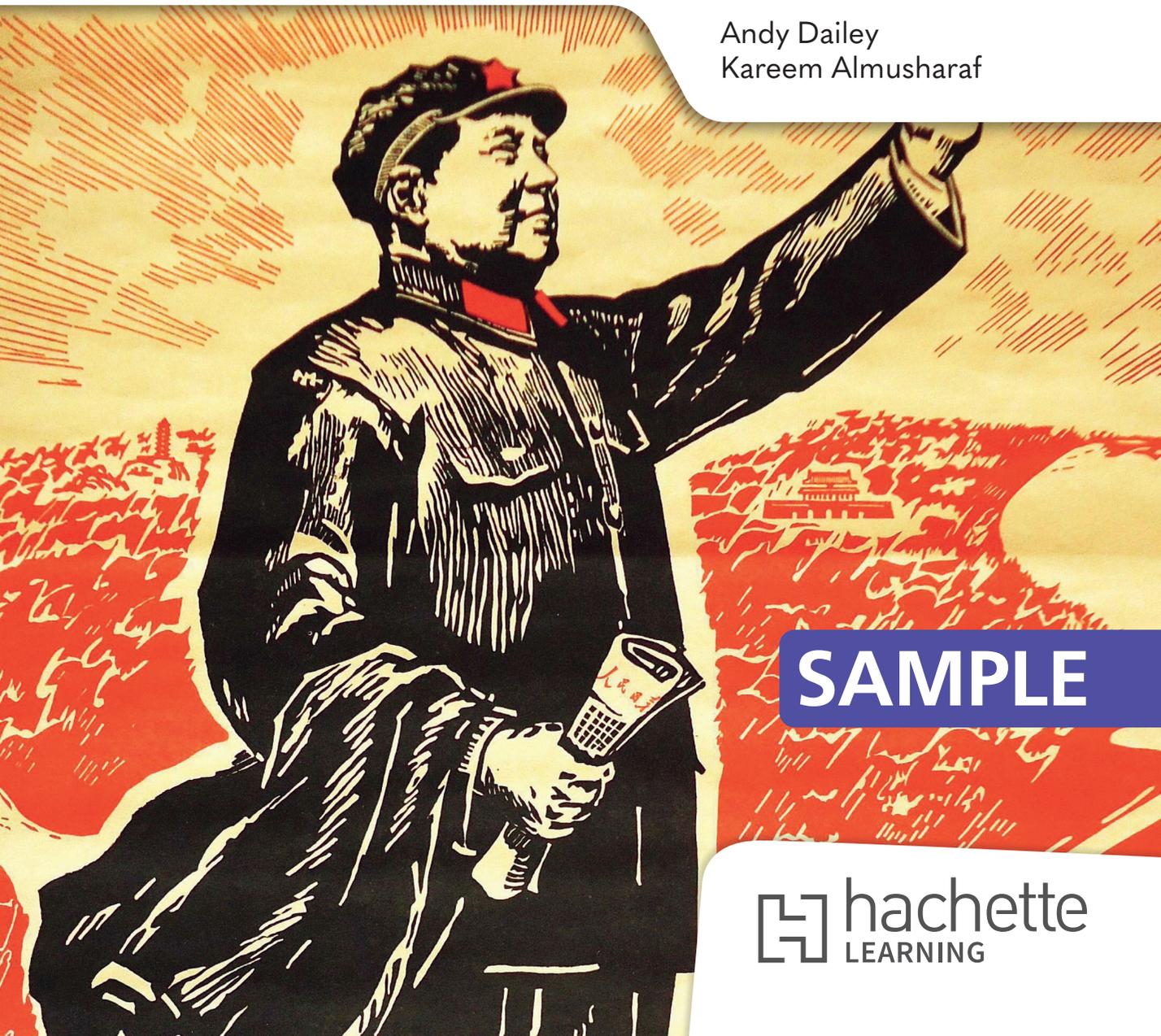


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# Authoritarian rule (from 1750 CE onwards)

Andy Dailey  
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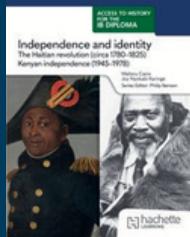
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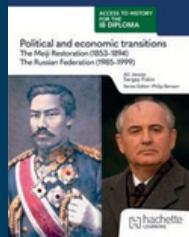
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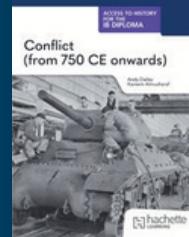
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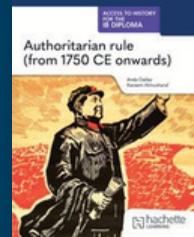
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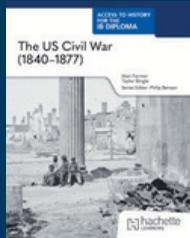
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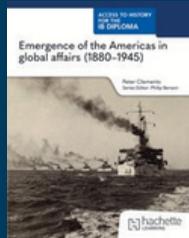
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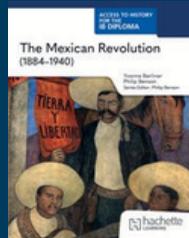
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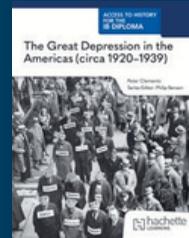
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# Argentina under Juan Perón, 1946–74

Juan Perón of Argentina and his rule is an interesting area for study. Rising to power through the conservative military, he introduced significant social and economic reforms that challenged conservatives in Argentina, including the Catholic Church, the military and business owners. During his rule he was increasingly authoritarian, excluding important, powerful sectors from his programmes while promoting his wife and a cult of personality.

This chapter will consider the following questions:

- ★ Why did the authoritarian rule of Juan Perón emerge in Argentina
- ★ How was the authoritarian rule of Juan Perón maintained?
- ★ How did Juan Perón's authoritarian rule affect people's lives?
- ★ How was Juan Perón's authoritarian rule challenged?

## What type of authoritarian ruler was Juan Perón?

Juan Perón was a populist authoritarian ruler, relying on popular support rather than systematic terror. His rule relied on nationalism, social welfare and corporatism, creating the ideology of Peronism, which mobilized workers and unions behind him. While Perón expanded rights for labour and women, his control of the press, suppression of opposition and manipulation of democratic institutions marked a distinctly authoritarian style of governance.

It is important to note that this chapter breaks down Juan Perón's rule through inquiry questions and lines of inquiry, not in a chronological order. For a chronology of events, see the following key dates:



## KEY DATES

- 1912** Universal male suffrage adopted in Argentina, increasing political involvement
- 1919** The 'Tragic Week' of violence against working-class immigrants
- 1929** Great Depression begins; mass unemployment and 60% decrease in national income
- 1930** Military coup overthrows government, reinforcing estanciero rule
- 1930–43** The 'Infamous Decade' of corruption and fraudulent elections
- 1933** Roca–Runciman Treaty is signed with the UK
- 1943** GOU seizes power in military coup; Juan Perón appointed Minister of Labour by the GOU
- 1944** President Ramírez removed, Perón named vice president; major earthquake
- 1945** Perón removed from government, imprisoned, freed after massive protests
- 1946** Perón elected president, takes over judicial system
- 1947** Women's suffrage; Perón courts the urban working class
- 1948** The Eva Perón Foundation and Female Peronist Party founded
- 1949** New constitution gives Perón a longer term of office and increased powers
- 1951** Perón wins second term, supported heavily by women
- 1952** Eva Perón dies
- 1953** Education reforms begin to promote Peronist ideology and the Perón cult of personality
- 1954** Catholic Church removed from role in education; Church excluded from government
- 1955** Perón excommunicated by Church; violence between Catholics and Peronists; Perón goes into exile as the result of in-fighting in the military
- 1972** Perón briefly returns to Argentina
- 1973** Peronists win national elections and Perón elected to a third term by September
- 1974** Perón dies, leaving third wife as president



## KEY TERMS

**Fascism** A political ideology which values highly authoritarian and nationalistic government, which are often led by a popular dictator where opposition and criticism of the government are limited or banned, which also promotes aggressive nationalism and national unity.

**Inflation** A sustained increase in the general price level of goods and services, resulting in a decrease in money's purchasing power or value.

## Juan Domingo Perón (1895–1974)

Juan Perón was an Argentinian military officer who achieved the rank of colonel, and politician who rose to power after the 1943 coup. His ancestors were both European (Sardinian, Scottish, Italian and Spanish) and from Argentina's Indigenous people. This ancestry was similar to that of many working-class Argentinians and helped shape his identity and political appeal. He travelled to Germany and Italy in the 1930s and early 1940s to learn about new military developments. While there, he was exposed to **fascism** that may have influenced his views of governance. Using his role as Secretary of Labour after 1943, he built support among workers through wage increases and welfare reforms. Backed by unions and his second wife, Eva (Evita) Perón, he was elected president in 1946.

Perón maintained his rule through populist policies, union alliances and Evita's immense popularity, while also restricting opposition and censoring critics. His government expanded healthcare, education and industrialization, improving life for many workers and women, though it also deepened social divisions and fostered authoritarian controls.

Challenges grew as the economy faltered in the early 1950s, **inflation** rose, and the Catholic Church and military turned against him. In 1955, he was overthrown and went into exile. Returning in 1973, he regained the presidency but died a year later. His legacy, Peronism, continues to shape Argentina today.

# 1 Why did the authoritarian rule of Juan Perón emerge in Argentina?

▶ **Key question:** What were the causes and consequences of Argentina's political and economic issues in the early 20th century?

There were several competing political and economic agendas in 19th- and early 20th-century Argentina. These divisions were primarily based on economics, and on immigrants versus major landowners.

## Role of ideas

Argentina was granted independence from Spain in 1818. Economically, it remained primarily agricultural. Wealthy landowners dominated both the nation's economy and politics, controlling vast amounts of land and poor farm labourers. Towards the end of the 19th century, European immigration led to a surge in **nationalism** along with the development of industry and urban centres.

How did the role of ideas lead to *continuity and change* in Argentina through 1946?

## Nationalism

Argentinian nationalists feared losing economic and political control to immigrants who settled into cities and formed a rapidly growing, urban working class. Nationalist groups such as the Liga Patriótica Argentina (LPA) or **Patriotic League** formed, attacking immigrants. The most notable violence was La Semana Trágica (the Tragic Week) in 1919, when striking workers were attacked by the LPA and other nationalist groups. Hundreds were killed and thousands injured and arrested. Nationalist gangs terrorized working-class neighbourhoods and attacked businesses owned by immigrants.

Anti-immigrant, conservative groups opposed:

- the scale of immigration, especially by non-Catholics
- international control of Argentina's economy in major industries like meat packing and sugar refining
- tax evasion by international companies
- manipulation of Argentina's currency by overseas governments and companies.

## Pressure for reform

Argentina's government was dominated by an **oligarchy** of conservative major landowners, the *estancieros*. The *estancia*, or ranches, owned by the *estancieros* were massive, some being 250,000 hectares in size. It is estimated that about 300 families owned most of the land in Argentina through this system.

## KEY TERMS

**Nationalism** In the most simplistic terms, the belief that one's nation is the most important identity and loyalty one can have, but can also have religious, racist or xenophobic connotations in extreme forms.

**Patriotic League** A violent nationalistic, xenophobic, anti-communist and anti-Jewish paramilitary group that formed in Argentina in 1919.

**Oligarchy** Rule by a small, privileged group.

**Estancieros** Owner or manager of a very large estate in Argentina.

The Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union, RCU) was the largest anti-oligarch party in Argentina. Its members demanded political and economic reforms, including:

- more government openness and transparency, instead of decisions by the oligarchy
- legal reforms to improve conditions for workers
- improved social-welfare programmes to support the poor and marginalized groups
- redistribution of wealth to make society more equal
- national, not private, control over resources such as oil.



### KEY TERM

**Universal male suffrage**  
Where all adult men can vote in elections.

Many of these ideas would be adopted by Perón and his regime. Due to pressure from the RCU and other groups, **universal male suffrage** was adopted in 1912. This led to a surge in political parties and participation of the male population, challenging the oligarchs' control.

To what extent did social factors affect governmental stability through 1946?

## Social factors

Immigration and industrialization generated new and growing socio-economic classes in Argentina in the late-19th and early 20th century. Argentina had been primarily an agricultural society consisting of few small cities and major farming estates. Argentinian society consisted of poor farm labourers and wealthy *estancieros*, with a very small middle class operating businesses and providing services, such as medical care and banking.

A rapidly growing class of immigrant urban workers increasingly challenged conservatives, demanding reforms including:

- the right to legally form labour unions and to strike
- improved working conditions and an eight-hour work day
- minimum wages and compensation for workplace injuries and accidents
- restrictions on child labour and safer working conditions
- more political representation in the government.



### KEY TERM

**Great Depression** A period of severe global economic downturn that began after the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and continued through the 1930s for most industrialized countries.

Workers formed labour unions and organized strikes, protests and engaged in collective bargaining. The **Great Depression** (see below) led to severe economic stress for farm labourers, who joined urban workers in demanding reforms. Unemployed farm labourers moved into the cities, swelling the ranks of the urban poor who were desperate for work. The *estancieros* sometimes responded violently to worker demands and strikes, and continued to dominate politics, manipulating elections, engaging in bribery and corruption, and intimidating those who opposed their control.

How significant was the role of conflict in the rise of Juan Perón to power?

## Role of conflict

The Great Depression led to massive unemployment in Argentina. Argentina primarily exported agricultural goods, such as beef and sugar, to international markets to pay for imports. With the collapse of

international markets, workers in these export industries lost their jobs and there was a nationwide surge in unemployment. Desperate workers demanded government support, but the government-controlling *estancieros* responded with few reforms and often with violence to prevent any erosion of their power or economic privilege.

### Military coup, 1930

The military, controlled by the *estancieros*, overthrew the reform-oriented President Hipólito Yrigoyen in 1930. The military:

- suppressed political activities of the urban workers and poor
- reduced civil liberties such as freedom of speech, right to assemble, organize unions, strike for better wages and conditions
- reinforced the rule of the *estancieros*
- created a legal precedent for the military to intervene to resolve political crises.

In 1932, after excluding the RCU and other political parties for urban workers and farm labourers, the military returned government authority to an elected government dominated by the *estancieros*. However, the military continued to control and manipulate the government from behind the scenes. The period 1930–43 has been labelled the ‘Infamous Decade’ by Argentinians because of pervasive corruption, political manipulation and fraudulent elections.

### Military coup, 1943

During the **Second World War**, Argentina’s economy and international affairs were disrupted. The UK, the largest importer of Argentina’s agricultural products, was no longer able to purchase goods as the result of its own economic problems during the war. At the same time, the USA pressured Argentina’s government to join the **Allied Powers** against the **Axis Powers**. Some in the military feared that a US-backed coup might overthrow the weak, unpopular *estancieros*-dominated government so that a pro-US government would form and drag Argentina into a conflict that could further disrupt the economy.

The Group of United Officers (GOU) seized power in a coup in June 1943, and set up a ruling military council, or **junta**. The GOU believed that the government was not only weak and corrupt, but that it was also not nationalistic enough to oppose international intervention or manipulation. The GOU outlawed strikes, dissolved many unions, took over universities and imprisoned members of the **Communist Party**. They intended to establish a strong, central government that would support industry, ensure social order and promote national interests over international ones.

### Vice President Juan Perón

One of the GOU officers was Juan Perón. He was appointed Minister of Labour in December 1943, and believed that positive relations between workers and the government were essential to avoid a national revolution.

#### KEY TERMS

**Second World War** In the context of Europe, a conflict that began in September 1939 and continued through May 1945.

**Allied Powers** Military allies against Germany, Italy and Japan among others which included at different times France, the UK, the USA, the Soviet Union and others.

**Axis Powers** Primarily Germany, Italy and Japan at various points of the Second World War.

**Junta** A military committee or council that takes over a government, usually through a coup.

**Communist Party A** political party of socialists that followed the teachings of Karl Marx which hoped to establish a society of equal citizens from the working class.



Analyse how the context of Source A influences how it can be used to answer how Perón's authoritarian rule emerged.

### KEY FIGURE

**Pedro Pablo Ramírez (1884–1962)** was an Argentinian army general who served as the *de facto* president of Argentina from 1943 to 1944. He came to power after leading a military coup which overthrew the civilian government. His authoritarian regime maintained a policy of neutrality during the Second World War, a stance that ultimately strained relations with the Allied Powers. International pressure and internal military friction led to his resignation, paving the way for the rise of Juan Perón.



Examine how the *perspective* in Source B can be used to answer how Perón's authoritarian rule emerged. According to Source B, what was the only way to prevent a violent revolution in Argentina?

### SOURCE A

Excerpt from a speech by Perón in August 1945

With our exaggerated tolerance, we have won the right to repress them violently. And from now on we establish as a permanent rule for our movement: Whoever in any place tries to disturb order against the constituted authorities, or against the law and the constitution, may be killed by any Argentinian. The watchword for every Peronista, whether alone or within an organization, is to answer a violent act with another violent act.

The military installed General **Pedro Pablo Ramírez** as president. Under intense US pressure to join the Allies in the Second World War, Ramírez ended Argentina's relationships with Japan and Germany, the enemies of the USA, in 1944. The GOU was outraged by US interference in Argentina's foreign policy and Ramírez was soon removed by other officers, including Perón. He was replaced by General Edelmiro Julián Farrell, but Perón remained Minister of Labour. Perón was elevated to vice president for his role and in this position, his policies made him popular with workers and poor peasants (see page 000).

Perón believed that supporting workers would prevent a revolution. As Minister of Labour, Perón formed close contact with workers and unions, and worked to implement new laws to protect workers, raise wages and extend government welfare benefits.

### SOURCE B

Excerpt from a speech by Perón in April 1945

If we fail to carry out the peaceful revolution, the people themselves will take the road of violent revolution. The solution to the whole problem is social justice [fair treatment] towards the masses. Naturally this is not a popular idea among rich men. But they are their own worst enemies. Better offer 30% now, than within two years, or perhaps even months, to risk losing all they have, including their ears.

### Perón's arrest, October 1945

Other military officers in the GOU began to see Perón and his popularity as a threat to their collective military leadership. Some liberal political parties, Catholics and the *estancieros* class were increasingly concerned with his influence as well. The US ambassador publicly stated that he had concerns with what he viewed as Perón's fascist ideology. President Farrell, who Perón had helped bring to power, was forced to demand Perón's resignation from all his posts on 9 October 1945. On 12 October, Perón was arrested and imprisoned.

### *Día de la Lealtad (Loyalty Day), 17 October 1945*

Perón's arrest sparked an unprecedented wave of popular mobilization. Labour unions, galvanized by Perón's partner (and later wife),

 **KEY TERMS**

**Descamisados** Meaning 'shirtless ones', it was a term used by the Peróns to affectionately refer to the urban poor workers who formed the core of their support.

**Justicialism** (*Justicialismo*) A mass movement and ideology in Argentina based on the ideas of Juan and Eva Perón.

What does Source C indicate about Perón's supporters?


**ATL** **Communication skills**

Write a short essay explaining how Argentina's post-war instability, nationalism and labour movements helped Perón rise to power. Use clear structure, subheadings and supporting evidence to make the argument accessible to a general reader. *This activity strengthens communication skills by focusing on clarity, structure and audience awareness, which will help students express complex causes of authoritarian rule in a coherent format.*

Eva Duarte (see page 000), organized massive strikes and demonstrations. Hundreds of thousands of workers, the '*descamisados*' (shirtless ones), gathered in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires and demanded Perón's release. The scale and intensity of these demonstrations overwhelmed the military government, who feared a popular revolt. The military decided to release him. Perón then addressed the massive crowd from the balcony of the Presidential Palace, announcing he would run for presidency with the Partido Laborista (Labour Party). This marked the birth of the Peronist Movement, or **justicialism**.

**SOURCE C**

Photograph of Perón's supporters, the *descamisados*, on Loyalty Day

**EXAM PRACTICE****Paper 2, Section A (6 marks)**

Analyse how historical events can result in multiple consequences. Use **one** example from your thematic study to support your response.

**Presidential election, February 1946**

To consolidate support from the working class, as Minister of Labour, Perón decreed in December 1945 that all business owners were required to pay special Christmas bonuses to their workers. Conservative landowners, military officers and the US government opposed him and supported other candidates.

His relationship with the USA was strained as the US government believed his pro-worker stance might mean that Perón could fall under the influence of the Soviet Union, the USA's Cold War rival. The US ambassador openly supported the Democratic Union opposition candidate, causing nationalists to support Perón against US interference. Perón won the vote in February 1946, polling 11% ahead of his nearest rival, leading to his first presidential term.

To what extent did economic factors play a role in the emergence of Juan Perón's rule?

## Economic factors

Economic factors were critical in the rise of Perón. While economic disparity and over-reliance on agricultural exports by Argentina were ongoing problems, the Great Depression led to a terrible economic crisis. Export income fell by 60% between 1929 and 1932 and international investment collapsed. The government's tax income rapidly fell with the reduction in exports, and the country faced rampant inflation on imported goods.

The United Kingdom was the most important market for Argentinian products. To preserve this vital economic link, while trade barriers were increasingly used to protect local economies, Argentina signed the Roca–Runciman Treaty of 1933 with the UK. The treaty:

- exempted some British companies from taxation and reduced taxation on British imports into Argentina
- ensured that Argentina would only buy coal from the UK, which was needed for trains and electricity generation
- ensured that British companies would receive preferential treatment compared to those of other countries
- guaranteed that the UK would import the same amount of Argentinian beef as 1932 for the next three years
- promised that 85% of beef exported to the UK would be through overseas-owned (mostly British) meat packers
- indicated that the UK would pay for Argentinian imports by paying off Argentina's national debt to the UK, instead of in cash or exchange of products.

The treaty served to save the crucial beef export industry from complete collapse during the Great Depression. The provisions of the agreement were controversial in Argentina, as it worked against Argentina's economic independence. For many it was a national humiliation and led to calls for **autarky**, or economic self-sufficiency. There was a surge of nationalism and anti-British sentiment throughout Argentina.

With calls for autarky, the government began to develop the industrial sector further through investment. As limited government funds were diverted into factories to reduce imports, there were increasing job opportunities for the many impoverished urban workers. Many farm labourers left agriculture and moved into cities for these jobs as well.



### KEY TERM

**Autarky** A state of national economic independence and self-sufficiency.

In 1935, there were approximately 500,000 urban workers in Argentina, but by 1945, there were over 1 million. With their growing numbers, they increasingly became more politically involved and economically important.

#### SOURCE D

Excerpt from *Juan Perón and the Reshaping of Argentina*, edited by Frederick C Turner and José Enrique Miguens

[The internal migration from rural areas of Argentina to industrial centres] has created an industrial working class of some 7 million people. In a national population of 27 million, this large class of urban workers makes Argentina unique within the Latin American framework. The working-class population has gradually become concentrated, and sooner or later it would have imposed its presence upon the political scene. In Perón, this mass found a leader and a program which facilitated its transformation into the greatest single power behind national politics.

The government used its limited funds to also purchase unsold agricultural products so that the *estancieros* would not lose income. This led to mass urban protests. The main organization representing the workers, the Confederación General del Trabajo (**General Confederation of Labour**, CGT), became an influential movement during this period.

As Minister of Labour, Perón worked to improve the economic conditions of workers and peasants. In 1944, he issued the 'Estatuto del Peón Rural', or 'Statute of the Rural Worker', that mandated rights to farmworkers. These poor peasants were now guaranteed minimum wages, stable employment, paid holidays and improved working conditions, including adequate housing and food. This earned Perón the loyalty of this large segment of the rural workforce, as this legislation led to immediate improvement in their lives and a new sense of dignity. However, by supporting workers, he was resented by many business and ranch owners.

#### CONCEPT SPOTLIGHT

##### Significance

One reason the emergence of Perón's authoritarian rule holds historical significance is because it reshaped Argentina's political and social landscape. His rise reflected wider discontent with inequality and elite dominance. Perón's appeal to workers and nationalists marked a turning point in Argentinian history: he forged a new political movement, Peronism, that remains influential today. This highlights how historians assign significance not only because of the immediate effects of an event, but also because of long-term impacts. Why might Perón's movement still resonate decades later?

Explain how the content of Source D can be used to answer how Perón's authoritarian rule emerged. According to Source D, to what extent did migration impact Argentinian politics?



#### TOK

Argentina's economic crisis during the Great Depression is often illustrated through statistics: a 60% drop in export income, rising inflation and British control of over 85% of beef exports. These figures help us understand the economic instability that fuelled public anger and support for Perón's rise. However, while this data highlights the structural pressures behind authoritarian emergence, it may also obscure the experiences of workers, nationalists and industrialists whose responses shaped events. How does the use of numbers, statistics, graphs and other quantitative instruments affect the way knowledge in history is understood and valued?

#### KEY TERM

**General Confederation of Labour** The largest labour organization in Argentina through 1946, that was then merged with the state. Its membership formed the core of the Peronist Party.

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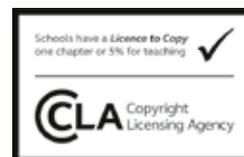
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