Juan Domingo Perón is among the most contentious figures in the modern political history of South America. On the one hand, many commentators are prepared to argue that he was a fascist, but others see in Perónism, which long retained the support of the Argentine working class, real elements of a social justice movement combined with severely compromised leadership.

Perón, an army officer, seized power in 1944 with a group of other officers. During the Argentine presidential election of 1946, Perón claimed to be a democrat who would accept any outcome. And it seems that, with the support of his hugely popular wife Eva Duarte de Perón (Evita)[1919-1952], he won that election quite fairly. His government was a sort of populist dictatorship, characterized by genuine efforts to raise the living standards of the urban poor, but also quite dramatic levels of petty corruption. He was initially support by the army, nationalists, and the Catholic hierarchy as well as the trade union support secured by Evita.

After Evita's death in 1952, and the severe economic problems which followed the failure of his nationalist economic measures, he was overthrown by a coup in 1955, and sent into exile. After 18 years of military rule, he was allowed to return in 1971, and won the presidential election of 1973. He was succeeded in office in 1974 by his third wife Isabel Martínez de Perón (Eva had been number two), who was herself displaced by a military coup in 1976. That period of military rule ended in 1982, and by 1989 yet another Perónist government came to power - headed by Carlos Saúl Menem. As of 1998 Argentina is still governed by the Perónist Party, although it must be noted that Menem's policies are very different than Perón's.

What is Perónism?
Speech of 20 August, 1948

In Congress a few days ago, some of our legislators have asked what Perónismis. Perónism is humanism in action; Perónism is a new political doctrine, which rejects all the ills of the politics of previous times; in the social sphere it is a theory which establishes a little equal ity among men, which grants them similar opportunities and assures them of a future so that in this land there may be no one who lacks what he needs for a living, even though it may be necessary that those who are wildly squandering what they possess may be deprived of the right to do so, for the benefit of those who have nothing at all; in the economic sphere its aim is that every Argentine should pull his weight for the Argentines and that economic policy which maintained that this was a permanent and perfect school of capitalist exploitation should be replaced by a doctrine of social economy under which the distribution of our wealth, which we force the earth to yield up to us and which furthermore we are elaborating, may be shared out fairly among all
those who have contributed by their efforts to amass it.

That is Perónism. And Perónism is not learned, nor just talked about: one feels it or else disagrees. Perónism is a question of the heart rather than of the head. Fortunately I am not one of those Presidents who live a life apart, but on the contrary I live among my people, just as I have always lived; so that I share all the ups and downs, all their successes an all their disappointments with my working class people. I feel an intimate satisfaction when I see a workman who is well dressed or taking his family to the theatre. I feel just as satisfied as I would feel if I were that workman myself. That is Perónism.

One Single Class of Men

I have never been of the opinion that in this world there should be groups of men against other groups, nations against nations and much less can I admit that men should be enemies because they profess a different religion. How could it be admitted, how could it be explained that anti-Semitism should exist in Argentina? In Argentina there should not be more than one single class of men: men who work together for the welfare of the nation, without any discrimination whatever. They are good Argentines, no matter what their origin, their race or their religion may be, if they work every day for the greatness of the Nation, and they are bad Argentines, no matter what they say or how much they shout, if they are not laying a new stone every day towards the construction of the building of the happiness and grandeur of our Nation.

That is the only discrimination which Argentina should make among its inhabitants: those who are doing constructive work and those who are not; those who are benefactors to the country and those who are not. For this reason in this freest land of the free, as long as I am President of the Republic, no one will be persecuted by anyone else.

The Twenty Truths of the Perónist Justicialism

From a speech of 17th October 1950 made at the Plaza de Mayo.

1. True democracy is the system where the Government carries out the will of the people defending a single objective: the interests of the people.

2. Perónism is an eminently popular movement. Every political clique is opposed to the popular interests and, therefore, it cannot be a Perónist organization.

3. A Perónist must be at the service of the cause. He who invoking the name of this cause is really at the service of a political clique or a "caudillo" (local political leader) is only a Perónist by name.

4. There is only one class of men for the Perónist cause: the workers.

5. In the New Argentina, work is a right which dignifies man and a duty, because it is only fair that each one should produce at least what he consumes.

6. There can be nothing better for a Perónist than another Perónist.
7. No Perónist should presume to be more than he really is, nor should he adopt a position inferior to what his social status should be. When a Perónist starts to think that he is more important than he really is, he is about to become one of the oligarchy.

8. With reference to political action the scale of values for all Perónists is as follows: First, the Homeland; afterwards the cause, and then, the men themselves.

9. Politics do not constitute for us a definite objective but only a means of achieving the Homeland's welfare represented by the happiness of the people and the greatness of the nation.

10. The two main branches of Perónism are the Social Justice and the Social Welfare. With these we envelop the people in an embrace of justice and love.

11. Perónism desires the establishment of national unity and the abolition of civil strife. It welcomes heroes but does not want martyrs.

12. In the New Argentina the only privileged ones are the children.

13. A Government without a doctrine is a body without a soul. That is why Perónism has established its own political, economic and social doctrines: Justicialism.

14. Justicialism is a new philosophical school of life. It is simple, practical, popular and endowed with deeply Christian and humanitarian sentiments.

15. As a political doctrine, Justicialism establishes a fair balance between the rights of the individual and those of the community.

16. As an economic doctrine, Justicialism achieves a true form of social economy by placing capital at the service of the national economy and this at the service of social welfare.

17. As a social doctrine, Justicialism presides over an adequate distribution of Social Justice giving to each person the social rights he is entitled to.

18. We want a socially just, an economically free and a politically independent Argentina.

19. We are an organized State and a free people ruled by a centralized government.

20. The best of this land of ours is its people.

Juan Perón

October 17, 1950, Year of the Liberator General San Martin

Source: Juan Domingo Perón, Perónist Doctrine. Edited by the Perónist Party. (Buenos Aires, 1952)