In October 1983, Argentinians surprised themselves when they made moderate Raúl Alfonsin their president. That historic election marked the end of a seven-year military dictatorship and, possibly, the long domination of Argentinian politics by Juan Perón and his followers.

Can Argentina finally shed its 50-year-old reputation as "the bad boy of the Western Hemisphere"? asks Schumacher, a *New York Times* correspondent.

The nation has considerable assets. Its people enjoy the third highest standard of living in the Western Hemisphere (behind the United States and Canada); "literacy is high, poverty low, and racial divisions hardly exist." Argentina is the world's third largest grain salesman. But it has long been plagued by political factionalism and economic woes. During the past 40 years, 46 cabinet economic ministers have come and gone. Inflation since 1976 comes to a "mind-boggling" 259,400 percent. The most frightening statistic of all: Argentina owes $45 billion to foreign banks, making it the world's third largest debtor, behind Brazil and Mexico.

Alfonsin must solve Argentina's economic crisis if democracy is to survive. Waiting in the wings is the military, which has unseated six civilian governments since 1930. Another adversary is the Peronist party, created by dictator Juan Perón, who ruled from 1946 to 1955, and again from 1973 to his death in 1974. The Peronists are a disparate lot, spanning the ideological spectrum from Left to Right, but their power base is in the nation's strong labor unions. Any move by Alfonsin to restrain wages or impose austerity plays into the hands of his political foes.

The new president has enjoyed some success in wooing the Peronist faction led by Perón's third wife, Isabel. The forced retirements of half the nation's admirals and generals strengthened Alfonsin's control over the military, already shaken by its defeat in the 1982 Falklands War with Britain. Yet Argentina's domestic economic problems are daunting, Schumacher notes, and they are compounded by the demands for sacrifice by overseas creditors and the International Monetary Fund. Without Washington's financial aid and intercession with Argentina's impatient creditors, he concludes, Alfonsin's prospects are bleak.
The first manifestations of the tension began to appear after Egypt's defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, notes Ansari, a Johns Hopkins scholar. To counteract what they perceived as the nation's moral drift and defeatism, Muslim fundamentalists began forming jama'at, fraternal groups devoted to traditional Islamic ways. The rise in Muslim religious fervor aroused uneasiness among the Copts, a Christian sect numbering in 1976 between 2.3 million (says the government) and eight million (say the Copts) in a land of 36.6 million. How much room would there be for a Christian minority in a fundamentalist Muslim Egypt? The Cairo government long restricted the number of Copt churches and forbade Copts to proselytize their Muslim countrymen. In 1971, their frustration compounded by anxiety over Islamic fundamentalism, the Copts elected a militant pope, Shenouda III.

Soon thereafter, isolated outbursts of Muslim-Christian violence began. Ansari argues that Egypt's President Anwar Sadat exacerbated the strains by exploiting Muslim religious passions for political advantage. Following a 1980 state visit to the United States marred by the protests of vocal Copt demonstrators living there, Sadat accused Pope Shenouda of conspiring to undermine "the Islamic character of the state" and of aiming to carve out a separate Christian state in Egypt.

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Matters reached a head in June 1981, when Copts and Muslims clashed in a Cairo slum, and 17 people were left dead. That fall, Sadat felt obliged to crack down on both Christian and Muslim groups. He exiled Pope Shenouda, broke up militant organizations of both persuasions, and began to jail their leaders. To halt the arrests, members of the extremist Muslim Tanzim al-Jihad group gunned down Sadat on the sixth of October.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak seems to have learned the lesson of Sadat's death, Ansari says. He has a broad domestic political coalition and has avoided sectarian rhetoric. But Ansari fears that other Egyptian politicians may find it harder to resist appealing to Muslim religious passions to boost their own popularity.

**Whither Sweden?**

"The Rational Humanitarians" by Hans L. Zetterberg, in Daedalus (Winter 1984), American Academy of Arts and Sciences, P.O. Box 515, Canton, Mass. 02021.

For much of the 20th century, Sweden has served as the world's model of a welfare state. Now, however, it seems full of dire portents, writes Zetterberg, who heads the Swedish Institute of Opinion Research.

Sweden's welfare state is very much a reflection of the national character, he says, a special brew of rationalism and humanitarianism. Rationalism in the sense that the Swedes like to stick as close to facts as possible. "Political debate in Sweden deals primarily with technical questions," Zetterberg says. Swedes tend to be faintly embarrassed by discussions of values or religious faith.

Swedish rationalism and humanitarianism have become wedded to an unshakable faith in government that dates back centuries. In part because they were spared feudal rule and always had a voice in their government, Zetterberg says, the Swedes never developed deep skepticism about the state. They tend to "regard bureaucracy as reason and, therefore, justice incarnate."

That belief is a key ingredient in the nation's cradle-to-grave "organized humanitarianism." Medical and dental care are practically free, and no tuition is charged for education up to the Ph.D. level. The government gives newlyweds low-interest loans to set up housekeeping. The system imposes a heavy burden of taxation, but Zetterberg sees a more pernicious flaw. Humanitarianism of this kind, he says, "loses its heart." The average citizen "begins to believe that his fellows will be taken care of by the system without any effort on his part." Meanwhile, an overweening welfare bureaucracy increasingly segregates beneficiaries from everyday life. "Children are sent to day-nurseries; the unemployed, to retraining centers; . . . the aged, to old people's homes."

Zetterberg fears that despite its many triumphs, the Swedish welfare state will produce an enervated citizenry. "Today's nonmilitary high-tax society is about to give birth to the computerized, controlled one of tomorrow," he predicts. "We ought to be able to do better."