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The Mothers of Plaza De Mayo Final March

by LADB Staff

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Jan. 25 marked the final march of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, the human rights group that, for a quarter century, brought both domestic and global attention to the human rights abuses of the 1976-1983 Argentine military junta. The mothers of disappeared persons held their last 24-hour demonstration in the capitol plaza, saying it represented a positive change in their relation with the government.

"Now the enemy is no longer in the house of government" Hebe de Bonafini, leader of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, said they would still hold weekly silent vigils to demand information on their children's whereabouts. She said their "resistance protests" were over because "now there is no longer an enemy in the House of Government," meaning the presidential palace in Buenos Aires. Bonafini referred to the good relations the group enjoys with President Nestor Kirchner who has done much to revoke the immunity from prosecution of former military leaders. "First we had dictatorship, then those who sold the country, who negotiated," she said. "Now, we are now experiencing a very interesting political moment in the country and also at the Latin American level. Those who can't see it are blind."

The Madres pointed to a series of prosecutions and gestures by the Kirchner government (see NotiSur, 2003-08-08, 2004-04-02, and 2005-06-24) and other governments (see NotiSur, 1999-11-12, 2001-07-13, and 2005-04-29). "It isn't that we're changing the Madres," said Bonafini, but the political backdrop had changed. "If we are arriving at socialism by the ballot, it seems to me that we must bet on this Latin American and Argentine political moment."

The daylong protest began at 6 p.m., Jan. 25, 25 years after the first one began. About 70 mothers, between the ages of 74 and 93, marched, guarded by 300 police officials. Street musicians performed, and sympathizers were also in attendance. The mothers first began their silent protests in 1977, wearing white kerchiefs on their heads and holding up photos of their missing loved ones. The protest was a form of pressure against the government, with an annual march always ending in the capital plaza and a 24-hour vigil. The final "march of resistance" came after some 1,500 prior marches, most occurring every Thursday, when the Madres decided to come together.

The Thursday marches began in 1977, with the 24-hour vigils of resistance becoming an annual event after 1981. Between 10,000 and 30,000 people were killed or disappeared during the military governments of the 1970s and 1980s, for reasons ranging from political dissidence to being a low-ranking officer who questioned military abuses. Journalists and religious figures who spoke out against the regime disappeared, as did people who seemed to have no relation to politics whatsoever.

A minor controversy broke out over the decision to end the marches, with related groups like the Linea Fundadora saying they would march until they died. Group leader Nora Cortinas, joined

by three other mothers, said, "We are more than 80 years old, but we're not little old ladies....Our children are always expecting us, until the day we die, to keep fighting."

For Estela Carloto, president of the Abuelas (grandmothers) de la Plaza de Mayo, if advances "are being made positively, it is necessary to keep asking it's unknown where 30,000 disappeared persons are, all the killers aren't in jail, and we haven't found 500 stolen children." Bonafini said there was no contradiction. "I didn't say 'I prohibit marches.' The others may do as they wish." The Madres group, however, decided unanimously to finish with the annual, daylong vigil.

In addition to exposing the crimes of the military dictatorship, the Madres have played a significant role as a nongovernmental left-wing political force in Argentine and regional affairs (see NotiSur, 2001-02-02, 2004-07-30, and 2004-08-13).

Prosecutions, arrests continue

Although the marches of resistance have ended, arrests and prosecutions against officials of the military regime are ongoing. In Spain, prosecutors asked for a 17,000-year sentence against former repressor Ricardo Miguel Cavallo in January. The former military man faces charges for seven killings, 152 cases of injury, 407 cases of terrorism, and overseeing the servitude of kidnapped persons, among other accusations. In Spain, the maximum sentence a court can impose is 30 years, although the courts impose longer sentences symbolically.

Spanish police arrested a former Argentine police officer in Madrid wanted in connection with kidnappings and torture during his country's "dirty war" against leftist dissidents, authorities said Feb. 9. The man was identified as Ricardo Taddei, 63, by a police spokesman on condition of anonymity because the detainee is not allowed to be identified. He was arrested Feb. 8 on an international arrest warrant. Taddei is allegedly connected to 161 cases of kidnapping and torture, authorities said. Police said Taddei was an officer in the Argentine Federal Police in the clandestine detention centers between 1976 and 1979, where he worked as a guard and interrogator.

A Jewish businessman was among the people Taddei allegedly kidnapped and tortured, authorities said. His remains were discovered in a field outside Buenos Aires in the late 1980s. Taddei left the Argentine Federal Police in 1979 to enter the Army as a colonel, and he also worked in military intelligence, Spanish police said. He fled Argentina in 1985 after he was implicated in several court cases and came to live in Spain with his wife and child. Though Taddei was arrested on an international warrant, an official at Spain's National Court said the tribunal was studying whether he was wanted in Spain as part of an eight-year investigation by Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzon into alleged crimes against humanity in Argentina and neighboring Chile.

The Spanish government has the last word on extradition. Argentina's government is also preparing to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the start of the dictatorship on March 24, with public ceremonies and the republishing of the book *Nunca Mas*, the historic document drafted by the Comision Nacional sobre la Desaparicion de las Personas (CONADEP).

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