

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

The City Hotel  
Córdoba, Córdoba  
April 7, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The Plaza Mayo is not the most beautiful in the city of Buenos Aires. In this respect it is surpassed by many plazas in some of the lesser cities of the Argentine. But in the sense of being significant, it is by all odds the most important in the Republic. It is as important to the Argentine as the courthouse square is to a county in the states. It takes a while to begin to appreciate the importance of the Plaza Mayo. At one end of it there is the Casa Rosada which travelers are erroneously informed is the home of the President of the Argentine Republic. Probably they are told this so that they won't ask too many questions and get themselves all mixed up with whys and wherefores. The travel booklets simply state that the Casa Rosada is the Pink House and can be compared with the White House, the home of the President of the United States. The Casa Rosada is big enough as buildings go in this country. And it is pink enough at a distance; but if one inspects it closely, he finds that the pink is peeling off. There is talk of razing the building and constructing a more imposing one in its place. The Casa Rosada is an administration building, housing many important offices of the Republic. It is a place where the president and his ministers often confer. It is the symbol of government. For this reason there are always sentries standing guard, all of them wearing the traditional army sword which would be a nuisance if military action were required. At the other end of the plaza there is a building which looks like it might have been, in its day, the Cabildo of the Spanish. If it were the old town hall, it certainly isn't anymore, for I have seen blue-uniformed students and nuns marching out of it on their way to the Cathedral. The Cathedral, which doesn't look like a cathedral at all, faces the Plaza Mayo from another direction. The Cathedral has some modern architectural traits. But in the main it appears as if it might be a duplicate of one of the buildings which the Public Works Administration put up in Rome during the reign of Caesar Augustus. Facing the plaza from the fourth side is a row of cheap pensión hotels. And on that same side on a corner is a sidewalk cafe. The Plaza Mayo, as plazas go, seems very average. Nevertheless, it is the hub of the Argentine Republic.

There is scarcely an Argentine newsreel which does not picture some public parade, pageant or reunion being held in the Plaza Mayo. Invariably Argentine history happens in the Plaza Mayo. Take the 1930 revolution for example. There had not been a revolution in 40 years; and, of course, there has not been one since. The main stroke of state took place in the Plaza Mayo. A handful of soldiers marched into the plaza, shot two volleys into the air and proclaimed the revolution to be a fact accomplished. People in the nearby hotels closed the windows so that the noise would not disturb them, discreetly waited for the newspapers to explain the commotion. In all the Republic there were less than five fatalities, all more or less accidental. It was nothing like an Anglo-Saxon revolution which, as history proves, is a more serious business. The Plaza Mayo, in a word, is the place where all national sorrow, patriotism and religion are "exteriorized." It is a part of Latin psychology to make evident these things; whereas it is the Anglo-Saxon make-up to show sorrow by silence, patriotism by respect and religion by reverence. For that reason, no doubt, we have no use for the word which I have enclosed with quotation marks. Not long ago former President Alvear died. There was, of course, the almost exclusive dedication of newspapers for three days to the "exteriorization" of his life. But the height of all "exteriorization" was in the Plaza Mayo where funeral services were held. The "exteriorization" in part consisted of elegant, black, horse-drawn hearses, special black carriages carrying flowers and a tremendous crowd which almost overflowed the plaza itself.

Holy Week, Semana Santa, has just ended and with it the most continuous and magnificent "exteriorization" of all. The "exteriorization" began on Palm Sunday

when, for the first time since Christmas, all the churches were filled, in spite of the fact that services lasted three hours. Palm Sunday all the churches held processions, symbolic of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Throughout the week there were other processions and symbolic ceremonies in the streets and public plazas. But the biggest "exteriorization" was Holy Thursday when the Plaza Mayo was jammed with the faithful. Thinking it would not be out of the way I brought my camera with me to the Plaza Mayo to take a few pictures of the gathering. I opened it and was surprised to hear a hissing sound of disapproval. Argentines are usually great at taking pictures, for that is a kind of "exteriorization." I noted, however, that none of them had their cameras with them on this occasion. Obviously I was guilty of sacrilege. Nevertheless, press photographers were having a field day taking photos from one of the police stands. Nothing daunted by my first experience I climbed the police stand and took a picture or two. This action put me in a different category, for I was given a hand climbing into the stand and climbing down from it. The sermon of the afternoon--the topic was Christian Peace--was not delivered by the Apostolic Delegate, a Bishop or a Monsignor, but by a simple priest. He had a tremendous voice. The public address system was working well and the words of the speaker thundered out of the microphones into the ears of the multitude with great volume. I was surprised at the form of the exteriorization which followed the sermon. Some of the people made the sign of the cross, as was proper. The others clapped their hands and voiced their approval.

Another interesting feature of the Plaza Mayo is its sidewalk cafe. It seems to be the place where all the foreigners in Buenos Aires meet, talk over their business and discuss the war. The genuine Argentines who stop there can be picked out by their rapid-fire talk, the gestures which are a part of their speech and the dice game called Bidu in which they are invariably engaged. The Germans are probably reading El Pampero, the axis sensation sheet of the city with its 120-point-or-larger headlines; or conversing in their language which, strangely enough, at first sound has a tone like English. In fact one soon accustoms himself to guessing the nationality of the sidewalk crowd by the murmurs of their conversation which reaches his ears. There are always a number of English, seeming quite unconcerned about the march of affairs, with the Herald or the Standard in their hands. There are French, Japanese, North Americans, every nationality. I doubt if there is another place quite like this in the entire Argentine. Why it is picked I do not know unless it is because there are hotels nearby, the subway systems are at hand and the colectivo buses circle the plaza as they prepare to dash out to the suburbs of the city.

It was here that I met two Argentine communists one evening. All the tables were taken, so I invited them to sit down with me. With no prompting or curiosity on my part, they began to explain their ideas on Argentine politics. At that I did get some information from them which appears to be correct. They said that the Radicals had 67 deputies in the new Congress, the Socialists 13 and that the Concordancia had the rest. The Concordancia is composed of the P. D. N., Castillo's party, and smaller conservative party groups which form a bloc in the Congress. The Radical-Socialist, or liberal group, has the slightest kind of a majority in the Congress. First test of the parties is to come soon when a president of the Chamber of Deputies is elected. Cantilo, a Radical, is now serving and will be the candidate of the Radical party again. The Socialists say it is their turn, however, and are threatening to "bolt" on this issue if the Radicals do not support a candidate of their choosing. If there is a "bolt", the Conservatives will name the President of the Chamber. In the Argentine, if the communists with whom I conversed are representative of their type, communism has more national than international characteristics. Aside from the discussion on the political line-up, these two chaps devoted themselves to giving a double-barreled lecture on the "Spiritual Side of Democracy." It was the same lecture which I have heard young P. D. N. Argentines give. I am certain that the lecture did not originate in Moscow.

Dr. Carl Taylor, rural sociologist on leave from the United States Department of Agriculture, has arrived in the Argentine to make a comprehensive survey of the

country. I have had a long talk with Dr. Taylor and find that he and I have many of the same interests. Dr. Taylor said he might visit me in Córdoba after I am well settled. I hope he can do so, for I should like to compare notes with him. The day before I left for Córdoba, George Christensen of Mendoza showed up and announced that Carlos Lazetti had just arrived from his trip to the states. Lazetti, a professor at the University of Cuyo, visited a number of eastern universities with Dr. Correas, the rector of Cuyo University. Both Lazetti and Dr. Correas were especially impressed by the "movement and dynamic tempo" which seemed to characterize all phases of North American life.

I arrived in Córdoba Saturday morning and presented myself at ICANA, the Argentine-North American Cultural Institute which Mr. Griffiths of the U. S. Embassy contacted to assist me in entering the School of Economic Sciences of the University of Córdoba. ICANA is an Argentine Institute which provides facilities for Argentines interested in learning English and obtaining a better understanding of the United States. Men who are interested in the promotion of the Institute seem to be Argentines who have business connections with U. S. companies. Thanks to ICANA and Mr. Griffiths I have been very cordially received in Córdoba. Yesterday and today I conferred with professors of the University about the studies which would be of most advantage to me. I shall know tomorrow the courses I am to take. I had a talk with a professor on a subject in which he is much interested--Argentina's opinion of the United States. He said he would like me to give some thought to the subject, as a kind of side issue, and suggested I would be in an unusually good position to get at some of the below-the-surface factors. He outlined some of his own general ideas on Argentina's opinion of US. Many Argentines, he said, have a positive distrust of the United States. They ask if there is a difference between German, English or North American imperialism. There are a lot of aspects to this question. Many Argentines, he noted, like the administration's hemispheric policy and think it is a sincere one. But will it change with the fortunes of politics? Or what value is political democracy without economic democracy? And so on. The Argentine feels that he will have to suffer a certain amount of "imperialism" for time to come because of his need of foreign capital, of foreign markets and his dependence on manufacturing nations for machinery and finished products. For that reason perhaps he has built up a counter-force of proud patriotism which he knows is inadequate to face and conquer all his economic problems. For that reason he is proud of the Industria Argentina and stamps many products with it that are made within the country through the grace of foreign capital. The average Argentine does not know the North American, the professor said. Yet, the North American is a definite type to him. He is the Yanqui, the hard-boiled business man, the dollar chaser, the representative of the corporation which has no soul. The North American is a combination of a financial promoter with not too many scruples and the Hollywood set with a high divorce rate, said the professor in summation. Argentines, he suggested, do not know what is between New York and Hollywood. They must if they are to change their opinion. It struck me that the professor put the case a bit strong. But his statement is interesting, very interesting!

Sincerely,

*Francis Herron*