

in their belts, threatening a *Muerto norte* version of Saint Batholomew's massacre. We felt kills watching them parade in a true silent horde, carrying signs that threatened a terrible revenge.

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

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

## 6. EVA PERÓN: ON WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE

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

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

Friends and companions,

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

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

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

I have told you about the conquest of female suffrage, an imminent achievement for our sex. I must reiterate my previous concepts. I must emphasize the need for the Legislature to promulgate this law so women can take the place they deserve in public institutions. A protector of civic faith, a testimony to national responsibility, a credit to public faith in the men that rule—the woman's vote will be the most powerful weapon ever brandished for the decisive conquest of the Argentine soul. It complements and verifies the male will, and contributes with the certified logic of another vast human sector. Workers, students, employees, professionals, farmers, women in a thousand towns and a thousand occupations, are having an effect on the complex electoral mechanism. They voice their concerns. They express their will. They introduce themselves decisively into the dynamics of the country. They bring their domestic responsibilities, already engaged as they are in the solution of national problems. They rescue from unjustified forgetfulness on the part of the public the feminine mentality and feeling, what is most intimate and clear about human experience. In short, they contribute to the electoral movement the clarity, the sixth sense, the portentous faculty of intuition, seeing right through the tricks of politicians and the fickle games of human passion.

The Argentine woman, responsible for the Christian nurturing of the family; the Argentine woman, essential foundation of the household, represents, above all else, what is unpolluted and truthful. Life itself, with its endless sequence of judgements, its infinite range of great and small needs, is present in the will of the woman. Women think for their households, which means thinking for their families as well as thinking for their country—the sum of all the families dispersed across the fertile ground of our motherland. Thus, female suffrage will provide civic rights to women already knowledgeable in human rights. In this way, women are attaching a universal stamp to their vote, a vote that will now carry the depth of everyday pain, joy, and concern. We mean to bring to the ballot the hearts of the women of this country. To abstract politics we want to bring human warmth, this breadth of life that

is always supporting her man in his struggles, and contributing to the national wealth. The woman of the factory is one with the rural woman; the woman of the laboratory lives under the same sky as the teacher in the far away school; the *porteño* woman [from Buenos Aires] in the street dreams of having a place in Argentine society, just like the sacrificing woman of the rural *pampa*. The hour of the woman has arrived in Argentina, [and will be a] precursor to American rights movements.

However, female suffrage means something else. It means responsibility. It means a sacred commitment—the responsibility and commitment of the example that the exercise of this right involves. Let us not forget that the woman represents the home. In fact, the home is the cradle of the new men, the environment where they develop. It is his education, the exercise of his first public faith, the example of the beginning of the difficult career of citizenship. This is where the weapon of suffrage is extraordinarily valuable for women: the will to choose, to discriminate, to illustrate; the will to deny or consent in the democratic game of the elections of a people.

I believe that we can't speak of an Argentine household that is not a Christian household. The image of the Crosses in the old houses of our ancestors is still fresh. We were conceived under the Cross... Under the Cross we learned our ABCs and counted on the abacus. Under the Cross we have crossed our hands in the last invocation. Everything of value in our customs is Christian. Dormant or active, the religious sentiment has prevailed over every other sign of non-Argentine ethic. We have told the truth when we have spoken about traditional Catholic faith. And we have lied, or we have made mistakes, when we built upon the foreign atheism that had infiltrated our legislation, or established by surprise in institutions such as education. So when we speak of the Argentine home, and of the woman as the symbol of that home, we speak of the Christian woman and the home based on this solid foundation of traditional morality. In fact, in order to legitimate our hope that every woman vote, we could add that every woman should vote according to her religious sense, that is, according to the measure of her duty as mother, wife or daughter....

Women will defend what is permanent with their vote, better than men will. When choosing, women define themselves in relation to the preservation of the home, the family, the Catholic faith, discarding everything that might be opposed to moral scruples and Argentine values. I think that women will be more than regular citizens at the ballot box: they will be the moral outpost, overcoming the sterility and narrowness of mere electoral politics. The hour of the woman is the hour of public virtue for this country. Her home guarantees her will. Her vote is not just a formal right, but a permanent commitment, along with the daily reality of the home. Being wrong would mean abdicating into strange hands her role as leader of her own. Voting wrongly would be a painful family experiment. The female vote inextricably binds within the com-

munity principles of moral order and political order. Women can vote and must vote, as the hope of collective dreams. But they must vote, most of all, as a demand of personal liberation, never more just than today....

## 7. LETTER TO PRESIDENT PERÓN

*Much as Vargas did in Brazil, the Peronist government (Argentina, 1946-1955) greatly expanded the state's capacity to provide services for the working classes. For the first time, workers were explicitly included in the dominant definition of citizenship—to the traditional (political) definition, Peronism added a social component. This change took many forms, both in discourse and action. Not the least important of these changes were the many policies of social inclusion and re-distribution of wealth undertaken by a great variety of new official departments. Another innovation was the creation of channels of direct communication between the leaders and their people, channels that went beyond the visible rituals of celebration of October 17. Every week, Evita received in her office a multitude of people (mostly poor women and children) who hoped that her Social Assistance Foundation would help them. Other state offices collected the messages common citizens sent to Perón, in which they asked for favors or offered advice on specific problems. The following letter, written by a group of neighbors hoping to become owners of their houses, reveals many aspects of the connection between these leaders and their people.*

Buenos Aires, December 17, 1951

To His Excellency the President of Argentina,  
General of the Army, Don Juan D. Perón

... Most Excellent Mr. President, about two years ago, approximately, your Wife favored us with the award of one of the prefabricated cabins built by the Ministry of Public Works... in Villa Lugano, with the help of the Department of Social Assistance, owner of this neighborhood of houses and land. These houses are inhabited by large families with more than three children each, and they are built on plots that we are requesting to buy. We will pay in installments, according to our resources, either to the National Department of Social Assistance or to whoever is designated by the National Mortgage Bank. We are humble people who have also dreamed of owning a small part of our dear native soil, and of seeing our children grow up healthy and happy,

"Carta de Juan Pafrocino Costa al Presidente Perón"; reproduced in Rose Aboy, *Utriusque para el pueblo. Espacio urbano y socialidad en un barrio peronista: Los Perales, 1946-1955*, MA Thesis: Universidad de San Andrés, 2002. Excerpt translated by the editors.