



# La Cámpora in Argentina

The Rise of New Vanguard Generation and the Road to Ruin

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## ABSTRACT

How a group of young radical utopians has captured the Argentine state, collapsed the economy and institutionalized authoritarian rule

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## Introduction

Since Aerolíneas Argentinas, Argentina's flagship carrier, was re-nationalized in 2008, its losses have grown from \$1 million a day to \$2 million a day. Earlier this year President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, rather than sacking the director for adding thousands of new jobs for unqualified bureaucrats and being unable to give any account of how the company's revenue was spent, dropped by to praise the leadership for their outstanding service to the nation. The overall debt of the carrier since it returned to government hands is more than \$3 billion, and it loses money with every flight.<sup>1</sup>

As Argentina faces a steep economic crisis – with 2013 inflation estimated to reach 30%<sup>2</sup> -- and growing social unrest, it is unlikely there will be any normal corrective action. The engineers of the nation's road to economic ruin are a tightly knit group of young professionals steeped in Marxist economic theory and brought together by a history of student activism and protest. Their strategies have bankrupted the nation while putting Argentina on a path of increasing confrontation with the United States and Europe, and the international financial and investment community, all while strengthening ties with Iran, Venezuela and its populist allies.

The group, known as La Cámpora, has gained unprecedented access to the president through her son, Máximo Kirchner, 36. Máximo has positioned himself as the hermetic president's primary gatekeeper and possible heir to a political dynasty that is famous for prizing loyalty above all else. Máximo's power increased dramatically when Néstor Kirchner, Máximo's father and Cristina's predecessor in the presidency, died in 2010.

The group provided the shock troops when the Fernández de Kirchner government blocked the distribution of independent newspapers, and to counter marches by government opponents while building a vast social media empire aimed at countering non-government media and the broadly and vaguely defined "enemies" – those who don't agree with the president.

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<sup>1</sup> "Aerolineas Argentinas se cae a pique con el control de La Cámpora," Hoy en la Noticia, March 28, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nasdaq.com/article/argentina-says-inflation-at-111-economists-say-its-26-20130215-00757>



Figure 1: Máximo Kirchner and his mother, President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner

The rise and growing influence of La Cámpora, is among the least understood but most important aspects of the Fernández de Kirchner's government, with direct ties back to the turbulent and violent "dirty war" between the Montonero Marxists guerillas and successive dictatorships in the 1970s. In acknowledgement of their absolute loyalty to her, the president fondly refers to the *Camporistas* as her "little soldiers." Rather than reporting through normal cabinet chains of command, its leaders respond only to the president and Máximo, operating as a parallel power structure and severely undermining the institutional oversight of their actions.

In exchange for loyalty, and trust in her 36-year-old son -- who until recently was more known for his affinity for video games, being a super fan of the Racing soccer club and high living in his home province of Santa Cruz -- the president asks for no accountability for the hundreds of millions of dollars in government money the *Camporistas* now control.

Máximo, whose long-time pejorative nickname was *Mínimo* ('minimum', a play on his name which means 'maximum'), is the oldest child of a couple where both parents served as president in part of the most enduring political partnerships in recent Latin American history, and he is often mentioned as a successor to his mother. He was raised on Peronist literature and has long been the undisguised favorite of his mother.<sup>3</sup>

The objectives of Fernández de Kirchner, Máximo and La Cámpora are to radically remake the Argentine state and to establish a permanent presence across the key nodes of government power and finance, and in social institutions such as education, long after the current administration ends. The "Project," as they call the current radical experiment in economic and social engineering, would in effect then be permanent.

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<sup>3</sup> Juana Libedinsky, "Heredarás mi Reino," Vanity Fair, December 2010.

The goals of the Project are clearly stated in their literature :

*We should consider ourselves the privileged of history. Today we must fight the ideological battle of all time: a country for the few or for the many. We have the opportunity to continue the historic struggle for the redistribution of income and social justice.*

*Let us retake the banners of struggle of our people throughout history: human rights, the creation of the Great Country of Latin America, industrial sovereignty, the force of organized workers and social justice. But above all else, politics as a tool of all people for social transformation.<sup>4</sup>*



Figure 2: President Fernández de Kirchner speaks in front of a La Cámpora banner

Already the group's leaders have engineered the hiring of thousands of loyal followers into the government bureaucracy -- a bureaucracy that has grown by more than 940,000 people since the Kirchner governments began in 2003, a rate of 278 people per day. The primary prerequisite to landing a stable, well-paid

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<sup>4</sup> This quote is taken from the La Cámpora homepage as a description of what the organization itself defines as its goals and objectives, accessed at: <http://www.lacampora.org/la-campora/>

government job in recent years has been the indispensable letter of recommendation from an important *Camporista*.<sup>5</sup>

## La Cámpora and the State

The Project holds as its core belief that Fernández de Kirchner and her closest followers represent not just those that elected them but the sum of the entire state of Argentina. Therefore, if one is in opposition to the government, one is in opposition to the state itself. “La Cámpora is in the heart of the government that has confused itself with being the state... these young people belong to a movement that adheres to Cristina, they are her foot soldiers,” noted one study of the group.<sup>6</sup>

La Cámpora is now the dominant wing of the governing Peronist party (officially the *Partido Justicialista*, or Judicialist Party), founded by Juan Domingo Perón, Argentina’s legendary populist president who ruled intermittently from 1946 through the 1976. His mixture of radical populism, Fascism and Marxism led to a legacy of economic boom and collapse. His first wife, Evita is idolized by *Camporistas*, and the president often portrays herself as the heir of the former first lady.

Almost anything the La Cámpora leadership does -- from expropriating foreign companies to attacking the independent media, appropriating state assets, or remaking elementary and high school curricula to emphasize the greatness of the Kirchner family and ideology -- is viewed by the group as the will of the state they run.

The group’s slogan is “Let’s go for everything” (*Vamos por todo*), an articulation of their vision of themselves as being a transformational generation in Argentina’s history based largely on what it is against: “neo-liberal” economic reforms, traditional education, traditional media, and party structures; and the payment of the foreign debt (especially to the so-called “vulture funds” that have refused to accept the steeply discounted offer on the \$100 billion in sovereign debt arising from Argentina’s 2001 default). The strong anti-U.S. sentiment stems in part from the U.S. support of the military juntas of the 1970s and early 1980s, responsible for significant human rights abuses. Political power is a sort of morality play in which good is used to overcome evil with no compromise possible.

While La Cámpora is not a secret society – the organization has multiple websites, a flag, parliamentarians and candidates, an identifiable leadership and a penchant for wearing identifying clothing when carrying out mass actions – its inner workings have remained relatively unknown, in part because most of its members refuse to

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<sup>5</sup> Diego Cabot, “La Cámpora, llave del empleo público: la agrupación se ha convertido en una ponderosa bolsa de empleo,” *La Nación*, August 19, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Di Marco, op cit,, p. 39.

give interviews to any medium not under their direct control. Given that the highest virtue of its members is loyalty to Fernández de Kirchner, her son, and the group, providing information to the outside world is tantamount to treason.

Lilian de Riz, a well-known Argentinian political scientist, wrote:

*What does Kirchnerismo do? It mobilizes the working class and offers them a platform of democracy, equality, dignity. One has to recognize that. But because it is a movement the political leader is the government. And the government is the State. And the State is the Nation. Because of that, everything else, those who are outside, are crooks, gorillas, the oligarchy, who don't want the people to be happy. Kirchner has been a great destroyer of the political party system because she has used all methods to destroy them, without mercy. In her ideology there is no concept of a balance that leads to negotiation.<sup>7</sup>*

## Nahón, Kicilloff and The Rise of New Economics

One of the most prolific authors and intellectual leaders of La C mpora, in terms of economic theory, Cecilia Nah n, was recently named ambassador to Washington after a short career in the foreign ministry where she helped upend the traditional and widely respected professional diplomatic corps.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 3: President Fern ndez de Kirchner and Cecilia Nah n, ambassador to the United States.**

<sup>7</sup>Laura Di Marco, La C mpora: Historia secreta de los herederos de N stor y Cristina Kirchner. Editorial Sudam rica, Buenos Aires, 2012, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Dinatetele, "Nah n lleva a Washington la diplomacia nacional y popular," La Naci n, December 24, 2012.

During her time in a think tank tightly linked to La Cámpora she co-authored numerous academic articles with Axel Kicillof, the messianic former professor of Marxist economics and now a recognized leader of La Cámpora, who is deputy minister of finance and on the board of important state corporations. He is often described as a Marxist or the “left of the left,” while Nahón, with a Masters in Economics from the London School of Economics, is widely recognized as one of the intellectual leaders of the group.

The young, photogenic Kicillof is Fernández de Kirchner’s main political adviser and the chief architect of the 2012 expropriation the holdings of the Spanish oil company Repsol. In defending the action, Kicillof mocked the concept of the “rule of law,” saying the concept only served to protect big businesses.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 4: Axel Kicillof, architect of Argentina's economic policies, with President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner**

Kicillof, who sports open collar shirts and long sideburns, is the man behind the policies of constrictive import and export controls and currency controls. He previously served as the chief financial officer of Aerolíneas Argentinas as it fell into

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<sup>9</sup> Hillary Burke, “Leftist Economist Masterminds Argentina’s YPF Grab,” Reuters news agency, April 12, 2012, accessed at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/20/us-argentina-ypf-kicillof-idUSBRE83J14X20120420>

financial ruin.<sup>10</sup> Kicillof has bragged that he has the president “hypnotized,” visits her presidential office several times a week, and talks with her at least once a day by telephone.<sup>11</sup>

With Kicillof’s help, Nahón was named head of the economic relations at the ministry of foreign relations. In 2012 she traveled with the president to the G-20 summit in Mexico, where she also accompanied the president on her famous shopping trips and acted as her “Sherpa” as one observer noted. That trip convinced the president, who has few personal friends, that Nahón was ready for a bigger role, sending her to defend Argentina’s positions in various international meetings before naming her to the ambassadorship in Washington.

The relationship of Kicillof and Nahón illustrates the tight knit nature of the leadership of La Cámpora. Both were active in founding the 1990s university student movement called “Dumb but no Too Dumb” (*Tontos pero no Tanto* -- TNT),<sup>12</sup> characterized by its hard-left ideology, its disregard for institutions, and disdain for the republican system of government. The economic premise of TNT was that capitalists have no ethics and therefore the state should define what the parameters of their economic action can be.<sup>13</sup>

“If Kicillof was the chairman of TNT, Cecilia Nahón was its CEO,” wrote one biographer of Kicillof, noting Kicillof’s disdain for traditional economics which grew during his student days, and his firm belief that he is a scientist, called on to solve Argentina’s problems., a job for which he views himself as uniquely suited.<sup>14</sup>

They are also firm proponents of the “Argentinization” of the economy, harking back to an idealized time when Argentina was almost totally self-sufficient industrially, and in food and fuel supplies, and enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the world. This vision is rooted in the 1970s, a time of turmoil when the Peronist party had an armed wing, the Montoneros, willing to attack opponents. Their group, including the president, are often called “*setentistas*” or ‘those of the 1970s’ because of the enduring belief that it is necessary to return to that model of the earlier Peronist period.

The Montoneros began as an armed branch of the Peronist movement and its official name is *Movimiento Peronista Montonero* or MPM. During the 1960s and 1970s, when Perón was in exile, the group carried out a series of armed actions, attacks,

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<sup>10</sup> “Argentina Politics: Radical Peronist youth gain clout,” The Economist Intelligence Unit, May 9, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Ezequiel Burgo, “Axel Kicillof: Los secretos del guru económico que logró hipnotizar a Cristina,” Clarín, April 15, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Sol Prieto, “La Resistente,” Página 12, December 28, 2012.

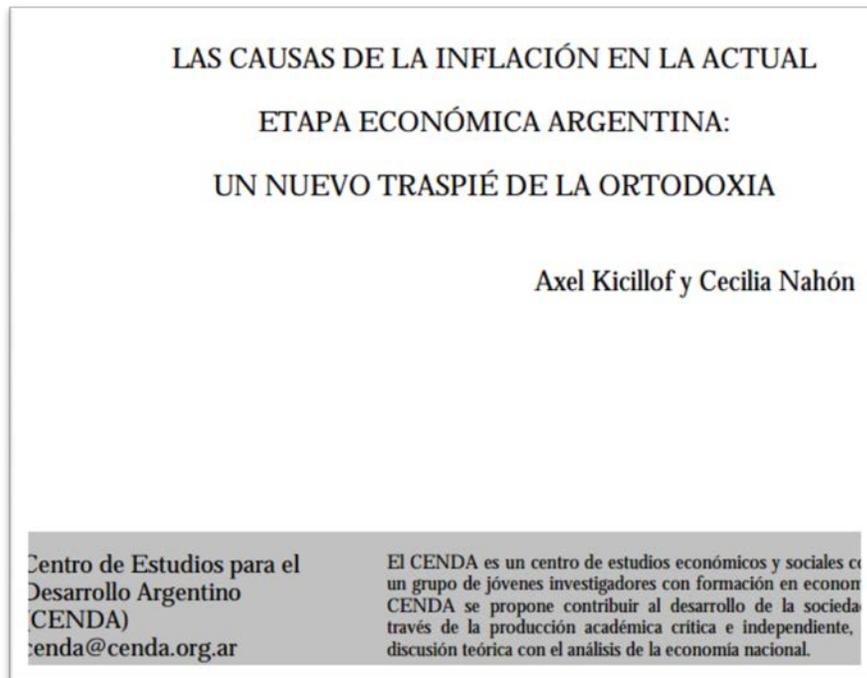
<sup>13</sup> Laura di Marco, “Que significa la llegada de La Cámpora a la embajada de EEUU,” La Nación, December 12, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Ezequiel Burgos, [El Creyente: ¿Quién es Axel Kicillof?](#), Buenos Aires, Grupo Editorial Planeta, 2012.

kidnappings and bank robberies, some targeting U.S. companies and officials, and other international interests, aimed at destabilizing the government and creating a “Socialist Fatherland.”<sup>15</sup>

However, when Perón returned from exile in 1973, his party was badly split and he eventually sided with the right wing faction, expelling the Montoneros from the party in 1974. After Perón’s death in 1974 his widow Isabel governed for two years, before being ousted by the military. She outlawed the Montoneros, and the military junta that ousted her waged an aggressive war against them, in the process kidnapping, murdering and “disappearing” thousands of civilians.<sup>16</sup>

Together Kicillof and Nahón founded a think tank called the Center for the Study of Argentine Development (*Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Argentino – CENDA*), an incubator for *Camporistas* entering the government and state agencies. Nahón is the godmother of one of Kicillof’s children, and her sister works directly for Kicillof in the ministry of economics. Together Nahón and Kicillof have published more than a dozen academic papers together. Nahón, in turn, is married to Sergio García, one of the senior managers of Aerolíneas Argentinas.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>15</sup> Princeton University Archive, accessed at:

<http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Montoneros.html>

<sup>16</sup> “Montoneros,” Encyclopedia Britanica, accessed at:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/391049/Montonero>

<sup>17</sup> “Nueva embajadora en EEUU: Cecilia Nahón reporta a Kicillof y se apoya en La Cámpora,” Opinion Popular, December 18, 2012.

Among the many academic papers co-authored by Kicillof and Nahon is a 2006 study in which they claimed to have discovered new evidence about the true causes of Argentine inflation, an arcane and idiosyncratic new interpretation of data from the prior years. They claimed their research was a “new setback” for the orthodox economic concepts practiced daily in central banks of well-managed economies around the world.

Kicillof “insisted that increasing the money supply doesn't generate inflation,” noted Ezequiel Burgos, his biographer. “If there is one thing that 99 percent of the economists in the world agree on, it is that if the number of dollars in circulation increases, sooner or later, there will be pressure on prices and inflation will increase.” Burgos goes on to say that,

*Kicillof believes in heterodox economics. In Aerolíneas Argentinas. In production to supply the internal market. In controlling business. In the existence of strategic sectors. In the power of the state to help these strategic sectors. In incentivizing demand. And, most importantly, that he is the person capable of reversing the influence held over us by the system of capitalist production.*

*Kicillof does not believe in the economics taught in the majority of the world. He doesn't believe that increasing the money supply causes inflation. He doesn't believe in lowering the rate of inflation, because this stifles the level of [economic] activity. He doesn't believe in a competitive exchange rate and exporting basic staples. He doesn't believe in INDEC [the national inflation index]. He doesn't believe in the business climate. He doesn't believe in journalists. He doesn't believe in anyone who criticizes him.*

Burgos and others note that Kicillof cobbles his theories together from smatterings of original economic classics by people such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Karl Marx and Maynard Keynes. He largely ignores secondary research, even that conducted by Nobel-winning figures. Perhaps this explains why he feels so comfortable dismissing the accepted economic consensus.<sup>18</sup>

Kicillof and Nahón's theories, despite the catastrophic real world-results, have come to dominate Argentina's economic policies, creating a populist movement that is overtly hostile to foreign investment, international norms and governance, and designed to benefit La Cámpora's project.

"Over the last ten years the businessmen have done what they wanted," Kicillof reportedly said after taking his job in the Economics ministry, summing up his

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<sup>18</sup> Burgos, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

economic policies. “Do you know why? Because I wasn't there...Now I'm going to control them.”<sup>19</sup>

Concern has mounted not only about government resources that the *Camporistas* already control, but increasingly about their reach into the broader levers of state power.

Through Nahón and others, the Kicillof wing of La Cámpora has gained significant influence in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The group also has key leadership positions in the Ministry of Justice, helping drive the Fernández de Kirchner government's deeply controversial efforts to reform the judiciary and strip it of much of its independence. The measures, broadly opposed nationally and internationally as an executive power grab, would remove the one independent branch of government that has often opposed Fernández de Kirchner's excesses. While the measures are likely to pass, they are also likely to be declared unconstitutional by the very Supreme Court they seek to demolish.

Those coming from a militant university background, including Nahón, are a driving force behind the Argentine government's increasingly populist and anti-American tone, its rapprochement with Iran, its growing defiance of international rulings, and, the economic policies which are leading to the highest inflation rate in Latin America, massive capital flight, and withering foreign investment.

Working through Máximo -- one of the few people the president trusts -- the *Camporistas* have been given almost free rein to carry out their economic and social theories, including: the expropriation of foreign investments; export and import controls broadly criticized for hindering free trade and violating international agreements to which Argentina is a signatory; price controls on basic goods; and vocal and ongoing attacks against the independent media with the intent to put them out of business.

The group has also been at the forefront of building a cult of personality around former president Néstor Kirchner, the president's late husband and predecessor, and Máximo's father. Néstor is being promoted in death as the “Collective Hero,” one who embodies the virtues of the whole society; his image is often paired with that of the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, cast as immortal heroes.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Burgos, op cit., p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> See for example the official La Cámpora website:  
<http://www.lacampora.org/2013/03/26/continua-el-homenaje-a-nestor-y-chavez-en-todo-el-pais/>



Figure 5: La Cámpora graffiti of Néstor Kirchner and Hugo Chávez, taken from La Cámpora website

## A Brief History of La Cámpora

According to numerous published accounts, La Cámpora was formed almost immediately following the election of Néstor Kirchner in 2003, an election he won with about 22 percent of the popular vote. In order to bolster his political standing he asked Máximo, who had shown little inclination for the political life that consumed his parents, to form a youth wing of the Peronist Party faction that he led.<sup>21</sup>

The group takes its name in honor of Héctor José Cámpora, a Peronist loyalist who served as president of Argentina for 49 days in 1973. He ran for president as a stand-in for Juan Perón, who was living in exile and whose candidacy the military junta had banned.

After moving the nation quickly to the left and opening ties to Cuba, Cámpora lifted the ban on Perón's candidacy and resigned, opening the way for new elections and Perón's final stint as president. Affectionately known in Peronist circles as 'The Uncle' (*El Tío*), Cámpora is revered for his unwavering loyalty to Perón. He is often described as a person who could have betrayed Perón and clung to power, but

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<sup>21</sup> Di Marco, op cit.

instead sacrificed his own ambition on the altar of Peronismo, a model for the Kirchner administrations.

The history of La Cámpora as a movement is in many ways the history of Máximo, a reclusive young man with long straight hair and a strong resemblance to his father. Máximo had failed to finish numerous academic endeavors, including sports journalism and law school, and was not inclined either to the public life or to politics. He has never given an interview in the media, and prefers his hometown to the capital.

He stayed in the family's home state of Santa Cruz, administering the First Family's ever growing real estate and business empire. He was most known for being a rabid fan of Racing, soccer club based in Avellaneda, a Buenos Aires suburb, and for the hours spent playing video games, but not as a political thinker.<sup>22</sup>

While the youth group was officially formed in 2004, it remained on the political fringe, while the traditional Peronist party consolidated its political party around Kirchner and his wife. While aggressively implementing poverty reduction programs and moving toward state intervention in the economy, Néstor was in many ways an establishment politician who courted the traditional political bosses.

It wasn't until Néstor left office in 2007 that La Cámpora began to make serious inroads in the government, as Néstor took an interest in the group, holding informal political education classes at his country home. He often spoke of the need for a "generational change" in the political leadership of Argentina.

But the real turning point came when Néstor died in 2010 and his wife turned to Máximo for emotional and political support.

The president had expressed to many that the old political guard had not taken care of her husband and that new political blood was needed in the system. At Néstor's funeral it was widely noted that the Máximo controlled access to his mother, keeping at a distance some leading politicians who arrived to offer their condolences while giving a prominent role to *Camporistas*.<sup>23</sup>

"That gesture [of denying access to the old political guard at the funeral] was that of a young man taking for himself the role of guardian not just of the first lady, but of the country, was revealing to many analysts," wrote on reporter. "It was clear that Máximo had come to stay."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Máximo Kirchner, the 'favorite son' with ever growing influence in his mother's administration," Mercosur, January 28, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Di Marco, op cit, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> Libedinsky, op cit.

La C mpera also put out statements of unconditional support for Fern ndez de Kirchner and organized marches of solidarity.



Figure 6: M ximo Kirchner and his mother President Fern ndez de Kirchner at the funeral of N stor Kirchner.

M ximo seized the moment and began acting as the chief gatekeeper to his mother, who has few close personal friends, trusted few of the old guard and had relied on her husband for economic advice. With N stor’s absence leaving a significant vacuum, M ximo immediately began placing his *Camporista* allies in key positions across the government. Almost all were under 40, and were quickly dubbed *Los Pibes* or ‘The Kids’. Before making important decisions Cristina was heard to say with increasing frequency that she would have to consult with M ximo.

Among those pushed to the forefront of his mother’s government were some whose parents been “disappeared” by the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, including the children of leaders of the Montonero guerrilla group.

Among the most prominent *Camporista* leaders today is Juan Cabandi , a national deputy, whose parents were “disappeared” by the military. He was born in a famous clandestine prison and was taken from his mother, who was subsequently murdered, when he was only 20 days old. He was raised by a policeman’s son. In

2004 he was identified as “recovered child #77,” by human rights groups tracing the fate of children kidnapped by the military.<sup>25</sup>

## La Cámpora Structure and State Capture

While Máximo is the undisputed leader of La Cámpora, and Kicillof’s star is ascendant, the group works through a directorate, all of whom are in the Congress or occupy senior government positions. The core group is made up of Andrés Larroque, nicknamed “the Crow”; Eduardo de Pedro, known as Wado; Juan Cabandié; Mariano Recalde; Jose María Ottavis; and Myra Mendoza, the wife of Ottavis and the only woman in the inner circle.

Other leaders include Hernán Lorenzino, the minister of economics and Kicillof’s titular boss; and Guillermo Moreno, who wields considerable influence in the economic planning. Another leading economic voice, Iván Hyen, died in mysterious circumstances in Montevideo, Uruguay while traveling with the president to a multinational meeting.<sup>26</sup>

Larroque, de Pedro and Mendoza were all elected to chamber of deputies (the lower house of congress, comprised of 257 members) in 2011, while Cabandié won reelection, and Ottavis became vice president of the lower house of Buenos Aires state, a significant post in the internal politics of Argentina. Since 2009, Recalde has been the manager of Aerolíneas Argentinas. Overall, 11 *Camporistas* were elected to the chamber of deputies in the 2011 elections in which Fernández de Kirchner was re-elected.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to control of the national airline, leaders of La Cámpora have been given significant posts within every major revenue-generating part of the government, including the national pension fund, the energy sector, railroads and government media. While few are heads of cabinet departments, the group reports directly to the president, bypassing normal hierarchical structures. In some cases the *Camporistas* make higher salaries than their nominal bosses.<sup>28</sup>

This gives the group access to billions of dollars in state funds that are often spent with virtually no accountability. At the same time, the government’s deficit has ballooned, the economy has stumbled, and Argentina’s non-compliance with international law has become more vocal.

It does not seem to matter that nothing under their economic stewardship has had even modest success. In addition to the well-documented woes of the airline, the

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<sup>25</sup> Di Marco, op cit., pp. 300-301.

<sup>26</sup> Di Marco, op. cit. p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Gabriela Perdomo. “The President in Black”. Maclean’s. March 26, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Cabot, op cit.

YPF oil company, now under the direct control of Kicillof, has fared abysmally. Its third quarter earnings in 2012 were 51 percent less than in the same period in 2011, before the Spanish investment was expropriated. Overall, the company's value dropped by more than 26 percent in 2012.<sup>29</sup>

At the National Administration of Social Security (*Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social -- ANSES*), the renationalized pension plan which controls hundreds of millions of dollars, the number of employees has grown 137 percent in the past two years. Many of those hired are political cronies of Diego Bossio, a longtime *Camporista* who also enjoys close relations with vice president Amado Boudou, who took over in 2011. This has led to an exodus of career bureaucrats, many of whom complained to reporters.<sup>30</sup> ANSES's payroll has risen from 2.3 billion pesos to 5.4 billion under his management.

In addition to ANSES, *Camporistas* are now in charge of Foncap, a micro-business financing mechanism that dispenses several million dollars annually; and Enarsa, the state energy firm founded in 2004 by Néstor Kirchner. *Camporistas* have filled the ranks of each of these agencies, often in leadership positions: Jose Ottavis was the director at Foncap, and Gastón Ghioni is the newly named finance manager at Enarsa.<sup>31</sup>

In order to fill government jobs the Fernández de Kirchner administration has relied on two parallel tracks. The first is to hire contractors -- nicknamed the "Resolution 48 workers" because of the presidential resolution which allowed the hiring -- by the thousands with relatively low salaries. In November 2012, the government announced that 5,000 new public jobs had been authorized and would be filled in an expedited manner because of the urgent need to fill the slots. The measure was designed to favor the contractors hired by the *Camporistas* as temporary hires.<sup>32</sup>

The net result is that thousands of *Camporistas* will remain burrowed into the government bureaucracy long after the government changes and a new administration attempts to implement its own programs. While political appointments are normal in any democratic government, the packing of the bureaucracy with people whose primary loyalty is to a political movement goes far beyond the norm of participatory democracy.

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<sup>29</sup> Pablo Fernández Blanco, "En el tercer trimestre YPF ganó 51% menos que cuando manejaban los Eskenzai," La Nación, November 8, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Maia Jastreblansky, "La Cámpora hace una "revolución" en la Anses", La Nación, October 4, 2011, accessed from: [www.lanacion.com.ar/1411557-el-plan-de-la-campora-para-revolucionar-la-anses](http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1411557-el-plan-de-la-campora-para-revolucionar-la-anses)

<sup>31</sup> Unsigned. "La Cámpora avanza en la petrolera Enarsa y le quita poder a De Vido". La Nación. June 18, 2012.

<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1483091-la-campora-avanza-en-la-petrolera-enarsa-y-le-quita-poder-a-de-vido>

<sup>32</sup> Mariano Obarrio, "Autorizan 5000 nuevos ingresos en el Estado," La Nación, April 3, 2013. See also the official decree, "Decisión Administrativa 1126.2012, Jefatura Gabinete de Ministros, published November 11, 2012.

## La Campora in the Schools

In addition to trying to ensure their presence in the federal and state bureaucracies after the president’s term, the president and the *Camporistas* are taking a page from the playbooks of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez: the indoctrination of youth to support the Project.

Over the past two years, the government of Fernandez de Kirchner has launched an effort to cultivate support for her agenda in an arena that has typically been off-limits to political activism: Argentina’s public school system.

Reports of the federal government’s political activism began to emerge as early as February 2011.<sup>33</sup> During a campaign ostensibly undertaken by three cabinet agencies to encourage Argentine youths to paint their schools --known as “1000 Flowers Bloom, We Paint 1000 Schools”-- *Camporistas* arrived in support of the initiative, delivering small grants to the schools to pay for the project and providing manpower to help with the painting.<sup>34</sup> However, they were interested in more than mere upkeep. According to reports, they arrived at the schools designated for painting with La Campora paraphernalia, which they handed out to students. At the entrance of at least one school, a pair of Campora flags were flying by the end of the day’s activities.

In July 2011, the 1000 Flowers initiative was repeated. By then the initiative had turned into an open recruiting effort, with older students targeting younger students, selling membership in La Campora as a simple community service exercise. While the first painting initiative was directed at middle schools, the subsequent recruiting effort targeted elementary students as well.<sup>35</sup>

More recently, the government’s activities in the schools have been more openly political. La Campora led the first ever congress of the Federation of High School Students (*Federacion de Estudiantes Secundarios*) in Buenos Aires in May of 2012, which was attended by 200 students from 42 schools.<sup>36</sup> While merely preliminary, the congress elected leaders (one of whom is the son of Campora loyalist Dante Gullo), established a “Plan of Action and Struggle”, and set up an organizational and communications apparatus. The congress also released a statement in opposition to

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<sup>33</sup> Unsigned. “La Campora izo sus banderas en varias escuelas a cambio de actos solidarios”. February 19, 2011. [www.perfil.com/contenidos/2011/02/18/noticia\\_0016.html](http://www.perfil.com/contenidos/2011/02/18/noticia_0016.html)

<sup>34</sup> Project homepage. <http://www.florecen1000flores.com.ar/>

<sup>35</sup> Mariano Confalonieri. “La Campora Kids” convoca a los chicos de la primaria para realizar accion social”. Perfil. September 18, 2011.

[www.perfil.com/ediciones/2011/9/edicion\\_610/contenidos/noticia\\_0029.html](http://www.perfil.com/ediciones/2011/9/edicion_610/contenidos/noticia_0029.html)

<sup>36</sup> Unsigned. “F.E.S.: El proyecto nacional en las aulas de la Ciudad!”. La Campora homepage. [www.lacampora.org/2012/05/07/f-e-s-el-proyecto-nacional-en-las-aulas-de-la-ciudad/](http://www.lacampora.org/2012/05/07/f-e-s-el-proyecto-nacional-en-las-aulas-de-la-ciudad/)

the policies of Buenos Aires Mayor Mauricio Macri, one of the Kirchner's foremost political opponents.

In August, reports emerged of *Camporistas* leading political workshops on “*El Héroe Colectivo*”, or the Collective Hero, held in middle schools around the country.<sup>37</sup> The workshops were based in large part on a board game featuring Eternauta, a popular Argentine comic character who has been adopted by La Cámpora as their mascot, although in their version Néstor Kirchner's face replaces the original.

Eternauta is also the emblem of the 1000 Flowers campaign. According to subsequent reports, the game was set up so that players could advance only by drawing cards that celebrated the accomplishments of Fernández de Kirchner and her coterie. The board games were also emblazoned with the presidential seal.<sup>38</sup>

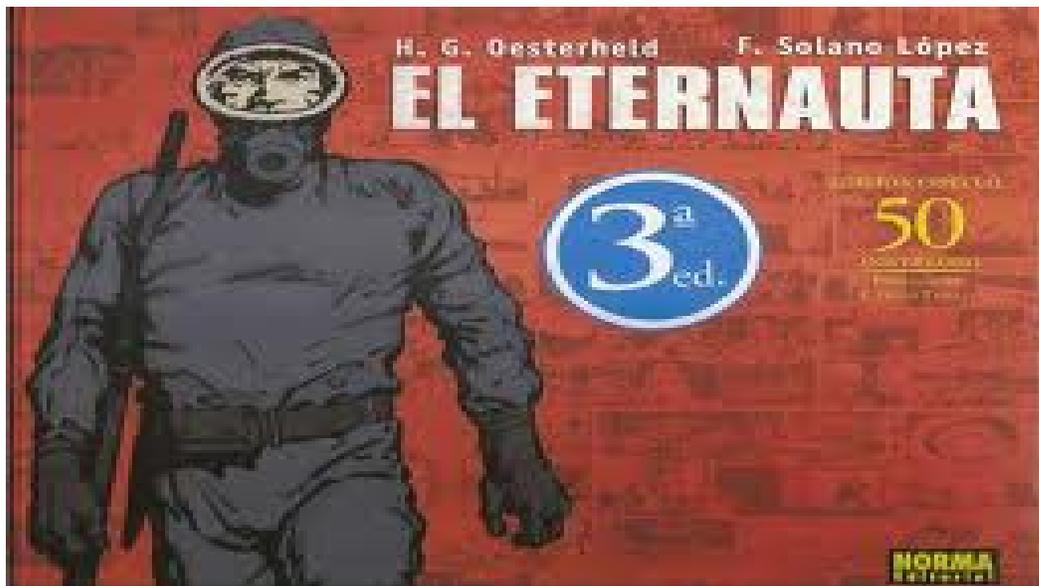


Figure 7: The original Eternauta cartoon superhero beloved in Argentina

<sup>37</sup> Laura Serra. "La Cámpora realiza talleres políticos en escuelas públicas", August 12, 2012. La Nación. [www.lanacion.com.ar/1498643-la-campora-realiza-talleres-politicos-en-escuelas-publicas](http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1498643-la-campora-realiza-talleres-politicos-en-escuelas-publicas)

<sup>38</sup> Unsigned. "Informe: La Cámpora sigue adoctrinando en las escuelas". September 6, 2012. Los Andes. [www.losandes.com.ar/notas/2012/9/6/informe-campora-sigue-adoctrinando-escuelas-665348.asp](http://www.losandes.com.ar/notas/2012/9/6/informe-campora-sigue-adoctrinando-escuelas-665348.asp)



Figure 8: The cartoon hero Eternauta with the face of N stor Kirchner. The placard reads "N stor Lives in the People."

According to students, the workshops emphasized the importance of working as a group, rather than as individuals. Students told reporters that Kirchner was described as a hero who helped bring Argentina out of its darkest days -- i.e., the financial and economic crisis of 2001-02-- and it was made clear that the approved collective path was that of the Kirchner de Fern ndez government.

A handful of different *Camporistas* have been identified as having a key role in driving the schoolhouse proselytization. At the Buenos Aires congress, Juan Cabandi  and Dante Gullo, both of them deputies in the national congress with long ties to la C mpora, were present. Other outlets have identified Andr s Larroque and Franco Vitali -- respectively, a deputy, and the undersecretary for institutional reform and democratic strengthening -- as the primary forces behind the project. Fern ndez de Kirchner also appeared to endorse the workshops in a press conference days after the news emerged in August.<sup>39</sup> Though she did not mention the workshops by name, she said she supported efforts to "shape Argentines committed to their country".

The reports of the Eternauta sessions in particular, and the presence of politics in the schools in general, provoked criticism from many officials not associated with the Fern ndez de Kirchner government. Opposition deputies requested official

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<sup>39</sup> Unsigned. "Larroque y Vitali, los impulsores del proyecto". La Naci n. August 12, 2012. [www.lanacion.com.ar/1498636-larroque-y-vitali-los-impulsores-del-proyecto](http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1498636-larroque-y-vitali-los-impulsores-del-proyecto)

reporting on the presence of La C mpora in the schools, and pointed out that the display of political symbols is explicitly prohibited in many school districts.<sup>40</sup> The director of education in Godoy Cruz, Mendoza, complained that the efforts take advantage of the lack of funding for schools; when *Camporistas* show up with even small sums of money, cash-strapped principals are often inclined to allow them what they want.<sup>41</sup>

La C mpora's presence in the schools may not be merely a long-term effort to build support. Indeed, introducing students to *Kirchnerismo* could have a more direct electoral impact, should one of the government's most recent initiatives come to fruition: the pro-government congressional bloc is pushing a measure to lower the voting age to 16 years old, down from its present minimum of 18 years of age.<sup>42</sup> Such a move would add an estimated 1.4 million people to the electorate, an increase of almost 6 percent, most of them just a couple years removed (if at all) from the middle schools where la C mpora is making in-roads.

La C mpora's activities in the schools emulate similar efforts by highly politicized governments elsewhere in the region. In recent years, the most famous such case has been Hugo Ch vez's Venezuela. The *Misiones* that popped up around Venezuela, endowed with the dual purpose of boosting support for *chavismo* while serving the poor in a number of capacities, had a significant educational element. The Ch vez government also founded more than a dozen new universities, most of them with a conspicuous Socialist or Bolivarian bent.<sup>43</sup> The Ch vez model, in turn, borrowed heavily from the political indoctrination campaigns of the Cuban revolution.

## The Road Ahead

Despite the significant inroads made by La C mpora leaders in recent years, there are significant indications that the group's future is not assured.

One of the main problems is that the popularity of the Fern ndez de Kirchner government has plummeted over the past year, from 54 percent when she was

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<sup>40</sup> Unsigned. "Antonijevich pide informes sobre "La Campora" en las escuelas". Baradero Te Informa. August 12, 2012. [www.baraderoteinforma.com.ar/antonijevich-pide-informes-sobre-la-campora-en-las-escuelas/](http://www.baraderoteinforma.com.ar/antonijevich-pide-informes-sobre-la-campora-en-las-escuelas/)

Unsigned. "En Tandil, las denuncias de los estudiantes desataron la pol mica". La Naci n. August 12, 2012. [www.lanacion.com.ar/1498637-en-tandil-las-denuncias-de-los-estudiantes-desataron-la-polemica](http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1498637-en-tandil-las-denuncias-de-los-estudiantes-desataron-la-polemica)

<sup>41</sup> Unsigned. "La C mpora en las escuelas: habla la funcionaria mendocina que sali  en el programa de Lanata". MDZ Pol tica. August 12, 2012. [www.mdzol.com/mdz/nota/409757-la-campora-en-las-escuelas-habla-la-funcionaria-mendocina-que-salio-en-el-programa-de-lanata/](http://www.mdzol.com/mdz/nota/409757-la-campora-en-las-escuelas-habla-la-funcionaria-mendocina-que-salio-en-el-programa-de-lanata/)

<sup>42</sup> Unsigned. "Pol mica en Argentina por proyecto de ley para votar desde los 16 a os". AFP. August 30, 2012. [noticias.terra.com.ar/elecciones/2011/polemica-en-argentina-por-proyecto-de-ley-para-votar-desde-los-16-anos,763d9f5c83879310VgnVCM5000009ccceb0aRCRD.html](http://noticias.terra.com.ar/elecciones/2011/polemica-en-argentina-por-proyecto-de-ley-para-votar-desde-los-16-anos,763d9f5c83879310VgnVCM5000009ccceb0aRCRD.html)

<sup>43</sup> Steven Mather. "Chavez Hails Revolutionary Progress in Education". Venezuela Analysis. July 27, 2010. [venezuelanalysis.com/news/5526](http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5526)

elected, to about 30 percent. Inflation is on the rise and remains the highest in Latin America; capital flight is ongoing; foreign investment has stagnated; monetary reserves have dropped to their lowest level in a decade; and, the efforts to control currency exchange have caused the value of the dollar on the black market to shoot up to almost 100 percent above the official rate. The “blue dollar” as the black market currency is known, now sells for 10 pesos, while the official rate is 5 pesos.

Protests against the government-backed judicial reforms, called by the political opposition on April 18, mobilized more than a million protesters banging pots and pans in the streets of the capital, and other hundreds of thousands of others in important urban centers. It was widely deemed the largest street protest in the past decade.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, La C mpora’s candidates were routed in a significant statewide internal party election in Santa Cruz, Fern ndez de Kirchner’s home state -- a campaign into which the national government poured resources to boost its young allies. The winning candidate slate, led by Peronist governor Daniel Peralta, ran a campaign directly attacking La C mpora and won 80 percent of the slots that were up for a vote.

After the victory Peralta’s camp announced that “Peralta swept the elections and M ximo Kirchner lost the elections in Santa Cruz.”<sup>45</sup> What was widely commented on in the media was that La C mpora’s election machine was directly in the hands of M ximo, who didn’t even bother to show up to vote on election day.

The elections demonstrated two of La C mpora’s enduring weakness, despite its access to state coffers and the levers of state power it controls.

The first weakness is that the group has little control of electoral territory and has a difficult time getting its people elected. This is in part because the Peronist party structures, while remaining at least nominally loyal to the president, have little use for the *Camporistas* whose avowed aim is to push them out of power. Though creaky, the party machine still controls the get-out-the vote organizations and party structures, especially outside the capital region. While able to mobilize supporters on the streets of Buenos Aires, La Campora remains a movement in formation rather than a mature political machine able to broadly contest power at the local and state levels.

The second weakness is that the leadership is highly centralized and identified exclusively with the president and M ximo, so any of the failures of policy hurt Fern ndez de Kirchner directly. As her own base continues to shrink, the president has turned increasingly to the group whose economic policies have brought

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<sup>44</sup> Unsigned, “Cacerolazo 18A: Multitudinarias protestas contra el gobierno en todo el pa s,” La Naci n, April 19, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Luc a Salinas, “Peralta declar  derrotada a La C mpora de M ximo Kirchner,” Clar n, April 1, 2013.

significant hardship and whose international posture has brought increasing isolation.

As political analyst Sergio Berensztein noted after the massive marches of April 18, the protests are the result

*Of the abrupt and abrasive presidential leadership that marginalizes or ignores the opposition forces and strangles the republican system of government. We have a president who is still quite popular and absolutely legitimate, but one who has decided to isolate herself and pursue an agenda that is personalist and transformational, an agenda she carries out without debate, even with her closest advisers, and one she preferred to hide from voters in 2011.*

*Our politics are characterized by an exaggerated and dangerous concentration of power in the head of the executive branch....The unbridled and undisguised ambition for power and money of the Kirchner family has twisted the spirit of the constitution, turning a hyper presidentialist system in a true authoritarian enclave that destroys the balance of power in the government and its system of checks and balances.<sup>46</sup>*

At the heart of the presidency is La Cámpora and its radical transformational agenda, one that is accelerating the economic decline of this well-endowed and once-prospering nation, while also casting a lengthening shadow over its democracy.

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<sup>46</sup> Sergio Berensztein, "Las cacerolas y la trampa de la catharsis colectiva," La Nación, April 21, 2013.