

Eva Perón

Born: May 7, 1919

Los Toldos, Argentina

Died: July 26, 1952

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Argentine political leader

Eva Perón was the second wife and political partner of President Juan Perón (1895–1974) of Argentina. An important political figure in her own right, she was known for her campaign for female suffrage (the right to vote), her support of organized labor groups, and her organization of a vast social welfare program that benefited and gained the support of the lower classes.

Early years

The youngest of five children of Juan Duarte and Juana Ibarguren, María Eva Duarte was born on May 7, 1919, in the little village of Los Toldos in Buenos Aires province, Argentina. Following the death of her father, the family moved to the larger nearby town of Junín, where her mother ran a boarding house. At the age of sixteen, Evita, as she was often called, left high school after two years and went to Buenos Aires with the dream of becoming an actress. Lacking any training in the theater, she obtained a few small parts in motion pictures and on the radio. She was finally employed on a regular basis with one of the largest radio stations in Buenos Aires making 150 pesos every month. Her pay had increased to five thousand pesos every month by 1943 and jumped to thirty-five thousand pesos per month in 1944.

Partners with Perón

In 1943 Eva met Colonel Juan Perón, who had assumed the post of secretary of labor and social welfare in the military government that had recently come to power. Eva developed a close relationship with the widowed Perón, who was beginning to organize the Argentine workers in support of his own bid for the presidency. Becoming Perón's loyal political confidante (one with whom secrets are trusted) and partner, she helped him increase his support among the masses. In October 1945, after Perón was arrested

and put in prison by a group of military men who did not support him, she helped to organize a mass demonstration that led to his release. A few days later, on October 21, 1945, Eva and Juan Perón were married.

Now politically stronger than ever, Perón became the government candidate in the February 1946 presidential election. Señora de Perón participated actively in the campaign, something no Argentine woman had ever done. She directed her appeal to the less privileged groups of Argentine society, whom she labeled "los descamisados" (the shirtless ones).

Influence in political affairs

Following Perón's election, Eva began to play an increasingly important role in the political affairs of the nation. During the early months of the Perón administration she launched an active campaign for national women's suffrage, which had been one of Perón's campaign promises. Due largely to her efforts, suffrage for women became law in 1947, and in 1951 women voted for the first time in a national election.

Eva also assumed the task of gathering the support of the working classes and controlling organized labor groups. Taking over a suite of offices in the Secretariate of Labor, Perón's former center of power, she used her influence to hire and fire ministers and top officials of the General Confederation of Labor, the chief labor organization in Argentina. Although not given the official title, she acted as the secretary of labor, supporting workers' demands for higher wages and backing a number of social welfare measures.

Helped the lower classes

Because Eva came from a lower-class background, she identified with the members of the working classes and was strongly committed to improving their lives. She devoted several hours every day to meeting with poor people and visiting hospitals, orphanages, and factories. She also supervised the newly created Ministry of Health, which built many new hospitals and established a successful program to fight different diseases.

A large part of Eva's work with the poor was carried out by the María Eva Duarte de Perón Welfare Foundation, established in June 1947. Its funds came from contributions, often obtained with force, from trade unions, businesses, and industrial firms. The

foundation grew into an enormous semiofficial welfare agency that distributed food, clothing, medicine, and money to needy people throughout Argentina and on occasion to those suffering from disasters in other Latin American countries.

Enjoying great popularity among the *descamisados*, Eva Perón helped greatly in maintaining the loyalty of the masses to the Perón administration. On the other hand, her program of social welfare and her campaign for female suffrage led to considerable opposition among the *gente bien* (upper class), to whom Eva was unacceptable because of her humble background and earlier activities. Eva was driven by the desire to master those members of the government that had rejected her, and she could be cruel and spiteful with her enemies.

Death and place in history

In June 1951 it was announced that Eva would be the vice presidential candidate on the reelection ticket with Perón in the upcoming national election. Eva's candidacy was strongly supported by the General Confederation of Labor, but opposition within the military and her own failing health caused her to decline the nomination. Already suffering from cancer, Eva died on July 26, 1952, at the age of thirty-two. After Eva's death, which produced a huge display of public grief, Perón's political fortunes began to decline. He was finally removed from office by a military takeover in September 1955.

Eva Perón's friends and enemies agreed that she was a woman of great personal charm. Her supporters have elevated her to popular sainthood as the champion of the lower classes. The favorable portrayal of her in the play *Evita*, first staged in 1978, and in the 1997 film of the same name, brought Eva to the forefront of the American public. By a large part of the officer corps of the military, however, she is greatly despised. There is still considerable difference of opinion regarding her true role in the Perón administration and her true place in Argentine history.

Source: <https://www.notablebiographies.com/Pe-Pu/Per-n-Eva.html>