

The City Hotel
Córdoba, Córdoba
May 9, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Invariably when I wish to discuss a problem at the Statistics Institute I talk it over with one student who is rated by Dr. Yocca to be the most able of all. The background of this student is ordinary. His parents came to Argentina thirty years ago from the Piedmont region of Italy. They became chacra farmers. The student of whom I speak was born and raised on a Córdoba chacra. Difficult though it was for his parents, they sent him to the grade schools and then to the Colegio Nacional, the Argentine high school. As a teen-age young man, attracted by the comparatively better standards of the city and convinced that nothing but a life of frustration and poverty would be his fortune if he followed chacra-agriculture as a life's pursuit, he came to Córdoba to work his way through the University. At year's end he will receive his degree from the School of Economic Sciences and, if all goes well, will become an instructor. He feels, perhaps rightly so, that the success which he may reasonably expect is limited by the nature of things. He is modest. He does not speak of his "capacidad." He is articulate, boundlessly so, for he is a master of what must be the most expressive language in existence. He has been to Buenos Aires no more than twice and has been in only four provinces of the Republic during his life. He is a "colonial," not a Porteño, by environment and in basic philosophy. Hungry for learning, he has read all books within his reach on the history, the economic and social problems of his country. To him what happens to the world is only important insofar as it will affect the Argentine. He tries to be constructively critical of his country in which he has a profound pride. If you ask him what the important problems of the Argentine are and how they can be solved, he will reply that there are many but that the overshadowing one is "politics." I am almost reluctant to use that word even in quoting him, because politics as we know and think of it is not the same thing. Argentines must see and discuss the "political" side of every important question, just as they must consider the "spiritual" approach. That done, as a general rule, it is quite safe to discount heavily the "political" and "spiritual" considerations and view the other factors on a firmer basis. This is all a foreword. In the following paragraphs I am going to sketch as faithfully as I can what this young Argentine thinks are the important problems of his country and what the future holds for the Argentine.

The conservatives have been in power since the revolution of 1930. The conservatives are, first and foremost, the landowners, the aristocracy of the rich, alluvial Province of Buenos Aires. They are the latifundistas of other provinces, the sugar and cotton plantation owners of the north, the bodega owners of San Juan and Mendoza, the bureaucrats of the government. They are the infinite few. A thousand landowners possess a third part of the Province of Buenos Aires. Hundreds more of them own square league upon square league of land. They were fearful in 1930, and are equally fearful today, that a liberalism born of the times and conditions might give land a social interpretation. They are fearful that the natural wealth of the various parts of the Republic will be developed and that independent regions will flourish and overwhelm them politically. Therefore they wanted, and they desire to keep, the reins of government in their own hands--these people whose ancestors obtained land through the beneficence of the Royal Cédula, by reason of the tyrannical decrees of the Great Restorer, Don Juan Manuel Rosas, or through the generosity of the Republic. Literally, the forefathers of the landed class staked out and claimed the wealth of the country. The government has not counter-claimed it or asked them to give much. Scarcely more than a hundred years ago men went out into the pampa, herded together thousands of cimarron cattle which roamed the plains, branded them and claimed them and the land upon which they grazed for themselves. It was never the intent, after the republic had been proclaimed, that the land be a gift to be

handed down as property generation after generation. It was the intent that land be rented to individuals by the government until their death and then should be returned to the public domain, eventually to be used for colonization purposes. Today Argentina has a landed aristocracy which is the economic and political ruler of peons and chacra farmers. Relatively few can hope to buy land. There are interest rates at five and six percent. Estanciero leases will permit no mixed farming by chacareros, without which they cannot attain financial independence. Grain farming has failed to break up the estancias. In effect, the chacarero sows and reaps grain as the peon of the estanciero.

The feeling of change, as it is today, was in the ambiente in 1930. It was manifested in the provinces of Córdoba, Santa Fe and Entre Ríos, rich agricultural provinces like Buenos Aires. These provinces were the stronghold of the Radical Party. Within Buenos Aires province itself large cities were growing in which the power of the Radical and Socialistic parties was becoming stronger and stronger. "Urbanization" was becoming a political threat. What if the people of these cities should organize cohesively and should outvote the "infinite few?" Yes, "the more it changes, the more it is the same thing." In a way it is history all over again. Before Argentina's war with Spain, the traders of Cadiz thought of Argentina as a colony (and a poor one because it had no precious metals), existing for the glory and advantage of the king. The decrees of the Cabildo of Buenos Aires carried out that policy, forbidding trade with other countries than Spain. This policy was decreed in spite of the fact that the merchants of Cadiz did not have ships enough to haul all the hides and agricultural riches of the Argentine to the parts of the world where they could be used and where they would be in demand. Hence a lively trade--called smuggling--thrived with the Portuguese, the Dutch and English. There, as plain as day, is the economic cause of the war with Spain. Vice-regal politics exists today. Freedom of trade and opportunity are not possible in many parts of the Republic. The conservatives are not anxious that the rest of the country develop and upset their political house of cards. They want to keep political and economic authority concentrated in Buenos Aires, just like the merchants of Cadiz once looked to their king for supreme power.

That is why the sugar producers of Jujuy, Salta and Tucumán provinces are "trustified." The national government, through its junta on sugar production, assigns quotas to the various provinces. To maintain these quotas the sugar trust must see that their provinces hew to the conservative party line. It is common knowledge that under a free, non-quota, competitive system that the northern part of Santa Fe Province would win much of the domestic sugar market, because the land is more suitable to sugar production and nearer the consuming market. There is also the question of three territories, those of Río Negro, La Pampa and El Chaco. These territories have sufficient population to become provinces and to merit representation in the national Congress. Is there fear of their political power? Is that why they are not recognized as provinces? If their politics should be of the liberal brand, conservatism would have no show. What would happen to the fruit industry of conservative Mendoza, for example, if Río Negro obtained recognition as a province and another regulatory junta had to change its quotas? The irrigated area of Río Negro is close to the sea and cheap transportation. Then, too, there are the visionary projects which are in the minds of many. The greatest single project--the project of which each single project is a part--is the decentralization of the Argentine. What are these projects? They are railroads and highways up and down the republic, across the Andes, into Brazil, up into Bolivia and the ore-bearing mountains of Jujuy and Los Andes. They are hydro-electric projects along the Andes and at Iguazú Falls. There is the canal which would unite the rivers Pilcomayo, Paraná and Río Dulce, thereby bringing needed water to Salta and Santiago del Estero.

(All this my chacra-born acquaintance says liberal "politics" can bring to this country. Ask him, as I asked him, when will conservative politics end, this

politics of the "infinite few!" Ask him, as I did, when will the time come that land and property will have a more social meaning in fact and colonization on a solid, mixed farming basis begin! He will look at you, as he looked at me, in a way that you will realize that his mind is of a different turn. For probably to you, as it is to me, when is as soon as possible; for him when is tomorrow. Insist that he set aside his beautiful theory, as he will do for the asking, and this is what he sees.)

In twenty years Argentina has shown no dramatic development, in spite of many natural opportunities. Argentine economists and sociologists complain that the country has "grown old before its time." There is something deeper than politics, something that is a part of people and manifests itself in what we for simplicity's sake call politics. It is the characteristic of tranquility, perhaps the most forceful weapon against dynamic development and change that there is. Change to us Argentines has a terrible strangeness. It is something beyond political parties. We must borrow the ambition of positive action from nations which have made a mark in the world. We have passed something like fifty colonization laws during the comparatively short history of the Republic, most of them with a Utopian preamble. Much of our other legislation sounds better than it really is. Is the Argentine willing in the next two score years to undergo the immigration and growing pains and to face the vast social changes necessary for it to become a developed country of thirty or forty million people? We shall probably think twice before we shall admit such forces to have free play. Perhaps, if we analyze ourselves, many of us think about many things just like the conservatives. Since the war for independence, Argentina has not, it is true, been a colony of Spain or been exploited by the merchants of Cadiz. But she has been a colony of the world, confused of late by the trade wars and the actual wars which have robbed her of traditional markets, thrust change upon her and panicked her into organizing juntas of regulation at home, thus adding to her bureaucracy, her budget and her confusion. As a colony we must sell meat and grains. Whatever we may say against the landed class and the landed system, we admire the cattle industry, something in which the Argentine leads the world. We know that the landed system has been the reason for the excellence of the livestock industry. We do not expect a quick transition from this system to another. Perhaps it will be best for all if it comes slowly, lentamente. The next decade or two, no matter what influences may begin to modify our national character, our prosperity will mostly depend on our status as a colony of the world, and we will be buffeted by all the whims and caprices, the hates and jealousies of the great commercial powers. What a difference this reality is from the way some other peoples, including many in the United States, look at us, pronouncing us without reason or sober judgment to be fascists. We are not a military people. We are anything but a military people. We are confused and troubled and do not know quite what to do about it.

Sincerely,

Francis Herson