

Marina Kabat The Argentine workers' anti-war movement during the Korean War (1950-1951)

ABSTRACT

During the Korean War, the United States, invoking previous treaties, asked Argentina and all Latin American governments for support. Notably, the US requested them to send troops to participate in the military conflict. The Argentine president, Juan Domingo Perón, looking forward to economic aid from the US, promptly agreed and began the preparations. But his arrangements were thwarted by a pacifist campaign organised by the Argentine Communist Party. Women, youth, and unionised workers were essential to this campaign. Particularly decisive was a mass demonstration of railroad workers in Rosario city. The campaign, despite harsh repression from the government, achieved its objectives, and no Argentine soldier was sent to fight in the Korean War, a testament to the success of the resistance.

KEYWORDS

Pacifism
Peronism
Strike
Communism
Peronism
Korean war

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines popular resistance to sending Argentine troops to the Korean War between 1950 and 1951. The most significant event of this process, a workers' demonstration in Rosario, has piqued the interest of various historians and is one of the focal points of our study. Today, I can offer a more comprehensive reconstruction of this event with access to new sources. Furthermore, carefully examining different documents allows us to analyse the entire process of resistance against Argentine involvement in this global conflict in support of the United States. To understand and reconstruct this process, I looked at various sources. First, I examined local, national and international newspapers, including newspapers from Uruguay. Second, I used declassified secret documentation from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Third, I studied newspapers associated with the Communist Party of Argentina (CP) and its political fronts and leaflets published and distributed by these same organisations. Finally, I also took into account, to a lesser extent, oral and written testimonies from those directly involved in these events.

Overcoming research challenges to comprehend the events under analysis necessitated a meticulous cross-referencing of various sources. From 1949, the government tightened its grip on the press, with censorship primarily impacting prominent national newspapers. Consequently, information from local newspapers could fill in gaps left by national newspapers. Foreign media also offered valuable insights, particularly from neighbouring countries or the United States. Similarly, the secret reports of the CIA were indispensable in understanding the government's repressive activity, systematicity and planning, and underscore the thoroughness of our approach.

However, the task of reconstructing the campaign against sending troops to Korea was not without its challenges, primarily due to the deliberate silencing of one of the parties involved. The Communist Party strategically used ad hoc fronts to promote a campaign against sending forces. Subsequently, after the fall of the Peronist government, it aimed to garner the support of Peronist workers. The events that thrust the Communist Party ahead of Peronism were conveniently omitted from the Party's official history. To study them, I had to rely on the testimonies of those involved and documents from that period, a testament to the complexity of our task.

ARGENTINE RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE KOREAN WAR

Perón's relationship with the US government was initially fraught with tension but gradually improved after he became president in 1946. At first, Perón's nationalist stance was viewed as a threat by the United States. During the political campaign leading up to the 1946 elections, which Perón won, the US ambassador to Argentina, Spruille Braden, became heavily involved in the campaign against Perón and was even identified as its leader.

This interference by the US ambassador in Argentine internal

affairs triggered a nationalist response that contributed to Perón's victory.

After George Messersmith replaced Braden in April 1946, diplomatic relations between the two countries slowly improved. In the early 1950s, the Truman Doctrine prioritised the fight against communism, and Perón became a crucial ally in this effort. Argentina faced economic difficulties and sought investment and credit from the United States. Therefore, both countries needed to maintain reasonable diplomatic relations while allowing minor conflicts to arise.

While Perón maintained a rabid nationalist discourse publicly, negotiations were quite different behind closed doors. Perón advocated for Argentine economic independence and claimed to hold a so-called third position. This meant that Argentina would maintain a neutral stance, trade with the East and the West, and uphold diplomatic relations. However, after the Korean conflict broke out, Perón informed the United States' former ambassador in Buenos Aires, Messersmith, that Argentina would side with the Western nations. Following this, the Argentine foreign minister advised diplomatic missions that the Argentine "third position" should no longer be mentioned abroad.¹ US intelligence judged Perón's local nationalist talks as "theatrical", "for domestic consumption", or meant to improve his bargaining power with the United States. Due to the Argentine government's strong support for the US, the US government overlooked the nationalist propaganda.² However, Messersmith expressed concerns to Perón about the potential confusion it could cause among the Argentine people.³

During Perón's presidency, the Argentine government signed the Chapultepec Acts in 1946 and the Rio Pact in 1950. This marked a shift from Argentina's traditional neutrality during the First and most of the Second World Wars and its antagonism with the United States regarding its role in Pan-American diplomatic institutions. In 1946, during Perón's first month in office, he requested Parliament's approval of the Inter-American Reciprocal Assistance and Solidarity, better known as the Chapultepec Acts. These acts were designed to ensure Latin American countries' support in conflict scenarios and were promoted by the United States. Later, before the Korean War, the Rio Pact, the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, was reinforced to create a legal provision for Argentine involvement in the Korean War. Congress ratified the Rio Pact on June 28, 1950, following Perón's orders.

Peronist government repeatedly assured that it was fully engaged in combating communism, and US intelligence believed that. The CIA reports that

Argentina feels that it is completely up to date in the fight against Communism. The opinion was expressed that in no other American country is the struggle against Communism waged so efficiently.⁴

Although the agency recognised that the Perón regime's effec-

1 Central Intelligence Agency. CIA Daily. Working paper, February 12, 1951, pp. 4-5.

2 The "ratification of the Rio Treaty as well as siding with the US against the USSR in the UN represent unprecedented measures of Argentine support of US policy". Central Intelligence Agency. Probable effects of recent changes in Argentine economic practice on US security interests, August 2, 1950, p. 6.

3 Central Intelligence Agency. CIA Daily op. cit. p. 4.

4 Central Intelligence Agency: Preparations of Argentine delegation for Conference of American Foreign Ministers. April 4, 1951, p. 2.

tiveness was probably exaggerated to impress the US, it also acknowledged that Peronism "set a high standard among Latin American states for containing Communism".⁵ The agency also considered that if Perón was overthrown, there could be a communist upsurge within the working movement and further labour unrest, which would negatively affect US interests as it would "considerably reduce food surpluses, an important US strategic interest in case of war with the USSR".⁶

PERÓN'S MILITARY PLANS AND COMMUNIST RESPONSE

When the Korean War broke out in June 1950, Perón prepared to participate, given the potential economic benefits of aligning with the United States. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hipólito Paz, convinced Perón to send a group of soldiers as soon as possible. Paz believed that Argentina should be the first country in Latin America to take this action. Perón was concerned that the war could expand and wanted to prevent Argentina from becoming isolated from North American markets.⁷

The CP was the only left-wing group in Argentina with a significant, yet minority, presence within the worker's movement. It initiated a peace campaign to promote a Popular Front strategy. Following the international campaign that had gained Sartre's approval, the CP initially sought the support of intellectuals. However, these efforts did not yield the expected outcome at the local level. Conversely, the CP successfully involved other political groups, particularly the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), a middle-class party, and a faction of Peronist union leaders displaced from the official unions. The movement gained support from the general public, as demonstrated by the significant number of signatures collected on petitions opposing the deployment of troops, as well as the decisive demonstration of workers in Rosario, a city in the Santa Fe province. Women's associations, such as the Unión Argentina de Mujeres (Union of Argentine Women) and the Agrupación Cultural Femenina (Women's Cultural Group), were crucial in gathering signatures. They also played a notable role in street protests, evidenced by the number of detained women.

THE PEACE CAMPAIGN IN BUENOS AIRES BEFORE 18 JULY

To carry out their peace campaign amid severe repression, the CP had to come up with creative ways to avoid being monitored by the authorities. In 1949, the Peronist government had launched a campaign against communist groups. After the outbreak of the Korean War, the surveillance of communist organisations became even more intense. Federal police units throughout Argentina were alerted to prevent any potential for communist activity. Extra patrols ranged over Buenos Aires's and La Plata's streets while intelligence agencies and police forces worked together. On 13 July, 1950, the Grupo por la Paz, a group advocating for pacifism, simulated a picnic excursion to

Tigre island to avoid police interference. This precaution was not enough: the Argentine Police were informed of the resolutions taken in that meeting (intensify the peace campaign and organise flash street meetings protesting against the ratification of the Rio Pact and the United States' interference in Argentina's internal affairs and Korea). As political activities required official permission, spontaneous propaganda was carried out instead. Small groups of activists conducted surprise propaganda acts in busy streets, at specific targets, or even in movie theatres, where they would shout slogans and distribute pamphlets. The goal was to retreat quickly and avoid the police. Despite communist provisions, the police often had prior knowledge of communist plans and were able to intervene and arrest protesters in cinemas or small street demonstrations. During the Korean War, communist agitators would often join crowds gathered around newspaper bulletin boards or markets and make derogatory comments about US involvement. Authorities were forewarned to be on the lookout for this type of propaganda but I have not found any record of anyone being imprisoned for this activity during the period under study.⁸

In July 1950, there was a lot of campaigning activity in Buenos Aires. Between 14 July and 19 July, the newspapers reported more than sixty people being arrested for acts related to the peace campaign. On 14 July, the communists reported arrests and raids in sixteen cinemas for the distribution of leaflets that were against the government's foreign policy and for peace in Korea. On 16 July, Chilean media reported that the police in Argentina's capital city had repressed an anti-war demonstration in front of the North American embassy hotel and detained 25 people.⁹ On 18 July, American media reported similar events taking place in Argentina. According to *La Prensa*, police arrested seven people at a cinema in downtown Buenos Aires for distributing leaflets promoting peace and calling for the withdrawal of US forces from Korea.¹⁰

El Diario reported on the same event and the subsequent arrest of five more communists the next day, raising the number of detainees to twelve within two days:

*Last night, for the second consecutive day, the "reds" held lightning-type demonstrations in the city's streets against the United States. [...] Four police officers were injured in clashes with protesters, five of whom were arrested*¹¹

On July 19, the police arrested twenty-one communist women in the downtown area who gathered, cheering for the CP and throwing leaflets.¹²

Despite intense police repression, the Argentine campaign collected 750000 signatures within a week, according to the *Daily Worker*, a communist newspaper published in New York:

Despite police terror against the collection of signatures for the World Peace appeal, 750 000 names have been obtained as of last week from trade unionists and members of various

5 Central Intelligence Agency: Probable effects op. cit., p. 9.

6 Idem, p. 2.

7 Paz, Hipólito: *Memorias: Vida y política de un argentino en el siglo XX*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1999, p. 161.

8 Central Intelligence Office: Information report: Argentina police actions against communist demonstrations. August, 30, 1950, pp. 1-5.

9 Broadcast by radio station CE 1174, Santiago de Chile, 7/16/1950. The Information Service of Foreign Radio Broadcasters captured the broadcast in the United States and cited it in a report from the Argentine Embassy in Washington. General Archive of the Nation, Intermediate Archive, National Asset Recovery Collection, commission 45, file 102752, p. 10.

10 *La Prensa*. Argentina desea consultas sobre su posible ayuda militar en Corea. Nueva York, 18 July, p. 1.

11 *El Diario*. Continúan las manifestaciones de los comunistas en la Argentina. New York, 18 July, 1950, p. 3.

12 *La Prensa*. En una manifestación de la zona céntrica se detuvo a 21 mujeres. Buenos Aires, 20 July, 1950, p. 8.

organisations [...] In addition to the collection of signatures, peace committees are being formed [...] To counter the peace sentiments among the people, police terror and intimidation is expected to increase. Despite this, the slogan Hands Off Korea is gaining wider support.¹³

RAILROADERS' WILD-CAT STRIKE AND DEMONSTRATION IN PÉREZ AND ROSARIO

On 18 July, several newspapers reported that the Argentine government planned to send troops to Korea. However, the next day, the government denied such plans. This sudden policy change was primarily due to a massive demonstration by more than 5000 railway workers in Rosario, the third-largest city in Argentina. The workers, who played a crucial role in the protest, demanded peace and successfully compelled the government to alter its foreign policy. In his memoirs, the Argentine foreign minister, Hipólito Paz, admits that plans were already in place to send troops, along with a propaganda campaign to gain public support. However, the worker demonstration forced the president to cancel these plans.¹⁴

The demonstration was planned to avoid an official crackdown. It was reasonable to assume there would be less surveillance in the countryside than in the city centre. The movement originated in a small town near Rosario. On 18 July, at 10:30 AM, workers from the Pérez railway workshops formed columns and, accompanied by their wives, mothers and daughters, walked on the train tracks towards Rosario.¹⁵ A nurse from Rosario told Badaloni that she was at the march, invited by fellow communists. She travelled by car from Rosario to Pérez with ten other militants to participate in the movement that they knew would start in that town. Other railway workers from Pérez, interviewed by the same historian, also attributed the organisation of the movement to the CP.¹⁶ According to some reports, the workers were allowed to pay tribute to General San Martín, a national hero, in San Martín Square in Rosario, which is why the police did not intervene.¹⁷ Some press articles state the workers held posters with pacifist slogans and portraits of Perón and his wife. While I did come across photos of the slogans, I could not verify if there were any pictures of the president or his wife present.¹⁸

In Rosario, the group from Pérez went to Plaza San Martín, first passing through the Unión Ferroviaria and nearby factories where new contingents of workers joined. Pérez's column took two hours to reach Rosario. At the Unión Ferroviaria's headquarters, other unionised workers waited on the street and joined them. The workers from the Rosario railway workshops left at 11 for the Unión Ferroviaria. The workers of the next shift, who were supposed to enter at 11:45 a.m., found an invitation to the rally on the blackboards. Consequently, they did not go to work at all. When the two groups merged, they toured the streets of Rosario and stopped by several factories to invite the workers to join them. Many people, particularly women from the Minetti Mill, followed

them and headed to Plaza San Martín, where they held a rally. Upon their arrival in Rosario, the protesters were met with various attempts by the Peronist factions to discourage them. Initially, the union bureaucracy made efforts to dissuade them. The leaders of the Railway Union stationed loudspeakers in their building, facing the street, to persuade the workers to abandon the street and return to their workplaces. The local branch president of the union also asked them to return to their homes or work in an orderly fashion. He mentioned that "foreign elements" had initiated the movement in Pérez. He advised the crowd not to follow them, not to be deceived by them, and to await orders from the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) instead.

Despite some workers leaving, new ones joined, allowing the demonstration to continue.

One of the speakers at the Plaza San Martín event also tried unsuccessfully to contain the movement; later, the police also tried to dissuade the protesters and, when that failed, ended up repressing them. At 2 p.m., former senator Demetrio Figueiras, a labour leader and a railway worker who was part of the column from Pérez, spoke at the event. Figueiras was a critical Peronist, so other, more obedient leaders had displaced him. According to *Crónica*, Figueiras urged the crowd to wait in an orderly fashion and trust in the national government.¹⁹ According to *La Capital*, people sang the national anthem in the plaza. Figueiras called them to resume work, return to their homes, and not continue the march because the police had not given permission.²⁰ According to *Crónica*, this "only partly had the desired effect because groups of exalted people tried to continue the march".²¹ According to *La Prensa*, at the end of an event, new groups of protesters arrived carrying slogans related to the conflict. Despite police requests, the protesters started walking down a central street. The column continued to move forward despite several attempts to stop it. The newspapers agreed that the protest was rejuvenating itself. While some protesters left the scene, others joined the demonstration, which had the participation of around 4500 to 5000 workers at any given time. The newspaper *La Capital* describes the police's repression of the column as follows:

Police officers charged against the demonstration, forcing it to retreat. When they reached Mitre Street, the body of flamethrowers threatened them with their arms, forcing them to deviate. There was a moment of tension since the members of the police force had their weapons ready to fire.²²

Protesters expelled from one street regrouped on another and continued advancing through the city centre, making initial attempts to stop them unsuccessful.

... but new orders reached the police headquarters stating that the protesters had to be detained and dispersed in any way. Pickets from the tear gas brigade, two teams of firefighters and infantry forces were called [...] Next, powerful jets of water were

13 Daily Worker. 750.000 Sign for peace despite terror by Perón. New York, 18 July, 1950, p. 2.

14 Paz. Op. cit., pp. 160-163.

15 Hubo manifestaciones callejeras en Rosario. Rosario, 19 July, 1950, p. 5.

16 Badaloni, Laura. Control, memoria y olvido: 'Marcha de la Paz' y huelga ferroviaria durante el primer gobierno peronista. Polhis, Mar del Plata, 2013, p. 9.

17 Hubo manifestaciones callejeras op. cit. p. 5; El Orden, Los comunistas provocaron tumultos en Rosario, Santa Fé, 19 July 1950, p. 1.

18 Hubo manifestaciones callejeras op. cit. p. 5; La Capital. Hubo ayer una manifestación en la zona céntrica de la ciudad. Rosario, 19 July 1950, p. 4.

19 Efectuóse una manifestación de ferroviarios. Exteriorización de apoyo a la Paz y al General Perón. Crónica. Rosario, 18 July 1950, pp. 3-7.

20 Hubo ayer una manifestación, op. cit., p. 4.

21 Efectuóse una manifestación de ferroviarios, op. cit. pp. 3-7.

22 Aclaración de La Fraternidad. Rosario, 19 July 1950, p. 4.

directed at the protesters, who, in hasty runs, tried to avoid getting wet. Taking advantage of the moment, gases were thrown at them, and the mounted police charged at them, which completely cleared the artery, and seized insignia and flags. They also proceeded to arrest several bearers of such insignias and take them to section 3 of the police.²³

THE CONTINUITY OF THE PACIFIST CAMPAIGN

Following the demonstration of Rosario's railroad workers, protests continued in Argentina. In Buenos Aires, the police arrested twelve women on 19 July for inciting a street demonstration and five young men for the same reason on 22 July. In La Plata on 24 July, the police arrested seven people, including a woman, a student, two construction workers, a meatpacking plant worker and an attorney, for distributing communist literature and shout-ing in favour of communism and peace.

More significantly, in Córdoba, another key province where no demonstrations had been reported until then, sixty communists were arrested in six cities. On July 23, sixty communists were apprehended in the Province of Córdoba for disturbances in Villa María, Cosquín, Río Tercero, Río Cuarto, Alta Oliva, and Córdoba. They were accused of organising anti-Perón, anti-American, and pro-peace movements and charged with violating the public safety law.²⁴

According to the oral testimony of Martín Arista, a second worker demonstration occurred. Arista's story provides insight into how working-class sectors lived during this period. In 1950, when he was 18 years old, he lived in his rural hometown in Buenos Aires. There were rumours of soldiers being mobilised, which worried his mother as she was afraid that the government might send troops to Korea, where her son could be involved.

The young people in the town made fun of the conscripts who could be sent to war, calling them "the Koreans". Two years later, Arista moved to Buenos Aires and began working in a metallurgical factory, where he met communist workers and joined the Party. He learned about the RyCSA metallurgical factory strike in Ciudadela, led by the communist leader who opposed Peronism. According to Arista's story, the internal commission stopped the factory without permission from the union authorities and began a march to Casa Rosada, asking for peace. RyCSA had 1300 workers, and other factory workers joined their column until they reached 4000. The communists made up only 10 per cent or less of the protesters, and the rest were primarily concerned about sending troops to Korea. In party circles, Abel Caballero was highly regarded for organising this successful demonstration under Peronism. While I have corroborated the location, importance, and reference to the communist metallurgical leader, I have not yet found a written record of this demonstration. This lack of registration may be partly due to more censorship of Buenos Aires newspapers than of newspapers in the interior. The communist campaign persisted in 1950, but it gradually lost its strength. The police informed the CIA that the "hit and run"

Communist demonstrations had declined by around 60% by the end of July.²⁵ Perón's statements denying the possibility of sending troops to Korea helped to calm much of the widespread unrest. However, the increase in repression, which I will discuss in the next section, also had an impact.

In March and April of 1951, the United States began to pressure Latin American countries to support the United Nations in the Korean War. This pressure started building up before a foreign ministers' meeting, leading to the relaunch of a peace campaign. A pacifist leaflet was published in Santa Fe, the province where the railroad workers' demonstration occurred. It reads:

*From 140.000 to 1.000.000 young Americans!
Youth from Santa Fe, beware!
This is the amount that is heard mentioned to integrate what
has been called the Latin American legion.
How many of us do they intend to send?
Washington will discuss this during the meeting of foreign
ministers [...].
You are for Peace, against War, and you do not want to par-
ticipate in this unjust massacre. Will you be able to give your
opinion and express your human desire? Washington will decide
that through the meeting of foreign ministers in its second
point. Internal Security
Can we stop the cost of living, the low wages and mass unem-
ployment that exist in our youth by exporting our products to
the war front?
Washington will decide on the third point, economic coopera-
tion, of the foreign ministers' meeting [...].
Argentine youth wants:
NOT to water foreign lands with our blood
NOT to feed aggressor armies with our meat.
NOT to humiliate our land with foreign military bases.
Young people, let us sign and make others sign the call of the
World Peace Council for a Peace Pact.
Argentine Council for Peace. Youth for Peace.
Province of Santa Fe.²⁶*

After the Conference of Ministers, the Communist Party and the Radical Civic Union denounced the government for giving in to US pressure. The Communist Party called for action:

*Our lives were given in Washington: let's not comply!
Against the just wishes of the youth who do not want to die
uselessly defending other people's interests,
What role will we play on the Korean front [...] perhaps to die in
a trench [...]
The government capitulated to the pressure of the Yankee mil-
lionaire aggressors.
We call on young people to resist.
For peace, against war.
We don't want to be trench mud.
We want peace and happiness.
Against sending young people.²⁷*

In 1951, a campaign was launched to demand an end to the attempts to send troops and food assistance. In July of that year,

²³ Hubo ayer una manifestación, op. cit., p. 4.

²⁴ Central Intelligence Office. Information report, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

²⁵ Central Intelligence Office. Information report, op. cit., p. 8.

²⁶ Consejo Argentino por la Paz. Juventud por la Paz. Provincia de Santa Fe, De 140.000 a 1.000.000 de jóvenes americanos! Joven Santafecino ¡alerta! Leaflet, Santa Fe, no date, 1951. Note that the word "Americans" in the leaflet title refers to people born on the American continent, not just US citizens.

²⁷ Consejo Argentino por la Paz. Se entregaron nuestras vidas en Washington: ¡no acatemos! Leaflet 1951.

a group of female workers in the meatpacking industry filed a complaint about the shipment of Argentine meat to US troops in Korea. However, no records of sabotage in the meatpacking plants were found. But I found a reference to the boycott of aid shipping by the crew of the *Coracero*, a ship in the merchant navy: "Upon finding out that the ship would leave with cargo for Korea, they abandoned the ship, resisting transporting products from their land for the aggressors".²⁸

PERONIST REPRESSION

Communist press condemned governmental violations of human rights throughout its peace campaign. As I already described, the *Daily Worker* denounced "police terror" and intimidation campaigns. In 1951 a communist leaflet recounted the victims of repression: 100 detainees in the territory of Chaco, and arrests and torture in Córdoba, where the police had raped a female activist. In the federal capital of Buenos Aires and in Buenos Aires province, numerous women who had been arrested were subjected to torture, to the point that some lost pregnancies. The leaflet also refers, as part of the same repression, to the kidnapping of the young student Mario Bravo.²⁹

A secret report from the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) informs that most of the activists detained in street demonstrations were turned over to the Special Section of the police; it alludes to this organisation's torture practices and the orders given by the authorities. For example, on 14 July, five young men detained in a hit-and-run protest were going to "be turned over to the Seccion Special of the Federal Police for 'interrogation'". The quotation marks indicate that they were about to be tortured.³⁰ They were all 18 to 20 years old. That same day, in a second demonstration in Buenos Aires City, two other activists caught in a second demonstration were turned over to the Seccion Special, "and police sources readily admit that they are in for some extremely rough treatment".³¹ Women received the same treatment. They were also turned over to the Special Section. For instance, on Sunday, 16 July, three young women aged 16 to 20 years were arrested with a boy of 18, and were going to be turned over to the Special Section.³²

According to the CIA report, it is evident that the president had complete knowledge of the situation. During his administration, Perón publicly denied the existence of torture. He blamed isolated police elements acting on their behalf when cases became public. The CIA report indicates that Perón closely monitored daily events and provided instructions to the police.

The authorities have been anticipating communist outbreaks [...] and were not caught off guard. The President was immediately apprised of all facts by the Oficina de Control del Estado (OCE),

the top presidential intelligence agency [...] The government had indicated that it would not tolerate such gatherings and vigorous measures would be taken to discourage them.³³

A few days later, "all intelligence and law enforcement agencies were closely coordinating their activities and funnelling their reports to the President through OCE".³⁴ On 19 July, the Buenos Aires chief of police received orders direct from Casa Rosada "to show no mercy against active Communist agitators, regardless of sex".³⁵

Communist activists were aware of the risks involved in street demonstrations but remained committed and displayed high morale. They often attempted to resist arrest through force. Typically, the police only arrested a few activists who participated in the demonstrations. Additionally, some police officers were injured during confrontations with activists. Even while in prison, the activists attempted to resist authority. For instance, an eighteen-year-old student named Sergio Guzman wrote the word "Peace" on the wall of his cell with his nails, and he was subsequently given an extra fifteen days in jail as punishment.³⁶

In two critical moments of the pacifist campaign, two severe events occurred. In 1950, Jorge Calvo, who was leading the communist peace movement in Argentina, and Ángel Zelly, a metallurgical union leader, were gunned down by a parastatal group with police complicity. In 1951, after the Washington Foreign Ministers' Conference, the young leader, Ernesto Bravo, was kidnapped and tortured nearly to death by the Special Section police. The police denied having him arrested while keeping him captive. Ernesto Bravo also had a prominent role in the communist campaign.

The murders of Jorge Calvo and Ángel Zelly were directly linked with the repression of the peace campaign. After the protest in Rosario, the chief of the Federal Police, Bertollo, announced on the radio that they would be taking decisive action against communist groups. Jorge Calvo was responsible for overseeing the peace movement in Buenos Aires province. He and Zelly, a metallurgical worker, and other comrades met in Quilmes City to plan the upcoming peace campaign activities. The meeting had just begun when a group of heavily armed individuals suddenly launched an attack. Survivors said that the aggressors claimed to be policemen, although they did not wear uniforms. They also recall that the police agent who guarded the communist headquarters was not present that day. It took a long time for the police and medical aid to arrive.³⁷ Recently, it has been discovered that the Special Section of the federal police updated Jorge Calvo's record ("communist identification card no. 92"), documenting his death suspiciously six days before his murder, which occurred on 4 August, 1950.³⁸

Ernesto Mario Bravo's case was also related to the peace cam-

28 Marítimos. number 7, July 1951, p. 3. See also Boletín Amigas de la Paz. Cómo luchan las obreras por la paz. number 7, July 1951, p. 3.

29 Consejo Argentino por la Paz. El caso Bravo y la lucha del pueblo argentino por la paz, la soberanía nacional y el progreso: ¡por un pacto de paz de las cinco grandes potencias! Leaflet, 1951, p. 4.

30 Central Intelligence Office. Information report, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

31 Ibid.

32 Idem, p. 3.

33 Idem, p. 2.

34 Idem, p. 4.

35 Idem, p. 6.

36 Idem, p. 7.

37 Heller, Amado. Oral testimony. February 2008, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KC_I68U2qzY&feature=emb_logo last visited February 27, 2024.

38 Furman, Rubén. Puños y pistolas. Puños y pistolas. La extraña historia de la alianza Libertadora Nacionalista. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2014, p. 246. Gilbert, Isidoro. La Fede: alistándose para la revolución. La federación juvenil comunista 1921-2005. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2011, pp. 308-310.

paign. According to the testimony of Juan García, a communist militant who was doing mandatory military service at that time, Bravo would have actively participated in the Rosario demonstration of 1950.³⁹ In 1951, he led the Argentine organisation of the Third World Festival of Youth and Students, an international event for peace that would take place in Berlin and had a relevant role in the International Peace Campaign. Bravo was kidnapped from his home by the police, who later denied having detained him. Bravo almost died under torture and was only released thanks to vast social demonstrations that included a two-day university strike. The case is well known because Bravo managed to prosecute and sentence the police agents who captured and tortured him, but not their superiors.

CONTEMPORARY SUCCESS AND HISTORICAL OBLIVION

The campaign against sending troops was successful despite official statements to the contrary. When sharing information with foreign intelligence agencies, the Argentine government tried to downplay the achievements of the pacifist campaign against sending troops to appear in control of the situation. This was consistent with Peronism's efforts to position itself as the primary barrier against communism in South America. Regarding the demonstration of Rosario, the CIA was informed that the movement failed when the CGT revealed that it had not authorised it. However, the CIA informants were unconvinced of this overall assessment and emphasised the contradictions between different sources.

The CPA was apparently trying desperately to influence Argentine public opinion against intervention in the Korean War. A source reported that the Argentine police feel that the CPA has been unsuccessful in this effort, although some governmental officials feel that the communist efforts have been extremely fruitful.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the campaign prevented the sending of Argentine troops to Korea by involving non-communist workers in demonstrations. The small actions by communist militants may have helped alert public opinion, but they were not enough to break the government's will. The government was not fazed by a month of minor street actions. However, when these activities coagulated into massive labour demonstrations and wild-cat strikes, the government changed its decision between 18 July and 19 July, 1950.

Despite the government's ability to put an end to street demonstrations, it did so through intense repression and by modifying its foreign policy. Most union leaders condemned the illegal demonstrations and strikes. However, in order not to lose support from their social base, they issued pacifist statements at the same time. After the Rosario demonstration, they celebrated the government's declaration that Argentine soldiers would not be sent to Korea. Ultimately, such enthusiastic support for the new government policy acted as a deterrent to a possible

attempt by the president to send troops later.

Although the pacifist campaign successfully prevented troops from being sent, it could not stop the supply of meat to the United Nations armies, which was the second item on the agenda. I only found one instance of transport boycott by maritime workers. However, I found no records of strikes or sabotage in the meatpacking industry. CIA reports express concern about the possibility of sabotage that would reduce shipments, and they consulted local sources about this possibility. The Argentine police deny the existence of such cases and state that they did not expect this type of action to occur.⁴¹

The campaign against food shipments failed for multiple reasons. The communists were no longer leading the meatpacking workers' union, although there were still some communist militants in the sector. Despite this, I found no records of strikes in the industry. Additionally, the communist leader José Peter, who had previously led the meatpacking workers before the rise of Peronism, was put under special surveillance by the government. One worker in the industry was imprisoned for participating in street propaganda activities.⁴² Furthermore, meatpacking workers experienced unemployment and temporary suspensions, which made them less interested in participating in a systematic boycott campaign. As such, a boycott would have worsened their lack of work. Other guilds, such as construction and textiles, where the communists had some influence, were not involved in supplying supplies. However, workers from these sectors participated individually in street agitation.⁴³

The success of the pacifist campaign contrasts with society's amnesia about it. Ironically, the reason for this may be its success in preventing the sending of troops, as the attempt made by the Peronist government was quickly forgotten. The official propaganda that attempted to deny the fact contributed to this, as it reduced the campaign to false rumours spread by the communists. The Argentine left parties have also not done much to keep the memory of these working-class struggles alive. The Communist Party after 1955 sought the Peronist vote, which resulted in previous complaints being silenced, while Trotskyism, which later became the dominant force within the left, did not care to highlight the struggles that communists promoted in previous historical moments. However, the memory of the events discussed in this paper has not been entirely lost. Last year, on its 73rd anniversary, a commemorative sculpture created by local artists was placed in Pérez, where the railway strike and march to Rosario began ■

39 García was mobilised with other conscripts as part of Argentine troops' preparation for their participation in the Korean War. García, Luis. Oral testimony, April 2009, in: Cutillo, Irene. *Historias gorilas: Represión en la Argentina durante los años 1943-1955*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo, p. 305.

40 Central Intelligence Office: Information report. op. cit., p. 8. The reference to the Rosario movement is found on p. 5.

41 Idem, pp. 4-5.

42 Idem, p. 7.

43 Among the people detained by the police were four construction workers, a meat-packing plant worker, a tailor, an employee, an attorney and a doctor. Central Intelligence Office: Information report, op. cit., pp. 6, 7, 9.

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