor Lencinas had tried in 1919 to counter-balance the traditional supremacy of the bodegueros over the viñateros through the enactment of Laws 758 and 759. But these laws were only partially enforced, and the huge sums collected from the viñateros and the bodegueros had fed a provincial bureaucracy often accused of inefficiency and corruption. It might then be asked why Carlos Washington did not try to reform the laws instead of yielding to the demands of the bodegueros. Could he ignore the argument that giving a free hand to the processors meant diminishing the bargaining position of the viñateros? Did he underestimate the fact that there were thousands of contratistas whose fate was bound to that of the viñateros?

In his second annual message, in June 1923, Lencinas acknowledged the indisputable weight of the deroguista movement, and praised his own decision for accepting a view which was contrary to his own personal position. It

¹⁵Law 810, of February 1923, repealed Laws 758 and part of 759. The bodegueros obtained still another triumph. In December 1923, Law 866 was enacted, reinstating a tax on grapes sold outside the province for the purpose of producing wine outside Mendoza with grapes from this origin, and forced the viñateros to resort to the bodegueros as the only source available to sell their production.

seems that Lencinas, as head of a movement claiming to be free from the oligarchical virus, should have been able to remedy the widespread deficiencies of the Comisión de Fomento, while using it to balance the interests of the two most important groups in the provincial economy, and not simply conceding to the wishes of the bodegueros.

The wine industry had other reasons to be content with the years 1922-1924. Not only were Laws 758 and 759 repealed, but the labor climate remained very peaceful compared with the agitation which José Néstor Lencinas had to endure in his two troubled years in power. The industry, as a consequence, was able to leave behind the period of crisis, and indeed in 1924 enjoyed one of the best years of the decade. Prices for wine were good, consumption increased, public works, both national and provincial, improved the utilization of water resources and communications, and with the economy on the upswing, immigrants once again settled in Mendoza in growing numbers, although far from the high figures of the first decade of the century.¹⁶

¹⁶ Foreign immigration to Mendoza increased steadily after World War I, as indicated by the following figures:

1918	547	1922	2,865
1919	885	1923	3,953
1920	1,740	1924	3,837
1921	1,528		

Ministerio de Agricultura de la Nación, Memoria de la Dirección General de Inmigración (Buenos Aires, 1928), p. 192.

Political favoritism was a ubiquitous feature of the Lencinas administration and this readily led to abuses in the handling of funds. This was particularly true in the Provincial Bank where the conduct of its directors, mostly political confidants of Lencinas, created a scandal that even affected his good name. Moreover, his first appointee as general manager of the Bank had to resign amid cries of anomalies, but the man Lencinas chose to succeed him was no better, ending up in the courts under prosecution for wrongdoing.¹⁷

But the Achilles' heel of the Mendoza government, the letras de tesorería, were to bring the province once again under federal tutelage.¹⁸ The use of the letras as

¹⁷The gross mishandlings in the Provincial Bank not only involved high officials of the administration, but also two Lencinist National Deputies, José A. Núñez and Luis Olmedo Cortés. They were investigated by a committee set up by the National Chamber of Deputies and after disclosure of their extensive illicit maneuvers in connivance with the high authorities of the Provincial Bank, they were expelled from Congress, further damaging the reputation of Lencinism. *Diputados*, 1925, I, 340-354; III, 761-770, 838-855; IV, 342-361, 449-471, 533-557, 574-586; V, 30-33.

Carlos Washington's intention to transform the Bank into a semi-private institution was repeatedly expressed, and to that effect several meetings were held in Buenos Aires and Mendoza. In a press interview the governor announced in August 1923 that all preliminary steps had been successfully taken, and reiterated his wishes that at the end of his term the new bank would be already functioning. *Los Andes*, August 19, 1923.

¹⁸Curiously, the most recent general work on the history of Mendoza, Jorge M. Scalvini's *Historia de Mendoza*, does not mention at all the letras when referring to the government of Carlos Washington.

a substitute for national currency had begun with the national government's reluctant tolerance at the end of the nineteenth century. Although their value was not at par with the peso, the letras were usually accepted for domestic transactions without any reservation, to the point that almost all provincial salaries were paid with them. The first symptoms of a noticeable devaluation appeared in 1921,¹⁹ and gradually the situation became more acute. As confidence in the letras eroded, nickel coins began to disappear from public use, and then pesos followed the same path. The principle of Gresham's Law was confirmed in Mendoza, where the "bad" currency removed the "good" from circulation.

The government believed that the bodegueros were by and large the beneficiaries of the situation, because they sold most of the production outside the province, in pesos, while they paid all local salaries and other expenses in letras. The Lencinist press put it in a very simple, one-sided perspective: the depreciation of the letras was "a new political maneuver of the conservatives."²⁰ Although the devaluation of the letras was small, the difference of exchange was significant because of the large volume of the wine trade. Los Andes estimated the bodegueros' windfall ranging from six to eight million

¹⁹Mendoza was then ruled by a federal commissioner.

²⁰El Látigo, February 1, 1923.

pesos annually.²¹ With this fact in mind, the government decreed in October 1922 that the tax on wine imposed by Law 779 should not be paid entirely in letras, as had been the case until then, but that 60 per cent be paid in pesos and the rest in letras.²² The industrialists rightfully protested that the government was violating the existing law which allowed full payment of taxes with letras. This action proved that the government was the first to show lack of faith in the papers it had issued. Moreover, the bodegueros argued that they were handling the funds they received from outside the province in the same manner that the government did with its grant from the National Board of Education, receiving it in pesos while paying out teachers' salaries in letras.²³

Judging the situation from a different angle, however, the measure taken by the government appeared reasonable, considering that the bodegueros were making a profit without justification. The government rule, nonetheless, worked in reverse, since by reducing the acceptability of the letras as payment for fiscal obligations, it diminished their market value.

²¹Los Andes, May 29, 1924.

²²During a four-month period in 1923, it was even decreed that the taxes be paid fully in pesos.

²³Los Andes, November 17, 1922.

Whatever the merits of the argument, the real value of the provincial money continued to decline. The devaluation rate reached 3 per cent by mid-1922 and increased to 4 per cent at the end of that year; it was lowered temporarily early in 1923 because of the large demand for letras to pay the wages for the harvest, but later climbed again, reaching 5 per cent in June 1923. The government, apparently did not welcome the devaluation of the letras, but defended them as instrumental to the economic progress of the province.²⁴ Los Andes contended that the avowed position of the governor was fictitious, for the letras were basically intended to provide the Lencinists with illegal currency to use for electoral needs, and to finance the provincial cash deficits.²⁵

In August 1923 Lencinas affirmed that the government wanted to restore the letras to par value, and was considering their full acceptance for tax payments. In a stance resembling that of the governments of the Régimen, he insisted that the province had the right to issue

²⁴Mensaje del Gobernador, June 1923, n. p. Federico J. Moyano, former Dean of the Law School of the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, and brother of Juan Agustín Moyano, asserts that it would have been a catastrophe to have withdrawn all the letras at once, since everything was traded in such currency, and some people did not have a chance to see a peso for a long time. Personal interview, Mendoza, June 25, 1972.

²⁵Los Andes, June 12, 1923.

letras unless the National Supreme Court ruled otherwise, because it was one of the prerogatives not entrusted to the Federal Government.²⁶ This was the same thesis that Governor Emilio Civit had enunciated in 1908, in response to a reprimand from Buenos Aires.

Another factor adding to the growing apprehension about the provincial money, was the spread of a rumor to the effect that the value of letras in circulation exceeded the \$ 9,380,704 the governor had reported in his 1922 message. This rumor was soon shown to be true when, in July 1923, Minister of Hacienda Soto's plan for a gradual withdrawal of the letras, involved the issuance of \$ 12,000,000 in so-called "bonos del tesoro." How was it possible that in spite of the fact that no law had authorized any further issuance of letras, 12,000,000 were now needed to replace \$ 9,380,000? The explanation given by the government was that in addition to this amount, there were \$ 2,586,982 held under the custody of the Public Credit, amounting to a total of \$ 11,967,686.²⁷

The situation in Mendoza by now was such that national currency, for all practical purposes, was like a foreign currency. The pesos disappeared from local

²⁶Ibid., August 10, 1923.

²⁷Public Credit was the provincial agency exclusively engaged in handling public debt, both internal and external, letras, and any other negotiable papers.

day-to-day transactions, while businessmen sought to protect themselves by raising the prices of goods when they were paid in letras. The vanishing coins were replaced by small substitutes--pieces of cardboard stating their equivalency--which the merchants used as exchange when they were paid in letras. Los Andes sadly referred to the "bad" currency, the letras, and the "worst" currency, the small cartoncitos, which brought to Mendoza a variation of the abusive system applied to the laborers in the workshops at Chaco.²⁸

In these circumstances, the national government seemed to be the only agency capable of putting an end to the dubious provincial money. Already in July 1923, the Acting Attorney General recommended that the national government demanded the immediate withdrawal of the letras. Thereupon, President Alvear proposed legislation to Congress to avoid further violations of the constitution in this matter. As a result of this pressure, Lencinas issued a decree on October 27, calling for a full count of the letras in circulation, and suggesting that the Mendoza government was at last determined to solve the problem. But the required action did not follow with the speed demanded by the situation.²⁹ The disarray provoked by the letras

²⁸Los Andes, February 2, 1924.

²⁹The further devaluation of the letras added more pressure to the beleaguered provincial government. By

reverberated in National Congress, where the prospects for a federal intervention grew with every day. Faced by this somber perspective, Lencinas hastily obtained legislative approval for a bill by which the letras would be gradually withdrawn.³⁰

The unlawful position of the government was put in evidence by a decree of September 11, which sought ex post facto to legalize the unauthorized issues made during Carlos Washington's administration. This decree approved the exchange of \$ 5,209,000, in addition to the \$ 12,000,000 of the Law 871. This action was taken at the time when the National Chamber of Deputies was about to decide on federal intervention. As the situation in Congress still allowed some flicker of hope that the intervention could be averted, Lencinas attempted an eleventh-hour solution, sending another bill on September 24 to the legislature, asking now for the immediate withdrawal of the letras, to be financed by a special tax on wine and grapes. This was the first serious step taken by the government in almost three years, to correct a situation which, besides being unconstitutional, encouraged speculation, reduced the real wage of the worker, and provided Lencinas' opponents with their most

July 1924 the discount reached 12 per cent, and the authorities tried a stopgap measure decreeing that all taxes could be payable again with letras.

³⁰It was Law 871, promulgated on July 31, 1924. It authorized the issue of "bonos" for 12 million pesos.

effective issue for toppling him from office. The bill was hastily approved by the provincial Chamber of Deputies, but by that time the ax had already fallen in Buenos Aires on Lencinas' government.

The lack of diligence with which Lencinas handled the issue of the letras seemed to indicate a confidence on his part that Alvear and the anti-Personalists in Congress would provide a shield against any intervention. But apart from this group, all other parties represented in Congress, by now extremely critical of Lencinism, pushed for intervention. It was the Federal Commissioner who investigated the status of the letras and took the steps for their eventual elimination. As it turned out, the total amount of letras withdrawn from circulation was \$ 16,638,920. Since Governor Lencinas had declared the total to be \$ 11,967,686, at least \$ 4,671,234 in letras, issued without any legal authorization, were in circulation. Early in 1926, just at the end of the federal intervention, two series of letras amounting to \$ 1,707,000 were discovered to be forgeries. The Lencinas' administration should not be blamed for this but it was responsible for at least \$ 2,964,234 in illegally issued letras.³¹

³¹Clarification of the report issued by the Federal Interventor, Enrique M. Mosca, in Senadores, 1929, II, 499-502.

The intense rivalry among national political groups gave Lencinas' enemies an opportunity to press for the end of his rule in Mendoza. The letras scandal was a prime issue for mounting a campaign for intervention. Why did Lencinas not take firm steps to eliminate this issue before the storm became unavoidable? Why did he tolerate the speculation that grew around the provincial money?

In theory, the letras were one of the best means to finance public works of general interest. When some special program required additional financing, the solution was to issue letras and to set up a regular timetable for their gradual withdrawal. As such, the letras yielded the same benefits, and played the same role, as municipal bonds. In practice, however, a number of transgressions violated the principles on which the letras were issued. They were not always applied to the purposes for which they were authorized; there were issuances of letras without the approval of the legislature; and instead of being issued for large amounts as was customary with bonds, they were printed in small values, with a format and size resembling that of the national currency. What is more, they were not withdrawn on schedule; or when they were, new ones were put in circulation in lieu of the old, thus maintaining the same quantity in the market when in fact they should have been

diminishing.³²

The bodegueros and businessmen in general tolerated and even accepted the issuance of letras. They found that by pumping money into the economy, more was to be gained than lost. They had supported such a policy on the part of the governments of the Régimen because they benefited from the artificial stimulus it gave to the economy. The bodegueros were always in the strongest position, since they traded the provincial wealth mostly in pesos. But the responsibility for this type of currency rested exclusively in the hands of the provincial governments. If the letras were devalued to the extent of being referred to as the "Mendozan Marks,"³³ it was the provincial authorities who were responsible, and it was their decisions which had the effect of driving the national currency, the only legal tender, out of circulation.

Was the Lencinist government too weak or simply negligent in solving the chaos of the letras? José Hipólito Lencinas asserts that some of Carlos Washington's collaborators were not seriously interested in finding a

³²Los Andes, July 21, 1923, noted that the government was like the magicians, on one side they burned the letras being withdrawn, with showy publicity, but on the other side, new letras were turned over to the public to replace those burned.

³³Ibid., August 3, 1923.

prompt and lasting solution.³⁴ Beyond this speculation, however, it appears that Governor Lencinas and his financial Ministers Soto and Moyano, failed to measure the power of the weapon they were placing in the hands of their political rivals. They vainly tried to cover up a fraudulent situation for which they were directly responsible.

Buenos Aires: The Final Test for Regional Populism

The iron-fist political methods of the Lencinists, the "packing" of the Judiciary through the Review Board, the problem of the letras, and the populist nature of the government in general--resembling that of Federico Cantoni in San Juan--had transformed the apparently rosy picture of Mendoza of February 1922. The relative political harmony existing at that time all but disappeared. Relations between the Lencinists and the opposition were in a state of collapse. By mid-1924, moreover, the political opponents--conservatives and popular parties (Personalist Radicals and Socialists)--had grown stronger in number and aggressiveness, encouraged by the misguided policies of the Lencinists.

The March 1924 election for National Deputies vividly displayed this growing antagonism. Although no opposition party could overcome the Lencinist majority in

³⁴Personal interview, June 23, 1972.

Mendoza, the relations among the political rivals became increasingly hostile. It was a prelude to the vindictive encounter which Lencinas and his enemies, especially the Yrigoyenists, would hold in Congress toward the end of the decade.

The Lencinists appealed to the populist rhetoric they had been displaying ever since José Néstor Lencinas campaigned for governor in 1917. But what made the 1924 election different from previous contests, was that now the opposition openly accused the government of corruption. While in the elections for the governorship, in January 1918 and December 1921, Lencinism had portrayed itself as a distinctive alternative to the Régimen, in 1924 its traditional anti-oligarchical position was challenged by its opponents. They claimed that Lencinism had taken on the attributes of their alleged enemies. The Socialists, applying their customary moralistic approach, depicted the Lencinists in blunt terms: "Each country has the government it deserves; Mendoza has a government of thieves...."³⁵ With the same critical tone, the Liberal Party spokesmen also denounced the climate of corruption and complained chiefly about the massive personalist propaganda of Lencinism. They contended that "people wants less turbulence, less 'gauchitos,' less pictures,

³⁵El Socialista, January 3, 1924.

and a bit more public honesty."³⁶

These defiant attitudes were also reflected in Buenos Aires, where national politics played an increasingly significant role in the Mendoza situation. This province and San Juan, were the only ones in the country ruled by populist governments that were at the same time strongly anti-Yrigoyenist. In a complex mosaic of political interests, the two Cuyo governments shared with the conservatives a hostility toward the Personalist Radicals, although there existed a profound aversion between them. But the Lencinists were accepted within the anti-Personalist faction, together with San Juan's Bloquism, not so much because of their own merits as branches of National Radicalism, but mainly for the contribution they made to the struggle against the Personalist faction.

Lencinas' popularity allowed his party to win handily the national and provincial elections in Mendoza. But it was in the National Congress that he had to face the implacable attacks of his old adversaries--conservatives and Socialists--and his new enemy, the Yrigoyenists. The examination of the credentials of the representatives from Mendoza in the National Chamber of Deputies, provided the opponents of Lencinism with the occasion to discredit

³⁶El Censor (Mendoza), January 12, 1924. The Lencinists distributed, among other things, thousands of calendars, pictures of both Lencinas, porcelain cups and alpargatas. In their rallies they played the hymn to José Néstor Lencinas.

the Mendoza government.

The selection of national senators had always generated intense interest, both at provincial and national levels. During the years of Lencinist rule, only one Senator had been chosen, Jorge Céspedes, an old Radical and personal friend of Yrigoyen, whose credentials were accepted in June 1922. But when the Lencinists sided with the anti-Personalists, Céspedes remained loyal to Yrigoyen. Ironically, the only Mendoza Senator chosen by the Lencinists became openly anti-Lencinist.

The second Mendoza seat had become vacant on May 1, 1922, at the end of Benito Villanueva's term, but was never filled. The legislature elected José M. Puebla, the former Minister of Government under both Lencinases, but his credentials were rejected by the National Senate, supposedly because he was born in Chile.³⁷ The local press speculated over the extensive delay in filling Villanueva's vacancy, which left Mendoza only half represented in the National Senate. One intriguing interpretation was that the choice of Puebla had been made deliberately with the idea that he would be rejected by the Senate. This would buy time until Carlos Washington ended his governorship and thus be available to fill the empty seat. At any rate, the Lencinists had a very weak

³⁷Senadores, 1924, I, 73-93. Puebla contended that he was born in Mendoza but baptized in Chile.

voice in Congress, where their representatives, restricted to the Chamber of Deputies, poorly served the interests of their province.³⁸

The credentials debate over the National Deputies elected in 1924 provided the forum for the Radical Yrigoyenists, conservatives, Socialists and Progressive Democrats, to launch a searing indictment of Lencinism.³⁹ No facet of the Mendozan government was free from the

³⁸Their legislative initiatives were extremely few. In 1923 National Deputy José Hipólito Lencinas introduced a bill to remove the tracks of the Pacific Railway crossing through the city of Mendoza. José A. Núñez re-introduced the bill on guidelines for the wine industry, which had been already reproduced by Carlos Washington Lencinas in July 1920, when he was National Deputy. In 1924 none of the three Lencinists deputies, José Hipólito Lencinas, José A. Núñez and Luis Olmedo Cortés, introduced a single bill. Their participation in the debates was nil, except those concerning the political situation of Mendoza. As noted earlier, in 1925 Núñez and Olmedo Cortés were expelled from the Chamber because of the Provincial Bank affair.

³⁹Diputados, 1924, II, 289-310; 341-371. June 9, and 10. According to the national constitution, it is the exclusive right of each Chamber of Congress to be the judge of the credentials of its members. The Chamber can reject any of them if it is proven that the election was not properly conducted at the ballot box. But the Chamber is not entitled to base its judgment on the local political conditions of the campaign, or any other situation not specifically related to the act of casting the ballot. This had been a traditional procedure of both Chambers of Congress. But the enactment of the Saenz Peña Law and the changes it provoked in voting procedures, made this requirement almost worthless. For a new factor began taking shape in the political habits of the parties and the electorate, which consisted of transferring the vices of the old days--fraud at the ballot box--to more sophisticated means, equally objectionable, of pre-electoral manipulation.

criticism of the representatives from those sectors. Mendozaan Deputy Frank Romero Day, independent but anti-Lencinist, asserted that the two pillars of Lencinism were money and the abuse of power--two corruptive elements. Enrique Bordabehere, a Progressive Democrat for Santa Fe, referred to a situation in the Department of La Paz, in Mendoza, in which policemen and "dead" persons had voted, as proof of the fraudulent nature of Lencinism. For what was most disturbing, Bordabehere observed, was that they had resorted to transgressing the law exclusively for the sake of transgression, since their electoral success was never in jeopardy. And the deputy for Santa Fe added these concepts of universal weight:

The amorality that characterizes the governments that subvert all norms of administrative and political decency, leads to this conclusion: that corruption, fraud, and wrongdoings, are traits that become ingrained in them and are practiced under the pretension of adding luster to these governments.⁴⁰

Socialists and conservatives repeatedly emphasized that their approval of the credentials of the Lencinists followed the specific rules of the Chamber, but did not represent, under any circumstances, an acceptance of Lencinas' government. "We will approve Mendoza's credentials, not because we want to," said the Socialist Deputy Adolfo Dickmann,

⁴⁰ Diputados, 1924, II, 359. Benito Marianetti believes that Carlos Washington could have been a more law-abiding ruler without risking the large majority he enjoyed. Personal interview. June 21, 1972.

...but because this is the sad political reality of the country, and because if we were to reject Mendoza's credentials for reasons not strictly related to the casting of the ballot itself, we would have to reject almost all the elections held in the country.⁴¹

The Lencinists' credentials were accepted, but it was a lackluster victory, for by June 1924 the pressure against Carlos Washington's rule kept mounting in Buenos Aires. La Época claimed the "moral necessity" to intervene in Mendoza, calling the situation there, as in San Juan, an "infectious case of political pathology."⁴² In June 1924, a one time notorious Lencinist, Roberto J. Rincci, now a zealous Yrigoyenist, introduced a bill to place Mendoza under federal control again. The originality of his bill was its Article 3, which called for 30 per cent of the provincial revenue to be allocated to withdrawing the letras.

The Alvear government, anxious to avoid the fall of a friendly governor, tried to block congressional approval of this bill. The Minister of the Interior, Vicente C. Gallo, in a very brief appearance before the Chambers' Committee on Constitutional Affairs, insisted that there were no grounds for the intervention. Unable, however, to prevent approval of the bill by the Committee, the anti-Personalists tried to delay the debate in the

⁴¹Diputados, 1924, II, 364.

⁴²La Época, June 17, 1924.

Chamber. This strategy took into consideration the fact that it was already mid-September and that Congress would adjourn at the end of the month. Moreover, Lencinas' term would end in February 1925, before the legislators were to convene again.

The other political parties, however, were firmly determined to end the Lencinist rule. The Personalists, especially, hated Lencinism not only because it had departed from Yrigoyen's hegemony, but also because of its close affinity with San Juan's Bloquism--now the most irreconcilable enemy of the Yrigoyenists. The conservatives in the Chamber sided with their party colleagues from Mendoza and supported the intervention. But here too there was a labyrinth of interests, because a group from the province of Buenos Aires, headed by Rodolfo Moreno, was not in favor of conceding any indirect help to the Yrigoyenists. The bonaerense conservatives had received support from the Lencinists when their own credentials were under fire in the Chamber, and the Lencinists had also sided with the conservatives in opposing the Yrigoyenist drive to intervene in Córdoba in 1923. The Socialists were in a special situation. Although on principle they were opposed to federal interventions in the provinces, the party had taken an official stand against any provincial government issuing provincial currency. In accordance with this policy, the Socialists

were committed to vote favorably on any intervention in a province engaged in such a practice.

During the two-day debate in the Chamber the opponents of the intervention attacked the measure in its financial provisions, alleging that it was unconstitutional to alter a provincial law by congressional decision.⁴³ They also argued that it would be practically impossible to attend the normal bureaucratic needs of the province with only 70 per cent of its regular income. To counter the government's strategy of delay, the Personalist deputies threatened not to attend any sessions if the intervention in Mendoza was not dealt with in the Chamber. The Lencinists' hope began to vanish when on September 24, by a close vote of 60 to 52, the deputies decided to debate Mendoza's case.⁴⁴ Later, the Chamber approved the intervention by 77 votes to 22.⁴⁵

⁴³Diputados, 1924, IV, 449-517; 530-606. September 23 and 24.

⁴⁴The affirmative vote of five Socialists was decisive in determining Lencinas' fate. Joaquín Coca, then a Socialist National Deputy, referred to this situation in El contubernio. Memorias de un diputado obrero (Buenos Aires, n.d.), pp. 118-120.

⁴⁵During the debates, the climate in the Chamber of Deputies was highly antagonistic, to the point that Deputies Rincci and José Hipólito Lencinas exchanged very offensive terms. In a move to delay the last session, the meeting was adjourned close to midnight of September 23, in what appeared to be an irregular procedure of the anti-Personalists, who presided over the session. This touched off a major scandal, with fist-fights and guns dominating the Chamber, and involving also the numerous public in the galleries.

Alvear now tried to persuade a majority of the Senate to block approval of the bill, pointing out that if the intervention were sanctioned, it would represent a triumph for the Yrigoyenists, at the expense of the government. But his efforts proved fruitless. During the debate in the Senate, Francisco Vergara, a Personalist for Buenos Aires, restated the position of his sector that Mendoza's case was not only a political question, but also one of "social hygiene and national decency."⁴⁶

The real battle-line lay between the Yrigoyenists and the anti-Yrigoyenists. Mendoza provided the stage for their new confrontation, and the decision to intervene or not in that province reflected basically the positions of the different groups in national politics. The government of Carlos Washington was almost a bystander in the debate. There was not even a Lencinist Senator to speak in its behalf. San Juan Senator Aldo Cantoni, tried a mild defense of Lencinism, but he was not convincing. Quite different had been the proposed intervention in Buenos Aires, sought by the anti-Yrigoyenists, and the proposed intervention in Córdoba, pushed by the Personalists. In these two instances there was a balance of forces in Congress which precluded either projects from materializing. But

Amidst the chaos, the Yrigoyenist Deputy Romeo Saccone demanded the continuation of the session and shouted that "If the police are against it, we will expell them with our guns!" La Prensa, September 25, 1924.

⁴⁶Senadores, 1924, II, 767-793 (September 29).

Mendoza could only rely on the numerically-insufficient anti-Personalist faction.

The Senate approved the intervention by 16 votes to 9. Alvear could have vetoed the law on the grounds of the alleged unconstitutionality of Article 3--allocating 30 per cent of the budget to withdraw the letras--but he decided not to do so.⁴⁷ Enrique M. Mosca, a former National Deputy and a prominent Radical leader for Santa Fe, was appointed Federal Commissioner.

Carlos Washington Lencinas and Lencinism.

An Evaluation

Federal intervention had been associated with Lencinism from its inception to its end. Both Lencinas' governments--lasting a total of four and a half years--were interspersed with four federal interventions. These interludes did not affect the continuity in the style of government of José Néstor Lencinas or his son. Both represented a special type of popular caudillo, in the sense that both had experienced the distinction of a university education. It was common for the well-to-do families of the province to train their sons in the leading professions, but it was unusual to have the doctores

⁴⁷The provincial Lencinist Senators appealed to the National Senate contending that the National Supreme Court in Anvaria v. Buenos Aires, in 1918, considered that federal interventions were actions of political nature, their scope limited by the constitution and the laws. Los Andes, September 27, 1924.

leading the crusade in defense of the "chusma de alpargata."

As had also been his father's policy, Carlos Washington frankly rewarded his political friends to the extreme of sheltering elements which eventually discredited his government. He adhered rigorously to the principle that to the victors belong the spoils, and he was given to nepotism, assigning posts to his brothers José Hipólito and Rafael Néstor, and other members of the family. Both of these practices were to cause him trouble. In the case of his brothers, their political actions reflected directly upon the governor, and whatever they did that was questionable or controversial inevitably affected his reputation.

The general mediocrity of his collaborators in the government indicates perhaps the paucity of talent within Lencinist ranks. There was a good number of lawyers among them, but they were not able to provide the movement with the efficiency and ethical spirit that would have improved the quality of the government. If some men were simply mediocre or not qualified to fill positions of responsibility, others engaged in illegal or controversial activities, placing on the government a stigma of corruption that exceeded by far anything that was ascribed to the regime of José Néstor Lencinas. Carlos Washington himself complained about the questionable

schemes brought up to his desk at the government house, which he called "solicitations of the most dubious and complex nature."⁴⁸ Looking back over the years at the period, José Hipólito Lencinas acknowledges that as the exercise of power often paves the way of corruption, so it was with Lencinism.⁴⁹

At a time when the only means of mass communication was the newspapers, and their impact was limited by the high rate of illiteracy and semi-illiteracy in the adult population, regional caudillos had to resort to other measures to maintain ties with the people. Lencinas travelled constantly all over the province, mending political fences and approaching people on a personal basis, as if he were also a member of the family. In this connection, it is said that he used to tour the departments carrying in his car a good number of coats. On occasion, when greeting or visiting some humble supporters, he would take off his coat to offer it as a personal gift to a man who warmly welcomed such a needed present. Then, as Lencinas moved to another place he would repeat the same action, thus establishing his image as a man of noble instincts and

⁴⁸Mensaje del Gobernador, June 1923. n. p.

⁴⁹"El cambio fue muy grande para no marearse," he said. Interview with José Hipólito Lencinas.

open heart.⁵⁰

Another popular story about Carlos Washington relates to his well known capacity to get acquainted with people and to his receptivity to the numerous invitations and toasts which were offered him everywhere he went. On the frequent occasions on which Carlos Washington had to cope with a succession of invitations involving food and wine, he is said to have resorted to voluntary regurgitation in between engagements. In this way he was able to keep his physical and mental abilities unimpaired by the excessive food and alcohol, without having to refuse an invitation, which would have been inappropriate on any occasion, and especially so for a man permanently under the people's eyes. Other anecdotal references seem to have evolved more from what his popular appeal suggested than from the real facts.⁵¹

Whatever the credibility of these stories, the fact is that Lencinas was extremely well-liked by the common

⁵⁰ This is a widespread story which had been repeated to me endlessly. The earliest instance in which I found such reference printed was in José María Rosa, Resurgimiento de un pueblo. Mendoza, setiembre 1930 a febrero 1932. Documentación complementaria (Mendoza, 1932), pp. 21-22. Rosa was the Federal Interventor appointed by the de facto government after the September 1930 revolution.

⁵¹ For example, in trying to add to Carlos Washington's stature as a populist leader, Dardo Olgún stated that he was "a fair singer and guitar player," "...y en el medio de mi pecho....," p. 30. But some contemporary observers affirm that Lencinas did not play guitar.

man. Ironically, in an administration discredited by charges of corruption, emanating from different political quarters, Carlos Washington was considered an honest leader. His inefficiency as an administrator may be attributed in part to a spirit always receptive to fiestas and warmly accepted by the feminine segments. These may have distracted him from fulfilling his duties more thoroughly and from setting a better example for his subordinates. But this could be only part of the explanation. Either he was deceived by people he appointed to high public positions, or he was been very neglectful in demanding observance of the law by those responsible for watching over the public interests, or he himself was the source and bad example of corruption. Without discarding the other two, the second alternative seems to be most plausible. The common men, many of them illiterates, did not comprehend the complexities of government and could not have understood that many of those purporting to represent the people--el "pueblo"--were in fact engaged in self-serving activities.

As to his political strategy, Carlos Washington only had to remind his followers that the Lencinist governments had implemented the minimum wage, the 8-hour maximum and the old-age pension, to undermine the charges made against him by the opposition. His political propaganda centered on these three basic accomplishments,

and they were appealing enough to retain the loyalty of his supporters.⁵²

The confrontation between Lencinism and its critics symbolized the class conflict existing in Mendoza society, since the political alliances were mostly determined by the economic status of the citizens, and the social values to which they conformed. Lencinism under Carlos Washington continued to represent, at least symbolically, the values of the lower segments, in opposition to those of the well-to-do. The hard core conservative element always considered the Lencinist movement as a distortion of traditional values, and rejected with contempt the "chusma de alpargata." "The Mendoza society does not exist any longer," claimed a typical representative of the creole upper class, "the depraved indigenous element [creole] fraternizes admirably with the corrupt and exotic sector [foreign immigrants], to undermine the foundations of society and degrade the provincial ambience."⁵³

⁵²Moreover, they enjoyed recalling that Carlos Washington has vetoed a bill in March 1922, which granted his mother the salaries which would have been collected by José Néstor Lencinas until the completion of his term. If he was so concerned with money, the Lencinists contended, there he had an open opportunity to accept a sizeable figure, which after all was given to his mother through a legal, customary procedure.

⁵³Severo Gutiérrez del Castillo, El Dr. Severo Gutiérrez del Castillo, al pueblo culto de Mendoza (Mendoza, 1922), p. 3.

The opposition against Carlos Washington was as aggressive as it had been against his father. The dogmatic Socialists fought tooth and nail against what they considered the political vices and social ills of some Lencinist groups, whom they also depicted as servile adulators of the "gauchito." Moreover, the position of the Socialists in regard to the letras placed them in total opposition to the Lencinist view on this matter. The conservatives, although electorally diminished in the province, were able to agitate the political sectors in Buenos Aires, where rested their only chance to get rid of Lencinism through a federal intervention. The Yrigoyenists regarded the Lencinist support for the anti-Personalist cause as a shameful abjuration of the noble Radical principles and their proclaimed interest for the underdog as simply demagoguery. As one Yrigoyenist stated in the National Chamber of Deputies, "I am a true worker, not one of those who profit at the expense of the worker."⁵⁴ But the fact is that the Yrigoyenists were unable to make serious inroads into the provincial political scene, and for this reason they vigorously joined the pro-intervention forces in Congress.

Regardless of their respective political orientations, the opposition groups within the province looked more

⁵⁴Words expressed by National Deputy for Mendoza, Francisco Rubilar, Diputados, 1921, IV, p. 155.

toward Buenos Aires than to the legal resources available at home, to redress their grievances against the government. Countless telegrams poured into the Federal Capital, addressed to Congress, the Minister of the Interior, the President, and the so-called "prensa seria."⁵⁵ It can be argued that the opposition felt undefended by the provincial institutions and sought the protection of the Federal Government, especially when the letras became the major issue. But it also seems clear that the opposition was compelled to appeal to Buenos Aires because of their permanent minority political status, and the fact that the Lencinists appeared to be unbeatable at the polls.

Since freedom of the press was absolute at this time, it was the best forum for all the groups and political parties to present their views and to criticize their opponents. It seems certain that the endless political documents, manifestos and telegrams issued by the different sectors reached a newspaper office before that of its addressee. In this respect, the appeals to La Nación and La Prensa played a most significant role in shaping the image of Lencinism

⁵⁵This expression was used for La Nación and La Prensa.

outside Mendoza.⁵⁶

There is no doubt that the weight of these two porteño dailies was very important in influencing public opinion, especially among conservative, well-to-do elements. Their criticism of Lencinism was based many times on constitutional grounds, and the objections they raised were in line with the orthodox viewpoint which guided their political philosophy.

The unfavorable comments of these two newspapers intensified as reports of corruption grew and as Lencinism imposed a climate of political intolerance in Mendoza. At one time La Prensa stated that in that province it was not possible to dissent with the Executive without risking freedom or life itself.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, their correspondents in Mendoza were local people directly associated with the conservative sectors, and as such, they reported one-sided versions most of the time. Because of the great influence they exerted, it is regrettable

⁵⁶The following evaluation of Lencinism serves to illustrate this fact.: "...este círculo demagógico y regresivo odia cordialmente a la ilustración, especula con la ignorancia de las masas, las incita a vilipendiar a la sociedad culta y a burlarse de la gente que viste con decoro y se comporta con corrección, simboliza sus ideales y su concepto de la evolución mental en la alpargata; administra los dineros públicos con la más absoluta falta de escrúpulos y abre las puertas de las cárceles a los procesados por delitos vergonzosos." La Prensa, March 14, 1926.

⁵⁷La Prensa, August 13, 1924.

that while condemning the excesses of Lencinism, La Nación and La Prensa did not envision the social transformation that this populist movement symbolized.

There was a noticeable change in the position of the Yrigoyenist La Época as a result of the definitive alliance of the Lencinists with the anti-Peronists. During the years when José Néstor Lencinas was governor of Mendoza, he was constantly assailed by La Prensa and La Nación. On the other hand, because he had been a traditional supporter and political friend of Yrigoyen, La Época openly defended Lencinas in the early part of his administration, but refrained from attacking him when his relationship with Yrigoyen began to cool. At the same time, La Época rancorously attacked La Nación and La Prensa with a language highly indicative of its hatred for the two well-established newspapers.

Conversely, during the governorship of Carlos Washington, as he openly embraced the anti-Personalist forces, La Época gradually became more hostile to his rule and his movement. But as La Nación and La Prensa were also opposed to Lencinism--as well as to San Juan's Bloquism--La Época found itself sharing with the two former "villains" the same feelings on both governments of Cuyo, and therefore ceased to attack La Nación and La Prensa almost completely.

The conservatives resented Lencinism, as they would

have resented any political force that took a pro-worker stand, regulated their business and taxed their operations. However, prosperity returned to the mercantile sectors, and the bodegueros especially profited from the Lencinist decisions. Carlos Washington followed the recommendations of the industrialists in implementing changes that served the interests of the bodegueros more than the general interests. But the businessmen and industrialists in general could not absolve Lencinas for his pro-worker position and the heavy taxation imposed upon them by the populist and costly administration. It was estimated that 70 per cent of the production costs of wine were taxes.⁵⁸ It turns out that under Lencinas' rule, the wine sectors improved their business. During the not too distant past, they had appealed to the provincial government for its support, and millions had been spent in destroying grapes and disposing of wine, just to protect the industrial interests. During the government of Carlos Washington they did not have to raise their cries for help, as in the past, but were intensely committed to let supply and demand rule the market. What better sign than this to prove that they were enjoying a period of

⁵⁸Ovidio V. Schiopetto, "La doble imposición interna en la República Argentina. Estudio del sistema impositivo de la Provincia de Mendoza." Facultad de Ciencias Económicas. Investigaciones de Seminario, V (Buenos Aires, 1927), 362.

prosperity?⁵⁹

Beyond economic considerations, however, the upper segments could not approve either the Lencinist philosophy or its methods. Political rivalry, with strong social overtones, was a fact of life, be it called "Causa versus Régimen," "poor versus rich," "bodeguero versus peón," "Jockey Club versus Círculo de Armas,"

⁵⁹Wine sales showed a steady increase in the Lencinist period:

1922	407,065,000 liters
1923	428,061,000
1924	472,084,000

Provincia de Mendoza, Síntesis de la Dirección General de Estadística, 1930-1931, p. 169.

Likewise, wine consumption per capita reached its peak for the decade in 1924:

1920	50 liters	1925	59 liters
1921	55	1926	62
1922	64	1927	50
1923	62	1928	56
1924	66	1929	57

Provincia de Mendoza, Ministerio de Industrias y Obras Públicas, El problema vinícola. Memorial de la intervención nacional en Mendoza a la Comisión Asesora para la industria vitivinícola (Mendoza, 1931), p. 110.

The prosperity of the wealthier sectors was also indicated by the growing number of cars:

1919	827
1920	946
1921	1,407
1922	1,582
1923	2,294
1924	3,409

Provincia de Mendoza, Síntesis de la Dirección General de Estadística, 1930-1931, p. 142.

"gansos versus pericotes."⁶⁰ The rivalry became more acute toward the middle of 1924, when political abuses, administrative corruption and the debacle of the letras, cornered the provincial government in an untenable position.

The fact is that in spite of the populist glamour of Lencinism under the guidance of Carlos Washington, its real achievements were less significant than its failures. Its promises went unfulfilled in every major field. Financially, not only was it unable to restore the value of the letras, but the government was seriously involved in illicit activities. The gross mishandling of the provincial money provided a measure of the inability of the Lencinas' administration to deal seriously with a complex and vital problem. Without diminishing the responsibility of the provincial authorities, the Federal Government was also to be blamed for not taking the proper action when it was needed. For years the central governments "conveniently" ignored these constitutional violations. Would they have had the same tolerance if any province had set up its own custom house or created a parallel army? With respect to social legislation Lencinism deserves credit for the old-age pension law.⁶¹

⁶⁰Pericote was a popular name, despectively given to the Lencinists by their opponents. A pericote is a rodent.

⁶¹Provincial Deputy Luis Olmedo Cortés expressed

But this solitary achievement shows the neglect in which the glowing promises of Carlos Washington were left.

In his relations with other branches of government, Lencinas resorted to the highhanded methods of his father in "punishing" opposition members, and tampering with the Judiciary in a most arbitrary manner. Administratively, the corruption in the Provincial Bank, the failure to make it a semi-private institution, and the lack of responsibility in other agencies of government, meant that the situation inherited from the oligarchy, as the Radicals denounced it in 1917, had not improved. Perhaps there is no better example of unfortunate negligence than the School Board's administration: no massive effort was made to reduce the lack of attendance at schools; literacy was far from universal; no real interest was shown in making the school administration more reliable and efficient, and the teachers continued to be the pariahs of the provincial budget.⁶²

To what extent was Carlos Washington a demagogue in

that it was a "Lencinist Law," adding, "y digo así, veinte veces Lencinista." Legislatura de Mendoza, Diputados, 1922, II, 1558. February 16, 1923.

⁶²In 1926 Governor Orfila intervened in the School Board. He appointed Leopoldo Suárez as interventor. In Suárez' critical report of the school system, he noted that the teachers' salaries were in arrears as follows:

1920	\$	89,752	1923	\$	87,601
1921		31,050	1924		328,568
1922		142,665			

Los Andes, February 3, 1927.

his quest for social justice? Every man can be his own historian in this matter, but a sound judgment must take into consideration both the inner motivations of the leader and the external expressions in which his purposes were carried out. A sympathetic writer would view Lencinas as a sincere reformer and a man aware of his tremendous popular attraction, who thought of himself as a positive leader, without properly realizing the magnitude of his shortcomings. A critical view would note that rhetoric replaced substance, since the positive accomplishments were meager in comparison to the professed purposes of protecting and improving the lot of the popular sectors. Under Carlos Washington's rule, only one major piece of social legislation was enacted. Here, moreover, is a good example of demagogic techniques, for Lencinists placed posters on the walls of Buenos Aires, praising the old-age pension law as an example of advanced social legislation, just for the self-aggrandizement of Lencinas' political stature in the national circles, because the law was only applicable 600 miles away.

Lencinas' ascendancy was conclusively proved by the electoral returns from 1922 to 1924. Apparently he saw in the people's support the best indication that he was following in the right path, when in fact his tremendous popularity blinded him to the real nature

of the problems he was facing. He said in his 1923 annual message that everything was satisfactory, without a single cloud in sight; and in 1924 he repeated that concept with the same naiveté. His movement was victim of the endemic problem which affects all personalist regimes: it did not exercise self-criticism and seemed to be mostly immune from the criticism of its opponents. Did Lencinas government fail to carry out its promises because its very nature was a contradiction of "efficient" government? Or did he fail because under a populist facade, his rule degenerated into one of "populachera" nature?

But in spite of his numerous failings, it is hard to close this evaluation of Carlos Washington without pointing out his most redeeming value. For he was a true popular leader who enlightened the lives of thousands of humble people just by being a symbol of a better life for them.

Although he fell from power by his own wrongdoings, he also became a casualty of the strange alliance of Yrigoyenists, conservatives and Socialists, who had their own special reasons for seeking the political destruction of Lencinism. Pictured against the higher designs and intrigues of national politics, it seems as if Carlos Washington's role was bigger than the man himself.

But the Mendozan leader was in October 1924 as popular as he had been in February 1922. At 35 years of age, he still had a great political future to explore, and from his first minute out of office he began an aggressive campaign to regain power. His departure from the government marked the start of a new political trail which eventually led him into a direct confrontation with Yrigoyen.

C H A P T E R VIII
THE EMERGENCE OF POPULISM IN SAN JUAN.
THE CANTONI CLAN

The thrust for political regeneration that led to the prominence of José Néstor Lencinas in Mendoza during Yrigoyen's first term was also experienced in San Juan. Before the Radical wind swept the land of Sarmiento, this province was poorly developed economically and ruled by an entrenched oligarchy, socially and politically backward. Furthermore, the provincial Radical Party was not infused with the reformist spirit of the Mendozaan Radicals under the leadership of José Néstor Lencinas. Although it represented a somewhat different voice from that of the conservatives, its leaders were also a part of the traditional provincial structure.

The changes experienced in the 1920's, which greatly modified this general setting, were mostly due to the energy and strong personality of Federico Cantoni, a young Radical who had no reservations about alienating the more moderate members of the party. This paved the way for the clash of the divergent Radical elements and, more importantly, shaped San Juan's destiny for a tumultuous decade.

The two Radical factions were the Intransigents and the Nationalists. The former group represented the non-conformist branch of the party, while the latter was more traditionally-oriented and loyal to President Yrigoyen. The Intransigents considered the other faction to be a virtual representative of the Régimen, while the Nationalists, and those of the conservative Concentración Cívica as well, viewed Cantonism as a leftist movement whose pro-populist position was close to International Socialism, a force which in their minds represented social anarchy.

The prominent leaders of the two factions were Cantoni, of the Intransigents, and Napoleón Rosellot and Ventura Lloveras, of the Nationalists. Cantoni was born in San Juan in April 1890. His father, a man of pleasant manners, came from Italy and devoted his efforts in San Juan to his profession of engineer. His mother, also an Italian, had a very strong character and was very domineering. It has been generally pointed out that Federico inherited and absorbed from her his tough personality. He graduated from the Medical School of the University of Buenos Aires in 1913, and practiced in his native province. In 1917 he was elected to the Municipal Council and became provincial deputy a year later.¹

¹Rosellot was the traditional Radical leader of San Juan, so closely related to the provincial elite that he had been in 1911 the president of the Social

Following in the steps of José Néstor Lencinas, to whom Cantoni looked for political inspiration, the Intransigent Radicals were committed to the longings of the popular sectors. In contrast with the traditional stance of the Radical Nationalists, they adopted the alpargata as their political symbol. Thus, the Intransigents pursued the social objectives of the Lencinists, and shared with them the symbol which best illustrated the nature of their followers, the "chusma de alpargata."

The reform of the provincial governments was, as noted earlier, a fundamental priority in Yrigoyen's program of national political reparation. Accordingly, the conservative government of San Juan became the target of the Radicals, who regarded the Sanjuanino administration as a fraudulent one. Submitting its complaints to the Minister of the Interior, the Radical Party stated that the republican system of government was not functioning in San Juan because of repeated electoral frauds and the shameful arrangements of the conservatives aimed at perpetuating themselves in office. The Executive Power granted full credence to these partisans accusations. Indeed, they

Club, an institution harboring exclusively the well-to-do. In 1917 he was the party candidate for the governorship, but was defeated by the conservative Amador Isaza. Since that time, Rosellot and his political friends had quarrelled almost constantly with the young Cantoni, although all of them pledged their allegiance to national Radicalism. Rosellot died in November 1919.

constituted the legal foundation on which it justified its action, for on October 17, 1919, less than three weeks after Congress had adjourned, President Yrigoyen issued a decree placing the three governmental branches of San Juan under federal jurisdiction. Manuel F. Escobar, then President of the Supreme Court of Buenos Aires Province, was appointed commissioner with ample powers to carry out his duties.²

Naturally, the conservatives considered this action another manifestation of Yrigoyen's authoritarian rule. But the Radicals, who were the sole beneficiaries of this situation, found themselves deeply troubled by their internal dispute. If the intervention were to succeed, it was imperative for them to achieve some kind of workable unity. Thus, from the outset of Escobar's rule, it became evident that it had been easier for Yrigoyen to tumble the provincial government than to unite the members of his party.

When efforts undertaken by delegates from the National Committee of the Unión Cívica Radical failed, the Yrigoyenists blamed the "Maximalist Cantonist ferment" for the lack of success in forging party unity. Moreover,

²Yrigoyen, Pueblo y gobierno, VI, pp. 402-420. Illustrative of the local conservative reaction against the presidential decision was the fact that several statues in the city of San Juan appeared covered with crape the following morning.

they argued that there was no possibility of uniting with the Intransigents because the two factions represented positions as divergent as "light and darkness, treason and loyalty, honesty and perfidy."³ However, the results of the elections held for National Deputies on March 7, 1920, were a warning that a divided party couldn't capture political control of the province.⁴

Although the two Radical factions together obtained more votes than the conservatives, by presenting candidates independently they had to accept a minority status. Until this election the Radicals had been confident that the conservatives would have no possibility of preserving their majority. After that contest, however, they strove to unify the party at any cost. Even so their negotiations reached a stalemate, and Interventor Escobar chose to postpone the elections for a new governor for a few more weeks. Escobar's action was blatantly partisan, since his official obligation was to set up the legal conditions by which San Juan could be restored to its institutional powers, not to pursue the amalgamation of the officialist party.

³La Prensa, February 19, 1920.

⁴The conservative Concentración Cívica got 7,712 votes against 4,929 of the Intransigent Radicals (Cantoni) and 4,275 of the Radical Nationalists. The Socialists polled 1,741 votes. Ibid., March 15, 1920.

To break the impasse, the selection of the Radical candidate for governor had to be maneuvered from Buenos Aires. Yrigoyen believed that a figure removed from the local scene might best guarantee the support of the Sanjuaninos. Other provincial leaders, especially National Deputy Marcial Quiroga, agreed that this action was the only means to rescue the party from irreparable fragmentation.⁵ Accordingly, with presidential advice and consent, San Juan's Radicals proclaimed the candidacy of Amable Jones for the governorship of San Juan.⁶ The Cantonists were dissatisfied with this arrangement for although they were the strongest faction electorally speaking, they had no representation on the ticket. Nevertheless, they accepted Yrigoyen's decision in order to maintain a united front.

⁵Diputados, 1922, I, 132.

⁶Jones was born in San Juan but had not lived in the province for many years. He was a distinguished psychiatrist who had participated in professional meetings in Europe and the United States, authored a good number of works, taught at the University of Buenos Aires, and was director of the main mental hospital in Argentina. Politically, he was a Radical of "the first hour" and a trusted friend of Yrigoyen. He had been a delegate from San Juan to the National Committee and a member of the Radical Convention which nominated Yrigoyen as a presidential candidate in 1916. Aquiles Castro was chosen as the candidate for deputy governor. Castro, representing a small, traditional wing of the party, commanded little political significance but, by the same token, was a non-controversial figure in the dissention-ridden domestic Radical scene.

Jones was highly respected because of his professional qualifications, but his debut in provincial politics had a touch of arrogance. After having been away from San Juan for many years, he returned to his native province only nine days before the elections to declare that although the history of the Radicals of San Juan was written with a "blurred pencil," he would mark it with "indelible characters."⁷

As expected, Jones triumphed although by a narrow margin, in the elections held on May 16, 1920. On July 9 he was installed in office, becoming the first Radical in history to serve as governor of San Juan.⁸ Political regeneration thus finally reached the province but only after extremely laborious party maneuvers. The problem ahead for the Radicals was how to avoid the desintegration of their "patch-quilt" unity.

Whatever the expectations and anxieties of the Radical groups about the performance of the newly elected governor, the authoritarian way in which he initiated his rule deepened their antagonism. The Sanjuanino historian Héctor D. Arias has stated that Jones created a sui generis Radicalism, which can not be properly called "Yrigoyenismo," but "Jonismo."⁹ Jones was quoted in a

⁷La Prensa, May 8, 1920.

⁸The electoral returns were: UCR 8,997; Concentración Cívica 8,272. Ibid., April 1, 1922.

⁹Arias and Varese, Historia de San Juan, p. 434.

congressional report as having asserted that he would govern "with the party, without the party and against the party."¹⁰

The political situation thus seriously deteriorated within a few months after Jones took office. The police, implementing the governor's policy, arbitrarily curtailed the activities of his opponents; the non-officialist press became subject to growing harassment. The governor was also criticized for having recruited from outside the province most of the high level staff of his administration and the Judiciary. In the unpretentious provincial environment of San Juan, the higher bureaucratic positions were closely connected to social standing. Hence, Jones' appointments ran counter to the interests of many local people, and offended their ever prevalent pride in the "patria chica."

The legislature took a decisive stand to check Jones' affronts, and especially the arbitrariness of his Supreme Court nominations. José Flores Perramón, president of the three-man Provincial Supreme Court, was the only member of this tribunal who was properly appointed, for the other two judges proposed by the governor were denied confirmation by the Senate. Jones then appointed two other judges but without seeking the consent of the Senate, he

¹⁰ Ministerio del Interior, Intervención nacional en la provincia de San Juan (Buenos Aires, 1921), p. 118.

proceeded, with assistance from the police, to expel Flores Perramón from his office and install his new appointees. Other judicial positions were filled in a similar fashion. These arbitrary manipulations by the governor ruptured the fragile Radical unity.

Under the leadership of Cantoni, then a provincial Senator, the Radical Intransigents and the conservatives decided to confront the governor squarely in the legislature by resorting to the drastic legal solution of impeachment. The governor had already convened the legislature for a special meeting of January 29, 1921, the sole purpose of which was to approve the 1921 budget. With this as grounds he insisted that he would not recognize any other motions made by the legislative power. A few days later, however, realizing that in spite of his warning the Chamber of Deputies was still seriously considering his impeachment, Jones adjourned the legislature by decree on December 24. This dramatic action stirred up even more criticism and, contrary to Jones' wishes, failed to prevent the confrontation between the two powers.

Following this action, each side tried to anticipate the other's move. Their inflexibility made any compromise almost impossible. Since the legislative building was guarded by the police, the anti-Jonist legislators met secretly at the home of one of the members on February 26,

1921. At this secret meeting, they approved the initiation of impeachment procedures against the governor, and suspended him. On this occasion, and to express their solidarity against Jones, they formed a legislative block --a bloque--and it is from this that the name Bloquista, thereafter associated with Cantoni's movement, was derived.

Jones reacted angrily to the action of these legislators, ordering their arrest and charging them with conspiracy and rebellion. Almost all of them were arrested, including Cantoni. The press, however, except the officialist, was critical of Jones' autocratic rule, and reacted with indignation. The massive arrest of legislators was such a flagrant violation of their prerogatives that the Minister of the Interior ordered Jones to release them immediately. The echoes of these serious discords reached the halls of Congress, and at the end of January 1921 the National Chamber of Deputies appointed an investigating committee to study the political situation in San Juan.¹¹

Naturally, Yrigoyen was opposed to this congressional initiative and informed the Chamber that it did not have the legal power to appoint such a committee; if the Chamber wished to have some information concerning San Juan, the normal procedure was to request it of the Executive Power.

¹¹Diputados, 1920, VI, 131-183 (January 27, 1921)

Moreover, asserting his authority, the President affirmed that the provincial conflict had to be resolved by observing the provincial legislation.¹² This clash between the President and a branch of Congress was a confrontation over whose decision was to prevail in solving San Juan's dilemma. From the institutional viewpoint the provincial situation was a chaos. The governor was facing an attempt by the provincial Chamber of Deputies to impeach him and he had been suspended by a process which did not follow the proper legal steps. At the same time, Jones was taking the legislators to court, another unconstitutional act, before judges who could not legally perform in this capacity because they had been appointed by the governor but without the consent of the Senate. The hope for an institutional solution within the province was totally unrealistic.

Forced by the circumstances in San Juan, which could not be modified locally, Yrigoyen finally acceded to the request of the National Chamber of Deputies and introduced a bill on March 4, 1921, intervening in San Juan. Understandably, Yrigoyen's bill was very short on words. The need for the intervention was stated in generalities. The official verbosity of seventeen

¹²Ibid., 255-256. The request of the anti-Yrigoyenist Radicals to intervene in San Juan and the report of the investigating committee are on pp. 441-537 (February 25, 1921).

months ago when conservative Governor Isaza was displaced from office in the name of "political regeneration" was altered now in typical Yrigoyen-style justification, that is, that the intervention would "reestablish the functional regularity" of the government.¹³ Congress, however, did not accept these hollow words and modified the text of the law specifically stating that the intervention should guarantee the proper constitutional functioning of the legislative and judicial powers, as well as municipal self-government.¹⁴

Yrigoyen needed this law in order to rescue a friendly governor in serious distress. On the other hand, he was most reluctant to comply with it in view of the terms in which it was passed. To indicate his displeasure to Congress, Yrigoyen did not sign the bill and it was automatically promulgated ten days after he received it. Even so, he let four more weeks elapse before appointing the commissioner, Raymundo M. Salvat, another member of the Federal Judiciary.¹⁵

¹³Yrigoyen, Pueblo y gobierno, VI, pp. 421-445. Yrigoyen's message to Congress is on pp. 436-437.

¹⁴This was Law No. 11,112, dated March 9, 1921.

¹⁵Salvat's arrival was warmly greeted by the Cantonists, who displayed their antagonism against Jones chanting enthusiastically, "¡Cantoni sí, otro no!" La Prensa, April 22, 1921.

In a few weeks Salvat completed the analysis of the provincial situation. Like Interventor de Veyga in Mendoza in 1919, he based his actions on constitutional law. Therefore, on the first of June he ordered the withdrawal of all troops guarding the legislature, declared null and void all appointments to the Judiciary made without the consent of the Senate, ordered the reinstatement of all the judges dismissed by the governor and invalidated the municipal elections held in November 1920. The Bloquists were joyful about Salvat's decision, but their euphoria was short-lived. On June 3, abruptly, Yrigoyen decreed the end of Salvat's mission, stating that he had fulfilled the purpose for which he had been sent to San Juan.¹⁶ The fact was that whereas Yrigoyen considered Salvat's mission to be finished when he was ready to uphold the suspension of Governor Jones, Salvat had not even intimated that he considered his work completed.¹⁷

¹⁶Ironically, on the same day of Yrigoyen's decree, La Época expressed editorially that the measures taken by Salvat, forcing Jones to rectify his highhanded decisions, proved that the President had never interfered with the situation in San Juan.

¹⁷Shortly thereafter, the Minister of the Interior published all the documents pertaining to this intervention, but omitted Salvat's report of May 6, in which he outlined the steps he was contemplating and the reasons for them. Noting this intentional omission in the official publication, La Prensa, warned the President not to ignore Salvat's report as it had Commissioner's Saavedra on Mendoza in 1917. August 4, 1921.

Pressed by Congress to explain the premature termination of Salvat's intervention, Yrigoyen simply reported on July 7 that the conflict between the executive and the legislature of San Juan had been resolved by the commissioner. The President was more specific in criticizing the provincial legislature for resorting to an illegal procedure in trying to impeach a duly elected governor. However, he added, if Congress considered that the forthcoming elections for the new legislature ought to be held under federal supervision, he would approve a bill declaring a new intervention in San Juan.¹⁸ This in itself demonstrated the weakness of Yrigoyen's defense for ending Salvat's commission. In Congress a bill was immediately introduced authorizing a further intervention, but it was stalled in a committee for almost three months.

In San Juan, meanwhile, the situation was the same as it had been before Salvat: a virtual impasse. The bitter animosities were as pronounced as ever, but now there were further complications. Since the legislature had suspended Governor Jones, the provincial Senate appointed its president, Juan Estrella, as the Chief Executive. Thus, each side in the dispute now had its own governor, although in reality, Jones' rule was

¹⁸La Prensa, July 8, 1921.

uncontested because Yrigoyen had authorized the 15th Infantry Regiment to provide the governor with all necessary protection.

But in mid-September 1921 Congress was renewing its interest in San Juan's affairs and approved a new intervention, the second in only six months, in order to normalize the Chamber of Deputies and the municipal governments.¹⁹

Appraising the provincial situation, Sergio W. Bates, a contemporary journalist, thought that in spite of his errors, Jones was a sincere man. But as a psychiatrist practicing his profession among unbalanced patients for thirty years, Bates suggested that Jones believed San Juan to be a huge asylum where the "insane" opposition could be domesticated with cold showers.²⁰ Jones himself had made a depressing psychological appraisal of the province and the people he was ruling. He described it as a dormant environment, devoid of patriotism and dominated by obscure and inferior groups, obsessed with political ambitions. Jones believed it was the consequence of the biological heritage, the lack of a large, beneficial immigration, the influence of a very

¹⁹This was Law No. 11,168, dated September 24, 1921.

²⁰Sergio W. Bates, Muerte de Jones (La tragedia sanjuanina) (Buenos Aires, 1922), p. 52.

low-quality press and the general absence of cultural values.²¹

The heated controversy of "Jones versus anti-Jones" gradually reached a crescendo. Acts were countered by others, words of condemnation were repudiated with others more aggressive. Political tolerance had evaporated to the point where the only possible solution appeared to be the total exclusion of one side and the absolute supremacy of the other. For several months serious warnings were raised suggesting that such political intransigence could only result in a total struggle. The grave and gloomy tone of the admonitions became a constant theme in the press. In November 1920, La Prensa pointed out that the road chosen by Jones forecast the barrenness of his government. When he arbitrarily suspended the provincial elections scheduled for January 1921, it was predicted that only regrettable consequences could be expected from such overbearing procedures by the governor. In despair that Jones would never soften his arrogant stand, Los Andes stated that he was approaching "the abyss where he will be irremissibly buried." A few days later a manifesto of the Concentración Cívica suggested that those who opposed

²¹Provincia de San Juan, Libro blanco. Documentos oficiales de los hechos producidos en San Juan y el procedimiento empleado por el gobernador Dr. Amable Jones (San Juan, 1921), pp. 4-5.

the governor should get together "to overthrow as soon as possible the sacrilegious standard-bearer of the anarchy." In June, La Prensa reiterated that by exerting uncontrolled power, Jones would lead San Juan to lamentable extremes. The same day Los Andes resignedly concluded that perhaps the only way to bring a solution to the crisis was "the sacrifice, the immolation [of the governor] by his own will in his place of duty."²² In fact, Jones was conscious of the danger to which he was exposed and in order to prevent a probable attempt on his life he protected himself by spending nights at different places.

The pugnacity of Jones' enemies in San Juan and Buenos Aires, who were Yrigoyen's enemies too, the deliberate inertia of the President in forcing a change in the governor's course of action, and the overweening attitude assumed by Jones, combined to create a situation which could only be modified if one of both sides would adopt a sincerely conciliatory attitude toward the other. But political hatred was not appeased and the situation continued to follow a hopeless downhill path.

Early in October Cantoni was assaulted by the police in his home in Jáchal, the second city in the

²²La Prensa, January 3, 1921; Los Andes, March 2, 1921; La Prensa, March 14, 1921; ibid., June 12, 1921; Los Andes, June 12, 1921.

province, and was wounded in the foot. His political adversaries, however, claimed that it was in fact a self-inflicted wound. Back in the capital, in a gathering at the Plaza 25 de Mayo, in front of the government house, Cantoni pronounced on October 25, these menacing words:

The tyrant Jones has to be thrown out of the government house, dead or alive. Every man must have ready a Mauser, and if he does not have it, a Winchester, and if he does not have a Winchester, a shotgun, and if he does not have it, a gun, and if he does not have any firearm, he must seek a club, a hoe, a pocketknife or a suncho. But we have to throw him out, dead or alive.²³

It was not by chance than, that early in the afternoon of Sunday, November 20, 1921, when Jones, Juan Maglioli, a well-known bodeguero, and Luis J. Colombo, President of the Supreme Court of San Juan, were entering the little town of Rinconada in Jones' car, a hail of bullets struck them, killing Jones and Maglioli instantly. As if to make sure, a handbomb was also thrown partially disfiguring Jones' body.²⁴

²³Crítica, January 9, 1923.

²⁴The town of Rinconada is located twelve miles south of the capital, in the Department of Pocito. Jones was not the first provincial prominent figure to die because of violence. San Juan had a long and bloody history of political passion. In 1858 former Governor Nazario Benavidez was killed while he was in jail; two years later Governor José Antonio Virasoro died leading an armed movement; in 1861 former Governor Antonino Aberastain was shot after being defeated by the federal forces at the battle of La Rinconada, the same place where Jones fell; in 1872 Governor Valentín Videla was assassinated, and in 1884 National Senator Agustín Gómez suffered the same fate.

Within a few hours the police began arresting suspects and in a few days most of those implicated were in jail. Among the arrested were Federico Cantoni and his brother Elio, also a physician, although they were not present at the Rinconada when Jones was killed.²⁵

Federico Cantoni refused to make any statement on the grounds that he was protected by legislative immunity. The other defendants, however, contended that the Cantoni brothers had planned the whole attack. They explained that their intention was not to assassinate the governor, but rather to kidnap him in order to force him out of office. They stated that they believed it was the only means available to break the provincial stalemate. In justification, the Bloquists claimed that when the plan was carried out some of the men were not too sober and others were unable to control themselves, and so, unfortunately, the situation got entirely out of hand.

Considering the state of political hatred existing in San Juan, it seems more plausible that the real motive of the Cantonists was to eliminate Jones. The mere kidnapping of the governor did not promise an effective change in the

²⁵None of the accused were professional trouble-makers, none had a police record and some were even members of well-known families in the province. One of the arrested, Vicente Miranda Jameson, who was accused by the Jonists of having mutilated the governor's right ear, had his left ear cut off in retaliation.

political situation. Did the Bloquists believe that Yrigoyen would keep his hands in his pockets? From a strictly political viewpoint, the episode of the Rinconada appears almost useless when it is considered that Yrigoyen could appoint a new commissioner to pursue the same political action which Jones had been following, as in fact he did. But the Bloquists were ready to pay the price for getting rid of what they believed was a tyrant. This priority, apparently, overshadowed any other consideration. Thus, Jones was removed from the scene, but not the system that supported him, for Yrigoyenism was, after all, the root of the problem for the Bloquists.

Understandably, after the Rinconada there was a recrudescence of the animosities between the two opposing groups. Aldo Cantoni, another brother of Federico who was living in Buenos Aires, went immediately to San Juan to rally the Bloquists in a campaign of public agitation in behalf of the men arrested.²⁶

²⁶ Aldo was 29 years old and was practicing medicine in the Federal Capital, where he also had gained the fame of being the "doctor of the poor." Politically, he was a member of the International Socialist Party and had openly defended the Maximalist principles, both in San Juan--where in 1916 he was the candidate of his party for National Deputy, and in 1917 the candidate for deputy governor--and Buenos Aires. He also took part in the Comité de Agitación Córdoba Libre, in favor of the university reform. To assist Aldo Cantoni some of his political friends like César A. Moya, Graciliano Recca and Aldo Pecchini, also came to San Juan from Buenos Aires and joined the UCR Bloquista.

The situation in San Juan excited national concern. Within the political parties and in the press, the comments and criticisms focused intensively on the behavior of the President. In general, his foes contended that his guilty tolerance of Jones' excesses had been the fundamental cause for the tragedy. The Yrigoyenists, on the other hand, blamed the event of the Rinconada on their opponents' spirit of revenge. La Época, for example, specifically accused La Prensa and La Nación in numerous heated editorials of being the real instigators of the crime.²⁷

As noted earlier, Congress had approved a limited intervention in San Juan, two months before Jones' assassination. But Yrigoyen did nothing to implement it until early in December, almost three weeks after the governor's death, when he appointed Julio Bello as Federal Commissioner.²⁸ Bello did not carry an olive

²⁷ Aquiles Damianovich, a prosecutor during Jones' governorship, wrote his own account of the intrigues which led to the governor's assassination. He blamed most of the local politicians for their selfish political ambitions, and asserted that former Minister of Interior Rosendo Gómez, in connivence with the Bloquists and acting as a fifth column within Yrigoyen's cabinet, masterminded Jones' elimination, so Gómez could outbid him as the party candidate for vicepresident in the 1922 elections. El crimen y el poder. La lucha por la vicepresidencia y el asesinato de Jones (Buenos Aires, 1922), p. 258.

²⁸ Bello was a loyal Yrigoyenist political leader in Santa Fe province. Yrigoyen, Pueblo y gobierno, pp. 446-455.

branch when he arrived in San Juan in mid-December, for it was intended that the Bloquists pay dearly for every drop of blood of the Rinconada. The Yrigoyenists had had enough of Cantoni. Jones' death was the final straw, and they confronted the Bloquists with vehement rage. Neither mercy nor forgetfulness would be granted to the assassins of Jones. The clash between Yrigoyenists and Cantonists during the 1920's would mark one of the unfortunate political events of the decade.

San Juan was then ruled by Deputy Governor Aquiles Castro, a hesitant and timorous man who had spent most of his time away from the province. But at the end of February 1922, Bello took control of the Executive Power in spite of the fact that the intervention law did not confer upon him the right to assume executive office. Commenting on Bello's abuse of power, La Prensa stated that San Juan was not under a federal intervention but under "an arbitrary proconsulate at the service of the supreme personalism."²⁹ This comment was typical of the Buenos Aires' press opposed to Yrigoyen. Although they had condemned the crime of the Rinconada, from a political viewpoint they were cautious about criticizing Cantoni's action. This attitude underscored the fact that Yrigoyen was the axis of national politics. Provincial affairs as well as provincial caudillos were

²⁹La Prensa, March 21, 1922.

simply dependent clauses of the two major currents: for Yrigoyen or against Yrigoyen. This rationale determined basically what was principal and what was accessory in the political game. It explains why at this time Federico Cantoni received such benevolent treatment from the powerful anti-Yrigoyenist press.

Another paradox was that while Cantoni was recognized as the image of José Néstor Lencinas in San Juan, his evaluation by the national press was quite distinct. The anti-Yrigoyenist newspapers had bitterly criticized Lencinas for his political methods and "populist demagoguery." Thus, if it were agreed that Cantoni was Lencinas' alter ego, why did he receive such different consideration in the "prensa seria" than his mendocino preceptor? Their respective relations with Yrigoyen seem to be the logical explanation. Although during his administration Lencinas had severed his former warm ties with the President, he was regarded by the press as a fervent supporter of the "Causa" and an old-time friend of the President. The Yrigoyen-Cantoni relationship, however, had never been so close and, in fact, Cantoni had been at odds with the traditional wing of the UCR in San Juan which professed total loyalty to Yrigoyen.

Cantoni, therefore, was not treated in the press as an "Yrigoyenist" as Lencinas had been, but quite the

opposite for he had faced the President head on by openly confronting Jones' rule in San Juan. Accordingly, the conservative and liberal papers in Buenos Aires and the Cuyo softened the rough edges of Cantoni's behavior, because in spite of his excesses, his actions served the important purpose of condemning Yrigoyen's rule. Los Andes provided an example of this attitude when referring to the April 1922 elections which took place after the events of the Rinconada, it praised the Bloquist electoral success as a proof that the people were against the absolutism exerted from above.³⁰ And a few months later, La Prensa referred to Bloquism as a "democratic force."³¹

Meanwhile, Interventor Bello successfully blocked any judicial action intended to obtain the release of Federico Cantoni. When a judge ordered it on the grounds that Cantoni was protected by legislative immunity and was not caught in fraganti in any wrongdoing, as stated in the constitution, Bello ordered the police not to obey the judicial ruling. When the same judge complained about this to the Provincial Supreme Court, its president, who had been appointed without the approval of the Senate,

³⁰Los Andes, April 11, 1922.

³¹La Prensa, September 4, 1922.

ordered the complaint to be filed.³²

Undiscouraged by these official actions, Aldo Cantoni kept the Bloquists throughout the province constantly agitating for the release of the prisoners. At the same time he took care of the medical duties of his brothers Federico and Elio. It was not difficult for Aldo to rally popular support for his two imprisoned brothers. Both Federico and Elio enjoyed considerable prestige with the people, for their profession had put them in daily contact with the less fortunate segments of the population, and as a general rule they had not charged any fees to indigent people, but provided them with medicine and even with money.³³ A special correspondent of Los Andes stated that in San Juan there were countless followers of Cantoni who would offer their lives to defend him.³⁴ There seems little doubt that the people whom the Cantoni brothers had assisted professionally felt obligated to them, and that their sense of gratitude far outweighed any reservations they might have had for their part in the Rinconada.

The first test of the popularity of the Bloquists

³²Ibid., June 2, 1922.

³³Ibid., December 2, 1921. See the special comment on the professional activities of both Federico and Elio Cantoni.

³⁴Los Andes, November 29, 1921.

after Jones' death, took place at the elections held in April 1922. Revealing their growing political alliance with the masses, they were able to defeat both the Yrigoyenists and the conservatives.³⁵ The counting of the ballots, however, did not resolve the controversy for in Congress Yrigoyenist members, whether in discussions of Bloquist credentials or in other debates, permanently reminded the latter of their shortcomings. Indeed, down until 1930 the assassination of Jones was a constant note in the polemic and the Yrigoyenists labeled their rivals, in the words of one deputy, as a mafia devoid of humanitarian feelings.³⁶

Meanwhile, the judicial process of the Rinconada, in the hands of the Yrigoyenist court, was moving forward. On October 10, 1922, two days before Yrigoyen ended his term, the prosecutor demanded a sentence of life imprisonment for Federico Cantoni, as the "moral author" of the crime, for having planned it, selected the men to do it, supplied the weapons and "having exerted spiritual

³⁵The electoral returns were as follows: UCR Bloquista 7,240 votes; UCR 5,685, and Concentración Cívica 5,461. Diario Nuevo (San Juan), January 4, 1923. The personal nature of this civic confrontation between Bloquists and Yrigoyenists was also evident in the ballots themselves, in what can be termed "the battle of the pictures." The former showed the pictures of Leandro N. Alem and Federico Cantoni and a five-point star, their symbolic mark. The latter's ballot carried the picture of Alem, Yrigoyen and Jones.

³⁶Diputados, 1922, I, 121 (May 12).

influence over the weak minds of other people." The prosecutor demanded a 20-year sentence for Elio Cantoni.³⁷

The inauguration of Marcelo T. de Alvear as President introduced a new factor in the relations between the national government and the political situation in San Juan. From the time Bello became commissioner in December 1921, he had merely perpetuated the Personalist rule in San Juan and President Yrigoyen did not have any visible intention to normalize the situation.³⁸ Bello returned to San Juan after Alvear's inauguration, and this led La Época to affirm that the commissioner's trip proved the continuity between the previous and the present administration, for Alvear was following in Yrigoyen's steps.³⁹ But La Época was entertaining a wrong notion. The Minister of the Interior, José Nicolás Matienzo, provided the new administration with quite a different political approach. As a strict believer in the supremacy of the

³⁷La Prensa, October 11, 1922.

³⁸In this respect, the province of San Luis provided the most ominous example of Yrigoyen's intent. Although federal intervention began in April 1919, at the end of Yrigoyen's term, three years and a half later, San Luis still continued under the federal tutelage.

³⁹La Época, November 4, 1922.

constitution, Matienzo, nine days after Alvear took office, instructed Bello in firm and unmistakeable terms that San Juan had to regain at the earliest possible time its full constitutional control.⁴⁰

The drastic change in the attitude of the national government was also reflected in the decision of Minister Matienzo that the coming elections for governor of San Juan, finally scheduled for January 14, 1923, should be held under the control of a Federal Electoral Board. Bello had argued that the intervention law required that the provincial norms should be applied and that the board should be a provincial one. The significance of this issue was that if Bello's contention was accepted, the electoral judges would be those appointed by the Yrigoyenists. Vexed by Matienzo's decision, Bello resigned on December 8, and, without waiting for his replacement, hurriedly left the province. His rule as Federal Commissioner had begun under painful conditions; it ended as badly as it had begun. Soon thereafter Alvear appointed Manuel Carlés to replace Bello, and finally the electoral phase began in earnest.

The first experiment with a Radical government in San Juan had ended tragically because of the profound division in the party ranks. Now, for the first time, one of the factions, the Unión Cívica Radical Bloquista, emerged as a strong political force with extensive grass roots support,

⁴⁰La Prensa, October 22, 1922.

trying to assert electorally the power of its numerical strength.

By the end of December each party had determined its course of action. The Yrigoyenists decided to abstain from the election since they were left with few friends once Bello had been swept from power. The conservatives proclaimed Duilio Graffigna and Alberto Vidart as their candidates. Graffigna has been the most prominent name in the industrial circles of the province. Thus, the fact that the most powerful bodeguero headed the conservative ticket helped to imprint Bloquist propaganda with a heavy anti-oligarchical overtone.

On December 26, the convention of the UCR Bloquista proclaimed the candidacies of Federico Cantoni and Juan Estrella.⁴¹ The electoral campaign in San Juan had a strong populist flavor, similar to that in Mendoza in 1918 when José Néstor Lencinas was running for governor.⁴² But unlike that campaign, in which there was a clear-cut

⁴¹Cantoni had been regarded as a candidate for a long time. In fact, even in the April 1922 elections, when Cantoni was in jail, there were posters bearing his face throughout San Juan stating: "The eyes of the martyr contemplate you. Vote for the UCR Bloquista." La Época, March 22, 1922.

⁴²A special report by a Los Andes correspondent, stated that Dr. Cantoni "es hoy lo que fue el Dr. José Néstor Lencinas antes de su elección, un ídolo lleno de sugerencias de bien; una promesa acariciante...es el representante más genuino de la masa popular...." January 16, 1923.

alternative between the candidates of the Régimen and the Causa, in San Juan the Bloquists not only had to face the traditional provincial oligarchy, but also the vindictive Yrigoyenists Radicals, who were now more than ever ready to make a pact with the devil himself if it meant the destruction of Federico Cantoni.

The candidacy of Cantoni, a man who was facing the possibility of spending his life in prison for Jones' assassination, inflamed the Yrigoyenists. La Época criticized Cantoni stating that it was a disgrace to allow the moral author of such a crime to become a candidate for the highest provincial office.⁴³ What La Época termed a criminal act, however, was for the Bloquists an act of patriotism. Irreconcilable viewpoints!

The Yrigoyenists recommended that their supporters vote for Graffigna, because he offered "order, security and tranquility" in contrast to the hecatomb they feared would certainly occur under Cantoni. In view of the political agitation he was directing from his cell, they wondered how Commissioner Carlés could allow Cantoni to convert his jail into the party headquarters. This was not an overstatement on the part of the Yrigoyenists, for Cantoni was engaged in intense political activity.

⁴³La Época, January 6, 1923.

In fact, he issued the party's program-manifesto from the jail.

This document, despite its origins or perhaps because of them, set forth the most advanced ideas expressed by any Radical group anywhere in the country to that time. It offered an innovative program in all aspects of provincial life, assigning to the State a very prominent role, especially as concerned social legislation and public works. The more important principles were: amnesty for political prisoners; proportional representation for legislative and municipal bodies; the direct election of National Senators; political rights for women; 8-hour maximum workday and minimum wage; protection for pregnant women; free medical attention in the capital and the departments; a campaign against gambling, vagrancy and alcoholism; reform of the tax system; priority for irrigation works and for worker housing; transformation of the Provincial Bank into a semi-private institution; extensive public works and simplification of the bureaucratic apparatus.⁴⁴ These principles were quite a departure from what was the traditional role of the government in the provinces, and the nation as well. This program is evidence that

⁴⁴Provincia de San Juan, Mensaje de S.E. el Sr. Gobernador de la Provincia Dr. Federico Cantoni (San Juan, 1923), pp. 5-9.

Bloquism, at least in theory, was oriented toward reforms far more advanced than those advocated by national Radicalism.

The electoral campaign was virtually monopolized by the Bloquists.⁴⁵ Their speakers proclaimed in every corner of the province that it was imperative that they win the election so that Cantoni could be liberated. This made a great impact on many people who viewed Cantoni as a doctor of the poor and helper of the needy and not as a political criminal. Indeed, the profession of the three Cantoni brothers was very useful to them in a popular campaign. More than mere political leaders, they were considered by the masses as "humanitarian saviors." The authority which was theirs as doctors was transferred to the political situation, and they won as politicians the aura of confidence and respect which they had as doctors. Moreover, as the election day approached there was a growing rumor that even if Cantoni did not win the election, the "people" of San Juan would prove its strength of character and energy by liberating the political prisoners.⁴⁶

⁴⁵They introduced popular entertainment as part of their political campaign, showing movies between speeches. José P. Gallardo, Definición doctrinaria del bloquismo sanjuanino (Rosario, 1932), pp. 17-18.

⁴⁶Crítica, January 9, 1923.

The electoral battle in San Juan echoed in Buenos Aires. The porteño press devoted much space and attention to the events in that province. Under normal circumstances, political and economic interest in the affairs of San Juan would be very modest in comparison with other provinces, but Jones' assassination and the dramatic popular rise of Federico Cantoni gave to the Sanjuanino dilemma an extraordinary relevance.

The positions taken by the leading newspapers projected their views of the provincial situation on the wider screen of national politics. La Nación and La Prensa, always moderate, indicated a somewhat benevolent opinion toward Cantoni because of his singular resistance to the personalist policy of former President Yrigoyen. Both papers refrained from referring directly to the affair of the Rinconada, but blamed the "political regeneration" policy of Yrigoyen for the abuses committed in San Juan by Governor Jones.

Crítica, an anti-Yrigoyen newspaper, widely read by the popular sectors, became the supporter of Bloquism in the Federal Capital. Crítica's special correspondent in San Juan, José P. Barreiro, wrote juicy notes strongly tinted with populist overtones, which served to stir up fervor in Buenos Aires for Cantoni's candidacy. The prominent attention given by Crítica to the election in San Juan brought the campaign to the concern of thousands in Buenos Aires. In one of his reports from San Juan,

Barreiro termed Bloquism a "party for a class, anti-capitalistic above anything else."⁴⁷ Graffigna, the conservative candidate was characterized as the representative of 360,000 casks of wine, but not as the representative of the people. This could only result, Crítica claimed, in a government of bodegueros for the bodegueros. In this black-and-white type evaluation, the provincial alternative was presented as one of choosing between the oligarchy and the people, with the connotations that each term conveyed to the masses. Crítica stated in brief, if in uncritical and simplistic words: "the struggle is polarized between the bordalesas and the Bloquism."⁴⁸ Moreover, seeking to grant respectability to the incident that ended Jones' days, Cantoni was referred to as "the chief of the events of the Rinconada."⁴⁹

The people who gathered at the Cantonist rallies in San Juan were overwhelmingly of humble extraction. The fact that they frequently came from far away indicates the attraction exerted among the masses by Cantoni's aura as defender of the poor. Barreiro wrote in Crítica that the wishes of the Bloquist leader were a

⁴⁷Ibid., December 23, 1922.

⁴⁸Ibid., January 3, 1923.

⁴⁹Ibid., January 6, 1923.

commanding order to his followers, for they felt for him almost an idolatry, "to the extreme that many religious women placed Cantoni's picture together with those of the saints of their devotion." Barreiro added that it was frequent to find "in the ranchos of the interior of the province the picture of Federico Cantoni side by side with that of Saint Anthony or San Vicente de Paul."⁵⁰

The vigorous campaign waged by *Crítica* in behalf of the Bloquism emphasized that more than an ordinary election was involved; it would be a revolution in the ballot boxes. The newspaper recalled in its columns some of the traditional methods which the patronos had used for years to influence the way their peons voted. But the Bloquists seemed assured that although nothing appeared changed on the surface, the people this time would know how to behave when casting their votes. As Crítica noted:

On election day the peasants--chinada--will have money, will eat and drink well and will get a ride to the voting place at the expense of the charitable Concentración Cívica...the chinada is too wise as to allow itself to be bribed with fifteen pesos, a liter of cheap wine and two or three meat pies--empanadas. The chinada will accept all that, but in the dark room they will remember Cantoni...⁵¹

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., January 7, 1923. The term chino and chinada refers to the lower class citizen of non-urban areas.

Judging the campaign from another facet of the political prism, La Época considered Cantoni's exaltation to be the glorification of crime. It felt it was appalling to see the Bloquist candidate did not show any repentance after the event of the Rinconada and, in fact, that his electoral success could result in his getting out of jail with impunity. La Época wrote that it was inconceivable that such a criminal might not only be spared the legal punishment he deserved, but had already been elevated to the dignity of a candidate to the governorship.⁵²

Cantoni had represented the Radicals of San Juan when the Lencinists held important meetings in Mendoza. He acknowledged with pride that José Néstor Lencinas was his political guide. This close ideological association between Lencinists and Bloquists provoked fear among those in San Juan who were opposed to the Mendozan regime and its populist political style. They were afraid that the administrative and financial disorder of the governments of José Néstor and Carlos Washington Lencinas might be duplicated in San Juan.⁵³ Hence, the opposition

⁵²La Época, December 29, 1922.

⁵³Heightening the fears of the anti-Bloquists, many Lencinists travelled to San Juan, with provocative intentions, to participate in the campaign. But Interventor Carlés sent them back to Mendoza, at once.

to the Bloquists was very strong among the propertied elements, especially those of the wine industry.

The propaganda of the Concentración Cívica was mostly devoted to raising an alarm about the possibility of a Bloquist government. They recalled to the electorate the excesses of Lencinism, and especially those committed against the workers who had disagreed with Lencinas. The conservatives added, with candor or malice, that Lencinism was the enemy of the working class and that following in its steps, the Bloquists were really wolves disguised in sheep's clothing.⁵⁴

Diario Nuevo, the leading voice of the conservatives in San Juan, claimed that the Bloquist program was deceitful because the workers did not owe anything to Cantoni, and that poor people had always earned good salaries and found enough jobs.⁵⁵ They were especially critical of the massive propaganda energetically directed among the workers and campesinos by Aldo Cantoni. They considered a substantial raise in all taxes, which they would bear almost exclusively, as the major threat from Cantoni's program. They viewed Aldo's unremittingly campaign as machinations of a dissolvent propagandist of International Communism. Expressing the fears and

⁵⁴La Prensa, January 9, 1923.

⁵⁵Diario Nuevo, January 11, 1923.

anxieties of the propertied groups, Diario Nuevo commented that the Bloquists intentionally sought to pit one class against another, trying to break the harmony between capital and labor, because by

fostering the low passions of the vile elements, they seek to conciliate the utopias of a senseless Communism with the coarse ambitions of people from the comités, which look at the government as spoils of war....⁵⁶

The conservatives believed that if the Cantonists attained power, this would constitute a threat to social peace in the province. To prevent this calamity, Diario Nuevo alerted its readers as would a commander in the battlefield, reminding them that the Marseillaise had always been a "hymn on the lips of the oppressed," and exhorted them:

Aux armes, citoyens! To the good Sanjuaninos, to those who sincerely wish their land free and prosper, to the workingmen who have civic dignity and a moral conscience, and aspire to extol their material well-being by their own intelligent effort....⁵⁷

This, in a nutshell, was the prevalent political philosophy of the conservatives. In their view, the electoral process was pitting noble men against ignoble men, as if on the one side were decent people imbued with the ethical values of self-discipline and masters of their own effort, and on the other, social agitators,

⁵⁶Ibid., January 13, 1923.

⁵⁷Ibid., January 14, 1923.

depraved and ignorant men, who aspired to live in a society mediocrely leveled from below rather than judiciously improved from above. The predicament for the electorate, as it was posed by the conservatives, was one of the utmost significance, because the crux of the matter was to choose between justice or crime, order or anarchy. Moreover, to protect the interests of the class it represented, the Concentración Cívica proclaimed itself "the traditional party of our democracy," which raised "the flag of law and order...."⁵⁸

To counterattack the conservative version of what Bloquism represented, the Cantonists tried to enhance their image by reiterating that theirs was an organic movement, based on sound political and institutional principles. In a declaration issued at the close of the campaign, they asserted that victory was in their hands "because we sustain principles of sound government and civilized ideals," and they affirmed that they would redeem the province with "respeto y orden."⁵⁹

The Bloquists flooded the province with

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹La Prensa, January 14, 1923. A few days before the election the independent newspaper of San Juan Debates (January 10, 1923), interviewed Cantoni in jail, where the candidate stated his confidence in the outcome of the elections, especially because it would not be "el resultado de la dádiva que deprime ni del hartazgo de bestializar, ni de la inconsecuencia de la borrachera."

propaganda and posters eulogizing Cantoni. One of them was a large red heart with the words "In the heart of the people there is only one man: Cantoni." Another showed him, with an inquisitorial look, stating: "The eyes of the martyr of the democracy are looking at you from jail." Another poster prepared by Ramón Columba displayed Cantoni behind bars with this epigraph: "The people who love Federico Cantoni, defender of the freedom of San Juan, won't allow him to remain in jail and will place him in the government house."⁶⁰ Meanwhile, in contrast to this display of confidence, the candidate of the Concentración Cívica admitted that, at best, his party could win in three or four departments, out of a total of eighteen.⁶¹

On election day, Sunday, January 14, 1923, the ballot boxes amply ratified the great popularity of Federico Cantoni. The Bloquists won all over the province, except Jáchal and Valle Fértil.⁶² What many

⁶⁰Crítica, January 9, 1923.

⁶¹La Prensa, January 13, 1923.

⁶²The UCR Bloquista received 12,042 votes against 8,119 for the Concentración Cívica. Ibid., January 18, 1923. The election return at the Rinconada, the little town where fourteen months before Jones had been assassinated, gave the Bloquistas 218 votes against 96 for the conservatives. Ibid., January 17, 1923. Once the electoral phase was completed, Interventor Carlés ended his mission and placed the province in temporary charge of Deputy Governor Castro.

had hoped and what many had feared had finally happened: Federico Cantoni, the rebel politician who one day led his men against Governor Jones, was now ready to change his status from that of a man almost ready to be sentenced to imprisonment for life to that of the newly-elected governor of the province. The distance of a single block between the jail house and the government house had never had such a strange symbolism! A little over three years before, when Yrigoyen intervened in San Juan for the first time, Cantoni had been greeted upon his arrival from Mendoza with hails for the "radicales de alpargata," and for the "gaucho Lencinas."⁶³ Now, San Juan's "chusma de alpargata" had elevated Cantoni to the height once attained by his revered Mendozan leader. More than a year in jail had created for Cantoni a new public image. He was now not only the good doctor in the minds of the easily suggestionable masses, but to most of his followers he was also a martyr, a man who had risked his life fighting against Jones' tyranny.

Four days after the election, the only member of the Supreme Court who had been duly elected, ordered the release of Federico Cantoni. The emotion of his followers was already noticeable in the jail and the

⁶³La Prensa, November 26, 1919.

popular joy spread into the street. He had to seek refuge in the legislature to avoid the effusion of the masses. Later, when he addressed the people gathered in the Plaza 25 de Mayo, Cantoni stated that his government would be one of open doors. He asked the people to keep a vigilant eye upon the Bloquists and warned that he would be inflexible with dishonest officials. Expanding his views beyond matters of local concern, and entering into what might be called his political thoughts, Cantoni referred to what he considered the true meaning of fatherland. For him, "the fatherland of showy little flags" was a vain word. Instead, its real meaning was the welfare of its people, its good health, hard and honest work properly remunerated; in sum, he said, the happiness of the person who works, not the spirit of the drone. As for his political enemies, he stated harshly that they were "sick people who must be secluded in asylums."⁶⁴ Thus, while Cantoni appealed to work as a creative source of the well-being of the individual as well as the society and assigned a sense of responsibility and duty to the concept of fatherland, he was unequivocally scornful of his opponents, and showed his reluctance to abide by the rules of any political compromise.

⁶⁴Los Andes, January 20, 1923; La Prensa, January 20, 1923.

Cantoni's words did not ease the fears of his adversaries. On the contrary, only a few days later Cantoni deepened the apprehensions of the industrial and commercial sectors of the province. At a meeting held at the legislature, attended by bodegueros, viñateros, workers and bureaucrats, among others, Cantoni accused the industrialists of laying off many workers in revenge for his electoral success. The bodegueros rejected the charge but touched off a kind of verbal warfare between them and the workers, with the laborers noisily and enthusiastically supporting the fiery warnings made by Cantoni.⁶⁵ Hardly a conciliatory beginning. Then, as if further evidence were needed to demonstrate Bloquist political power, at the end of January the legislature elected Aldo Cantoni National Senator.

But more was in the making by the provincial lawmakers. In the already tropical summer of San Juan, the Bloquist-controlled legislature added more heat to the political situation. On February 22, in accordance with the promises made during the campaign, it approved an Amnesty Law for all those involved in the incident that caused the death of Governor Jones, on the grounds that it had been an act of sedition,

⁶⁵La Prensa, January 27, 1923.

strictly political.⁶⁶

It was time of vindication for the Bloquists, who praised the men of the Rinconada as heroes. Aldo Cantoni stated in the Provincial Senate that they were seeking the amnesty

not as an act of pardon or grace toward political prisoners, but as an act of perfect justice for those who have sacrificed their tranquility and personal freedom, and even risked their own lives to free San Juan from the evils of tyranny.⁶⁷

Castro, the acting Governor, vetoed the Amnesty Bill stating that the case was under consideration by the Judiciary and that it alone had the authority to pass a judgment. His veto had only the value of a protest however, for the legislature easily overrode it.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Eventually, the Bloquists initiated a new judicial expediente, totally justifying their action at the Rinconada. Fearing its future "disappearance," the original expediente was copied by Interventor Bello and placed in the hands of the national Radical authorities. Today, neither expediente exist in San Juan archives.

⁶⁷ La Época, March 14, 1923. A few days earlier Federico Cantoni expressed the same views to his supporters, thanking them for believing that the Rinconada was "something other than a repulsive crime." La Prensa, March 8, 1923.

⁶⁸ Castro had replied to the legislature on March 12 that because of the uniqueness of the case, he could not sign the Amnesty Bill until the National Government and Congress had resolved what to do. The Minister of the Interior quickly and properly informed Castro that his view was a judicial nonsense.

On March 7, when the Provincial Chamber of Deputies rejected Castro's veto, the Bloquist Carlos Valenzuela praised Federico Cantoni for being the only politician in Argentina "que había quebrado la prepotencia de Yrigoyen." Legislatura de San Juan, Cámara de Diputados, Actas, libro No. 376, p. 23.

The enactment of the Amnesty Law was the final blow. The Jones' case was completely closed before any judicial decision had been rendered. Whether assassins or political revolutionaries, those who had planned and participated in the Rinconada did not have to fear any further legal action. Cantoni had spoken grave words before Jones was assassinated, and he spoke with the same severity after being released from jail. The Yrigoyenist Radicals predicted the proximity of the storm and demanded early in March a new intervention by the Federal Government.

This request was an extraordinary one in a situation marked all along by unusual events. The Yrigoyenists, in theory, were asking something very strange: that the Federal Government declare that it did not consent that the duly elected authorities of San Juan assume power. This may well be the only case in Argentine institutional history in which intervention was demanded in the affairs of a province before its new officials were installed. However, there was a rationale for this attitude no matter how strange it might have been. The anti-Cantonists had a great fear of Cantoni and the Bloquists, fear of what they called the "gauchocracia atropelladora."⁶⁹ The resoluteness shown by Cantoni in previous incidents had proven that he was not a paper

⁶⁹La Época, March 11, 1923.

tiger. What would come next, the anti-Cantonists wondered, once Cantoni was sworn in as governor?

In an interview held in Buenos Aires on March 18, Cantoni justified his position once again and outlined the role and philosophy of the Unión Cívica Radical Bloquista. He pointed out that the electoral plank had specifically listed as its first priority amnesty for all political prisoners involved at the Rinconada. If the people of San Juan, well aware of this fundamental principle of the Bloquist program, had voted overwhelmingly for him, then it was reasonable to interpret that the people also voted for an amnesty law. Turning to his own interpretation of the role of Bloquism and its ideological position as a branch of national Radicalism, Cantoni observed that

our Radicalism is not like any other Radicalism in the nation, which does not have any program or a specific political goal. Neither is our party the leftist movement which provoked so many comments from easily frightened individuals. To ask that the workers of the wine industry in San Juan earn a salary of 3 pesos per day instead of 1,50 is not a demonstration of a Bolshevik tendency, much less when it is considered that an hectare of vineyard yields from 3,000 to 4,000 pesos.

Cantoni stressed that the UCR Bloquista had clearly defined its principles and goals, and that to implement them he was committed to being the governor of the province and not the boss of a party.⁷⁰

⁷⁰La Nación, March 19, 1923.

But before becoming the ruler of all the Sanjuaninos, Cantoni had to surmount still another challenge. Acting Governor Castro declared that the date for the installation of the new government should be July 9, that is, exactly three years after Jones began his term in 1920, and not May 12, as the Bloquist legislature contended. This became a major issue sparking once again high emotions in the opposing sectors. The date as such did not have a great significance, but each side tried to demonstrate its power by forcing the other to accept its installation date.⁷¹

On May 12, the day on which the government should have changed hands, Castro remained in control of the capital. Cantoni had moved to the neighboring town of Concepción, a few miles from the capital, where in its City Hall he was sworn in as governor before the legislators. He then stated that he was ready to enter San Juan with 3,000 men and take it by force, if necessary. On the brink of such an encounter, President Alvear declared that Cantoni was the legal ruler of the province, thereby bringing the threatened conflict to

⁷¹La Época advised Castro not to let the new government be installed in May, no matter what consequences followed. Whether it provoked a federal intervention, as the Yrigoyenists wished, or a major commotion, the important fact was not to surrender power before July 9. Furthermore, the Yrigoyenist paper labeled Cantoni an anti-governor and termed his ascendancy to power the triumph of barbarism over civilization. May 12, 13, 1923.

an end.

Upon entering San Juan to start his government, Cantoni, in a conciliatory mood, declared that all should "put the past away." Trying to dispel the growing fears of the traditional sectors, he affirmed that he would prove how a government can legislate for the working class without being Communistic. He recommended to all the people that they go back to work, each with his own tools, a hoe, a plow, or a pen, so that all together could transform San Juan from being a province exploited by bad governments into a prosperous land.⁷²

But although both sides had apparently lowered their arms and the threat of warfare dissipated after the presidential order, the deep and bitter animosities between Bloquists and anti-Bloquists remained as intense as before.

Before turning to examine the first Bloquist government it might be well to assess the political and moral climate that led to Cantoni's election, as well as the responsibility for the violence displayed.

Halfway through his presidential term, Yrigoyen had decreed the "political regeneration" of San Juan. But three federal interventions in as many years proved the sterility of his policy and his efforts. Contrary to

⁷²La Prensa, May 14, 1923.

what happened in Mendoza as result of Yrigoyen's 1917 intervention, the Sanjuanino Radicals were badly split and Jones' nomination as a compromise gubernatorial candidate reflected this division. Unfortunately, Jones understood little of what political compromise meant. But the fact that he failed to carry out some of his duties in accordance with the law and was unable to achieve a workable harmony among the local Radical groups was not entirely his own fault. He was not a politician and his profession had not trained him in the artful maneuvering of give and take. Indeed, those who erred most were Yrigoyen and the Radicals of San Juan who selected Jones, for although the governor behaved in an authoritarian fashion, he believed in his righteousness up until the very moment of his assassination.

It seems reasonable to conclude that when Jones took the grave actions which raised general protest, Yrigoyen shrank from squarely facing the problems created by the man for whose selection he was mostly responsible. He had a unique opportunity to clip the wings of the controversial governor through two federal interventions. In both instances the President preferred to adhere to the principles of party loyalty, first by suddenly terminating the Escobar intervention, whose decrees aimed at restraining the excesses of

Governor Jones, and secondly, by procrastination in not implementing the second intervention voted by Congress. At any rate, Yrigoyen's position did not allow for any fact other than that Jones was entirely right and his opponents entirely wrong.

Apparently, Yrigoyen took any criticism against Jones as criticism leveled against himself, and thus he defended the authority of the governor as he defended his own. His adversaries argued that he could have avoided Jones' death if he had complied within a reasonable time in instituting the intervention voted by Congress in September 1921, for the unnecessary delay caused more exacerbation in Jones' opponents. Although this seems a plausible argument, this action might only have postponed Jones' fall because both sides were frantically intransigent.

The governor considered himself to be not only a good governor, but an exceptional one, and rejected any compromise. But Jones' opponents were not blameless. Professing to correct the wrongdoings of the other side, both parties acted illegally. Both considered their actions as defensive in nature, neither side ever admitted to being wrong. In the process, justice was ill-served, federalism continued to be a dead principle, political accommodation was unknown, and tolerance was viewed as cowardice. Since Jones had the upper hand

because of the protection he received from the federal army, the Bloquists, although they were the largest faction of the Radical Party, felt irremissibly left out and reacted like desperados.

Whatever they had planned, the kidnapping or the assassination of the governor, they shouldered the burden of a deplorable act. It can be speculated that time was on the side of the Bloquists. Jones could not be reelected, his term would have ended on July 9, 1923. More importantly yet, Yrigoyen could not have reelected either, and his successor would have been installed in the Casa Rosada by October 12, 1922. These dates did not mean an instant solution to the grievances of the Bloquists, but certainly they offered hope for an end to the authoritarian rule of Governor Jones and the political hassles he provoked. Why did not they await the outcome of these timed events and avoid the blemish of a despicable human sacrifice?

It appears that political hatred was too deeply ingrained to be effectively controlled. The high emotions of the Cantonists who had decided to face any risk provided that Jones was removed from the political scene, left no room for alternatives. Thus, inevitably, Jones' elimination became the original sin of Bloquism.

Reviewing the history of those turbulent times leading up to the beginning of Cantoni's government, the

most significant achievement of the Bloquist movement was the inspiration of a new sense of class solidarity among the lower segments. The poor, illiterate campesino could not understand the meaning of "Aux armes, Citoyens!" but he could follow every word from Cantoni when he promised a minimum wage, an 8-hour day, and the taxation of the wealthy few to alleviate the necessities of the deprived many.⁷³

Because of the political conditions in San Juan, where the conservatives had ruled for so long, Cantoni's personality and program galvanized the poor and frightened the well-to-do. He polarized the politics of this hitherto quiet province by kindling the hopes of the common man which in turn frightened the local elite. As it was under the Lencinas in Mendoza, the involvement of the masses with Cantoni was emotional, not ideological, folkloric, not doctrinaire, as if imbued with the fervor of a Bible belt revivalism. Although Cantoni did not promise to convert San Juan into a Socialist province, but only to balance the existing inequalities, he could not avoid provoking a political confrontation because of the strong class overtones of his social program. For in January

⁷³According to the 1912 provincial census, there was in San Juan 43.2 per cent illiteracy, ranging from 32.5 per cent in the capital to 75.7 per cent in the remote department of Iglesia, in the northwest corner of the province. San Juan, Segundo censo general de la provincia de San Juan (Buenos Aires, 1910-1912), p. 11. Alejandro E. Bunge stated that according to the electoral records, empadronados, in 1916 there was in San Juan 45.6 per cent illiterates. La Nación, July 13, 1939.

1923, revealed the forcefulness and determination of Federico Cantoni. They attested to his temperamental, obdurate, and redoubtable personality. Such was the image the "gringo" Cantoni had in the eyes of thousands of Sanjuaninos when he moved from the jail to the government house to begin the first populist experiment in San Juan. His political ascendancy has no parallel in the history of the provincial caudillos in twentieth century Argentina.

C H A P T E R IX

FEDERICO CANTONI

AND THE FIRST BLOQUIST GOVERNMENT

Federico Cantoni, in the best tradition of the provincial caudillos, embodied the soul of Bloquism. He was the leader who had taken the major steps in consolidating the movement: he had severed its ties with the established UCR in the province, he was responsible for the event of the Rinconada, and he provided the party with an unprecedented socially-oriented reformist program. However, Cantoni tried to portray his movement as being one dependent upon principles. In consonance with this view, his basic instruments for action were the party, the UCR Bloquist, and its program, which he had outlined when he was in jail. In spite of his out-and-out command over the Bloquist conglomerate, he persistently alluded to the goals of the party, for he believed that an institutionalized Bloquism could achieve its reformist objectives without falling into the excessive personalism he had condemned in former President Yrigoyen.

Despite Cantoni's pretense of subordination to an impersonal organization, he was in reality the symbol and substance of his regional movement. He not only set the tempo of its populist drive, but by his own conduct set the example to be observed by all his

followers. As a logical corollary of this personalist vertical structure, those who challenged his leadership from within found themselves out of the movement. Thus, notwithstanding Cantoni's efforts to "institutionalize" it, Bloquism and Cantonism shared the same political identity and ideological foundation.

The social question awakened by the Bloquists in the popular sectors of the dormant environment of San Juan, provoked in the masses a feeling of confidence and hastened their desire for social advancement. The 1923 election had proved that the impoverished and mostly illiterate people were ready to follow a leader who had shown a sincere understanding of their social degradation and an earnest preoccupation to find the means to improve their living conditions.

Cantoni's crusade for the underdogs, as that of Lencinas in Mendoza, was a grass roots movement, with emotional overtones. He championed specific, down-to-earth goals for social justice which were written into the program of the party. But his ideals were not infused with an intellectually-developed ideological content. The only doctrinaire influence reached Bloquism through Aldo Cantoni and his friends from Buenos Aires, all militants of the political left. But primitive San Juan was more receptive to a pragmatic

leader than to advanced social theoreticians. A man who served with him many years in the political field recalls that for Cantoni there was little significance in the stereotypes of left, right, or center, for Cantoni was a doer par excellence, who applied his own yardstick to appraise the needs of the Sanjuaninos.¹ Therefore, political doctrines or mere lucubrations on the social conditions were to a large extent irrelevant to him, although, of course, his actions and his movement represented a practical application of innovative social theories.

Besides being a doctor-politician, Cantoni was also a farmer at heart. As such, he was constantly advising people to devote their energies to agricultural labor and to bringing new land under irrigation. Like a Physiocrat, he thought that tilling the soil was the most noble activity in life. Moreover, Cantoni set an example for his people by rejecting gambling and drinking, and he impressed upon the movement the quasi puritanism of his personal habits and the inflexibility of his character.

Cantoni spoke to the people in simple words, in a language dressed with popular, and sometimes, coarse

¹Personal interview with Dr. Eudoro Rodríguez, who was a very close political friend of Federico Cantoni during the 1930's. July 6, 1972, San Juan.

terms. He adorned it with acute and ingenious sentences so typical of the men of the interior.² Besides his distinctive verbal way of communicating with people, Cantoni had a very peculiar characteristic, for which he also became well known later outside his province: he dressed in a very sloppy manner, wearing slovenly suits and filthy shirts.³ Those who collaborated with Cantoni, of course, accepted him as he was. One of his more severe critics in our time, however, asserted that Cantoni deliberately "did not use either the comb or the soap," in order to appear more like the rabble he protected, or perhaps his slovenliness was merely a result of his low-quality Italian style upbringing.⁴

This was the man who many believed would bring social justice to San Juan by narrowing the gap between

²Personal interview with José P. Barreiro, who was Undersecretary of Government during the governorship of Federico Cantoni and Secretary of Government during the governorship of Aldo Cantoni (1926-1928). Buenos Aires, May 16, 1972. Barreiro was a young correspondent for Crítica, the Buenos Aires newspaper, when he joined the Bloquists. He fulfilled the intellectual side of Bloquism, not only for his editorial writing in San Juan's La Reforma, the voice of Bloquism, but for the writing of documents and statements.

³In a humorous way, one of Cantoni's friends once stated that the caudillo bought his new suits with stains already on them. Personal interview with José P. Barreiro.

⁴Personal interview with the Sanjuanino historian Emilio Maurín Navarro, son of one of the bitter foes of Cantoni. San Juan, July 3, 1972.

the rich and the poor, while others thought that he would transform the province into Dante's hell with his Communist ideas.

Cantoni, like Carlos Washington Lencinas in Mendoza, was 33 years old when he assumed power. His figure was tall and imposing. Strong and solidly built, he had a round, stolid-looking face; small, almost beady eyes, and a walrus mustache. Judging him by his contemporary photographs, his expression impresses as stern and rather unsympathetic.

His political baptism as governor of San Juan did not portend tranquil days. The event of the Rinconada had shaken the provincial scene so intensely that from his first day in office he had to face not mere political adversaries, but unwavering enemies. These were the Yrigoyenist Radicals and the conservatives, who neither asked nor offered a single day's truce to the Bloquist governments in the 1920's. In Yrigoyenist eyes, San Juan under Cantoni was a land of barbarians, La Época simply termed that province "the country of the extraordinary."⁵ The tenuous harmony between the Bloquists and conservatives when both were aligned against Jones' rule, evanesced as soon as Cantoni became the governor-elect. Thus, by May 1923 the province was deeply polarized, with most of the Sanjuaninos engulfed in the political rancor

⁵La Época, July 18, 1923.

between the Bloquists and anti-Bloquists.

Social Reformer, "Grite Quien Grite."

The election returns had clearly revealed that most of the citizenry supported Cantoni and his well publicized program of government. So, with characteristic personal determination and aggressiveness, he began to carry out the party's platform. Among the more important laws enacted by the legislature were the 8-hour workday and the minimum wage, a pioneer landmark in San Juan's social legislation.⁶

To reinforce the workers' support on this matter and to indoctrinate them about its importance and proper observance, the government sponsored the creation of the Centro de Acción Obrera, a non-official labor branch of Bloquism. The result of these measures was a sharper

⁶To this effect the province was divided into two areas, with a set minimum salary of \$ 3,00 per day in the capital and surrounding departments, and \$ 2,50 in the more remote areas. Cantoni by decree expanded the schedule of the provincial employees, including working on Saturdays. "No somos ingleses," he said, "somos criollos, el sábado es para trabajar." La Prensa, May 20 1923.

These laws were published in a pamphlet which was widely distributed. It informed the workers that they did not need any kind of outside assistance in order to contact the Department of Labor. Thereupon, the workers were advised that in case these laws were violated by the employers, they should simply notify the Department of Labor or the police authorities. Provincia de San Juan, Ministerio de Gobierno e Instrucción Pública, Departamento del Trabajo, Estadística y Archivo, Las leyes de jornada de 8 horas y salario mínimo (San Juan, 1924).

confrontation between patrones and workers with the governor determinedly taking a pro-worker position. The reaction of the employers was as militant as that of the governor. They threatened to close their business in protest against the "Communist" Bloquist legislation, and many did so. Cantoni, in turn, retaliated with the same uncompromising attitude. At a special rally of the Centro de Acción Obrera, in February 1924, he reiterated that the first priority of the government was to satisfy the needs of the workers, even if it meant colliding with the interests of the capitalists. He asked the mass of wage-earners to boycott the business which laid off personnel, and to those out of work he announced that the government would provide them with jobs. Leaving no doubt as to his intentions, he restated that he would carry out his social policy no matter "grite quien grite."⁷ The governor's pro-worker position was reaffirmed in 1924 when he declared May 1st a provincial holiday. The decree associated the international celebration of the day of the workers with the success of Bloquism in implementing social benefits for the Sanjuanino laborers.

This stern stand of the Bloquist leader was consistent with his avowed posture in favor of the

⁷La Nación, February 11, 1924.

workers. His principle was illustrated by what he often stated as his guiding rule on the subject: If the peón is a Bloquist, the peón is right; if the patrón is a Bloquist, the peón is right; if both the peón and the patrón are Bloquists, the peón is right.⁸ Corroborating the firmness of Cantoni's policy and actions, a contemporary observer expressed that in general, "all the descamisados--shirtless--improved their living conditions, upgrading the social situation of the province. Since Cantoni ruled San Juan, the poor were always considered right, even at the expense of the rich men."⁹

Because of the critical attitude of the government toward the business groups, the main anti-Cantonist force was not organized under party leadership in traditional political fashion, but rather in a heterogeneous association of property owners and mercantile sectors. Within the context of Sanjuanino politics this was a logical alignment because the businessmen and industrialists were forced to become the financial pillars of the Bloquist "social revolution." This association was established in December 1923, under the name of League for the Defense

⁸Personal interview with José P. Barreiro.

⁹José Palermo Riviello, Filípicas argentinas (Buenos Aires, 1939), p. 524.

of Property, Industry and Commerce of San Juan, and its declared purpose was to protect the economic interests of the province. Although the League claimed to be non-partisan, its president was Juan Maurín, one of the more influential landowners and bodegueros and a prominent member of the conservative Liberal Party, the former Concentración Cívica. Among the other leaders were the Yrigoyenist National Deputy Ventura Lloveras; the provincial Senator Eudolio López, who had been expelled from the Bloquism; the former conservative National Deputy Juan P. Tierney, the leader of the Progressive Democratic Party in San Juan, Ventura Larrosa, and Domingo Elizondo, one of the directors of Diario Nuevo. The League was in fact a political block composed of all the segments of the anti-Bloquist spectrum. It was as passionately anti-Cantonist as the Cantonists were fiercely anti-Leaguers. Their viewpoints were totally uncongenial, the men of the League believed that Bloquism represented evil Communism, while the Cantonists considered those who formed this mercantile-political melange as "exploiters of the people."

The disciple of José Néstor Lencinas was opening in San Juan a new and risk-filled path. His frank and fiery verbal tirades against the capitalists often provoked irate comments from the traditional sectors

inside the province and elsewhere. The Mendoza Los Andes asserted that the country had never experienced a ruler so audacious and desorbitado, adding that Cantoni's mentality was the epitome of the suburban agitator or the demagogic caudillejo of long ago.¹⁰ La Prensa accused him of dividing the people into antagonistic camps, workers against capitalists, thus encouraging a class struggle in the same fashion as was predicted by the believers of the dangerous theories emanating from Moscow.¹¹ The business and industrial sectors of San Juan regarded Cantoni's position as that of an extremist. They resented the seeds of hatred he planted in the labor groups by portraying the patronos as "enemies and exploiters of the working class."¹²

Cantoni was neither a follower nor an ideologist of the Soviet regime, but by his words and actions he brought to the forefront of the social scene the problem of the disparity between the "haves" and the "have-nots." This new approach weakened the traditional authority of the well-to-do and led the lower sectors to abandon their previous subservient social and political role. What the anti-Cantonists viewed as a foreign

¹⁰Los Andes, February 12, 1924.

¹¹La Prensa, February 12, 1924.

¹²Ibid.

ideological influence was in reality only a crusade for mass rights led by a reformer, not a revolutionary, one whose ideas and endeavors were rooted in the region and who had a first hand knowledge of the living conditions of the lower groups and of their more pressing needs.¹³

The Bloquist labor policy stripped the conservative class of its dominant status to the extent of placing it in a defensive situation. La Reforma, the semi-official newspaper in San Juan, referred to the provincial "aristocracy" as "reactionary, religious and traditionalist," and deplored the fact that in the past, merely bearing a certain name entitled a person to a special consideration, while the poor people had to acquiesce submissively to their inferior position. To the "respectable" families, La Reforma added, the "chinaje" were almost non-existent, they were just like serfs.¹⁴

Not surprisingly, anti-Cantonist phobia was at the highest level in the Club Social, the provincial refuge of the prominent and the well-to-do. The church was also under the influence of these sectors, not because

¹³"Se diviniza la alpargata," disdainfully stated a prominent Mendozaan conservative. In fact, he summed up in these four words the whole dimension of the social change brought by the Bloquists. Los Andes, September 16, 1923 (Article by Lucio Funes, "El drama de la Rinconada.")

¹⁴La Reforma, August 27, 1924.

of a direct involvement of its hierarchy against the government, but due to the resistance of the religiously-minded upper sectors, who viewed with apprehension the anti-clerical overtones of the Bloquist program and propaganda.

Cantoni attempted to tear down the social barriers which until then had separated the rich elements and the poor ones into two totally separated worlds, by castigating what he believed to be the arrogant social position of the upper groups. Soon after he assumed office, Cantoni had the opportunity to assail the ceremonial apparatus of the elitist elements. He decided that on May 25, the new anniversary of the revolution for independence, the traditional Tedeum would not be financially supported by the State.¹⁵ Cantoni, an egalitarian at heart, contended that it was not proper to place a national celebration under the mantle of a Catholic ceremony, when, precisely because of the freedom of worship guaranteed by the constitution, the province should refrain from officially favoring any specific religious creed.

The governor's anti-church position was seized on by his foes as a basis by which to berate the "foreign,"

¹⁵The Tedeum is a religious service, traditionally performed nationwide to commemorate important patriotic events. It provided some pomp for the authorities and the church, but it never had any real meaning for the people at large.

"exotic" mentality of his movement and to rally political opposition against Bloquism. This was especially evident on the occasion of the same celebration in the following year, 1924. Since at that time the struggle between the government and its opponents was at its peak, the anti-Bloquists took advantage of the patriotic celebration to rebuff strongly the social policy of the government on behalf of the "chusma de alpargata."¹⁶ In a backward province like San Juan, where the religious tradition carried a weight among the upper sectors, Cantoni's attitude may be considered truly revolutionary. The only precedent for an attempt to separate the business of the State from that of the church was in the province of Santa Fe in 1921, when a new provincial charter embodying that principle failed to be approved.

Besides challenging the role of the church as a vehicle for upper class preeminence, Bloquism also questioned the meaning generally assigned to the concept of patria. Here too the Cantonist approach clashed head-on with the conventional concepts of the higher social

¹⁶Debates, May 26, 1924, reported that the Tedeum was attended by the most "selected and distinguished" people of San Juan, "as in the good old times," openly rebuffing the "absurd pretension of the governor of eliminating a traditional act." That was the occasion, it added, to see with full splendor again "el elegante traje de gala, el guante blanco y el zapato de charol, prendas que mira con horror el oficialismo, que en un acto de ridículo concepto personal ha trocado por el chambergó polvoriento, el chiripá y la alpargata."

circles. The Cantonists affirmed that being a true patriot did not lie in extolling some military or civilian accomplishments once a year, but rather in working hard every day to improve the conditions in the community, the means of production and the services of the government.¹⁷ On another occasion the Bloquists stated that honoring one's country did not simply consist in performing a vanity-filled ritual, holding a sumptuous ball for the well-to-do or in attending a useless Tedeum.¹⁸ The Cantonist views were striking at the heart of the banal, revered traditions of provincial life.

Perhaps the most significant social reform of the Bloquists lay in utilizing the provincial budget as a tool to effect a better distribution of wealth. The magnitude of the change, when compared with previous budgets, is illustrated by the figures themselves: the expenses for 1923 had been \$ 2,420,000 while those for 1924, the first Bloquist budget, amounted to \$ 7,249,000. A 300 per cent increase!¹⁹

Through the 1924 provincial budget the Bloquists put in motion their program aiming at bettering the social and economic equilibrium in the provincial

¹⁷La Reforma, May 19, 1924.

¹⁸Ibid., July 4, 1924.

¹⁹San Juan, Presuruesto general para 1924 (San Juan, 1923), n.p.

society. The new budgetary policy of San Juan, which placed responsibility for the welfare of its inhabitants on the shoulders of the State, represented a pioneer application of a system that through the decades was to become a universal feature of modern States.²⁰

The significance of the budget was that it substantially raised all the lower salaries while it left almost untouched the higher ones, that it created and extended the existing primary social services, and planned an extensive program of public works. The monthly salaries of the lower positions were changed as follows:

	From \$	To \$
Ordenanzas (blue collar)	70-80	100
Supervisors (blue collar)	90	120
Office workers	100	130
Policemen	65	95
Firefighters	75	95
Ordenanzas (departments)	50	95
Policemen (departments)	50	95

Source: Presupuesto general para 1924, n.p.

²⁰San Luis, another province of the Cuyo region, offered a marked contrast with San Juan regarding the use of the budget as a social leveler. When the conservative governor of San Luis, Alberto Arancibia Rodríguez, ended his term in 1930, he remarked with satisfaction and as a sign of his austerity as a ruler, that he had governed his province with budgets always below \$ 3,000,000. Moreover, he added that he had always allocated lower amounts than those that were authorized. Reynaldo A. Pastor, San Luis, su gloriosa y callada gesta, 1810-1967 (Buenos Aires, 1970), p. 324. In 1928 the San Juan budget was \$ 12,174,000, four times larger than San Luis budget, although its population was only 60 per cent larger. Thus, both Cuyano provinces illustrated the obverse and reverse on the vital issue of the degree of State participation through fiscal policy, in the economic and social development of the provinces.

The public health services were tremendously improved. In the capital, the only existing hospital increased its personnel from 42 to 69, and its annual budget from \$ 36,000 to 369,000. For the first time it provided odontological service, and free prescriptions at an annual budget of \$ 180,000. Also for the first time nine medical centers were created in the departments to minister directly to the poor people living far away from the capital in a province where means of transportation were almost non-existent.²¹ Moreover, these measures were an effective attack against the widespread number of quacks.

New blood was pumped into the Provincial Department of Labor by more than doubling its personnel and by increasing its budget from \$ 10,000 to \$ 25,000. Public works also received prominent attention, in line with the job-oriented objectives of the budget, with the allocation of \$ 2,718,000, an amount larger than any total budget in the past.

Although the 1924 figures promised to transform the living conditions of the lower segments and the economy of the region in general, the burning questions were: who

²¹Presupuesto general para 1924, n.p. The significance of these measures is illustrated by the fact that the trip from the capital to Jáchal, 120 miles to the north, demanded eight hours by car. La Prensa, March 2, 1925. There was no railway line connecting these two cities. Likewise, to the distant Valle Fértil department the mail was delivered by mule, once a week. La Reforma, February 4, 1926.

would bear the burden of financing such mammoth figures, and how. The business and industrial sectors, already at odds with the government because of the obrerista policy of the Bloquists, realized that their fears about the "Communist" regime were becoming a reality. A comparison of the revenues collected during 1923 and 1924 reveals the reason for the somber mood of the business community and the propertied class:

Tax	1923 \$	1924 \$
Wine	1,011,000	1,685,000
General Franchise	294,000	392,000
Property	355,000	1,247,000
Additional on Property	-	212,000
Sales	48,000	248,000
Grapes	-	1,424,000
Other	1,134,000	1,598,000
Total:	2,842,000	6,806,000
Difference over 1923:	3,964,000	

Source: San Juan, Mensaje del Excmo. Sr. Gobernador Dr. Federico Cantoni (San Juan, 1925), p. 25.

Cantoni believed that these sectors were capable of absorbing a significant increase in taxation because the provincial wealth was practically in their hands, especially in those of the landowners and bodegueros. The governor repeatedly affirmed that as a consequence of the protective policies of the Régimen in the past, they enjoyed an undeserved privilege and were in fact undertaxed.

The governor was determined to carry out his policy, and there was no way for the opposition to block it. Their only recourse was to issue one protest after another, but no one in the provincial government lent them a benevolent ear. Furthermore, the income of the bodegueros was made almost entirely in pesos because they sold most of their production outside the province. As letras were also circulating in San Juan, this allowed the industrialists to profit by their devaluation, as had their Mendozaan counterparts. Cantoni was dead-set against speculation with the letras and tried to end it by heavy taxes on those engaged in the exchange of currency and through direct police repression.²²

As was the case in Mendoza, the letras had to be fully accepted as means of payment for all the provincial taxes. Disregarding the law, in October 1923 Cantoni ordered the bodegueros to pay all taxes and the salaries of their personnel in pesos. But in contrast to the vacillating attitude adopted by Carlos Washington Lencinas in Mendoza, where the bodegueros were never seriously pressed by the government, Cantoni resorted to expeditious

²²The most striking case involved Aldo Galletti, general manager of a private bank in San Juan. He was accused by the government of speculating with letras and he was very heavily fined. As Galletti was an Italian, his appeals involved the Italian Minister in Argentina and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Eventually, the legal dispute had to be resolved by the National Supreme Court.

methods to enforce his decree: he allowed the bodegueros 48 hours to obey his ruling and in case they attempted to resist his order, he threatened to set up a new five-cent tax on wine, with the exclusive purpose of calling in the letras in circulation. The forceful attitude of the governor allowed him to impose his will, but the devaluation of the letras persisted because they could not be applied for tax payment purposes.

The business and industrial sectors, however, did not remain passive. In February 1924, when the legislature enacted a new tax on grapes, the bodegueros decided to take a firm stand and suspended all shipments of wine in protest. This paralyzed the collection of taxes, and almost 80 per cent of the bodegas closed their doors.²³ But Cantoni was not a man to remain idle while facing such a challenge. In an officially-sponsored rally in front of the government house, he accused the bodegueros of exploiting the working people and warned them that it was useless to protest because the more they protested, the higher would be the taxes that they would have to pay. Moreover, Cantoni threatened to have the State take over the administration of their business in case they declared a lockout, and

²³On this occasion the bodegueros decided to pay half of the salary to their personnel during the lockout.

to produce wine and sell it at cost price.²⁴

The mercantile interests became extremely concerned and once more, responded by crying out to Buenos Aires. They condemned Cantoni's "Bolshevik" policy and his professed purpose of destroying the productive forces of the province. In response to their request for a federal intervention Cantoni stated that he was not preoccupied at all about the situation because he would be elected again by the people.²⁵

The unflexible position of the governor increased the number of protests sent to Buenos Aires and hardened their tone. The nature and extent of the complaints finally became so serious that Cantoni had to go to the Federal Capital to counteract the pressure of his enemies. There, he said that the position of the bodegueros was merely revengeful, because he had forced them to become honest industrialists.²⁶ Cantoni also cast doubts on the motives of the bodegueros in closing their business. Since it was harvest time, he accused them of speculating on the delay in purchasing the grapes, in order to exact a lower price from the

²⁴La Nación, February 29, 1924.

²⁵La Prensa, March 3, 1924.

²⁶Ibid., March 12, 1924. To avoid the adulteration of wine Cantoni had imposed an exorbitant tax on brown sugar, a vital element needed to adulterate wine.

viñateros. In general justification of his tax policy, Cantoni asserted that high taxes could only be applied when the industry and business were experiencing a prosperous situation. High taxes could not be imposed if they were affected by unfavorable circumstances.²⁷ Since the government did not back off an inch from its original position, finally there was no alternative for the bodegueros and viñateros but to return to their normal activities. They grudgingly paid their taxes but under protest.²⁸

When the harvest ended, however, a large number of workers were laid off placing a social burden upon the government. Cantoni knew by direct observation the backwardness in which the peasants and unskilled workers were permanently living. Believing that it was a primary duty of the State to provide jobs and security for the humble sectors, Cantoni started a number of projects to develop the means of transportation in the province,

²⁷La Prensa, March 12, 1924.

²⁸The largest business concern in San Juan, Santiago Graffigna S.A., a vineyard-bodega complex, reported very good profits during the Cantoni years, as follows: 1923: \$ 413,120; 1924: \$ 605,170, and 1925: \$ 229,932 (From the yearly State of Accounts and General Report furnished by the Graffigna Corporation to the author). The 1925 report, however, referred to the "difficult financial situation" being experienced in San Juan. Doubtless, other less important mercantile sectors were hard-hit by the tax increases sanctioned by the Bloquists.

while helping the jobless men. His policy, however, was not to institute the government as a big hearted distributor of the spoils of office, for there was in Cantoni an inveterate belief in the work ethic, which he preached by his own example. Although he was the first ruler in his province to alter the traditional governmental policy of non-involvement in socially-related matters, Cantoni was a stalwart against handing out government jobs, a custom deeply rooted in provincial life. He always rejected the view that the budget should serve as an umbrella to protect parasites, for he believed in the innate virtues of the "self-help" philosophy, and he clearly disdained the evils associated with a bureaucratic-plagued administration.

Besides the heavy taxation on grapes and wine, the Bloquists greatly modified property taxes. Not only was the tax rate increased, but more significantly, the assessments of the properties, especially those valued above \$ 6,000, were adjusted to values ranging from three to fifteen times higher than before. This was in fact an undisguised attack against the opposition since most of the men of property were ragingly anti-Cantonists.

The franchise tax on business in general was also substantially raised, and a new and very heavy one was

applied to those dealing with the exchange of currency. This tax was aimed at preventing speculation on the letras. The highest taxation, \$ 30,000 per annun was imposed on those institutions where gambling was allowed, a tax mainly leveled at the Social Club, the exclusive gathering place for the more wealthy men of San Juan and a bastion of the opposition.

In defense of the new taxes, Cantoni stated in his usual amusing but pungently verbal style, that before he assumed power only three groups paid taxes, "the poor, the gringos, and the fools," and he added that it was time that the rest also paid them.²⁹ Regardless of the seriousness of such an assertion, it is understandable why such draconian tax legislation raised a clamor and even provoked the political rebellion of the taxpayers.

With regard to the role of the letras in the local economy, Cantoni shared the long-held belief of many Cuyano leaders, both conservatives and Radicals, favoring their use. Therefore, in June 1923, the legislature authorized the issuance of \$ 4,000,000, the main purpose being to reinforce the capital of the Provincial Bank and to finance public works. Following the pattern of similar currency in the provinces of

²⁹La Prensa, May 23, 1924.

Mendoza and Jujuy, within a few months the Sanjuanine letras began depreciating. In view of the limited amount of currency handled by the campesinos and the workers, Cantoni always contended that they could not be a factor in the deterioration of the value of the letras. He specifically accused "capitalist speculation in connivence with the political Machiavellism of the opposition" of being responsible for their devaluation.³⁰ Regardless of the veracity of this charge, the fact was that the root of the problem was not the lust of the opposition but the existence of illegal provincial money in circulation. At the retail level the national currency practically disappeared. Consumer goods were given one price in pesos and another, higher, in letras, and the cartoncitos replaced the coins for small-scale transactions.

But Cantoni learned from the example of neighboring Mendoza that the letras could become an issue which could topple his government. Therefore, he allowed the payment of taxes to be made in letras again. But this was not enough to preclude the danger of a federal action, especially since Congress had eagerly and almost unanimously voted in December 1924 to discuss the provincial situation. Realizing his diminishing chances

³⁰Mensaje del Gobernador, May 12, 1925, n.p.

to maneuver, Cantoni decided in February 1925 to get rid of the letras once and for all. Most of them were publicly burned within a few months, and by May 12, when Cantoni completed his second year in office, the letras had practically become a thing of the past. In contrast to the inefficiency of the government of Carlos Washington Lencinas in dealing with the letras, Cantoni did not hesitate to severely tax the mercantile sectors in order to get the funds with which to replace the provincial money. Only by firm determination could he end a situation upon which the political future of his government was hanging.

Another manifestation of Cantoni's strong grip on provincial affairs was his manipulation of the municipal system. Since the intervention into the government of Isaza by the federal authorities in October 1919, there had been no self-rule in the departments. Cantoni kept them under his direct control, to the point where by mid-1924 more than half of the districts in which San Juan was politically divided were under the total command of the governor. In a few departments where the local authorities disputed with Cantoni, they were easily removed from office by the Bloquist legislature. The importance of this issue was basically political because from the economic viewpoint the departments had a very modest role. In fact, the services to the

inhabitants of many departments improved when the provincial government took all matters concerning public health and public works into its hands. One serious problem arose, however, in the municipality of the Capital. The electorate for municipal elections was restricted to property owners and those who paid a business tax. A large number of them were anti-Cantonists. Therefore, at the municipal elections held on December 1924, Dr. Indalecio Carmona Ríos, a physician, was elected mayor of San Juan as a candidate of the League for the Defense of Property.³¹

Cantoni did not have much patience with his political adversaries and soon a serious conflict developed between the provincial and the municipal government allegedly involving a refusal of the neighboring departments to admit the refuse disposal of the Capital. Since Carmona Ríos gave one order and the police gave a different one, this resulted in a colossal headache for the mayor. As the police were under the command of the governor, Carmona Ríos had no other recourse but to complain to the Minister of the Interior demanding a federal intervention because

³¹The restrictive nature of the municipal elections is well illustrated by the figures themselves. Carmona Ríos got 383 votes against 176 for the Bloquist candidate, both totalling 559 votes. La Prensa, December 8, 1924. But in the national election held in April 1922 in the city of San Juan 5,797 citizens voted, almost ten times the number which participated in the municipal election of 1924.

of governmental violation of the principle of municipal autonomy. Minister Gallo replied to the Mayor after Carmona Ríos wired his complaint for the fourth time, stating that it was purely a local matter.³² This domestic incident, however, greatly inflamed the desires of the anti-Cantonists to get Congress to abolish the Bloquist government.

The partisan zeal of the Bloquists was also evident in the field of popular education. Following political tradition, as soon as Cantoni assumed office, a large number of teachers were laid off for clearly political reasons. On the positive side, however, the 1924 budget significantly raised the teachers' salaries from 100 to 150 pesos monthly for those in the elementary schools, and from 150 to 200 pesos for those in the secondary schools. In line with Cantoni's wishes to redress the failures of previous governments, he kept the salaries of the teachers almost up to date, but he did not pay the fourteen months which were in arrears when he assumed office. Furthermore, the educational system was placed under a new, non-traditional orientation. Although the number of schools remained virtually the same,³³ there

³²La Prensa, March 31, 1925.

³³There were 55 public provincial schools in San Juan in 1923 and 1924, and 56 in 1925, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Educación común en la capital, provincias y territorios nacionales, reports for those years (Buenos Aires, 1924, 1925 and 1926).

were some beginnings on the teaching of practical subjects, such as agricultural techniques and sewing for girls. Moreover, special classes were devoted to educating the pupils in personal hygiene and the prevention of contagious diseases.

Political Scene: Room for Bloquism Only

These social changes made an impact in the daily lives of the lower classes by upgrading the quality of life in their sedentary lethargic communities. But heightened political hatred obscured the advantages derived from the progressive ideas implemented by the Bloquists. They used their tremendous political strength to divide and stereotype the citizenry between "good guys" and "bad guys." This led the Bloquists to accuse the dissidents in their movement of being traitors and to regard criticism by members as misbehavior--"inconducta partidaria." Such was the fate of a few Bloquist legislators who openly rebelled against what they considered the tyranny of the party, asserting that they were, above all, representatives of the people rather than servants of the comité. This attitude fostered a climate of fear and distrust because being an active opponent of Bloquism meant risking official harassment, if not open persecution.

Their complete control of the legislature enabled

the Bloquists to justify their actions on legal bases. The opposition claimed that Cantoni's actions, regardless of their formal legality, were the arbitrary acts of a despot. The Bloquists, of course, always stated that they were faithful observers of the law.³⁴ Thus, the weight of the law represented at times a tyranny against the opposition, and an instrument of the capricious will of the governor. The Bloquists applied the "theory of virtual and immanent infallibility," contended La Prensa, derived from a popular support which the Cantonists regarded not as a temporary electoral preference, but as a historic mandate, a real plebiscite in the Yrigoyenist connotation of the term.³⁵

In the political atmosphere of San Juan, where the will of the governor prevailed so ostensibly and where the program of the party was the backbone of governmental action, the legislature, naturally, played a secondary role. But to say that it was a rubber-stamp body, which in fact it was, does not reflect its real character. The task of the legislature was to enact laws based on party

³⁴José P. Barreiro recalled the tenacity of the Provincial Department of Labor against Juan Maurín, a leading landowner and bodeguero of San Juan, and an unbending opponent of Bloquism. Maurín was fined several times by the Department, some of them on flimsy allegations. But he paid all the fines punctually and never appealed to the governor or asked for any clemency. Personal interview.

³⁵La Prensa, November 18, 1923.

guidelines which had been established in advance. Hence, it did not function as a deliberative body independent of the Executive, but rather as a complementary branch of government. This enabled Cantoni to present his views as if they were the rule of the entire party, and not of one person.

He met periodically with the deputy governor, the ministers and the Bloquist legislators to deal with the agenda of the legislature.³⁶ Thereupon, when the lawmakers met in formal sessions, they simply ratified what had already been decided in the general party meeting. There was no discussion of the proposed legislation in both branches of the legislature because the objections of the few opponents were easily overruled.³⁷ Although in theory

³⁶In May 1925, a book was stolen from the Cantonists which contained the proceedings of the meetings held by Cantoni with the other high officials of the administration and the legislators. Its content was widely publicized in San Juan and in Buenos Aires. It was emphasized that one of the points approved in the meeting of June 13, 1924, stated that any Bloquist Deputy or Senator who did not vote according to the instructions of the party would be fined 400 pesos. The opposition to Bloquism tried to stir up public opinion in light of such irrefutable proof of subordination of the legislative power to the executive.

³⁷Perhaps there is no better example of abusive legislative behavior than the way in which the 1924 budget was approved by the provincial Senate. In order to overcome the opposition of some members, the Cantonists met on a Sunday at 8:00 in the morning, without notifying those Senators they knew were questioning the enormous size of the budget. But as more Senators were needed to obtain quorum, two from the opposition were brought to

this system denied the principle of separation of powers, the government defended this procedure alleging that its major responsibility was to enact the legislation promised to the electorate before they were elected by the people. According to the Cantonist theory, the electoral support for Bloquism had endorsed the view that it was unnecessary to have a major argument on projects which were already backed by the majority of the people. What was needed, they asserted, was to implement the principles outlined in the program, fulfilling in this way what had been promised to the citizens when the Bloquists had sought their vote. To enhance their viewpoint, the Bloquists repeatedly pointed to the regrettable spectacle of the National Congress, which had been transformed into a sterile body because of the spirit of obstruction prevalent among the congressmen, and the lack of definitive guidelines on which course to follow.

The legislators not aligned with the Bloquists faced steadfast official hostility in the legislature. This was extended to the point where those members opposed to the government were unable to collect their salaries, while the Bloquists cashed their dietas regularly. The

the Senate by the police. Then the budget was approved "a libro cerrado," that is, without any discussion in the Senate. La Prensa, February 25, 1924.

credentials of newly elected opposition legislators were routinely sent to a committee and simply left to die there.³⁸ It seems that the Bloquist attitude was in part a reaction to that of the National Senate where the members elected by the Bloquists were left waiting for months for a decision as to whether they would be accepted by that body.

The political climate of San Juan was one of growing intolerance with each sector reserving cutting words for its opponent. In his annual messages to the legislature Cantoni referred to his adversaries with typical aggressiveness. In his view, his opponents were the representatives of reactionary interests who blocked the government merely for the sake of obstructing it and maliciously ignoring the progress achieved by the Bloquists.³⁹ In May 1925 he referred to the League as the symbol of a greedy and sordid capitalism.⁴⁰ Conversely, for the opposition a Bloquist represented a kind of barbarian under the evil influence of Marxism

³⁸The most publicized case was in the provincial election held in January 1924, in which Sergio W. Bates, a former independent supporter of Cantoni and director of Debates, was elected Senator for the Capital by a split hair margin over the Bloquist candidate. His credentials, however, were never approved.

³⁹Mensaje del Gobernador, May 12, 1924, n.p.

⁴⁰Ibid., May 12, 1925, n.p.

whose sole aim was to destroy the moral and material well-being of the Sanjuanino society.

If the legislative power appeared submissive to the desires of the executive, the Judiciary as a whole played a similar role. The majority of the judges who had been appointed by the Bloquists did not challenge the decisions of the provincial administration. In general, the Judiciary observed a very cautious attitude and never presented to Cantoni the defiant challenges which the Mendozaan Judiciary had to José Néstor Lencinas. There was one important case, however, in which Cantoni had to face an adverse judge. The directors of the leading opposition newspaper, Diario Nuevo, Domingo Elizondo and Héctor Conte Grand, charged in mid-1923 that illegally issued letras were in circulation. The government denied the allegation and jailed both men. The ensuing investigation proved that the letras the two men presented as evidence had been adulterated to make them appear to have been illegally issued.

The government, then, seized the occasion and accused Elizondo and Conte Grand, two of its major political enemies, of being responsible for having altered the letras. In August 1923, Judge Augusto Castellanos ordered Elizondo released from jail--Conte Grand was ill and therefore allowed to be out of prison--but the governor ignored this decision. Cantoni believed

that Castellanos, a judge appointed to the bench by the Bloquists, was unfaithful to the party, and, in consequence, from that month on his salary was not paid. This situation raised the protests of the opposition against Cantoni, in San Juan as well as in Buenos Aires, but to no avail. Even the Provincial Supreme Court remained silent on the issue. As the Judge Castellanos did not show signs of giving up and resigning, in June 1924 the government eliminated his post from the judicial system and, accordingly, from the budget. Thus, through an apparently legal administrative arrangement, Castellanos was purged for confronting the governor.

Another instance of Cantoni's authoritarian behavior involved a Bloquist provincial legislator under indictment in the federal court in San Juan. Cantoni ignored the federal legal action alleging that the legislator was protected by immunity, and denied the assistance of the police to arrest him.⁴¹ As only national lawmakers were free from federal prosecution, Cantoni's position was in fact a contempt for national authorities. President Alvear had to order the 15th Infantry Regiment,

⁴¹ Furthermore, the semi-official newspaper La Reforma alerted Sohar Ruiz, the federal judge, that "patience is running thinner" in the government and warned him that the day will come in which he will be punished for his "canallesca conducta." La Prensa, April 25, 1925. Sohar Ruiz suffered a "financial" punishment from the Bloquist government. His properties, which were assessed at \$ 192,000 were re-assessed to \$ 615,000. La Prensa, May 13, 1925.

stationed in San Juan, to enforce the ruling of the federal judge. Only then did Cantoni acquiesce.

The opposition press, through artificially-created conflicts, was subjected to similar rough treatment by the Bloquists. Sometimes the distribution of newspapers was impeded, at other times there was physical intimidation of non-Bloquist newsmen. On another occasion, the independent Debates urged journalists toward Bloquism to stay away from San Juan in order to be spared the government's ire.⁴² The official pressure against Diario Nuevo was such that the paper finally suspended publication in June 1925, hoping that eventually a federal commissioner would repress the "forajidos embravecidos" Bloquists.⁴³

These grievances had been voiced by the press before. Bates' newspaper Debates had stated that Cantoni

⁴²Debates, December 21, 1923, warned its colleagues:

Tú que das en el diario cuatro palos
al gobierno que ves que no anda bien
vas a cobrar el milagro de las mieses,
por un palo que dés, te darán diez.

Compañero, comprende lo que digo,
compadece a los pobres que allá van
no te vendan halagos ni promesas,
compañero, no vayas a San Juan.

In June 1925, the distribution of Diario Nuevo was prohibited because it had printed the full speech of National Deputy Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo urging federal intervention in San Juan. La Prensa, June 27, 1925.

⁴³La Prensa, June 28, 1925.

was a trampler, an atropellado, as a man, and a trampler as a ruler. Still more antagonistic to Cantoni's actions, La Libertad, from Mendoza, claimed that it was time to think about Cantoni as a "morally insane" as had been the cases of the Paraguayan dictators Francia and Francisco Solano López.⁴⁴

In reality, by 1925 the opposition in San Juan was forced into a corner. Bloquism enjoyed such sizeable popular support that it rendered its adversaries politically impotent; it was hopeless to try to defeat Cantoni electorally. To liquidate the "provincial Communism," the League had no recourse but to knock at the doors of Congress. They flooded Buenos Aires with aggrieved telegrams and manifestos protesting the draconian taxes imposed by Cantoni upon their properties, grapes, wine, and business in general. They clamored for federal intervention!

Buenos Aires Stops Bloquism

The two most important newspapers in Argentina, La Nación and La Prensa, played a major role in giving Bloquism national focus. Both were highly critical of Cantoni and his movement once he became governor. Very often they exposed in their columns what appeared to be

⁴⁴Debates, June 11, 1924; La Libertad, March 20, 1924.

the arbitrariness of the Bloquist regime, and publicized the afflictions denounced by the League.

As happened in Mendoza, the permanent correspondents of La Nación and La Prensa in San Juan were active opponents of the government. La Nación was especially linked with the anti-Cantonists because its correspondent was Domingo Elizondo, one of the directors of Diario Nuevo. In consequence, the information published by both Buenos Aires newspapers was typically one-sided and the editorial comments reflected the same political views. For example, for the liberal, legalistic-minded La Prensa, Cantoni's rule was a mixture of autocracy and demagoguery.⁴⁵ As for La Nación, it pointed out that the Bloquists controlled the judge, the policeman and the journalists, what else was needed to impose their absolutism?⁴⁶

The Bloquists assailed both papers for neglecting to report what was significant in the provinces while providing a wide coverage of foreign affairs. La Reforma ridiculed La Nación and La Prensa for ignoring the fact that they were Argentine, not foreign papers. For while they informed their readers about the industrial situation in Vladivostok or that in Shanghai three Chinese had died of a dreadful plague, they only

⁴⁵La Prensa, May 5, 1925.

⁴⁶La Nación, September 27, 1924.

reported political news out of the Argentine provinces, without properly analyzing other spheres of general interest. It was more imperative and relevant, added La Reforma, to write about the economic and social developments in Salta, San Juan or Catamarca provinces, than to write a detailed report about the cost of living in New Zealand.⁴⁷

The anti-Cantoni forces had two powerful allies in Congress: conservatives and Yrigoyenists, and from the outset of the Bloquist government they attempted to crush it. The first major confrontation took place during 1923 when approval of Senator-elect Aldo Cantoni's credentials was deliberately delayed, almost to the end of the session. The National Senate was already entangled in the partisan intrigues which rendered that body so ineffective during the 1920's, and the Cantoni's credential issue became one more factor added to the political machinations taking place in that branch of Congress.

⁴⁷La Reforma, September 22, 1924. Meanwhile, the biting attacks on Cantoni in La Época continued undiminished. Their fierceness was exemplified by the terms it constantly used when referring to him and his movement: "desborde de barbarie," "iracundia salvaje," "personaje de toldería," "sátrapa," "gobierno bárbaro y barbarizante," "comunismo semigaucha," "oficialismo mazorquero." July 3, 1923; January 11, 1924; January 21, 1924; April 1, 1924; August 20, 1924, and March 26, 1925.

Aldo Cantoni was admitted as a Senator in September 1923, but when another Bloquist, Carlos R. Porto, was appointed National Senator by the provincial legislature in February 1925, he had to resign before his credentials were discussed. The majority of the National Senators were not only interested in rejecting Porto as their peer, but were also ready at that time to approve a federal intervention in San Juan.

The Bloquist predicament in Congress was the result of two insuperable barriers: the Yrigoyenists could never forgive the event of the Rinconada, and the conservatives could not swallow the "Communist system" by which they believed the Bloquists were dispossessing the productive sectors of San Juan of their wealth.

In January 1924, the League presented to Congress a statement highly critical of the Bloquist rule. They claimed that the Provincial Bank was basically serving those in the official circle in open disregard of the rules of the institution. They blamed the "famosas leyes obreristas," the 8-hour daywork and the minimum wage, for the existing unemployment. Furthermore, the League stated that the property tax was merely an act of revenge against the well-to-do, and that the fines set up for violating the labor laws were so high "as to make any infringement of its regulations impossible." A candid comment, to say the least. The extensive document of the

League concluded that the unruly Bloquist administration not only had suppressed the right to work, freedom of the press and of trade, but even the freedom to think! There was no other place to turn, it claimed, except to the Federal Government because all the provincial doors were closed to their appeals. Every time they complained to the Bloquist government, it responded with more stringent laws. Justice, they added, was submissively at the mercy of the oppressive Executive Power.⁴⁸

In mid-1924 a bill calling for federal intervention in San Juan was introduced in the National Chamber of Deputies by the Yrigoyenists. The reactions in the press reflected the three basic views on the matter that characterized the political sectors. La Época was jubilant at the prospect of intervention. It stated that San Juan was under the tyranny of a government

varnished with a university-prestige facade which disguises its real appearance. But the clothing and the university front are its only civilized features. Its mentality, its passions, its procedures, identifies it with the most irresponsible and barbarian government during the sad era of the national organization.⁴⁹

The Bloquists, scornful of the intervention bill, reaffirmed the class overtones of their political stand.

⁴⁸Liga de Defensa de la Propiedad, la Industria y el Comercio de San Juan, Memorial presentado al Poder Ejecutivo de la Nación, January 19, 1924.

⁴⁹La Época, June 28, 1924.

They claimed that they had successfully defeated the representatives of capitalism, the bodegueros, the large landowners, and the aristocratic sectors. Proudly, they stressed the fact that Cantoni was not an "illustrious name," that he had never set a foot in the Club Social, and that his family was not one of those boasting a noble descent. They claimed it was the "chusma," as the conservatives had called them, who had attained power by their own right.⁵⁰

Between these two opposed viewpoints, there was another, mildly critical of Cantoni. It reproached the governor for not controlling his primitives impulses and his intolerance, which had led him to rule the province as if it were his personal property with no feeling of obligation to account to the people for his actions.⁵¹

The National Congress now became the arbiter of Bloquism's fate. In December 1924 the National Chamber of Deputies debated a conservative-sponsored request to the Executive Power to include the intervention in San Juan on the agenda for the coming special congressional period.⁵² Among the stream of invectives

⁵⁰La Reforma, July 5, 1924.

⁵¹Debates, July 7, 1924.

⁵²Diputados, 1924, VII, 82-111 (December 4).

against Bloquism, no words were more biting than those of Deputy Matías Sánchez Sorondo. He referred to San Juan as if it were a strange land, totally alien to Argentina, located "in the center of wildest Africa or in the depths of the barbarian Polynesia." He recited the Cantonist faults with sordid overtones; persecution of capital, of the Judiciary and the opposition; absolute control over the legislature, and a Soviet mentality of government. Sánchez Sorondo referred to the similarities between the regimes of Cantoni and Lencinas, calling them a "holy brotherhood." Moreover, he termed the Bloquists a "horde," an adjective which since then was often used by the critics of the Bloquists. The fiery deputy for Buenos Aires completed his diatribe by inserting into the congressional record the large number of suits leveled against Cantoni before he assumed the governorship.⁵³

Belisario Albarracín, a deputy for San Juan, had to bear the burden of defending and justifying the Bloquist government. The essence of his position was that although it could be admitted that Cantoni was somewhat violent in the expression of his political views, no person could claim to be more honest than Cantoni. But the heated debate proved to be a mere formality since the conservative request was approved by the Chamber almost unanimously. Later, when it was discussed in the

⁵³Ibid., 83, 90. The insertion is on pp. 112-114.

National Senate, Aldo Cantoni placed special emphasis on the social accomplishments of the Bloquists and their efforts in behalf of the needy sectors of San Juan. Stressing the populist nature of the Sanjuanino government, Senator Cantoni stated that the political problems of the province were no longer solved at the Club Social or decided by a clique of "half a dozen of big names." The anti-Cantonists repeated the familiar charges and the Senate approved the resolution overwhelmingly.⁵⁴

But this emotional congressional encounter only served as a wide display of anti-Bloquist sentiment, for President Alvear not only did not include the intervention in San Juan on the parliamentary agenda, but he cancelled the whole special congressional period.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Senadores, 1924, II, 63-101 (December 18). The quotation is on p. 73.

⁵⁵Besides the problem of San Juan, Alvear wanted to prevent that Congress discussed other disputed issues, especially once he had secured the extension of the budget for 1925.

The political adversity affecting both Mendoza and San Juan led to a reinforcement of their political ties. The Lencinist convention held in Mendoza in December 1924 voted its solidarity with the Bloquist government. Cantoni replied to Carlos Washington Lencinas that "conocés demasiado mi temperamento, vigorizado cívicamente al lado de tu austero padre, José Néstor Lencinas, para que esa amenaza pueda llegar a preocuparme." La Prensa, December 19, 1924.

Nevertheless, the anti-Bloquist animosities grew steadily as Federico Cantoni solidified his one-man rule in San Juan. The new congressional drive against Cantoni began soon after Congress convened for the ordinary 1925 period. The Yrigoyenists sponsored another intervention bill and mounted an implacable attack against the Cantonists.⁵⁶ The Radical Personalist Deputy Vergara led the push to liquidate Cantoni. He retold all the economic and financial grievances as they were reported by the conservative League for the Defense of Property. He sneered at the pro-worker stand of the Bloquists, believing it a fraud against the workers and a vehicle for class hate.⁵⁷ Striking a theme which had been burning the Yrigoyenists since 1921, Vergara condemned again the fact that all those who participated in the attack against Jones at the Rinconada had become provincial legislators or had been rewarded with jobs in the administration. Vergara summed up the Bloquist program as one of "violence, dissolution, anarchy and class struggle," and asserted that San Juan had fallen into the clutches

⁵⁶Diputados, 1925, II, 67-100 (June 10); 169-198 (June 18); 212-228 (June 19), and 289-336 (June 24).

⁵⁷The same view was expressed thirty years later by a Radical author who referred to both Bloquism and Lencinism as devoid of ethical principles, and as movements which dealt with the social question in a demagogic fashion. Gabriel del Mazo, El radicalismo. Notas sobre su historia y doctrina, 1922-1952 (Buenos Aires, 1955), p. 131.

of Bolshevism.⁵⁸

The Bloquist representative, Albarracín, tried again to justify the rough spots of Cantoni's behavior. He practically left unanswered, however, the serious charges made in the Chamber that the leading Bloquist officials from Cantoni down had benefited with extremely generous credits from the Provincial Bank.⁵⁹ The Sanjuanino Deputy Ventura Lloveras, an Yrigoyenist, made another explosive accusation. By resorting to mathematical computations which remained both unproved and unchallenged in Congress, he affirmed that according to the taxes in force, the government was not collecting just over seven million pesos annually as it declared, but more than four times that amount. This simply meant that either the difference was netted by people in the government or that there was a

⁵⁸Diputados, 1925, II, 78. The Socialist Jacinto Oddone also joined the anti-Bloquist chorus. However, he did not see any reason to criticize the meetings held by the governor with the legislators to coordinate in advance the labor of the legislature. In the Socialist Party, he said, they not only would fine the dissidents, but they would expel them. Ibid., 89.

The list of those implicated in the Rinconada and the public positions held by them afterwards is in Juan Alberto Bracamonte, Una verguenza nacional. El Cantonismo en documentos (Buenos Aires, 1927), pp. 57-59.

⁵⁹However, it is fair to state that during the extensive congressional debates, the anti-Bloquists never mentioned what type of guarantces were backing the munificent loans granted to the Bloquists by the official bank.

giant slovenliness in accounting, or perhaps both at the same time.

Sánchez Sorondo, who had spearheaded the attack against the government of San Juan in December 1924, reiterated with impassioned words that that province was a "real cancer of democracy." He insisted that the intervention in San Juan was not like any other federal intervention, but a real expedition against an Indian incursion. By a vote of 84 to 3 the Chamber of Deputies left no doubts that the anti-Bloquist sentiment was riding at high crest.

The National Senate witnessed a new and extensive parade of arguments pro and con Cantoni. Vices and virtues were analyzed again through the partisan light of each sector. That cataract of words seemed unnecessary. Cantoni's fate was decided before the debate began. Out of nineteen Senators only three voted against the intervention, Pedro Larlús, for Córdoba, Leopoldo Melo and Aldo Cantoni.⁶⁰ A few days later Alvear appointed General Eduardo Broquen as interventor.

Meanwhile, in San Juan, Cantoni defended his battered administration by opening to the public two new buildings of the Rawson Hospital, the only one in the Capital. His improvised speech on that occasion

⁶⁰ Senadores, 1925, I, 346-358 (June 27); 401-410 (July 2); 425-429 (July 16); 469-489 (July 23); 490-530 (July 24), and 532-602 (July 25).

alluded to the fact that while the sterile opposition in Buenos Aires was ready to conquer San Juan as if it were a malón, he provided the poor with another humanitarian roof to assist them and to give them comfort and hope.⁶¹

Using all possibilities on hand, the Cantoni government tried to clog San Juan administrative wheels in order to reduce to a minimum the financial resources at the disposal of the intervention. All possible allocations were made, fines were condoned or dismissed, a general moratorium on the paying of taxes was granted and a very slow process to collect taxes through the courts was established.⁶²

A last stand was attempted by Governor Cantoni, who wanted to read before Commissioner Broquen the last decree of his administration. It expressed a protest at the intrusion of the central government and its violation of the federalist spirit of the national constitution.⁶³ But Broquen did not allow Cantoni to voice this last minute piece of his mind. Though the federal intervention

⁶¹La Reforma, June 30, 1925. A malón was a devastating Indian incursion on a white settlement.

⁶²Reacting against this unusual move, La Prensa sadly commented that it was as if the end of the Bloquist government meant that the province ought to disappear. July 9, 1925.

⁶³Ibid., August 9, 1925.

did not end Bloquism, it closed the first and most important chapter in the history of the movement.

The literature on Cantoni and Bloquism is scant. Naturally, the pro-Yrigoyenist writers have strongly criticized the Sanjuanino leaders. Manuel Gálvez stated that Federico Cantoni resembled a "Stalin aburguesado," with talent but without scruples, who granted benefits to the lower classes and was blindly admired by them. But Gálvez believes his methods were so violent that his regime surpassed anything known in Argentina; not to side with him, was to be against him.⁶⁴ Félix Luna asserted that the Cantonis transformed San Juan in a land where only the best armed man, the most resolute, the most macho could survive. In the Far West, in Sierra Morena or in Sicilian lands, added Luna, they would have been celebrated highwaymen for their propensity to loot for their loyal followers and for the downtrodden who considered them their caciques.⁶⁵

Analyzing Cantoni and Bloquism from a different angle, the Sanjuanino historian Juan Rómulo Fernández gives a brief account of the Cantonist era, concluding that Federico Cantoni was the politician "que más altos puntos calza en todo el país argentino." This may be

⁶⁴Gálvez, Vida de Hipólito Yrigoyen, p. 395.

⁶⁵Luna, Yrigoyen, p. 348.

understood as a complimentary remark on Cantoni, but the real meaning of this evaluation is not clear. Fernández' account, however, does not mention specifically the social legislation enacted by the Bloquists, and his short reference to the 1927 provincial constitution does not mention granting suffrage rights to women.⁶⁶ The local historian Héctor D. Arias had treated the subject in a balanced, although traditionally narrative way.⁶⁷

Judgments of Cantoni's rule reflect the controversial and still emotional involvement provoked by his personality and his actions. The three following views project a range of opinions held by observers who were directly or indirectly close to the contemporary scene. The Sanjuanino historian Emilio Maurín Navarro, son of Juan Maurín, believes that Cantoni was an "atropellador," a characteristic he links with the "Italian impulses" of an Al Capone, and that Cantoni's personality resembled that

⁶⁶ Fernández, "San Juan, 1862-1930," Historia argentina contemporánea, IV, pp. 534-537. Quotation is on p. 537.

⁶⁷ Arias and Varese, Historia de San Juan, pp. 440-455. The only biography of Federico Cantoni is an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Robert R. Smith (University of California, 1970). This is a researched work, narrative in nature, which handles evenly the virtues and failures of Federico Cantoni. Noticeable among its conclusions is that Smith finds somewhat difficult to understand in 1970 "the furor, heated controversy and even class hatred" generated by Bloquism, p. 288. "Radicalism in the Province of San Juan. The Saga of Federico Cantoni (1916-1934)."

of the Louisianian Huey Long. Maurín Navarro can not see anything positive in Bloquism, which he believes was a "permanent illegal association."⁶⁸

Another Sanjuanino, the competent historian Horacio C. Videla, whose father was bitterly opposed to Cantoni, thinks that although the reforms carried out by the Bloquism were progressive, it would have been preferable if they had been implemented through more orthodox means, free from the violence which permeated the actions of the Bloquists. Videla contends that Cantoni was a man sincere in his beliefs and acknowledges that Bloquism represented a new experiment oriented to benefit the popular sectors which until then had been neglected in San Juan.⁶⁹

José P. Barreiro, the intellectual force in the Bloquism of the 1920's, presents the most sympathetic view toward Cantoni. He agrees with his critics that Cantoni was an arbitrary ruler, but firmly points out that his first government was "an exemplary one." Barreiro rejects the view that Cantoni was a demagogue, but recognizes that he lacked the self-restraint to curb his arbitrariness and to smooth the rough edges of his personality.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Personal interview with Emilio Maurín Navarro.

⁶⁹Personal interview with Horacio C. Videla, San Juan, July 6, 1972.

⁷⁰Personal interview with José P. Barreiro.

These three dissimilar views are, in general, representative of the diverse opinions expressed about Cantoni and Bloquism. The historian will find that they contain some grains of truth, because Cantoni's real image is somewhat reflected in all of them. Certainly, the personal nature of the Sanjuanino leader and the extent of his accomplishments and failures are so controversial that to judge him and the movement he led would be a task permanently subject to challenge and revision.⁷¹ Already in the 1920's there was almost a traumatic preoccupation on both sides with what history would say about them. Cantonists and anti-Cantonists elevated their vision above their daily acrimonious disputes, and placed themselves on a moral, superior level, beyond their generation, when presumably the "final truth" would emerge. "The day of judgment for this historical government," asserted La Reforma, will

⁷¹Political legend had weaved around Cantoni a very widespread story, that of "giving away" coats or overcoats to the poor people, and thus, posing as a "benefactor" when in reality he would be a plain demagogue. The same attitude, as noted before, was attributed to Carlos Washington Lencinas, and so, both Cuyano leaders share the anecdote. Most of the persons who have been witness, directly or indirectly, of Cantoni's times, seldom fail to mention the story of the coats. However, two persons closely associated with Cantoni, José P. Barreiro and Eudoro Rodríguez, flatly denied that this was ever true.

show "the titanic material and spiritual accomplishments achieved by Cantoni." La Época, on the contrary, appealed to that time "when in the future the people will learn about the atrocities committed by the gangsters who today dominate San Juan...."⁷² Today, at least, we are certain that both sides were mistaken believing that history could speak with one voice or that it could render a "final" verdict. Bloquism, as any other personalist-rooted enterprise--as attested in the major examples of Rosism and Peronism--would be always subject to a historical inquiry in which opinions will surely differ far and wide.

Both sides seemed to have played the dual role of exploiters and exploited, both lacked moderation in attacking and defending themselves. Political polarization clouded the issues in dispute and passion replaced reason in the daily exercise of their antagonism, where even minor events or disagreements were enlarged out of proportion.

The first Bloquist government achieved most of its social goals and these accomplishments constitute a watershed for which Cantoni deserves full credit. He represented the first tangible hope for the humble people, with better working conditions, better salaries and spreading health services into far corners of the province,

⁷²La Reforma, August 1, 1924; La Época, July 10, 1924.

where it still was almost an adventure to live. Bloquism however, failed to enact the political reforms it promised, such as proportional representation in the legislature, or to insure full municipal autonomy. Economically, its fiscal program for a better balanced distribution of wealth was another landmark in an era in which any scheme smacking of Socialism or even advocating a mild welfare State was generally rejected as "exotic." But in the process, the financial tourniquet was applied too drastically to the business sectors. This inflamed the opposition to seek the political annihilation of Bloquism. Defending their position, the Cantonists disregarded civil liberties, basic freedoms were curtailed or placed under a permanent siege and the judicial system lost its most precious foundation: its independence.

But a further appraisal of the historical role of Federico Cantoni and Bloquism will be developed in following chapters, after the results of the last federal intervention in San Juan, the fourth in only four years, are discussed. Cantoni, like Lencinas in Mendoza, was enjoying large popular support when the federal intervention brought to an end his populist experiment. Its political enemies were able to stop Bloquism in 1925, but it was too strong to admit defeat.

C H A P T E R X

LENCINISM AND BLOQUISM PROVE THEIR RESILIENCE

Federal interventions, in Mendoza since September 1924 and in San Juan since August 1925, had placed these provinces again under the control of the national authorities. And once again the two Cuyan populist movements were confronted with the need to re-establish themselves as the strongest political force in their respective provinces. To regain their leadership they had to overcome a barrage of criticism and taunting reproaches from their opponents, both in Mendoza and San Juan, and in Buenos Aires.

Unlike the previous interventions during Yrigoyen's presidency the anti-Lencinist and anti-Bloquist forces hoped that this time the Federal Government would not thwart their aspirations for a definite change in the provincial scene. In theory, at least, the federal commissioners were not only to probe into scandal-tainted administrative proceedings and abuses of political power, but to restore some kind of harmony in both western provinces.

Lencinism: From the Llano to Power Again

Lencinas' opponents pressed the federal interventor to try in earnest to bring into court all the Lencinists

accused of corruption. "¡A la cárcel los ladrones!" --to jail with the thieves--a phrase coined at the giant rally of anti-Lencinists held in November 1924 in the capital of the province, became their permanent war cry. The non-Lencinist press, in Mendoza as well as in Buenos Aires, began reporting details of the dubious dealings in which many Lencinists had been involved while serving as government officials. The charges of corruption ranged from the alleged appointment of large numbers of aviadores,¹ to the more serious accusations of fraudulent operations within public institutions, especially the Provincial Bank. However, most of the cases aired in the press were never brought to trial. These cases, mostly involving low-level hirelings, became lost in a labyrinth of charges and denials, without ever reaching the courts.² Thus, only a few months after Mosca began the intervention, it became clear to the frustrated anti-Lencinist sectors that the intervention was not aimed at destroying their political adversaries.

On the contrary, the political activities of the Lencinists were neither forbidden nor curtailed, and they

¹"No show" employees and workers who cashed their salaries without ever working.

²The most important Lencinist officials, of the few who were prosecuted and found guilty, were the director of the Provincial Bank and the Superintendent of Irrigation.

were able, therefore, to maintain active political support throughout the province. The instructions of Minister of Interior Gallo to Mosca clearly reveal the "white glove" policy with which the central government handled the situation:

The federal commissioners are sent to the provinces neither to turn its files upside down, nor to make inquiries and investigations searching for guilty men and criminals, which will be processed before judges appointed by the commissioner himself. Your duty is not to render verdicts in favor of or against friends or political adversaries. Your mission is to guarantee the free expression of opinions and to insure the impartiality of the Federal Government in reorganizing the public life of the province.³

Because of this attitude emanating from Buenos Aires, the focus of political concern in Mendoza turned from possible judicial prosecution of the Lencinists, to the new challenge of electing a constitutional government.⁴ The beginning of a new electoral cycle inevitable renewed political hostilities, but now they seemed even more bitter than in December 1921 when Carlos Washington was elected governor. For the Lencinists now had an additional hostile public opinion to confront because of the charges of corruption against many of their leaders.

³Ministerio del Interior, Memoria del Ministerio del Interior, 1924-1925 (Buenos Aires, 1925), pp. 119-120.

⁴The intervention set the date of the election for August 1925, after it had been twice postponed.

At the end of May the Liberal Party selected Mario Arenas as its candidate for the governorship. In the Lencinist camp, with Carlos Washington barred from running because the constitution prohibited a man from serving two consecutive terms, there was a struggle among other prominent Lencinists, especially between Leopoldo Suárez and Alejandro Orfila. Finally Orfila managed to get the support of the majority.⁵

Because of the Interventor's reluctance to investigate former Lencinist officials or curb their political activities after Lencinas' ouster from power in September 1924, the Lencinist chances for returning to office were extremely favorable. The great personal popularity of Carlos Washington continued to be the backbone of his movement. Most of his supporters remained unaffected by the charges of corruption leveled against party leaders and persisted in their loyalty to the caudillo.⁶

⁵The Lencinists completed their ticket with Carlos Saá Zarandón, who had been the provincial Police Commissioner under José Néstor Lencinas.

⁶Very often the Lencinists expressed in popular verses their feelings of admiration for their two undisputed leaders, José Néstor and Carlos Washington Lencinas. A book could be compiled of all the laudatory popular poetry written in their praise, and against the conservatives, during most of the 1920's. In general, it extolled the gaucho-qualities of the two leaders, imitating on many occasions the criollo language and metrical style of José Hernández' Martín Fierro. The

This phenomenon from a conservative viewpoint, was evidence of a deplorable demagoguery that existed at both regional and national levels. The metropolitan daily La Prensa maintained its criticism of the Lencinists, insisting that they were exploiting the feelings of the simple people much as the Bloquists were doing in San Juan, and contending that both movements were offsprings of the personalist model set up by Yrigoyen from the Casa

following verses illustrate the indomitable spirit of the modest Lencinist troubadours:

Es el gaucho verdadero
es la tradición, la raza,
es el buen criollo que pasa
arriscándose el sombrero

Es el sagrado heredero
de la patria tradición
es la chusma en redención
que en estas tierras andinas
Don José Néstor Lencinas
salvó de la humillación

Las obras de esos cretinos [the conservatives]
a todo gaucho lo espanta
¡secar la uva en la planta
producto del suelo andino!
¡Tirar al canal los vinos!
¡no darle trabajo al pobre!
¿qué hay con que a ustedes les sobre,
ganzotes camanduleros?
si en ese tiempo el obrero
no podía ganar un cobre

Están rotas las cadenas
en la tierra mendocina
¡abajo gansos de Arenas!
¡viva Washington Lencinas!

La Palabra, December 28, 1925; December 18, 1924;
January 29, 1925.

Rosada.⁷ La Prensa's criticism focused in fact, on a very significant political paradox. Both the Bloquists and the Lencinists were not only branches of the old Radical trunk, but both were, in general, pursuing the same fundamental goals as the Personalist Radicals. From this hypothesis, Lencinism, Cantonism and Yrigoyenism constituted a vanguard of the "Causa" against the "Régimen." These three sectors appealed to the popular segments and all represented the side of reform in politics. Nevertheless, the Cuyano movements proved to be far more committed to social reform than were the Yrigoyenists. Moreover, the clashes first in Mendoza between José Néstor Lencinas and Yrigoyen, and then in San Juan over the Jones' affair, opened such an irreparable breach between the regional parties and the national Radicals under Yrigoyen, that their great affinity of principles was destroyed by the personalist ingredients which rule everyday politics.

The electoral campaign in Mendoza contributed once again to a charged political atmosphere as Lencinists and anti-Lencinists gave vent to a political rhetoric and style that was permeated by strong class overtones. Society ladies (the damas mendocinas) threw flowers from the balconies of the Jockey Club at the Liberal Party candidates marching together with the legion of old conservatives, the living symbol of the "Mendozan

⁷La Prensa, July 18, 1925.

patricians."⁸ Their sense of upper class superiority was also reflected in the slogan directed against the Lencinists: " A la cárcel los ladrones!" The response of the Lencinists was a mixture of pride and arrogance: " ; Viva el gauchito ladrón!" (Hail the "little gaucho" thief!).

The Bloquists came from San Juan to campaign once more on behalf of their neighbors. Lencinism and Bloquism, as the Mendozan La Palabra put it, constituted liberal, advances forces in support of the lower classes, and a curb to the haughtiness of the "aristocrat, capitalist, and conservative elements."⁹ Such a categorization of the anti-Lencinists, regardless of its accuracy, served the Lencinist purposes of advertising the socio-political situation in terms of rich versus poor. The Lencinists, moreover, answered their opponents' accusations of corruption by affirming that those who had violated the ordinary procedures while in office, did so to return to the people the pillage they had suffered under the governments of the "Régimen."

Climaxing the populist stance of the Lencinist campaign, La Palabra referred to their opponents on the eve of the election as the "young idlers who show off

⁸Ibid., July 27, 1925.

⁹La Palabra, January 4, 1926.

the established prestige of their illustrious ancestry," comfort-loving and parasitic people, who had never experienced adversities in life, lived in permanent slothfulness, looked down on the humble people, and were anxious to gain power in order "to enslave those who live chained to the heavy capitalist machine." In contrast, noted La Palabra,

The Lencinist Radicalism symbolizes democracy, evolution and revolution.... Will they [the conservatives] understand tomorrow [election day] and forever that it is the shirtless people, the rabble, rejected and cursed...who will impose their principles and willpower to bring new conceptions, new horizons and new men to the polity, marching straightforwardly to achieve truth and justice.

The Lencinist newspaper added, "let them [their opponents] call us the rabble, the shirtless...let those dirty souls discharge all kind of adjectives upon us... let them wallow in their political impotence and their orphanage of popular support...." Nothing, it concluded, would prevent the Lencinist victory.¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid., January 2, 1926. The editorial stated in Spanish: "El radicalismo Lencinista, que es democracia, evolución y revolución, les hará comprender mañana y para siempre, que es el pueblo descamisado, que es la 'chusma' despreciada y maldecida...quien impondrá su pensamiento y voluntad para dar al Estado político nuevas formas, nuevos horizontes y nuevos hombres y marchar camino recto al triunfo de la verdad y la justicia." "...que se nos moteje de chusma, de descamisados...que gasten los roñosos de alma y corazón todos los adjetivos...que se revuelquen en su impotencia de vencidos y huérfanos de simpatías populares...."

The Socialists of Mendoza, reacting to both the Lencinist and anti-Lencinist campaign were appalled by what they called the "Mendozan chaos." They viewed the masses as perennial victims, earlier under the rule of an oligarchy which simply ignored them, and now under a Lencinist tutelage, which perverted and degraded them. The Socialists referred to the Lencinist leaders as common criminals, assassins if they needed to be, "coimeros" by their own recognition, corrupted and corruptors.¹¹

As was usual during elections, especially at the national level in twentieth century Argentine politics, each party proclaimed itself to be the only one able to promote general prosperity in Mendoza. If the political propaganda were to be believed, depending on which party won the province would either become a paradise or would disappear off the face of the earth after the election. The Liberals, professing to represent the feelings of all the social groups "from

¹¹El Socialista (Mendoza), August 1, 1925. The Socialists watched with dismay during the electoral campaign "the parade of cars and trucks filled with reckless men, drunkards and roughnecks, yelling, insulting and provoking pacific people by shouting '¡Viva el gauchito Lencinas, borracho y ladrón!'" Stressing the fact that these were not isolated incidents, the Socialists added that all the Lencinist posters bore the inscription: "¡Viva la chusma de alpargata!" Ibid.

the palace of the fortunate to the shack of the humble peón," stated that they were "the only hope to save the province."¹² In December 1925, the Lencinist convention which chose the party candidates, proclaimed that "only Radicalism could save the future of the province."¹³

Another sector, the Yrigoyenists, before they decided to withdraw their candidates in November, issued a statement rejecting all compromise with other political forces. In their view, the choices at stake were "freedom or servitude, truth or deceit, a free election or a fraudulent one, justice or iniquity." The Yrigoyenists felt these fundamental principles should not be compromised by entering into any sort of political alliance.¹⁴

In a last effort to stop what appeared to be a certain return of Lencinism to power, the Yrigoyenists requested a new postponement of the election. They posed this dilemma to the Minister of Interior: how was it possible, they argued, that men who had engaged in illegal activities could now be able, "by an aberration

¹²La Prensa, June 1, 1925.

¹³Ibid., December 7, 1925.

¹⁴Ibid., November 24, 1925.

of the popular mind" to serve again as the representatives of the people?¹⁵ But the Federal Government preferred to let the issue be decided at the ballot boxes.

On Sunday, January 3, 1926, Lencinism received overwhelming support at the polls.¹⁶ Many anti-Lencinists felt, now more than ever, that the Mosca intervention had been a useless, ineffective interlude. But some Liberals took comfort in the fact that the new governor would be Orfila and not Carlos Washington. Their hope was that the powers of office placed in the hands of the former would serve to offset the preeminence exerted by Carlos Washington. The novelty of this political situation was that for the first time the Unión Cívica Radical Lencinista had voted in a governor who was not a Lencinas. This broke the monopoly of a prominent popular name, a personalist characteristic which was even present in the name of the party itself. But the Lencinists had no doubt that despite the fact that Orfila would be the new

¹⁵Ministerio del Interior, Memoria del Ministerio del Interior, 1925-1926 (Buenos Aires, 1926), p. 116.

¹⁶The election returns were: Unión Cívica Radical Lencinista 20,405 votes; Liberal Party 14,308; Socialist Party 4,381. La Prensa, January 10, 1926. The Lencinists also obtained a majority in both houses of the legislature as well as in the municipal contests, except in the capital and two departments, where the Liberals won.

governor, power had really reverted back to the "gaucho Lencinas."¹⁷

For the conservatives and the anti-Lencinists in general, it was a sad reality to have to accept Lencinism in power again. In their opinion, its victory constituted the triumph of corruption and opened the door to a repetition of the excesses of the "inorganic populachería" of the Lencinists. La Libertad, the fierce voice of the conservatives, even urged Mosca to remain as commissioner until public opinion, the "sana y decente" one, could see confidence in government restored.¹⁸

La Prensa attributed the electoral success of the Lencinists to their manipulations with the emotional feelings of the masses, who tended to attach a character of martyr to any leader who was under the accusing finger of the law and surrounded himself with an aura of "persecution."¹⁹ In reality, the angry criticism by the anti-Lencinists during Mosca's intervention did not

¹⁷This situation may be considered somewhat as a historical antecedent to the event of almost half a century later at the national level. In the presidential election of March 1973, the major slogan of the Justicialista Liberation Front was: "Cámpora to the government, power to Perón." As in Perón's case, Lencinas continued to be the undisputed leader of his movement.

¹⁸La Prensa, January 29, 1926.

¹⁹Ibid., January 7, 1926.

permeate the simple mentality of the common man. By using honest or despicable means, depending on the views of each side, the "gauchito Lencinas" continued to be the patron saint of the lower groups.

The Lencinists celebrated with fervor their return to the government, revelling in their own familiar way. The Lencinist La Palabra expressed its views in a scornful way calling the conservatives of the Jockey Club "a caste of usurers and exploiters."²⁰ Even the inmates at the city jail collectively expressed their exultation at the victory of the "noble y valiente chusma de alpargata."²¹ The joy displayed by the Lencinists, however, was observed by the opposition as further evidence of the revengeful attitude of primitive people. In the words of the Mendozan correspondent of La Prensa, the Lencinists provoked "populacheros" episodes, of intolerable "gangsterism" whose pleasure was to parade drunk in front of the Jockey Club, in the heart of the city, "shouting insults impossible to be reproduced."²²

These events and the style and language used by the opposing sides indicate that the electoral decision was based fundamentally on emotional feelings. The majority

²⁰La Palabra, January 7, 1926.

²¹Ibid., January 18, 1926.

²²La Prensa, February 6, 1926.

was committed to a caudillo, more by sentiment than ideology. The opposition was also temperamentally committed to reject the values and social standing represented by this caudillo and his followers. Class differences, however, continued to be a vital factor in deciding the behavior of the electorate and in subordinating every other issue to a single one: are you for or against the populist cause.

The return of Lencinism to power also served to frustrate the hopes that the opposition had placed in the federal intervention. If it was a fundamental principle that the people must govern themselves, commented La Prensa, the Mendozan experience indicated that interventions were nothing but arbitrary measures taken against the provinces by a stronger power that abused its constitutional authority.²³

For Carlos Washington the electoral victory of his movement gave him the opportunity to move onto the larger stage of national politics. Following a practice that they had condemned in the Régimen of appointing former governors to Senate seats, the Lencinist-dominated legislature named their hero to the post vacated by Benito Villanueva.²⁴

²³Ibid., January 10, 1926.

²⁴Lencinas had also been elected provincial Senator in the January 1926 election and held this position and that of National Senator-elect concurrently.

In spite of Lencinas' commanding role within the party, he did not exert a very strict control over the Orfila government.²⁵ The new administration, reflecting the different personality and interests of the governor, had its own characteristic, more attuned to what could be considered a traditional provincial rule than to the populist-oriented style of José Néstor Lencinas or Carlos Washington. From a political viewpoint it was a Lencinist government, but Orfila relied to some extent on his own men and his own ideas. Moreover, his modus operandi had to be different for he did not have the appeal associated with the name Lencinas.

Orfila was one of the most prominent bodegueros of Mendoza. Understandably then in his first message he promised not to damage the interests of the capitalists and warned the legislators that it would not be prudent for the government to transform itself into the tutor of the wine industry.²⁶ But Orfila also improved the existing

²⁵Lencinas was regarded as the supreme caudillo, never losing the power with which he kept his movement alive. In truly paternalistic fashion most of the correspondence from his partisans and political friends addressed him as "jefe único," "soldados disciplinados," "jefe espiritual y único," "único y genuino jefe." From the correspondence in the hands of Antulio Horacio Lencinas.

²⁶Provincia de Mendoza, Mensaje de S.E. el Gobernador de Mendoza D. Alejandro Orfila (Mendoza, 1926), p. 13.

social legislation, increasing substantially the minimum wage, which had remained at the same level for the private sector since enacted by José Néstor Lencinas in 1918. He also extended the minimum wage provision to domestic service, and granted it also the Sunday holiday. Orfila, however, plunged the province into major financial difficulties, which included a sizeable loan from the United States that greatly increased the provincial debt. Worse yet, this large indebtedness did not correct the ills which the huge loans were supposed to cure, especially the perennial deficit of the School Board.²⁷

Lencinism received a very serious political setback in 1927, on the occasion of the April 3 provincial elections. The political campaign had been very heated, but the Lencinists were confident of another victory. However, when the votes began to be counted, the support for the Yrigoyenist candidates proved to be stronger than the Lencinists had anticipated. Facing the possibility of an electoral defeat, on the night of the 6th a Lencinist group invaded the electoral office and violated several ballot boxes. Civic life in Mendoza was still primitive and personalist-oriented, but that night it was set back to the dark ages of caudillismo. Eventually the April

²⁷Orfila's government was referred as "the alleged reign of extortion" by the weekly The Review of the River Plate, LXVI, December 14, 1928, p. 38.

elections were declared void, but the wrong step had already been taken. By this pitiful action the Lencinists contradicted the noble efforts of José Néstor Lencinas in his life-long pursuit of a true political democracy.

Curiously, most of the tarnish affecting Orfila's rule and the unfortunate events of April 1927, did not diminish Carlos Washington's prestige. He was able to preserve the immense popularity he enjoyed with the common man, both in the city and throughout the departments. Moreover, his personal charisma was so strong that it seemed an impossible task for the opposition to eclipse his fame among the masses of Mendoza. In fact, the political change in the governorship seemed just a tactical step within the Lencinist strategy; nothing could restrict the future moves of Carlos Washington if he wished to return to rule the province after Orfila's term.

If within their respective provincial borders Lencinism and Cantonism were so powerful that they could cope with a federal intervention and later attempt to return to power, the situation outside the patria chica was totally different. In Congress, conservatives and Yrigoyenists were gathering the strength to challenge the ambitions of the men from Mendoza and San Juan.

Although Carlos Washington had been elected early in 1926 to a vacancy in the National Senate, that body allowed eighteen months to pass before taking up his

credentials. In the meantime the Senator-elect could not participate in its deliberations or do much besides denouncing the chamber as a docile body that was subordinated to the aims of "politiquería" and insensitive to popular feelings.²⁸

Finally, by the end of August 1927 the Senate's Credentials Committee got around to recommending that Carlos Washington's diploma be rejected. Almost certain that the Senate would endorse its committee's recommendation, Lencinas decided to spare himself the defeat and resigned his post to the Mendoza legislature. This move left the Senate empty-handed, without credentials to reject. In marked contrast to its premeditated idleness in taking up Carlos Washington's credentials, the Senate urged the provincial legislature to appoint a new Senator, presumably with the objective of reviewing his credentials and rejecting them before adjourning on September 30. The Mendoza legislature deliberately ignored the Senate request, but on October 1, the day after Congress recessed for the year, the legislature also rejected Lencinas' resignation, thus, allowing Carlos Washington to enjoy his status of Senator-elect.

Bloquism: A Second Popular Mandate

As with Mosca in Mendoza, General Broquen, the Federal

²⁸La Prensa, August 16, 1927.

Commissioner in San Juan, did not intend to "liquidate" Bloquism. In fact, during the fifteen months he ruled the province, Broquen maintained a policy of tolerance toward the Cantonists.²⁹ They too retained their partisan fervor, as had the Lencinists under similar circumstances. The anti-Bloquists raised protests against what they felt was a too lenient attitude on the part of the Federal Government, and because the authorities had not conducted a full investigation into the Cantonist rule. The Yrigoyenists in particular, urged the postponement of the elections until justice was done with regard to Jones' assassination.

In disapproval of Broquen's policy, both conservatives and Yrigoyenists abstained from participating in the national elections for National Deputies held in March 1926. The statement in which the Yrigoyenists announced their abstention was indicative of their extreme dislike of the Cantonists. They called the Bloquists "an army of fanatics...spreading the seeds of class hate, social dissolution, violence and bloodshed in simple-minded humble people...."³⁰ In spite of these dreadful invectives, the Bloquists again proved at the

²⁹Félix Luna refers to Alvear's policy toward the Cantonis as one of "tácita protección." Alvear (Buenos Aires, 1958), p. 71.

³⁰La Prensa, March 2, 1926.

polls the large popular support they enjoyed.³¹

The Cantonists took advantage of the non-punitive attitude of the intervention to promote their political comeback. To this end they selected Senator Aldo Cantoni as their candidate for governor. The Yrigoyenists, as they had since Jones' assassination, proclaimed their electoral abstention. The conservative Liberal Party adopted the same position, alleging that Cantonism continued to be at war with the civilized values of order, stability and respect for the law. In this way, the political field was again left open for the election of a Bloquist government. Regardless of the benefit which they could gain from their enemies' abstention, the Cantonist newspaper asked the anti-Bloquists to reconsider their attitude; to give up the "Jockey Club mentality" and the stupid prejudice of "believing they were different from and above the workingmen."³² More significant yet, La Prensa lashed the anti-Cantonists for their negligent inertia. The ills affecting the provinces of Mendoza and San Juan, it said, were a result of "the lack of preoccupation of the well-to-do and cultured class with public affairs, having devoted themselves to the pleasures of the material well-being

³¹The Bloquists polled 13,333 votes against 2,563 for a group of "Independents." Cantón, Materiales para el estudio, II, p. 96.

³²La Reforma, July 13, 1926.

they were enjoying...."³³

Meanwhile, the Bloquists stressed that historical experience strongly suggested that what the province needed was a government with an iron grip, energetic and firm, like that which Aldo Cantoni could provide. They appealed again to their followers for order and discipline in exercising their civic duties. With a moralistic tone, the Unión Cívica Radical Bloquista warned its rank and file that they did not wish any citizen to be drinking or provoking the opposition, to prove that they represented a movement of responsible men.³⁴ As expected, in the elections held on October 31, 1926, Aldo Cantoni was elected Governor of San Juan by a decisive vote.³⁵

Broquen's report of his rule as Federal Commissioner justified his refusal to become engaged in the investigative process demanded by the opponents of Bloquism, into the financial situation of former government officials and to

³³La Prensa, July 16, 1926.

³⁴La Reforma, October 29, 1926.

³⁵Aldo Cantoni received 17,125 votes, against 7,069 for the candidate of the Concentración Cívica. Senadores, 1929, I, 204. The Bloquist success was a reward for their unabated political activism. They were only defeated in a few municipal elections, where a restricted franchise to vote still existed. The opposition won in the municipal election in the Capital again, as well as in two departments.

reopen the judicial process of the Rinconada. No anti-Bloquist, explained Broquen, was willing to understand that the intervention could not and should not perform any acts but those specifically aimed at reestablishing constitutional rule. On the contrary, he stated that some groups had entertained the erroneous belief that the Federal Commissioner had gone to San Juan to deliver the government to them on a silver platter.³⁶

From Buenos Aires La Prensa observed with deep pessimism the political reality of the two Cuyano provinces. It felt that both the Mosca and the Broquen interventions had not brought any changes, but had simply marked time until the return of the Lencinists and Bloquists. In its frustration, La Prensa concluded that the Saenz Peña Law had failed, for in reality the mere superiority of the number had only satisfied the will of the populachería.³⁷

When Governor Aldo Cantoni began his term early in December 1926, he inherited the same political climate of intense loyalties and hatreds which had existed under his brother's rule. Even the sporadic flashes of violence

³⁶Ministerio del Interior, Memoria del Ministerio del Interior, 1926-1927 (Buenos Aires, 1927), pp. 145-147. Broquen also pointed out that the opposition to the Bloquists could only organize a weak propaganda apparatus, for in the March 1926 elections the Bloquists had opened 47 comités, in contrast to only 13 Yrigoyenists and 4 Liberals.

³⁷La Prensa, November 17, 1926.

returned to the Sanjuanino land. On November 30, 1926, only a week before inauguration, an attempt was made on the life of Aldo Cantoni. He escaped death only accidentally by having exchanged seats in his car with his chauffeur, who died instantly.³⁸ Thus, by a whim of fate, San Juan was spared another political tragedy.

Federico Cantoni had begun his populist government in 1923 with the events of the Rinconada in the immediate background. Three years later, only a miracle allowed Aldo Cantoni to reassume the populist crusade from the government house. Hatred and political violence in San Juan took no respite.

The second Bloquist administration constituted a harmonious extension of the previous government of Federico Cantoni. Such continuity had not been present in Mendoza when Orfila succeeded Carlos Washington. However, although to a large extent the governments of Federico and Aldo Cantoni in the 1920's can be considered a unit in their policies and their actions, Aldo's administration made evident the personality differences between the two Cantoni brothers. For Aldo was less tempered and a better organizer than Federico. Despite Aldo's long indoctrination in the ideals of the political left, his government did not convert San Juan into a Socialist model. Basically, he

³⁸The assailants fled to the mountains, but they were caught by the Bloquists. The man who had shot Cantoni's chauffeur was killed. This led the opposition to charge that the Cantonists had taken justice into their own hands.

accentuated the characteristics that had provoked the fierce opposition against Federico's rule, especially its financial aspects. Business and property taxes, which had been substantially raised by the first Bloquist government, were now heavily increased again. This renewed the adamant opposition of the mercantile sectors against the Cantonists. Aldo also carried out an ambitious program of public works, which remain to his everlasting credit.³⁹

Paralleling Carlos Washington's steps, Federico had been elected provincial Senator and soon thereafter the legislature of San Juan appointed him National Senator. As with the Mendozaan caudillo, Federico also continued to be the undisputed leader of Bloquism. Under his guidance, the populist zeal of the government, as well as the innovative, reformist spirit which so especially characterized Bloquism, was kept alive.

The rhetoric of class conflict continued to be present in the Bloquist literature, which viewed the province as divided between exploiters and exploited, and between "pueblo" and "anti-pueblo." The Sanjuanino patricians, said La Reforma in one of its many editorials critical of the opposition, represent the old castes, parasitarians and useless, who lecture on "civic action"

³⁹The Sanjuanino historian Horacio C. Videla summed up the rule of the Cantonis as "grandes vientos de reforma." Retablo sanjuanino (Buenos Aires, 1956), p. 96.

in front of the poker tables. Federico Cantoni, on the other hand, was portrayed in the official press as a man who knew the sufferings of the poor people and who was engaged in a permanent struggle against the privileged and the exploiters.⁴⁰

Two special illustrations serve to reveal the intensity and determination of Federico and Aldo Cantoni and their movement to effect an integral reform of the Sanjuanino society. One was a license tax imposed upon the medical profession; the other, of far reaching importance, was an amendment to the provincial constitution.

Early in 1927, in line with the Bloquists' traditional approach to revenue raising, the government of San Juan greatly increased all business and professional franchise taxes. Of particular interest, it established an extremely high tax of \$ 5,000 per year on doctors, but exempted them from paying it if they agreed to work two hours daily, without pay, in the Asistencia Pública, the Public Health Agency. According to the Bloquists, this severe action was taken in order to control what they considered the abuses and lack of humanity of the medical profession. They specifically assailed the medical association

⁴⁰La Reforma, January 26, 1927.

for setting up guidelines, which, in the Cantonist view, constituted a cynical commercialization of a most important social service.⁴¹

Beyond the technical or administrative conflict which resulted from these guidelines, the affair had a clear political dimension. Most of the doctors were opposed to the Bloquists and they interpreted the imposition of the tax as a hateful political tourniquet, inspired not with an eye to the provincial coffer, but engineered by the government to reap political benefits by offering free medical service to the population, without costing a cent to the province. Since the large majority of the people who attended the Public Health Agency were from the poorer classes, who constituted the political following of Bloquism the anti-Cantonist doctors would be forced to cooperate, indirectly, with the policy of their adversary.⁴²

⁴¹The bylaws of the doctors' mutual association stated that they would not accept employment at any hospital unless they were paid \$ 200 a month, and that they would not assist patients in consultation with other physicians without a payment of 50 pesos and previous approval of the deal by the association.

⁴²It also seems that the doctors feared an outright Socialism, as can be inferred from the conservative-sponsored bill to approve another intervention in San Juan, which was introduced in the National Chamber of Deputies in 1927. It stated that if all doctors were to cooperate with the government, there would be no patients left to be assisted privately, because all the people would be entitled to free medical assistance. Diputados, 1927, I, 769 (June 22).

Enraged by this, the doctors of San Juan with the cooperation of the medical profession in other provinces, launched a campaign to repeal the tax.⁴³ A war of words broke out between the doctors and the supporters of the regime. With his typical bluntness Federico Cantoni stated that if a butcher paid over \$ 1,000 annually in municipal taxes, it was only fair to demand \$ 5,000 from a doctor who earned ten times as much.⁴⁴ The Bloquist press, for its part, denounced the doctors as insensitive to need, and depicted them as mercenary members of a privileged caste.

The fiscal and social aspects of the tax issue soon became entangled in politics, providing one more battleground for continuing the permanent struggle between Bloquists and anti-Bloquists.⁴⁵ The issue

⁴³According to Dr. Indalecio Carmona Ríos, a Socialist leader and a medical doctor himself, of the 56 doctors registered in the city of San Juan, only 12 agreed to pay the tax. Personal interview. July 6, 1972. San Juan.

⁴⁴La Reforma, December 30, 1926.

⁴⁵The Sanjuanino doctors appealed to the courts to void such a high tax. A year later, the National Supreme Court ruled on this thorny and highly emotional issue, asserting that this license tax was unconstitutional because it had been levied with the purpose of penalizing a special class of persons. Rizzotti v. San Juan (1928). Amadeo, Argentine Constitutional Law, pp. 211-212.

demonstrates, in a capsule, the combative nature of their relations. The populist stand of the former and their position in behalf of the humble sectors irked the traditional segments of the provincial society. Besides, the fiscal policy of the second Bloquist government alienated the business and land-owning sectors to the point of total irreconciliation.⁴⁶

The second illustration, symbolic of the reformist nature and resoluteness of the Sanjuanino movement, refers to the amendment of the provincial constitution which took place early in 1927. This was one of the most important and least known achievements of Bloquism. The plans for a constitutional reform had been expressed by the Cantonists in the early stages of their movement, and the reformist impetus was mainly engineered by the leftist intellectual mentors of Bloquism.⁴⁷

⁴⁶The provincial budget for 1927 surpassed 10,000,000 pesos, an exceedingly high figure for an underdeveloped province. Therefore, all levels of taxation were raised again. A sizeable amount of the budget was allocated for public works, especially for highway construction. The Bloquists built a road to the west, to Calingasta, which was heralded as a model. However, as the finca of Aldo Cantoni was located there, the opposition contended that this monumental work through mountaneous terrain was intended to serve the personal economic interest of the governor. A significant step was the enactment in April 1928 of an old-age pension, financed through an additional tax on wine. The pension, on paper at least, granted financial assistance to persons 60 years old and older.

⁴⁷Three days after assuming office, Aldo Cantoni sent a message to the legislature proposing constitutional

The 1927 reform constituted a pioneer experiment in light of the new principles it embodied. Some of its provisions were so innovative that they invited challenge as unconstitutional. But most of its clauses revealed the advanced nature of the document. In fact, some of its principles were not incorporated into the national constitution until two decades later. The populist spirit which guided this reform, as well as the new socio-political principles it comprised, could be a theme for a special work in itself. Only the thrust of the most salient reforms and the Bloquist justification for them will be given here.⁴⁸

In the political field the principal innovations were: (1) it granted universal suffrage for women, both in municipal and provincial elections. Until then only

reform. It acted very promptly and early in January the delegates to the constitutional convention were elected. The Bloquists obtained 13,245 votes; the Socialists 1,863 and the Progressive Democrats 1,208. Fourteen Bloquists were elected along with two Socialists and one Progressive Democrat. The new charter became effective on February 11, 1927. La Prensa, January 12, 1927.

⁴⁸Provincia de San Juan, Diario de sesiones de la Honorable Convención Reformadora de la Constitución (San Juan, 1927). Graciano Recca, a leftist politician who came to San Juan with Aldo Cantoni, was the factotum behind the constitutional amendment. Grecca stated that the fundamental reform they could accomplish would be to grant constitutional status to the rights of the workingmen. La Prensa, January 9, 1927.

men voted and even in municipal elections there was a restricted franchise; (2) it declared the total separation of church and State; (3) it established the single-member district electoral system instead of the two-thirds majority system, sanctioned for the nation by the Saenz Peña Law. In this way only the winner of every district was elected, without any representation assigned to the minority in any district; (4) in case of a federal intervention the provincial budget would have no legal force; thus the "intruding" federal authorities would not be able to handle any provincial funds, and (5) it set up a unicameral legislature by abolishing the Senate.

In the social field, the new constitution established the right of every person to a minimum of economic security, a minimum wage, labor protection and safe working conditions. It reaffirmed the principles of National Law 1420 that public education should be lay, compulsory and free of charge. It also provided direct assistance to pupils whose parents could not afford to acquire school materials.

Federico Cantoni, who had been elected delegate to the convention, was the leading Bloquist spokesman. There were no extensive debates at the convention partly because of the small non-Bloquist representation, and partly because the Cantonists had prepared and discussed the

constitution in advance. They therefore, believed that it was not necessary to delve extensively into matters on which the majority had clearly made up their minds as indicated by their having voted for the Bloquists. In this respect, the Bloquists applied in the constitutional convention the same procedures as they had in the legislature.⁴⁹

Because of the strong social accent of the proposed reforms Cantoni made precise references throughout the debates to the social situation in San Juan. He emphasized time and again the populist principles with which Bloquism was identified, and by referring to the unfortunate condition of the lower sectors, he underscored the basic class differences afflicting the Sanjuanino society. Justifying the need for setting up welfare legislation for rural workers, Cantoni recalled that the patrones always reserved for the peons the storage area, or the worst room of the house. He asserted that the solution to these problems lay in promoting the right of the workers to demand social justice based on principles of social solidarity and not as a handout or an act of charity.

Cantoni agreed that the workers should have the right to strike, but only through pacific means. This thought

⁴⁹La Época, which had never printed a single word of criticism of Yrigoyen, referred to the Bloquist delegates as a "conciliábulo de serviles." January 30, 1927.

suggests that in addition to Cantoni's concern for social justice, he also believed, in line with his paternalistic style, that the labor movement should be somewhat controlled or regulated by the State. At the same time the Bloquist caudillo reaffirmed his known opposition to transforming the State into an employment agency. Thus, in justification of his exclusion of government personnel from the constitutional minimum wage provision, Cantoni stated that people should not be encouraged to seek government jobs, a practiced so rooted in the minds of the individuals. On the contrary, he asserted that people should invest their savings in the creation of small industries and other business. Cantoni dreamed of transforming the laggard provincial economy into an active center composed of independent shopkeepers and industrious small-size landowners.

The Socialists agreed with most of the reforms introduced by the Bloquists, but they expressed their total opposition to the election of the legislature by districts. The Socialists argued that one party could obtain the majority in all of the districts, as actually happened with Bloquism, even if it was a split-hair margin, and the new legislation would not allow any representation for the minority.⁵⁰

⁵⁰This system had been applied briefly in Argentina early in the century and it was established in Great Britain and France.

But what provoked the rage of the anti-Bloquists was Cantoni's open statement that the representation of minorities was useless. This scorn for minority representation, anti-democratic as it appeared, has to be analyzed in conjunction with his view of grass roots government. Cantoni thought of a representative of the people as one who was closely identified with the needs of the district he represented. At the same time, on a larger scale, Cantoni felt the role of the representatives as a group was to fulfill the program outlined by their party. Therefore, there was no need for a politician to act independently of the norms and principles set up by his political organization. This fundamental assumption led Cantoni to state at the constitutional assembly that "caudillismo" was dead in San Juan because Bloquism was an organic party, at the service of an official program of action and not men's own ambitions.

The Majority-only system so enthusiastically defended by Cantoni elicited cutting criticism from almost all national sectors. In their eyes, it confirmed the opinion about the authoritarian nature of Cantonism. The Socialists strongly objected to including the single-member electoral provision in the constitution and pointed out that the Bloquists were following in Mussolini's steps, for the Italian leader also believed that the minorities were worthless.⁵¹ Apparently, Cantoni refused

⁵¹La Vanguardia, February 8, 1927.

recognize that although the majority should in fact have the right to rule and dictate policy, any majority, regardless of its size, represented majority but not absolute power. Aside from this major objection, the Socialists gave their support to most of the Bloquist reforms, especially to the provision granting universal suffrage for women.⁵²

The Socialist La Vanguardia, which had always been critical of Bloquism, recognized that "there are many innovations which are badly needed in the national constitution, in order to bring it up to the times we live in."⁵³ In fact, the Sanjuanino charter incorporated many features which were very close to the Socialists' heart: a non-religious stand, popular education under the principles of Law 1420, universal vote for women, and bringing down the barriers of a restricted electorate for municipal elections. In comparison to the provincial constitution, noted La Vanguardia, the national one "is an anacronism, something very inferior."⁵⁴

⁵²The Progressive Democrat Ventura Larrosa was the only delegate who was opposed to this step, believing that women's right to vote should be granted gradually. The first priority, Larrosa said, was to improve the procedures and habits of the males voting before allowing women to vote.

⁵³La Vanguardia, February 15, 1927.

⁵⁴Ibid. In his 1927 annual message to the legislature Governor Aldo Cantoni proudly pointed out that those scholars who had until then looked at the

The anti-Bloquist sectors, however, believed that such a reform was less than an asset for San Juan. Thus, when the reforms were proposed by Governor Aldo Cantoni, they were scorned as an attempt to intrude one-sided partisan views into the fundamental law of the province, in order to please "populachero" desires. Another major criticism of the opposition focused on the right to a minimum of economic security, a principle which they considered would pave the way for a guaranteed "salary for loafing."⁵⁵

As for universal suffrage for women, Juan Antonio González Calderón, an expert on constitutional law, believed it to be a legal provision, but questioned whether it would not cause a deterioration in family life. Furthermore, González Calderón declared that the principle of universal suffrage would transform democracy into demagogy, as had been the case in the municipal elections. He felt that if the electoral system were to be entirely democratized, it would end up being corrupted.⁵⁶ Another criticism pointed out that there

social legislation of Uruguay as the most advanced or at the Mexican constitution as a model, now had in the constitution of San Juan a testimony of progressive, modern constitutional law. Mensaje del Gobernador de la Provincia, Dr. Aldo Cantoni, May 12, 1927 (San Juan, 1927), p. 11.

⁵⁵Diario Nuevo, February 10, 1927.

⁵⁶La Prensa, January 3, 1927.

would be nothing evil in a federal intervention--which Bloquism attempted to quash through financial strangulation--if it aimed at restoring law and order in the province.⁵⁷

What was perhaps one of the most significant achievements of the constitution became a reality in the elections held on April 8, 1928. On that day women throughout San Juan exercised the right to vote for the first time, without any restrictions. It was a harbinger of the more significant day in November 1951, when women all over Argentina were able to vote under the same unrestricted conditions for the first time. Thus San Juan had the privilege of being the first province in Argentina where women exercised the right of universal suffrage, and hence the leader in the crusade for equality.

This achievement was especially remarkable because it was implemented at a time when there was generally strong sentiment against granting women a right

⁵⁷Diario Nuevo, February 19, 1927. Experts in constitutional law who examined the 1927 San Juan constitution contended that the provision declaring that the provincial budget was unapplicable under a federal intervention, was unconstitutional. Arturo M. Bas, El derecho federal argentino. Nación y provincias (Buenos Aires, 1927), p. i-ix; Octavio Gil, Autonomía provincial. Historia y concepto constitucional (Buenos Aires, 1928), p. 186; Faustino J. Legón, Comentario de la nueva constitución de San Juan (Buenos Aires, 1927), p. 69.

traditionally reserved for men. This sentiment was due in part to the fact that women were not considered politically prepared to exercise their right to vote, and in part because of the desire, especially of the upper classes, to protect women from the abuses generally associated with politics and voting practices.⁵⁸ The April 1928 provincial election proved, at least, that women could exercise voting rights without giving up their values and their way of life as many widespread critics had feared.⁵⁹

⁵⁸The Bloquists also led the way in promoting female participation in the activities of the party to the extent of setting up special women's organizations. With women voting, citizen participation in the electoral process in San Juan improved significantly to 36.6 per cent of the total population (56,000 voters on a provincial population of 153,000 inhabitants). In comparison, the figures for national elections, with only men voting, were:

	Population	Voters	%
1926	147,097	20,473	13.91
1928	161,592	28,918	17.89

Ministerio del Interior, Memoria del Ministerio del Interior, 1927-1928. p. 73.

⁵⁹The Bloquists were as successful with the feminine side of the electorate as they had been with males. The returns of the April 8, 1928, provincial election were as follows:

	Male	Female	Total
U.C.R. Bloquista	21,363	24,771	46,134
Socialist Party	2,933	2,130	5,063
Blank	2,146	2,665	4,811
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total	26,442	29,566	56,008

Provincia de San Juan, Junta Electoral de la Provincia, Libro de Actas No. 6, pp. 233-258.

After the federal interregnum, Lencinism and Bloquism had proven their strength by returning to office, largely because of the unabated support of the "chusma de alpargata." While the second Bloquist government honored its promises for social and political reform, and continued exerting an authoritarian rule, Lencinism was much less effective in making a reality of its avowed populist stand. But now the solid leadership earned by Carlos Washington and Federico Cantoni in their Cuyo provinces, had to confront in Buenos Aires the opposition from hostile and powerful political forces. For in Congress they had to become engaged in an offensive-defensive operation, that is, projecting a positive view of the principles and procedures of their regional movements and staving off the attacks and challenges of their embittered political adversaries.

C H A P T E R X I

LENCINISM AND BLOQUIISM. FROM CUYO TO BUENOS AIRES:
NEW CHALLENGES AHEAD

Bloquism Encounters the National Senate

With the designation of Carlos Washington Lencinas and Federico Cantoni as National Senators by their respective provincial legislatures in Mendoza and San Juan, the National Senate became the scene of a direct confrontation between Cuyano populism and Yrigoyenist Radicalism. The conflict took the form of a debate over credentials. In the case of Cantoni, and of his fellow Senator-elect Carlos R. Porto, the issue seemed simple.¹

¹ Carlos R. Porto, who had been Minister of Government under Federico Cantoni, had also being appointed National Senator and his credentials were considered together with Cantoni's.

To emphasize the special nature of their movements, the Lencinists and Bloquists in Congress organized a parliamentary group called the "leftist block." Their aim was to adopt a "uniform policy" in Congress, molded in "liberal, progressive, reformist and humanist principles, for the benefit of Argentine democracy." This political cluster constituted in theory an ideological force aspiring to project into national level policy the creed of their provincial movements. Their Radicalism, they stated, was leftist-oriented and eminently liberal. They offered guarantees to a "sano" capitalism and pledged to protect the lower class sectors "so neglected by the Régimen and some Radical governments." La Reforma, April 22, 1926. This parliamentary scheme, however, have no effect because the Lencinists and Bloquists congressmen, small in number even under normal circumstances, were practically excluded from Congress by the rejection of their credentials. Regardless of its ephemeral existence, the creation of this self-serving block served to demonstrate the special ideological ties between the two populist Cuyano movements.

Under the constitution the Senate only had to determine whether their election by the legislature was made in accordance with the law. In reality, however, national political interests as well as personal rivalries entered into the picture. Besides the sharp animosities aroused by Cantoni's personality, a complicating factor was the determination of the Yrigoyenists to seek revenge for Jones' martyrdom.

Yrigoyenist hatred for Cantoni extended to anyone sympathetic to him and his movement. Thus, the association of Carlos Washington with the Bloquists hurt the former's chances of having his own credentials accepted by the Senate. Jorge Calle, the Lencinist National Deputy, noted this when he wrote to Carlos Washington that many congressmen were unhappy with the brutality of Cantonism and warned that "it is very unwise to be aligned with the political situation in San Juan. This is the least I can tell you."²

The opening of the debate over Cantoni's credentials aroused wide public interest; all the halls and corridors of the Senate building hummed with people avid to attend the meetings; the visitors gallery, the barra, was filled to capacity; an air of expectancy settled over the Chamber.

²Jorge Calle to Carlos Washington Lencinas, May 18, 1927. Correspondence in the hands of Antulio Lencinas.

Senator Mora Olmedo, of San Luis, spoke for the majority of the Credentials Committee in urging rejection of the credentials. Mora Olmedo in his address critically reviewed the performance of the Bloquist governments, and based the Committee's negative recommendation on the contention that Bloquism represented a system of immorality and tyranny, in open defiance of the national constitution. Cantoni and Porto responded to Mora Olmedo's stinging remarks by mounting a counterattack, pointing out the underdeveloped and elitist conditions that prevailed in Mora Olmedo own province, San Luis, and citing numerous examples of its inadequate social organization, its backwardness and the parasitical nature of its bureaucracy. Porto, for example, contrasted San Juan with San Luis in the fields of public works, education and finances, amply demonstrating the deplorable conditions in the latter province.³

When it was Cantoni's turn to defend his credentials, he proved to be the attraction of the debates. His picturesque language and the unusual frankness with which he spoke to the Senators aroused general attention. Cantoni's main contribution during the several days of debate was an impassioned defense of the workingmen of San Juan. In a blunt reference to the very Senators who would decide his seat, Cantoni proclaimed

³Senadores, 1927, I, 472-481 (August 18).

the more I know the most important men of my country, the more I love the chinos of my patria chica. They have a greater soul and deeper feelings...and I am convinced that their sentiments are superior and nobler than those of the men sitting in this hall.⁴

He also warned the leaders of the country not to neglect paying attention to the stomachs of the poor, and he justified on moral grounds the license tax set up for doctors in San Juan. Cantoni also reiterated his views against the State functioning as an employment agency, deploring the fact that many people in Argentina were begging to enter the bureaucracy, while the poor farmer, his wife and children, had to work hard from sunrise to sunset. The Senator-elect told his attentive audience that he always advised the Sanjuaninos to increase their personal wealth, to avoid vices in order to be thrifty, and to work harder to produce more goods, because the

⁴Ibid., 506. Cantoni expanded this views in an outspoken and direct way:

El señor presidente [of the Senate] habrá oído hablar de esos chinos roñosos, y yo digo señores senadores: la roña del trabajo es una roña superior y tiene más mérito y más prestigio por su virtud y menos mal olor que esta roña inteligente y cerebral que cree que se puede servir al país sólo con discursos...y hace también perder el tiempo en discusiones como éstas, en la que no se hace más que gastar papel impreso y muchos miles de pesos para la impresión del diario de sesiones, que en realidad no sirve sino para demostrar que algunos hablan más o menos bien, otros más o menos regular, o más o menos brutalmente como lo hace el que habla.

Ibid., 512.

better off they became economically, the more independent they would be. Thus, all the citizens would have more freedom to vote for whomever they wanted, instead of being compelled to follow the choice of the patrón.

As in every occasion in which Yrigoyenists and Bloquists confronted each other, the events of the Rinconada, which had been hotly disputed since 1921, were discussed again, but now neither group was able to convince the other. At issue in the debate, however, was a conflict over political style as well as philosophy. This was well revealed in the following exchange between Cantoni and Senator Luis Linares, for Salta:

- Linares: In San Juan the Senators-elect are very popular. How could it be different if they, by a well conceived and coldly executed system dispossess a minority to give to a majority?
- Cantoni: That is democracy! to rule for the majority!
- Linares: That is demagogy! It is a shame, a despoilment!⁵

Such was the strength of the Cantonist arguments, however, that La Prensa, certainly no friend of the Bloquists, asserted that the decisive stand of Federico and Porto had pulverized a number of adverse viewpoints and had won wide support for the Sanjuanino Senators-elect. Commenting on the frankness of speech which was habitual to

⁵Ibid., 626. The full debates are in 448-491 (Aug. 18); 498-507 (Aug. 20); 508-548 (Aug. 22); 549-593 (Aug. 23); 594-648 (Aug. 24).

Cantoni, La Prensa stated that he had "called by their proper names things which were usually referred to by euphemisms." The porteño paper also praised Porto for his description "in master strokes," of the pitiable working conditions of the laboring sectors in San Luis, and concluded that "until now never had anyone spoken in the Senate with such frankness and fairness."⁶

But the oratory of the Upper House did not change the minds of any Senator, for the vote followed well defined positions; the credentials of Cantoni and Porto were rejected 14 to 6.⁷ The Bloquists, however, took the view that they had lost only a battle and not the war, for less than two weeks after the rejection of the credentials, San Juan's legislature again elected Cantoni and Porto as National Senators.

Lencinism and Bloquism. Bulwarks of anti-Yrigoyenism

The importance of these two Cuyo movements as part of the sector nationally opposed to Yrigoyen, was emphasized by the upcoming presidential election, scheduled for April 1, 1928. The political climate in Argentina heated up well in advance of that date. The strong possibility that Yrigoyen could be elected for a second presidential term had already in 1927 provoked euphoria among the Yrigoyenists.

⁶La Prensa, August 22, 1927.

⁷The Yrigoyenists and the conservatives voted for rejection; four anti-Personalists and two Socialist Senators, Juan B. Justo and Mario Bravo voted for approval.

As for their opponents, early that year and after entangled maneuvers, the anti-Personalists proclaimed the candidacies of National Senators Lepoldo Melo and Vicente G. Gallo for the presidency and vicepresidency.

Because Mendoza and San Juan were important anti-Yrigoyenist bastions, a very peculiar situation developed. The conservatives were adamant against Yrigoyen. But at the same time they cherished the same feelings against Lencinism and Bloquism, which they considered to be as demagogic and pernicious as Yrigoyenism. On the other hand, the political reality was such that they needed the support of the Cuyo movements in order to attempt the defeat of the Personalists in 1928. The conservative-oriented Melo-Gallo ticket created problems in Mendoza for both the conservatives and the Lencinists. The Liberals of Mendoza considered it impossible for them to enter into any kind of political partnership with the Lencinists in support of the same presidential ticket. The Mendozan conservatives were torn by the decision they had to make and they debated heatedly over the proper course for them to follow. In December 1927 the majority of the Liberal Party decided to reject any common cause with the Lencinists, and therefore, to endorse their own presidential candidates. "We never could join in a presidential ticket supported by Lencinism," declared the conservative Raffo de la Reta on this occasion. "Not

even if it is only the presidential candidate," added Gilberto Suárez Lago, another Liberal leader.⁸

Since they were committed to preventing the return of Yrigoyen to power, the anti-Personalist sectors outside Mendoza harshly criticized the attitude taken by the conservatives of that province. What was necessary, sadly commented La Prensa, was to think of national interest first and local interests later.⁹ But most of the Mendozan conservatives remained totally intransigent. For them the first priority was "to destroy Lencinism."¹⁰

While the conservatives thus found themselves in a crossfire, the Lencinists for their part viewed the return of Yrigoyen to the presidency as a sure sign of a new federal intervention in Mendoza. Thus, the presidential election was a fundamental matter of political survival for them. It seemed terribly awkward that a populist caudillo like Lencinas should be supporting a "galerita" like Melo, but Carlos Washington did not have any other alternative in his drive to prevent Yrigoyen's victory.

The Yrigoyenists, both in Mendoza and Buenos Aires, revived the memory of José Néstor Lencinas from the oblivion in which they had buried him since 1919. They recalled his letter to Melo of that year in which he

⁸La Prensa, December 17, 1927.

⁹Ibid., December 22, 1927.

¹⁰Ibid., December 17, 1927.

told him "you will never be president." Thus, one strong weapon against Melo's candidacy, which Carlos Washington openly supported, was, ironically, Carlos Washington's father letter. The Yrigoyenist emphasized the duplicity of the son in comparison with the integrity of the father, to the point of affirming that José Néstor Lencinas "never was a Lencinist," that he had nothing to do with his descendents, whom the Personalists referred as a "generation of cockroaches."¹¹ Ten years after his heralded assumption of power in Mendoza, José Néstor Lencinas' memory was revived in the turbulent presidential campaign of 1928, but this time as a banner of the Yrigoyenists!¹²

In San Juan Bloquism also constituted one of the supporters of the anti-Yrigoyenist camp. The same anomaly evident in Mendoza was present here, where a populist leader like Cantoni was supporting Melo for president. But the anti-Yrigoyenist fervor they shared forged a link

¹¹La Época, March 10, 1928.

¹²Since both sides had high stakes at issue, Mendoza witnessed a political campaign of abuse and intolerance. As an illustration, a few days before the election, Walter Rittman, a young Englishman who had arrived recently in Mendoza to work for the Banco Anglo Sudamericano, was stopped one night in the street by a group of roughs who ordered him to cheer for the gaucho Lencinas. Rittman was unable to understand what he was asked to do, but his silence was taken as a provocation and he was fatally shot. The Review of the River Plate, LXVI, April 6, 1928, pp. 7, 9.

between Cantoni and the anti-Personalist national leaders.

The participation of Federico Cantoni in political rallies in the Federal Capital was one of the most colorful characteristics of the 1928 campaign. In contrast to Melo's dull and unattractive style, Cantoni spoke to the people in plain words, highly flavored with popular, vulgar terms, which La Reforma defined as "unkempt oratory,"¹³ but which always created an impact on the audiences. Cantoni's presence at political rallies was in permanent demand. Night after night when he announced that he was ending his speech, the people asked him not to end it but to go on. The familiar and aggressive tone of his attacks against the Personalists stirred up the Yrigoyenist aversion for him more and more. Partisan fervor thus led to street violence and one night Cantoni saved his skin only miraculously after his car was fired upon several times.¹⁴

The 1928 presidential campaign clearly placed Federico Cantoni on the national stage. His case was practically unique in Argentina's political history after

¹³La Reforma, March 14, 1928.

¹⁴Violence, of course, was not exclusive with one sector. But when a few days before the election a new and serious armed confrontation took place between the Yrigoyenists and their opponents after a rally at which Cantoni had spoken, the Personalists abruptly decided to end their political campaign, they said, in order to avoid more bloodshed.

1862, for Cantoni was a provinciano who had gained fame in his native land, not in Buenos Aires. In 1928 his personal style and commanding rhetoric produced an impact on the porteños, a fact which becomes more significant when it is realized that Cantoni was from a backward province far away from the influential and richer littoral. Whether Cantoni was hated or applauded, the fact is that his name became a household word in the very heart of the nation's capital. Domingo F. Sarmiento, another Sanjuanino, had also been "a bull in his ring and a super-bull in other people's ring,"--"toro en su rodeo y torazo en rodeo ajeno"--as he put it, but he had not built up his national stature in his native province. On the contrary, Cantoni was attractive in Buenos Aires because of the qualities he had already shown as a popular caudillo in San Juan; and, equally significant, while he was in Buenos Aires, he retained his native Sanjuanino spirit and mentality.

Yrigoyen's Political Regeneration Revived

Despite the efforts of the anti-Yrigoyen forces, the presidential election of April 1928 constituted a sweeping personal triumph for the ex-president. Yrigoyen popular vote was twice as large as that received by his leading opponent, Melo. In Mendoza, where the Lencinists and conservatives supported rival slates, Yrigoyen won by a

much smaller margin than his national percentage. Even so, this marked the first electoral defeat for Lencinism since 1918. San Juan, on the other hand, gave a clear majority to Melo, the only province to do so, but here of course, the Yrigoyenists, aware of their disadvantage had abstained from the election.¹⁵

As feared by the Lencinists and Bloquists, the Personalist victory meant that their days in power were numbered. The fate of the governments of Alejandro Orfila and Aldo Cantoni was as certain as the sun which rose everyday in the east. The Yrigoyenists had been pressing since 1927 for Congress to vote a federal intervention in San Juan, but without result.¹⁶ With the support of the conservatives they had been successful in blocking acceptance of the credentials of Cantoni and Porto as Senators-elect. But the election of April 1 opened the door of political opportunity for which the Personalists

¹⁵The election returns in Mendoza were: UCR Personalist 27,323 votes; UCR Lencinist 20,166. Cantón, Materiales para el estudio, II, p. 114. In San Juan the returns were: UCR Bloquist 19,594; Socialist Party 6,001. Pablo Alberto del Carril Quiroga, Antecedentes electorales nacionales. Distrito San Juan, 1927-1943 (Córdoba, 1948), n.p. For this election the Bloquists formed two other political organizations, called Comité Pro-Ferrocarril a Calingasta and Comité Pro-Ferrocarril a Jáchal. The Socialists impugned this maneuver, for its purpose was to give the Cantonists both the majority and the minority seats. Therefore, the electoral judge declared the election void. Ibid., pp. 233-243.

¹⁶Diputados, 1927, I, 752-779 (June 22).

had been waiting since 1922.¹⁷

The new Congress, where the Yrigoyenists enjoyed a larger voice in 1928, especially in the Chamber of Deputies, proceeded to debate the sending of an intervention to San Juan, even before Yrigoyen's inauguration. These debates constituted another chapter in the continuing three-way struggle between the Cuyano populist movements on the one hand and their enemies, the Yrigoyenists and the conservatives. The terms used by the anti-Cantonists in Congress to characterize the Bloquists and their leaders, marked a special chapter in Argentine congressional annals. A collection of all the words expressed to denigrate the Sanjuanino movement would comprise an anthology of hatred very seldom, if ever, leveled at a provincial political force and a provincial caudillo. Cantoni was depicted, among other things, as a despot, madman and a monster, the ruler of a "sinister mafia," who was only satisfied with the blood of his enemies.

¹⁷Jorge Calle wrote to Carlos Washington that Yrigoyen had decided that no Senator from the opposition coming from a province won by the Personalists would be accepted in the Upper House. Calle also told Lencinas that Diego Luis Molinari had said informally, but for everybody inside Congress to hear, that Yrigoyen would dissolve the Senate if this body accepted the credentials of Cantoni and Porto. Jorge Calle to Carlos Washington Lencinas, April 21, 1928. Correspondence in the hands of Antulio Lencinas.

The Yrigoyenist position was based on the uncompromising principle that after the assassination of Governor Jones nothing legal had occurred in San Juan. They repeated this point over and over; after November 20, 1921, nothing legal happened in San Juan, absolutely nothing. The Yrigoyenists were committed to the view that Bloquism and the Cantonis had done nothing in accordance with the law. Thus, the representatives of the Radical Personalists who proclaimed themselves to be defending the rights of lower segments, the "causa," ignored whatever positive action might have taken place socially in San Juan under Bloquism. The Rinconada affair marked for them a fundamental dividing line. Since Jones' death, stated the Yrigoyenist Deputy A. González Zimmerman, "all the political life of San Juan, all the rights and guarantees of the people, all the institutions, have been under the sole jurisdiction of the federal government and National Congress." Hence, from the Personalist perspective, San Juan had been in theory, and was now placed in fact, under a kind of "super-intervention."

Dissenting from the Personalist view, the Socialist Adolfo Dickmann contended that not all the blame should be placed upon the Cantonis' shoulders, for the real enemy of San Juan was the abject condition and misery of the poor. More responsible for the conditions in San Juan than the Cantonis, Dickmann added, were

the spurious capitalists of San Juan, who during the long years they ruled that province never tried to improve the lot of the lower sectors. What did the bodegueros and the wealthy class of San Juan do while amassing a fortune thanks to the tariff protection? When the federal commissioner [Broquen] went to San Juan, the first thing the bodegueros did was to demand the repeal of the minimum wage act; they wanted workers again to earn only one peso or one peso and a half, as during the "Régimen"....

In the National Senate the Yrigoyenists emphasized that the election of April 1928 had constituted a plebiscito, and as such, nothing contrary to the will of the majority could prevail any longer. Therefore, the anti-Cantonist rhetoric was tinted with grave epithets. The Cantonists were branded "pigmeos morales," "gangsters," "zaparrastrosos turned wealthy," "criminals." For Senator Molinari, of the Federal Capital, Cantoni's rule represented the "most dismal, ominous and darkest era of any civilized nation." The fiery Yrigoyenist Senator also predicted that Federico Cantoni, "Jones' assassin," would never rule San Juan again.¹⁸

President Alvear approved the intervention law a few days before ending his term, but it was left to President Yrigoyen to appoint the federal commissioner. His choice was Modestino Pizarro, a former Radical member of the Buenos

¹⁸ The intervention bill passed in the House with the support of the Yrigoyenists and the conservatives against the anti-Personalists and the Socialists. The only Socialist in the Senate, Mario Bravo, did not cast his vote. Diputados, 1928, II, 264-334 (July 13); 384-448 (July 18); III, 24-36 (Sept. 24 and 25); 804 (Sept. 30). Senadores, 1928, I, 583-649 (Sept. 20). Deputy Dickmann's quotation is on p. 302.

Aires province legislature. The instructions issued to Pizarro stated that he should perform his duties providing "the most complete freedom and political guarantees," as well as with "absolute impartiality."¹⁹ But words aside, the political climate of San Juan was especially tense. Now for the first time Cantoni's enemies had both control of the provincial government and the support of the federal power to offset the numerical superiority enjoyed by the Bloquists. Any hopes that the intervention could bring peace and stability to the province was illusory.

The arbitrariness of the Pizarro intervention, exemplified in the persecution and harassment of Yrigoyen's opponents, opened a new cycle of repression and political intolerance in San Juan. Furthermore, the economic situation took a turn for the worse in 1929. The wine industry was severely affected and unemployment, which had been non-existent during the Cantoni governments, added another somber note to the deteriorating provincial scene. Violence only encouraged more arbitrariness as evidenced in the primitive way in which domestic political quarrels were settled.

The mad rush of the intervention and the tenacious opposition against Yrigoyen lowered a temporary mantle of

¹⁹Ministerio del Interior, Memoria del Ministerio del Interior, 1928-1929 (Buenos Aires, 1929), p. 21.

forgetfulness over the reproaches made against the Cantonists in the past by the non-Personalists adversaries of Bloquism. Before they had been assailed as executioners, now they were becoming martyrs.²⁰ But in spite of the growing tribulations, Federico Cantoni continued enjoying the fervor of his supporters as firmly as ever. "The chinos know three things that are essential for them," reported a special correspondent sent by La Prensa to analyze the situation in San Juan,

that their salaries have been raised, that their working hours have been shortened, and that the chief of the party takes care of them in his medical office, free of charge, and that if they need it, he gives them the medicine, also without charge.²¹

The province of Mendoza, sharing San Juan's fate, was also placed under the federal intervention.²² Yrigoyen appointed Carlos A. Borzani, a trusted aide and long-time Yrigoyenist from Buenos Aires province, as commissioner.

²⁰In February 1929, while Aldo Cantoni was brought from the jail to the court house, there was an attempt against his life, but it failed. Later on, the assassination of Manuel Ignacio Castellanos, a lawyer for the Bloquist leaders in jail, including Aldo Cantoni; in February 1930, strained even more the antagonistic relationship between the intervention and its opponents.

²¹La Prensa, February 6, 1929.

²²The congressional debates brought to light the old familiar charges against Lencinism. And it was almost defenseless, in the Chamber of Deputies there was only one Lencinist member, none in the Senate. Diputados, 1928, II, 649-720 (July 26); 738-757 (July 27). Senadores, 1928, I, 654-678 (Sept. 22).

This marked the first time that Mendoza fell properly into Yrigoyen's hands since in his first administration José Néstor Lencinas had run the provincial Radical Party and the government with considerable independence from Buenos Aires. The federal intervention meant hard times for the Lencinists, for they, like the Bloquists, became the open target of police repression. Although in theory the federal commissioner was instructed to guarantee all liberties and to fulfill his duties in the shortest possible time,²³ his unwritten purpose was to achieve the political destruction of Lencinism. This was evidenced by the constant harassment of its leaders, a fact acknowledged by a sympathetic Yrigoyen's biographer, who stated that "the decent Radicals are repugnant to the atrocities which were committed and are committed in San Juan and Mendoza."²⁴

The popularity of the Lencinist movement had in fact been diminishing largely as a result of the unfortunate administration of Alejandro Orfila. However, it now began to experience a political revival as a reaction to the cruel position in which it was cornered by the Yrigoyenists. The repressive nature of the intervention and the growing economic crisis helped to lift the fallen image of the

²³Yrigoyen, Pueblo y gobierno, VI, p. 491.

²⁴Gálvez, Vida de Hipólito Yrigoyen, p. 427.

Lencinists.

A few months after Borzani was in power, Carlos Washington complained to the Minister of the Interior about the persecution against his party carried out throughout Mendoza. The continuation of such a policy, warned the Mendozan caudillo, "could degenerate into deplorable events, and might eventually affect the social and political peace of Argentina."²⁵

The National Senate Rebuffs Regional Populism

While the main assault against the Cuyano populist bastions was being carried out by the interventors within the provincial borders, the National Senate once again provided the stage for a public confrontation between the Yrigoyenist national spokesmen and the defiant popular leaders. The issue was again the credentials of the Senators-elect of Mendoza and San Juan, Carlos Washington Lencinas, Federico Cantoni and Carlos Porto. As noted before, they had been named Senators again by the respective provincial legislatures in 1927, but during 1928 no action had been taken on their credentials. Only in July 1929 did the Senate begin to study them in earnest. The resulting political debates greatly contributed to the gradual

²⁵La Prensa, March 7, 1929. Lencinas also regretted that Mendoza was again absorbed by the porteñismo, a direct allusion to the large number of public officials from the Federal Capital, and some from La Plata, brought in by the intervention. There was widespread resentment among the Mendozans at being governed by "forasteros," people from

paralysis which was taking hold of the executive and legislative branches of the Federal Government.²⁶

The great excitement aroused in 1927 when Cantoni's credentials were first considered and rejected, was minor compared to what now was taking place. Several weeks were devoted to the discussion of the credentials of Cantoni and Porto. On the days when the Senate met, a large crowd congregated around the entrance of the building, on Victoria Street (later renamed Hipólito Yrigoyen). The President's supporters comprised a large majority of the spectators. From an improvised tribune set up just across the Senate entrance, their heated words helped create a climate of anxiety and expectation, and demonstrated an open hostility against the anti-Personalist Senators, especially Leopoldo Melo. Indeed, the first scheduled session to discuss the credentials had to be called off because the anti-Personalist Senators refused to walk through this hostile gathering to reach the Congress. In contrast with the usual empty galleries for the public, all the tickets available to people wishing to attend the meetings had been given away well in advance, and, once

another region, a situation which even led a small group of Yrigoyenists of Mendoza to take an anti-Borzani position.

²⁶Ramón Columba, a direct observer of such barren political performance, as a member of the staff, recalled that the senatorial hall looked like "el patio de un inquilinato con ocupantes desunidos que se sacan los trapitos al sol." El congreso que yo he visto, II, p. 197.

more, the entire building was invaded by curious spectators filling halls and corridors. Congress was placed under strict security and even the newspaper correspondents were frisked. La Nación, a severe critic of Bloquism, explained that such popular commotion was due to the fact that "people who had never attended a legislative debate were anxious to watch the great congressional scandal."²⁷

The unusual show outside Congress had its counterpart in the Senate hall itself. The traditional three warning bells at the disposal of the President of the Senate to keep the sessions in order, but which still allowed journalists to hear the tempestuous arguments on the floor, were reinforced with three additional bells. They deafened all voices and were used several times at the peak of the most heated debates. Cantoni displayed the same oratorical characteristics that he had in 1927, but now the words exchanged by the two opposing sides were more cutting than ever. In contrast to the stereotyped language of protocol usual to the Senate, Cantoni's rhetorical style was distinguished by its blatant sincerity; it seemed as if he were talking informally around the table in a bar. At times, his picturesque phrases even prompted the laughter of the Yrigoyenists themselves. La Razón referred to his unorthodox language as a "cult of vulgarity."²⁸

²⁷La Nación, July 19, 1929.

²⁸La Razón, July 23, 1929. A correspondent from the pro-conservative newspaper El País, of Córdoba, reported

The newspaper Crítica, which had been the loyal spokesman of Cantoni in the Federal Capital since he had been jailed in 1921, maintained all out support for the Bloquists. This enhanced very significantly the personality of the Sanjuanino caudillo in Buenos Aires.²⁹ In response to the criticisms made of Cantoni's style during the debates, Crítica asked since when had being frank and honest, and calling things by their proper names become anti-parlamentarian.³⁰ There was nothing strange in Cantoni's language, argued Crítica on another occasion, because this was the way he always talked with the workers and farmers. The real anomaly, it added, would have been if Cantoni had made academic speeches.³¹

The Vice President of the nation, Enrique Martínez, who chaired all the Senate meetings on the San Juan credentials, reprimanded Cantoni on several occasions

about Cantoni: "if this man governs as he speaks--and it is the most probable--we realize why he has so many adversaries." But the correspondent also added that Cantoni referred to matters known to all members in Congress but never mentioned before. David Paredes, La demagogia en acción. Fisonomía del congreso argentino, 1929-1930 (Buenos Aires, 1937), p. 139.

²⁹The impact of the role played by Crítica on this occasion can be measured by its large circulation. On June 29, 1929, this paper issued a record 529,669 copies. Moreover, Crítica published in full Cantoni's speeches in the Senate.

³⁰Crítica, July 24, 1929.

³¹Ibid., July 27, 1929.

for using such unparliamentary language, "el viejo Irigoyen" in referring to the President of Argentina, or calling the Personalist wing of the Radical Party the "Partido Peludista," or "Peludismo," and for alluding to the famous presidential "amansadora," the waiting room at the government house, as "juntando orines."³²

The Yrigoyenists, however, were well on the way to getting even with the Cantonists. They had disposed of them in San Juan through the federal intervention, and now they felt was the time to liquidate them in the Senate.³³ The most severe clash of the long debates took place between Diego Luis Molinari and Cantoni. From the outset Molinari had voiced the Personalist position with impressive clarity: "Never, never will Cantoni and

³²After one of the most tumultuous meetings, La Nación reported that in the number and caliber of insults exchanged between the two sides, it could be compared with nothing in the past. July 24, 1929. La Vanguardia, July 29, 1929, called the debates "la payada--a singers' duel--parlamentaria." Interest in the meetings was so great that the Chamber of Deputies could not meet on several occasions for lack of a quorum because so many members had gone to the Senate to follow the debates.

³³In May 1929 the Personalists had requested, without success, that Cantoni and Porto's credentials be filed because theirs were "dirty credentials," and as such, non-existent. Senadores, 1929, I, 17-28 (May 13). Manuel Gálvez stated that before the credentials were discussed in Congress in 1929, President Yrigoyen told some friends that "the people should go to the Senate to prevent Cantoni's admission." The President, said Gálvez, could not think anyone being indifferent in this matter. Vida de Hipólito Yrigoyen, p. 415.

Lencinas be seated in the Senate...." adding straightforwardly that "there is not one single Argentine who can deny that Lencinas is a thief and that Cantoni is a murderer." As the Yrigoyenists had repeatedly pointed out, their fundamental objection to accepting the Bloquists was the Rinconada murder in 1921. Neither peace nor pardon would be possible, Molinari asserted, until the guilty men were duly punished. His extreme antagonism to Cantoni was illustrated in the somber image he painted of the Sanjuanino caudillo, at the time he assumed power in 1923: "...thirsty for revenge, he looked like an exacerbad wild animal, with his reddish mouth and blood-filled eyes.... At his side, corpses were lying, but this was not important...."

Cantoni spoke at a great length in defense of his own credentials. For four and a half consecutive sessions his speech monopolized the attention. His words, sometimes caustic and impassioned, at other times candid and unruffled, filled hundreds of pages of the congressional record as he offered a justification of his actions, and explained the tenets of his pragmatic political principles. He began his extensive defense by recalling his early steps in the Radical Party, and the influence exerted upon him by José Néstor Lencinas. Cantoni stressed the firm attitude taken by the Mendozan leader, who had not hesitated to confront Yrigoyen when the President attempted to usurp for

his own advantage the political principles of Radicalism.

As for his rule in San Juan, Cantoni reiterated the norms which guided his government at the grass roots level, such as his permanent advice to his comprovincianos to work the land instead of seeking non-remunerative and unchallenging jobs in the government. More poignantly, Cantoni leveled severe criticism against negative characteristics of the provincial society. Why, for instance, did the Bloquists allow most doctors in the interior of the province to be foreigners practicing without Argentine certification? Because the criollos were leisure-lovers, cómodos, affirmed Cantoni, and they were unwilling to make the sacrifice of living in the countryside. Moreover, the criollo population seemed content with being cured with herbs, but the gringos wanted to have a doctor and proper medicine, otherwise they would not go to live in the interior.

The Bloquist leader pointed out how he had introduced courses in the provincial schools dealing with practical activities. Likewise, Cantoni emphasized his preoccupation with providing jobs for every person in San Juan. But at the same time he questioned the usefulness of having a growing number of idle doctors, lawyers and engineers when, by working the land, anyone could improve his economic position and therefore, be politically independent.

When Cantoni referred to the masses, he specifically

included women. He was concerned with the practical means to promote their social and economic advancement, such as training them to work in factories that processed agricultural products. Through economic independence a woman would have a catalytic effect on her family life because

living in a rancho she could instill in her husband an attachment toward their home, helping him in giving up the habit of getting drunk in a pulpería, when he finds his rancho in a miserable condition, where even the bare essentials for life are unavailable.

Such were the shameful conditions, added Cantoni, prevalent in the Argentine provinces. The solution, as he saw it, was to promote the role of the State as a social protector under special circumstances, like assisting the needy in general, and the elderly in particular,

because if the Yrigoyenists believe it is necessary to give retirement pay to bank personnel and those in the armed forces after thirty years of service, besides granting them other important benefits, the Sanjuaninos also believe that the government has the obligation to avoid a situation where the unfortunate people have to beg to survive.

Recognizing that certain habits were deeply rooted at all social levels, Cantoni defended the high licence tax imposed by the Bloquists on gambling activities. We cannot stop people from gambling "even if we jail them," he said, "they will bet to see who spits farther or whose spittle dries sooner." Therefore, Cantoni believed it reasonable that the State should have an important share of the gambling revenue, to use for the general welfare.

The Sanjuanino caudillo also underscored the importance of having established in San Juan a school-home for unwed mothers and abandoned children, so they could learn how to protect themselves in life. "Because in our country," Cantoni stated, "when a woman gets into trouble, the first thing her family does is to throw her out of the house."

Delving into political matters Cantoni replied to the Personalists assertion that the 1928 electoral landslide gave Yrigoyen a free hand to "regenerate" the provincial governments, by demanding that Buenos Aires observe a fair play rule. If the Yrigoyenists had been elected to govern the nation, it was their right to do it. For the same reason, however, since the Bloquists had been elected by the majority of the people to rule San Juan, the popular will had to be respected. If the people were really sovereign in selecting who would govern them, this principle had to be applied at the provincial level as well as the national level, "because there is no difference between a Yrigoyen for the nation and a Perico de los Palotes in the provinces."³⁴

Trying to dispel the charges that he ruled his party autocratically, Cantoni explained to the Senate the organic structure of the Unión Cívica Radical Bloquista. In contrast to the procedures followed by the Personalist Radicals, Cantoni stated that

³⁴Perico de los Palotes is an expression meaning any undetermined person.

We wrote a party platform, because we believe that in order to ask a citizen for his vote, it is imperative to inform him what we hope to accomplish in the government. We believe that a president of the nation, that a governor of a province, is not an individual without obligations toward his supporters, but a man who must introduce himself to the people with a written program in his hand; because the people are tired of only listening to rhetorical vagueness about the constitution, the fatherland and the flag.

Close to the end of the long debate Cantoni added a note of caution, warning the Yrigoyenists not to lead Argentina into a dead end:

The friends of the president, jubilant in their victory, do not realize that they are pushing the country--more by the actions of the incondicionales that surround the President than by his own lack of capacity--towards a collapse which unfortunately, may set the country back for many years to come.

While the main debate lay between Cantoni and the Yrigoyenists, other sectors had a chance to express their viewpoints. The position of the Socialist Party on the credentials issue was voiced by its lone Senator, Mario Bravo, who represented the Federal Capital. Like Cantoni, Bravo noted the wide gap which had separated the patrón from the worker in San Juan, the latter being economically impoverished by meager wages and politically subordinated to the will of his employer. Bravo recognized the major accomplishments of the Bloquists, especially women's suffrage, the minimum wage, the 8-hour maximum and the pension for the aged. But Bravo did question the value of these social benefits when accompanied by a general

curtailment of political freedom and basic civil rights, and the establishment of a rigid, autocratic government. In his final analysis Bravo considered that the mockery which Cantoni and his men had made of law and order in San Juan, was a strong and sufficient enough reason to persuade him against accepting the Senators-elect credentials.

The great expectation about the final outcome of the debates ended when the Socialist Mario Bravo expressed his opinion supporting the rejection of the credentials. Crítica appealed to Bravo to sustain the position he and Juan B. Justo--who had died in 1928--had taken during the credentials debate of 1927 in favor of accepting the Senators-elect from San Juan. But it was in vain, for by a vote of 13 to 12 the Senate rejected a motion to postpone the discussion of the credentials until San Juan returned to a constitutional rule. This vote sealed the fate of Cantoni and Porto's senatorial hopes.³⁵

³⁵A sepulchral silence was observed while the Senators voiced their crucial vote. When it ended, the people jamming the gallery exploded with wild enthusiasm. Later that night, the Yrigoyenist followers improvised a parade through the popular Avenida de Mayo in celebration of the Senate decision. La Prensa, August 3, 1929. The debates for Cantoni's credentials were Senadores, 1929, I, 59-63 (June 25); 107-110 (July 4); 117-127 (July 11); 129-191 (July 16); 193-220 (July 18); 287-309 (July 20); 315-342 (July 23); 345-388 (July 25); 423-461 (July 27); 466-496 (July 30); 497-548 (July 31); 549-616 (Aug. 1); 617-692 (Aug. 2).

Certainly, Bravo's vote would have reversed the final result. The Socialist Senator consequently became the target of bitter criticism from the Bloquists for his attitude. La Vanguardia, on the other hand, carried a campaign in defense of Bravo's position, and labeled as "a misguided interpretation" the Bloquist charges that Bravo had "sold" Cantoni. The Socialist newspaper claimed that the Bloquist view blurred the real issue in dispute, because under the pretext of raising a banner against Yrigoyen, the country was taking the risk of creating a national figure out of a caudillo far more dangerous than Yrigoyen.³⁶

The Senate decision on Cantoni's credentials made clear the outcome of Lencinas' diploma. Carlos Washington made an extensive and detailed defense of his government during the Senate debates. But he had to face grave accusations of administrative corruption during his term as governor and for the huge fees he collected while being a lawyer for the Provincial Bank. Given the mood of the Yrigoyenists and conservatives, there was nothing the "gauchito" could do to offset the adverse decision of the Upper House.³⁷

³⁶ La Vanguardia, August 6, 1929.

³⁷ Senadores, 1929, I, 139-190 (Sept. 10); 300-325 (Sept. 19); 351-390 (Sept. 20); 398-402 (Sept. 23); 499-585 (Sept. 25).

After the distressing Senate experience, Lencinism and Bloquism had to travel the road of adversity. Unlike 1927, the rejection of their leaders' credentials left them without any official base. In 1927 the two caudillos had the support of their respective provincial governments, and their legislatures could insist on appointing them National Senators. Now, both provinces were in the hands of their foremost enemy. Making the situation even gloomier, their followers were the target of constant harassment by the intervention authorities. Left powerless in the patria chica as well as in Buenos Aires, they had to resume the uphill road from the llano.

Lencinism: On the Road to Nowhere

The Personalists, at last, had avenged the old wounds inflicted by the Cuyano movements. But the ills of the year-old interventions in Mendoza and San Juan were seriously damaging the Yrigoyenist image. This raised anew the hopes of Lencinism and Bloquism that they might regain power in a future electoral confrontation. The gross abuses of both interventions were especially helpful to the Lencinists, for in terms of prestige they were in a much weaker position than a few years before.³⁸

Carlos Washington seemed to be aware of his more

³⁸Edmundo Correas stated in his reference to this period that the procedures of the intervention were "retrógrados y bárbaros." "Historia de Mendoza," p. 502.

exposed position, for his views on the way to handle public affairs underwent a dramatic change. In theory, at least, he diassociated himself from many of the policies he had observed while in office. "Ten years of active political action and many bitter experiences," Carlos Washington said in an interview with La Nación, "have changed many of my old beliefs." Among other things, he was critical of the previous Lencinist policy toward the Judiciary, which curtailed its basic independence to perform justice. He advocated that the Judiciary Review Board should seat representatives from the opposition, a view which the three Lencinist governments had flatly rejected when they were in power. Carlos Washington also stressed the need to create the Tribunal de Cuentas, to check handling of public funds--as required by the 1916 provincial constitution, but never implemented. He urged the transformation of the Provincial Bank into a semi-private institution, a pledge voiced by him and his father many times in the past, without practical results. Lencinas also stated that his party was the friend of the worker, but added that it was equally the friend of capital, thus, greatly softening the tone of the old propaganda tirades which helped so much to shape the Lencinist image in earlier times. Finally, Carlos Washington asserted that he had already shown that he had the personal qualities to serve as leader of a party. Now, he said, as youth

paved the way for a mature mind, his ambition was to become, above all, a statesman.³⁹

Meanwhile, in Mendoza, Judge Alberto Gómez Cabrera--the executioner arm of the Borzani intervention--had issued a warrant charging Carlos Washington with political corruption and maladministration during his governorship. Without the shield of congressional immunity, the Lencinist leader faced the certainty of arrest once he returned to his province.

After the Senate rejected his credentials, Carlos Washington's mood continued very sour against Yrigoyen. But he was confident that the deteriorating national political situation was brewing the possibility of a change. "It is simple to predict the future of the government," he wrote to a political friend and leader of the party, "for it is losing prestige day by day." The signs of corruption could be seen everywhere; rumblings of protest filled the air, sometimes soft as a rumor, sometimes openly shouted. According to Lencinas, the old timers recalled that the same symptoms had been present in 1890, just before the crisis. There was a general malaise then, sometimes felt very strongly, sometimes mildly, but always in crescendo.

Carlos Washington expressed in his letter that he was planning his return to Mendoza once he had settled a

³⁹La Nación, April 25, 1929.

suit against him.⁴⁰ But he was concerned about the attitude the commissioner would assume, as well as about the uncertainties ahead for his movement. "I don't know if the miserable people of the intervention will arrest me later on.... The hijunagranputa Gómez Cabrera will be anxious to lay his hands on me." Anyhow, asserted Lencinas, "we will have the pleasure of attending the funeral of this rotten government, for the people are getting sick of it, more and more every day."⁴¹

On October 17, 1929, Carlos Washington sent a telegram to Yrigoyen complaining of new arrests of party members in Mendoza. He indicated to the President his pessimism about a possible change in the policy of the intervention. But he wanted public opinion to know about his unanswered appeals to the Federal Government, in order "to defend myself and my party against the 'barbarism' of the provincial police."⁴²

In Mendoza the Lencinists began to plan for the forthcoming return of Carlos Washington. The Yrigoyenists were incredulous that Lencinas would risk a return to his

⁴⁰Francisco Benavídez, President Yrigoyen's secretary had sued Lencinas for libel based on the terms he had used in the Senate.

⁴¹Carlos Washington Lencinas to Jorge Albarracín Godoy, Buenos Aires, October 15, 1929. Lencinas considered that the years ending with zero had witnessed grave developments in Argentine history, and he looked to 1930 with the expectation that it would mark the end of "peludism."

⁴²La Prensa, October 18, 1929.

province. A vitriolic Yrigoyenist paper predicted that Lencinas would not be able to return for twenty years, until all his judicial troubles had ended.⁴³

On November 8, a federal judge in Buenos Aires ruled in favor of Lencinas with regard to Benavídez' accusation, thus clearing the last legal obstacle to his immediate return. However, as the proximity of Carlos Washington's trip increased, so did tension and anxiety in Mendoza. In an effort to avoid public demonstration by the Lencinists, the police prohibited any rally welcoming the caudillo. Applauding this decision, La Voz Provincial urged that any violation of that order be crushed by whatever means were necessary.⁴⁴

Lencinas' concern for his homecoming trip was heightened by an anonymous phone call he received in Buenos Aires warning him that an attempt on his life would be made upon his arrival in Mendoza. In response to this threat Lencinas at once sent a telegram to the President, alerting him to the potential disturbance he might encounter and placing all responsibility squarely on Yrigoyen's conscience. "Before I depart for Mendoza," Lencinas said,

⁴³La Voz Provincial (Mendoza), October 24, 1929. This partisan publication referred to the Mendozaan caudillo as Carlos "Chicago" Lencinas, connecting him with the style of the mafia in that American city.

⁴⁴La Voz Provincial, November 9, 1929.

I inform you that according to some accounts, the authorities of the intervention, under your jurisdiction, have announced that my arrival in Mendoza will be prevented, even if to do so they have to resort to violence. I do not know, of course, the extreme measures the intervention may take.... Perhaps these rumors are only an intimidation plan.... But if instead of being the expression of a churlish policy, they are in fact, new evidence of the state of repression prevalent in Mendoza, which has voided all rights and freedoms, it is Your Excellency who must take all the required steps to prevent any excess, if you do not wish to assume before the nation the responsibility for whatever might happen upon my arrival in Mendoza, in case there is an attempt against my life....⁴⁵

The President did not take the situation lightly. Through the Minister of the Interior he ordered the intervention authorities in Mendoza⁴⁶ to revoke the prohibition against a rally welcoming Lencinas, and to take all necessary precautions to avoid any disturbance, no matter which kind of provocation was given by the Lencinists.

On Sunday, November 10, La Nación reported the observations of its Mendozan correspondent written the day before. He indicated that there was widespread belief that Lencinas would be arrested when the train entered the province, and that a number of Lencinists were to board the train in the city of San Luis in order to prevent the arrest of their caudillo. The dispatch from Mendoza

⁴⁵La Prensa, November 10, 1929.

⁴⁶Commissioner Borzani was outside Mendoza, and Alfredo Sosa was replacing him.

concluded that "this accentuates the impression that tomorrow grave events would occur."⁴⁷

Lencinas and his entourage arrived at Mendoza on the afternoon of November 10. In traditional fashion, he was warmly greeted by the multitude, although some provocative Yrigoyenist groups were also in the vicinity. With Carlos Washington in front of the people, as was their custom, the Lencinists marched in civic procession the ten blocks separating the Pacific Railroad station from the Círculo de Armas. From a balcony of the Círculo party leaders addressed the people gathered in the street and in the adjacent San Martín Plaza. Then, in a split second, while the orator preceding him was winding up his speech, Lencinas was shot from a short distance. A tremendous confusion ensued with more guns being displayed and more shots terrorizing the area. In a few seconds the peaceful welcome home rally had turned into a nightmare. Carlos Washington was hurried to a hospital but he was already dead. José Cáceres, the person who shot Lencinas, died the following day, victim of the shots fired at him in the aftermath.

Suddenly, the threats and warnings of the last few days and the nervous exchange of telegrams gained dramatic relevance. Mendoza and the whole nation were shocked into disbelief and engulfed in consternation at the

⁴⁷La Nación, November 10, 1929.

assassination of Carlos Washington.

Who was responsible for what happened? The heavy burden of responsibility for the death of the popular Mendozan caudillo fell inevitably upon the intervention authorities and on President Yrigoyen. The reports from acting-Commissioner Sosa to the national government provided the official explanation for Lencinas' ill-fated return. According to the investigation of the Mendozan police, Lencinas had had relations with Cáceres' wife, and Cáceres had sworn to take revenge. Thus, the intervention concluded, Lencinas' assassination had nothing to do with politics, but was merely the act of an aggrieved and desperate individual who tried to take justice into his own hands against a man who had violated his honor.⁴⁸

The Yrigoyenist press, both in Mendoza and Buenos Aires, adhered to this interpretation of the event. However, the non-Yrigoyenist publications throughout the country granted this view very little credence. Dismayed by Lencinas' tragic end, the more important newspapers in the Federal Capital and the interior attributed the crime to the growing mood of intolerance which, late in 1929, was undermining the political life of the nation.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ministerio del Interior, Memoria del Ministerio del Interior, 1929-1930 (Buenos Aires, 1930), pp. 44-48.

⁴⁹ José Hipólito Lencinas stated that Yrigoyen was

President Yrigoyen ordered a special inquiry into the assassination, and appointed the Minister of Public Education and Justice, Juan de la Campa, to take charge. A few days later, de la Campa concluded his analysis of the situation and reported to the President that the cause for Lencinas' death was that previously reported by the intervention authorities. The government had gathered testimonial support from people who asserted they had heard Cáceres promising to take revenge against Carlos Washington. From the judicial viewpoint, since both Lencinas and Cáceres were dead, the investigation led to no other conclusion and, accordingly, the case was officially closed. Justice had been evaded once again.⁵⁰

The case was not closed, however, in political circles or for a large part of the public. Except for the core, ultra-partisan Yrigoyenist newspapers, there was general revulsion over the crime. Most of the press

the moral author of his brother's death. Carlos Washington Lencinas. Realidad, misión y futuro de una época, p. 149.

⁵⁰ Minister de la Campa's report is in Ministerio del Interior, Memoria, 1929-1930, pp. 49-55.

An Argentine author lends support to the view that the assassins of Lencinas were the "gansos," the conservatives. But he does not indicate any evidence thereof. Roberto Juárez, Atentados políticos en la Argentina (Buenos Aires, 1970), pp. 285-286. This author's account of the assassination of Amable Jones (pp. 252-257), and Carlos Washington Lencinas (pp. 279-286), contains several factual errors.

concurred in the view that Lencinas' political assassination was a step back into the past era of caudillism. They also agreed that despite the criticism Lencinas deserved, he was the standardbearer of the popular sectors of Mendoza and because he was a politician of tremendous popular persuasion, he still would have had much to offer in public life.⁵¹

The Mendoza movement had been built around the all-encompassing personalities of José Néstor and Carlos Washington Lencinas. Reflecting on the political significance of the tragedy befalling the UCR Lencinista, their followers asserted that the movement already had its apostle in José Néstor Lencinas and now it had its martyr in Carlos Washington. "Two are now," they proclaimed, "los muertos que mandan!"⁵²

⁵¹Lencinas was killed three days before his 41st birthday. His brother José Hipólito made public the maneuvers by which the federal intervention was promising freedom for all Lencinists in jail if the three Lencinas brothers were away from Mendoza until after an election was held. La Prensa, November 12, 1929.

⁵²La Acción (General Alvear, Mendoza), November 23, 1929. This Lencinist newspaper of southern Mendoza published a verse, among the many from Lencinist inspiration, entitled "The dead who lives," which partially said:

Noble gaucho que ya has muerto
de cuerpo, pero no de alma;
hoy la provincia te llama
porque fuiste el defensor
del pueblo trabajador
en esta tierra cuyana

Padre fuiste para el pobre
y noble para el obrero

The repercussions of the Mendoza event on national politics were felt in the deepening of the breach between Yrigoyenists and anti-Yrigoyenists. The possibility of any kind of accommodation between the opposing sides now appeared remote. After the enactment of the Saenz Peña Law, Argentina had entered into a period of reform politics. Although slowly, the electorate had been moving forward in making political tolerance a fact of civic life. The return of Yrigoyen to power in 1928, however, had awakened old animosities and generated new tensions. These were evidenced in the growing want of forbearance as reflected in street riots in Buenos Aires in October 1929. But Lencinas' assassination evoked the fear that the worst evils of caudillism--personalism and blind support by followers--were becoming entrenched in the dominant political forces in Argentina.

y ahora, el pecho lleno
de tus memorias divinas
te vivan, por ser soldados
del batallón de Lencinas.

Para nosotros no has muerto
noble Güasinton Lencinas
porque tu alma querida
palpita entre los cuyanos
fuiste generoso y bravo
y p'al obrero, un hermano

Ya termino esta versada
y una plegaria te envío,
porque fuiste un noble amigo
en estas tierras andinas
mis lágrimas son tu sangre
porque muero por Lencinas.

The name "Güasinton," for Washington, was the way in which his name was popularly pronounced. Ibid., January 11, 1930.

How did various sectors of opinion view the episode? Crítica placed Lencinas' fate within the larger framework of national politics. "We are going through a civic depression," it noted, "that could lead us into the hands of tyranny or crime." Future historians, Crítica warned, would have to analyze in depth the pathological crisis of the Argentine democracy.⁵³

Focusing on the general depression gripping Argentina, Benito Marianetti stated that the idea that Lencinas' assassination was the work of an enraged individual was not acceptable. He recalled that when the train passed through Gutiérrez, a town near the capital of the province, someone shouted from the platform of the railway station: "you are accompanying a corpse!" The Socialists interpreted this new outburst of political violence as a result of the "política criolla." In their view the "matones Lencinistas" and "matones Yrigoyenistas" were all products of the same regressive political school.⁵⁴

La Época, which did not publish a single word about Lencinas' funeral, pressed the official interpretation that Lencinas' death was due to personal revenge, but soon thereafter switched its emphasis to demonstrating the humanitarian values for which President Yrigoyen stood. To that effect, it filled its columns day after day with documents, letters and manifestos issued years

⁵³Crítica, November 13, 1929.

⁵⁴La Vanguardia, November 19, 1929.

before, stressing the fact that Yrigoyen had always being a messenger of peace toward his political opponents.⁵⁵

Perhaps National Deputy Nicolás Repetto, a Socialist, stated the correct views. He did not believe President Yrigoyen had any advance knowledge of the attempt to assassinate Carlos Washington. But Repetto thought that in committing such a crime "someone had wished to interpret the political conveniences of President Yrigoyen in Mendoza."⁵⁶

The untimely death of Carlos Washington Lencinas marked the virtual end of Lencinism. Since 1918 the Mendozan movement had enjoyed the warm support of the masses, but its image had also been tarnished by its own excesses while in power. At the end of 1929 Lencinism

⁵⁵La Época reproduced notes sent by Yrigoyen to the President of the Conservative Party of Mendoza in 1918, in which he painted the principles of the Radical Party with glowing colors, as well as the note the President sent to the Mendozan damas, also early in 1918, conveying his deep concern for all human rights. La Época also stirred up support for Yrigoyen by reprinting his decree of November 1921 condemning Governor Jones' assassination. The paper reproduced the instructions given to the interventors Borzani and Pizarro to illustrate the political honesty observed by the Federal Government. The assassination of Jones suddenly became a very important defensive tool to stave off the anti-Yrigoyenist sentiment created by Lencinas' death. In Mendoza, the Yrigoyenist La Voz Provincial, headed its issue of November 20, 1929: "Today is the 8th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Jones by the Cantoni brothers."

⁵⁶Diputados, 1929, IV, 209 (Nov. 20).

was in the process of regaining its strength in Mendoza while Yrigoyenism, all over Argentina, was becoming more and more a political prisoner of its own growing shortcomings. But on that fateful November 1929 afternoon, Lencinism was left stranded in a political limbo from which it never escaped. The leadership of the Unión Cívica Radical fell into the hands of Carlos Washington's brothers, José Hipólito and Rafael Néstor. But they could not duplicate the emotional rapport their late brother had enjoyed with his followers, and were unable to cement the movement at a time of acute political confusion and duress.⁵⁷

The federal interventions in Mendoza and San Juan continued on their reckless paths, performing their duties in effect as militant branches of the officialist party. The words of Interventor Pizarro in San Juan provide an illustration. Bloquism, he said, "has inculcated hatred for the people well-dressed," and had instilled in its supporters the glorification of

⁵⁷The split which took place in the Lencinist camp is evident in the candidacies for the governorship of Mendoza in the February 1946 election. José Hipólito Lencinas headed the Unión Cívica Radical Lencinista ticket; Bautista Gargantini, who had been Deputy Governor during Carlos Washington Lencinas' rule, was the candidate of the Unión Cívica Radical; and Faustino Picallo, who had been a Lencinist leader in the 1920's was the candidate of the Peronist coalition.

barbarism, as exemplified in their war cry "¡Vivan los macho Cantoni!" As during Rosas' times, with the "Hail to the Restorer of the Laws," added Pizarro, "it chilled the spine of the 'gente de bien'."⁵⁸ La Prensa, which had so often criticized the Cantonists in the not too distant past, now castigated with the same vehemence the repressive tactics of the federal authorities in San Juan. It was, said that newspaper, as if everything in Bloquism was evil simply for being Bloquist, and as if the virtues of honorable behavior were at the exclusive domain of the Personalists.⁵⁹

In fact, the national elections held in March 1930 indicated that in Cuyo the political wounds were not healing but deepening. In Mendoza the Lencinists were able to improve their electoral standing in comparison to the 1928 national election, but the Yrigoyenists polled the majority of the votes in an election plagued with gross irregularities. The election in San Juan was an unbelievable story, for the figures were the reverse of 1928: UCR Personalist 22,672 votes; UCR Bloquista 2,885; Socialist Party 2,332. These figures are clear evidence of the incredible electoral farce perpetrated by the

⁵⁸Modestino Pizarro, La verdad sobre la intervención en San Juan (23 de diciembre de 1928-6 de setiembre de 1930) (Buenos Aires, 1930), pp. 61-62.

⁵⁹La Prensa, November 4, 1929.

federal intervention in San Juan.⁶⁰ Thus, the electoral frauds which were the ominous trademark of the década infame--the era of conservative dominance over most of Argentina from 1932 to the advent of Peronism--were masterfully foreshadowed in San Juan in March 1930, under Yrigoyenist authorities.

At last, after almost two years under federal control, the election of the new provincial authorities was scheduled for Sunday, September 7, 1930.⁶¹ But this test never took place, for a day before, on September 6, Yrigoyen was toppled from office. With his ouster an era in Argentine history came to a close.

⁶⁰Carril Quiroga, Antecedentes electorales, n.p. La Prensa March 9, 1930, asked if there were only 2,885 Bloquists in San Juan, why so much blood and persecution?

A sympathetic biographer of Yrigoyen stated that the comparison between the March 1930 and the April 1928 elections "no ofreció mayores novedades," except for the Federal Capital, where the previous Yrigoyenist strength weakened. Luna, Yrigoyen, p. 444.

⁶¹Rafael Néstor Lencinas headed the Lencinist ticket in Mendoza; Rufino Ortega that of the Yrigoyenists. In San Juan, Federico Cantoni was the Bloquist candidate, while Carlos Conforti was the Yrigoyenist one.

C H A P T E R XII

THE POPULIST MOVEMENTS OF MENDOZA AND SAN JUAN.

AN OVERALL VIEW

For Mendoza and San Juan the Radical interlude had brought in many respects a social and political transformation, which through hindsight appears even more historically meaningful today than in the 1920's. Beyond the impact exercised by Lencinism and Bloquism on the provincial societies and at the national level during their own times, their importance must also be considered in a long-range perspective. For both movements anticipated some of the significant changes which took place throughout Argentina during the 1940's and 1950's. Peronism was not patterned after Lencinism and Bloquism, but in many ways, its nature, structure and performance paralleled those of the popular regimes of Mendoza and San Juan in the 1920's.

Let us attempt a comprehensive view and further generalizations on the historical significance of the two Cuyo movements.

Lencinism and Bloquism symbolized a practical regional effort to bring about new social conditions for the common man and to implement a new style in provincial politics and citizen participation. In the process,

successes and frustrations intermingled, for although Lencinism and Bloquism were prominent regional, socially-oriented movements in the 1920's, politics became extremely personalized, federalism a largely ignored principle and even reform an evasive goal.

The socio-economic conditions in the two Cuyo provinces late in the second decade of the century favored the development of the incipient populism, especially in San Juan, where a more primitive physical and cultural environment prevailed. Its geographical isolation contributed to economic stagnation and to the preservation of a rigidly stratified society. By and large, the impoverished and disorganized masses were subject to difficult, sedentary living and working conditions. Against this background, the significant social and political reforms which took place in Cuyo appear all the more remarkable considering the obstacles the Lencinas and Cantonis had to face at a time of prevalent elitism and a generalized lack of protection for the poor sectors. For as a social, political and economic class, the upper segments resisted the cultural evolution put in motion by Lencinism and Bloquism, labeling them at times as simply "Communist" inspired. Social equality did not convey the same meaning for the upper and lower sectors, and dignity was a concept reserved almost entirely for the well-to-do.¹

¹This elitist frame of mind is well illustrated by

Under such conditions, the emergence of the regional popular movements provoked a social collision by challenging the traditional dominant forces. Among the symbolic expressions of class differentiation, few will exemplify this point better than the role of clothing. Its significance has been directly and indirectly stressed throughout this study. Clothing was an indicator of hierarchy for all the groups. Socio-economic status and party identification were ascribed to an individual according to the way that person dressed. The alpargata was perhaps the best exponent of a definite political affiliation, being an unmistakeable sign of lower class. As such, it became a symbol of pride to the humble sectors, while the non-populist groups associated the alpargata with the rabble who constituted the vertebral column of Lencinism and Bloquism.²

an editorial comment of La Prensa, when Orfila's government in Mendoza enacted the Sunday holiday and the minimum wage for the domestic service. Heading its comment as "Violent reforms," this paper believed that the families with some status would be forced to experience a period of discomfort when they did not have on their day of leisure a cook to prepare their meals or maids to clean up their houses. April 20, 1926.

²The Argentine Socialist leader Américo Ghioldi, in truly Socialist fashion, has equated the alpargata with the traditional vices of the comités of a bygone era, the taba, the asado, and the wine, all of which had formerly been used to buy votes on election day. Alpargatas y libros en la historia argentina (Buenos Aires, 1946), p. 37.

In view of the irreconcilable viewpoints held by the clashing political forces, it might be asked whether the social reforms achieved in Mendoza and San Juan could have been accomplished by less severe fiscal and political procedures. Any answer would certainly be speculative. What is certain, however, is that both Cuyano movements became engaged, albeit to different degrees, in unjustifiable practices that neither institutionally nor morally were proper to impose upon an ideologically pluralist society. For in spite of their public assertions, the Lencinas and Cantonis were above all caudillos of a party rather than rulers for all their comprovincianos. In their efforts for improving the daily life of the common man, which they certainly did, their actions did not always respect reasonable limitations to their power; their leaders many times forced their will upon the provincial scene as if instead of being the choices of a majority, they were the absolute masters of their states.

The influential factor which greatly contributed to the promotion of Lencinism and Bloquism outside Cuyo, was the role they played within the anti-Personalist sectors due to their implacable hatred for Yrigoyen. Ironically, this represented a tremendous contradiction because ideologically there was closer affinity between the Lencinists and Cantonists and the Yrigoyenist Radicals, than between the former and the so-called "galeritas," the Radical anti-Personalists who were more conservative-

oriented.

In fact, the Cuyano leaders championed the cause of reform in their regional sphere of influence to an extent that the Yrigoyenist Radicals did not even attempt to match at the national level. If Yrigoyen presumed to be a reformer, José Néstor Lencinas was a pioneer in implementing social reforms and Federico Cantoni even surpassed the achievements of his Mendozan mentor. If Yrigoyen fought strenuously for a fundamental political reform, the secret ballot, Cantoni extended it to women. The country as a whole had to wait almost a quarter of a century to enjoy the same right.

But the intra-party differences, created to a large extent by the independent leadership exerted by José Néstor Lencinas in Mendoza and by Jones' assassination in San Juan were crucial in provoking an irreparable breach between the populist movements of Cuyo and the Yrigoyenist Radicals. As old conflicts bred new ones, a significant incongruity resulted in which Yrigoyenists on one side, and Lencinists and Bloquists on the other, both groups in theory representing advanced social movements, sided with conservative political sectors or groups less progressive than theirs, for the exclusive purpose of attacking and destroying each other.

Writers with pro-Radical Yrigoyenist inclinations have contended that the Cuyo movements were not in fact truly

Radical. Certainly, although both stemmed from the same trunk and shared some essential characteristics, Yrigoyen was neither involved in the excesses which were part of the actions of Lencinism and Cantonism, nor he was a reformer of the caliber of José Néstor Lencinas or Federico Cantoni. Furthermore, after the 1930 revolution, neither Lencinism nor Bloquism returned to be a part of the Unión Cívica Radical.

Unlike Lencinism, the Unión Cívica Radical Bloquista re-emerged in 1932 as the foremost political force in San Juan.³ But if in some respects this movement represented in 1932 a continuation of the popular force it was in the 1920's, it was besieged again by the fury of its local adversaries. National politics had changed significantly also. Argentina's president was now conservative General Agustín P. Justo, not Yrigoyen; hence, Bloquism more than ever, found its influence confined to the provincial sphere. In fact, from an ideological standpoint, Cantonism became an anomaly in a country where the conservatives were rigorously imposing their will. Such was the weakness besetting the third Bloquist government that in February 1934 it was violently ousted from power in a fashion resembling nineteenth century caudillism, by the same

³Contrary to what Senator Diego Luis Molinari had predicted in 1929, in the provincial election held on November 1931, Federico Cantoni was overwhelmingly elected governor of San Juan for the second time.

elements which fought against it in the 1920's.⁴

Lencinism and Bloquism were rooted in the same populist principles and followed a similar pattern of authoritarian politics. Both were pioneers in placing in the hands of the State the responsibility for altering the inflexible social determinism imposed by the traditional sectors, which an author has referred to with a sentence which epitomizes the principle of the privilege: "we are born either gentlemen or sans-culottes."⁵

Nevertheless, Lencinism and Bloquism also presented basic differences resulting from the disparities in the personalities of their leaders. In general, Lencinism was more austere and reform-minded under José Néstor Lencinas,

⁴When Federico Cantoni died in July 1956, he was no longer regarded as a "dangerous Communist," for age and moderation had softened his early implacable political zeal. Nobody wanted to assassinate him any more, and he even was on speaking terms with some of his former bitter enemies. His brother Aldo had served as National Senator again from 1932 to 1941, and died in September 1948. Bloquism is still a strong provincial party, but today it represents a political entity with a somewhat different orientation from its original one.

⁵Ricardo Sáenz Hayes, Ramón J. Cárcano. En las letras, el gobierno y la diplomacia, 1860-1946 (Buenos Aires, 1960), p. 355. A Mendoza writer who was extremely critical of Lencinas and Lencinism, stated that the masses were not "un conjunto de hombres libres y concientes...." but "una entidad muerta, depresiva en su laxitud, cobarde en su abandono...anulativa de todo espíritu de virilidad." Severo F. del Castillo, "La servidumbre y el servilismo en las masas populares y en los empleados y funcionarios públicos," Revista Argentina de Ciencias Políticas, XXXIV, 1927, 483.

but reached its peak of popularity under Carlos Washington. Bloquism in the 1920's presented a more coherent line under the rule of Federico and Aldo Cantoni, although Federico's role appears to have been the most significant of the four caudillos. Moreover, besides personal variances, the Bloquist performance seems to have been more determined and effective. It successfully ended the problem with the letras, maintained a firm position in forcing the business groups to accept its social and fiscal reforms, and used the provincial budget as a social and economic leveler to an extent previously unknown in Argentina. But although Bloquism appears to have been more responsible than Lencinism in handling the public purse, in general the Sanjuanino movement ruled in a harsher fashion than Lencinism.

Because of their special situation vis-à-vis Buenos Aires, Lencinism and Bloquism also championed the cause of federalism. It is somewhat difficult, however, to judge the real dimension of their avowed federalism because during the Yrigoyen's presidencies, Buenos Aires represented a major center of opposition to them. Therefore, for Lencinism and Bloquism their defense of federalism meant their own survival. As a general rule those who advocated the supremacy of the federalist principle were those sectors who were in control of the provincial power. The opposition continually demanded the assistance of

Buenos Aires in redressing their grievances. Although the provincianos are federalist at heart because of their natural revulsion against the all-absorbing dominance of Buenos Aires, in reality the social, economic, and political structure of Argentina made them, almost in a fatalistic way, heavily dependent on Buenos Aires.⁶ Whether sincere, feigned or simply the result of political circumstances, Lencinism and Bloquism thought of themselves as truly defenders of federalism.

Eventually, the encroachment of partisan political interests in the relationships between the central government and the provinces of Mendoza and San Juan, made their defense of the federalist principle seem a sham. For during the Radical era, from 1916 to 1930, both provinces were intervened five times each, which is a record even for a period noticeable for the large number of federal interventions. Referring to this natural weakness of the provincial governments in relation to the federal authorities, Federico Cantoni, in a 1925 letter to Carlos Washington Lencinas, in which he rejected the overtures of some Yrigoyenists to regain the support of Bloquism and

⁶Writing in 1933, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada referred to the biased and neglectful attitude of the man from Buenos Aires: "For the inhabitant of Buenos Aires, to look toward the interior is to look outside, abroad. For him the interior is Europe.... The interior...signifies work, illness, ignorance and oblivion. Nothing there interests us." X-Ray of the Pampa (Austin, 1971), p. 232.

Lencinism, wrote that the two Cuyano parties should be united to avoid "playing the sad role of squeezed lemons; they lose the juice and then they are discarded in the garbage."⁷ But even such a special regional unwritten alliance as the one constituted by Bloquists and Lencinists, was rendered useless when confronting the more powerful central government.

Furthermore, the National Congress in the 1920's conclusively proved the necessity that National Senators should be elected by direct vote of the electorate, not by the provincial legislators. This reform was achieved in 1949. But a reform still waiting to become a reality is that the admission of congressional members be made automatic, and thus, not be left subject to the potentially dangerous procedure of leaving in the hands of a politically-minded majority the power to accept or reject the credentials of the newly-elected representatives. Because this type of manipulation prevailed in the 1920's, Mendoza and San Juan were denied the constitutional right of proper representation in Congress. For years, Mendoza had only one Senator instead of two, and there were none for San Juan. Argentines had adopted many foreign constitutional models, but as stated by José Nicolás

⁷Letter dated May 18, 1925. Correspondence in the hands of Antulio Lencinas.

Matienzo, "we make them work creole style."⁸

A comprehensive view of the goals, actions and symbols of the Cuyano popular parties clearly reveals that they were a harbinger of Peronism. Lencinism and Bloquism, of course, were regional, semi-agrarian populist parties, limited in scope, inorganic and unsophisticated, in contrast with more modern and developed political expressions of what Américo Ghioldi referred to as "industrial populism."⁹ But in addition to the logical variances resulting from the changes produced by the technical and social evolution, there is a historical continuity based on some essential characteristics linking the provincial regimes of Mendoza and San Juan in the 1920's and the national Peronist movement in the 1940's and 1950's.

These three movements were basically a product of the mentality, social characteristics and political behavior peculiar to the Argentines.¹⁰ In the history of this century

⁸José Nicolás Matienzo, Nuevos temas políticos e históricos (Buenos Aires, 1930), p. 17.

⁹Personal interview with Américo Ghioldi, July 22, 1972. Buenos Aires.

¹⁰The ideological association between Yrigoyenist Radicalism and Peronism has been stated by several authors. For example, two Argentine sociologists stated that the distinctive feature of Peronism was its not having absorbed "disposable masses," social and economically marginal, migrating from the rural interior to the urban centers, but having organized them, because the masses had already expressed their longings for reform and social justice. Thus, Peronism would represent "a continuation and expansion of the characteristics already detected in

strong similar facets can be detected both in the idiosyncrasy and actions of many decades ago in the era of the "política criolla," and in the governments freely elected by the people. Even in more recent times, some of these traits appeared during the interludes of what can be called the years of the "military-cracia."

These characteristics are openly manifested in the populist goals of Lencinism, Bloquism, and Peronism. Their highest aspirations were to achieve the social redemption of the underdogs, to eliminate the preeminence of a social and economic elite, and to make effective a better distribution of wealth within the established economic order.

In the quest for these goals, they also shared the personalist structure of their movements, the immanent authoritarianism of their political leaders, the emotional tone in which their ideological principles were vented, the class inferences which to a large extent constituted the basic intrinsic content of the populist movements, their lack of tolerance or simply, their disdain for the rights of the opposition, their tendency to manipulate the

Radicalism." Darío Cantón and José Luis Moreno, "Bases sociales del voto radical en la Argentina de 1928/30," Revista Latinoamericana de Sociología, VI (September and December, 1970), 464.

Félix Luna extends the continuity of the popular pattern to the nineteenth century, asserting that the movements of the last fifty years, "radicales, yrigoyenistas o peronistas," have "el mismo perfil" as those of the equestrian caudillos. Los caudillos (Buenos Aires, 1971), p. 34.

Judiciary, their partisan interference with the press and other means of political communication with the people, and the adoption of similar and effective socio-political symbols, such as language, dress, cultural activities, and an intense spiritual association with the vernacular.¹¹

¹¹ There is a widely known grade school verse in Argentina which has been adapted through the years for political purposes, and constitutes another example of the continuity of the popular symbols. The original strophes say:

En el cielo las estrellas
 en el campo las espinas,
 ¡y en el medio de mi pecho
 la República Argentina!

Félix Luna (Yrigoyen, p. 419, and Olguín, "...y en el medio de mi pecho...", p. 35) cited this version referring to Carlos Washington Lencinas:

En el cielo las estrellas
 en el campo las espinas,
 ¡y en el medio de mi pecho
 Carlos Washington Lencinas!

Luna and Olguín do not provide the source, but the author found a similar verse in La Palabra, April 16, 1925, stating:

Las estrellas en el cielo
 en el suelo las espinas
 y en todas partes Lencinas
 el primero de este suelo.

The association with Peronism appeared in 1944 when President Pedro P. Ramírez lowered the rents in the city of Buenos Aires. Then the adaptation read as follows:

En el cielo las estrellas
 en el campo los claveles
 y un ¡viva! para Ramírez
 que bajó los alquileres.

And a year later, at the time of the presidential campaign the verse was changed to:

En el cielo las estrellas
 en el campo el algodón,
 y en el medio de mi pecho
 el retrato de Perón.

All these factors combined seem to explain to a large extent why throughout several decades the popular movements in Argentina--regional and national--have been projecting themselves as an exclusive and conclusive political solution. This rigid approach, a blessing or a curse as the only alternatives, beclouded the proclaimed altruism of their purposes with a dose of distortion and dogmatism. This was illustrated by the Yrigoyenist Radicals for whom the choice was strictly between the "Causa" or the "Régimen"; for the Cantonists, with the dilemma of deciding between "the Bloquists or the bordalesas," and for the Peronists, simply the alternative of selecting between "Perón or Braden."¹²

Lencinism and Bloquism in the early decades of the century were mocked by their opponents as movements reneging on Argentina's traditions. But they were, in fact, a type of the caudillismo so rooted in Argentine life.

¹²Because Bloquism continued its political life independently of Peronism, these two movements have been regarded as two different entities. This was not the case with Lencinism, which after practically disappearing from the political scene in 1930, years later appeared historically linked with Peronism. When in November 1951 homage was paid to Carlos Washington Lencinas on the anniversary of his death, one orator stated that "yesterday's chusma de alpargata are today's descamisados." La Palabra, November 12, 1951. Likewise, popular poetry, in true Lencinist tradition, also expressed the same view:

Fue precursor de la hora [Carlos Washington]
que hoy disfruta la nación
que el ínclito Perón
engrandece cada día
con honda sabiduría
de preclaro conductor.

Ibid.

National Deputy Matías Sánchez Sorondo was wrong when he asserted that San Juan during the rule of Federico Cantoni was "in the center of wildest Africa or in the depths of the barbarian Polynesia."¹³ No, San Juan under the Cantonis, as well as Mendoza under the Lencinas, were in Argentina. And both movements, although at times rough, violent and tainted with corruption, but always authoritarian, paternalistic and committed to the improvement of the needy sectors, did not represent an isolated example in Argentine history in this century. They attest to the historical continuity, both in principles and procedures, of the popular movements in that country in the last sixty years, regardless whether the masses involved were called "chusma de alpargatas" or "descamisados."

These movements generated and nurtured themselves with emotional, class-oriented, popular fervor, endorsed by an unquestionable support from the majority of the citizens at the ballot boxes. However, their governments can not be called democratic ones. Historical evidence seems to indicate that in the basic framework of Argentine politics since the enactment of the Saenz Peña Law, even if the ruler represented the popular will, it did not necessarily mean that democracy was a reality.

The central achievements of Lencinism and Bloquism lies in having spearheaded the trend to social equality

¹³See p. 361.

by driving deep wedges into a traditional system which understandably resisted change. However, the Cuyano movements became self-entrapped by the methods they applied to achieve their goals. But this predicament did not only plague Lencinism and Bloquism. It is a quandary that in spite of the enactment of the Saenz Peña Law still bedevils Argentine political life.

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For the period covered in this work the Archivo Histórico of Mendoza was only partially organized and it was not as rich as could be expected. The explanation for this seems to be mostly political, for not all the pertinent documentation was properly channeled into the official repository. The changes of governments and the incurable bureaucracy seem to have affected the appropriate gathering of the documentation. The Archivo Histórico of San Juan has scant material on the Cantoni era up to 1930. The main reason given for this situation is the January 1944 earthquake which destroyed the city. But political and bureaucratic considerations may also partially explain the scarcity of documentation.

The Archive of the Legislature of Mendoza has valuable items, though unfortunately some official reports are not available. The Archive of the Legislature of San Juan, more modest than Mendoza's, is well kept but is not as complete as one would desire.

Other manuscript sources for this study seem to be more limited or less accessible. I was kindly allowed to consult the personal correspondence held by Horacio Antulio Lencinas and Jorge Albarracín Godoy, in Mendoza, and the

late José P. Barreiro in Buenos Aires. To fill the gap I conducted interviews with a wide range of participants. In addition to the interviews I was able to obtain responses in writing from several others to a long general questionnaire I submitted to them. I am very grateful for their cooperation.

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NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

Newspapers

During the Radical era (1916-1930) the press in Argentina was free and newspapers could voice all shades of political opinion. Both the General San Martín's Library in Mendoza and the Franklin Library in San Juan--the main public libraries in these provinces--have excellent newspaper collections. Naturally, it is richer in Mendoza, but both are very well kept. An exception to this generalization concerns Diario Nuevo, a conservative daily of San Juan. Although the Franklin Library has only a few volumes of Diario Nuevo, the full collection of this newspaper is in private hands in the city of San Juan and was made available to this researcher.

(a) Federal Capital

Crítica, 1918-1919; 1921-25; 1927-30.

La Época, 1917-1930.

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(b) Mendoza

La Acción (General Alvear), 1927-28. Weekly, Lencinist.

Los Andes, 1917-30.

El Censor, 1924. Weekly, conservative.

El Intransigente, 1919-20. Radical, anti-Lencinist.

El Látigo, 1923. Weekly, Lencinist.

La Libertad, 1924-29. Conservative.

La Montaña, 1918-19. Lencinist.

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Pensamiento Nuevo, 1920. By-weekly, Anarchist.

El Régimen, 1917-18. Conservative.

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La Voz Provincial, 1928-30. Yrigoyenist.

(c) San Juan

Debates, 1921-25. Independent, but anti-Cantonist after 1923.

Diario Nuevo, 1922-25. Anti-Cantonist.

La Reforma, 1923-30. Cantonist.

Periodicals

The Review of the River Plate (Buenos Aires), 1928.

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