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Recommended Citation
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Category/Department: Argentina
Published: Friday, July 1, 2011

To establish and consolidate a dictatorship, it is necessary to combine the brute force of the military with the acquiescence of civilian authorities who fulfill the other part of the subjugation, giving an ideological foundation and republican cast to the government that emerges from the trampled democracy. This is the synthesis of the discourse that the Argentine government and human rights agencies are engaged in. Thus, when they speak of the 1976-1983 military regime, they define it as a "civilian-military dictatorship" rather than simply a "military dictatorship."

This is also why, with the restraints that hindered them broken, investigations have begun and civilians who were at the service of the de facto government have been sentenced. In recent weeks, this has included legislators and members of the judiciary—judges and state prosecutors—as well as defense attorneys. But they are not alone; also being tried and sentenced are powerful business leaders who joined some lawyers, as earlier was the case of many Catholic priests who participated in torture and used confessional secrecy to extract information from victims.

As former attorney general Hugo Cañón wrote, "Members of that second tier were central protagonists who, hidden in sites less involved in the dirty works of the criminal plan, operated equally in pursuit of the 'Objectivos del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional,'" as the dictators called the process of trampling liberties.

In this new stage, in which eight members of the judiciary and several lawyers have been investigated and sentenced, without relegating trials of the military to a back burner, Argentina's human rights policy is an example for the rest of Latin America, especially South America, where governments such as those of Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil have done little or nothing in this regard. In Argentina, the emphasis has been put on those who, without having taken up arms, contributed to the plan that sought to exterminate a sector of society and to change the country's economic matrix.

Human rights organizations and professional agencies that study the issue say the corporate legal system, the Catholic hierarchy, business leaders who supported the neoliberal policies that would destroy the nation's production model, and the major media outlets that added to their communications businesses a voluntary submission to the regime's propaganda to obtain greater benefits were decisive factors in the dictatorship.

**Spotlight on judiciary**

But the main target today is the judiciary, which gave formal support to a supposed republican functioning, with powers that simulated independence. Included in that structure were operatives active in the extermination plan: informants and those who legitimized illegal procedures, rejecting habeas corpus petitions while knowing that clandestine detention centers (more than a hundred) existed, from which the persecuted only left to be disappeared or thrown from planes into the sea. In Argentina, 30,000 people were disappeared.
In late April, the case of Juan Martín Romero Victorica, current prosecutor for the Cámara de Casación (appeals court), became public. A criminal prosecutor during the dictatorship, he is accused of informing those who appropriated babies born in captivity and those responsible for the "death flights" of any accusations or suspicions implicating them in those and other crimes against humanity.

Until May 17, the only judge convicted of the era’s worst crimes was Víctor Brusa, tried in Santa Fe province and sentenced to 21 years in prison.

In recent weeks, however, investigations and sentencing have been handled by the courts of the provinces of Mendoza (two deputies and a judge), Córdoba (two prosecutors and a former judge), Tucumán (a member of the provincial supreme court), Buenos Aires (Romero Victorica), Chaco (two prosecutors), Salta (a judge), and the city of Buenos Aires (a deputy) and two prosecutors).

An at another level, and taking an action that would have been unimaginable a few years ago, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, archbishop of Buenos Aires and primate of Argentina, was summoned to testify on two emblematic issues: one was the investigation of a systematic plan to appropriate babies born in captivity and the other was to clarify all that occurred at the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), the principal extermination camp and clandestine maternity center, through which at least 6,000 persons passed (NotiSur, Jan. 16, 1998) and (Jan. 29, 1999).

Using a privilege that protects Catholic Church officials, Bergoglio did not appear at the tribunals on either occasion. In the first, he provided written testimony and in the second he answered the questions at the archdiocesan offices.

To date, among civilian members of the clergy, only one priest has been tried—former police chaplain Christian von Ernich, nicknamed the "devil's priest," who in 2007 was convicted of seven murders, 42 kidnappings, and 31 cases of torture, for which he was sentenced to life in prison.

**Powerful business interests now in the spotlight**

In the business realm, progress has been slower. Those affected are very powerful, and the network that protects them has so far shown almost no cracks. Nevertheless, former economy minister and creator of the dictatorship's economic plan José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, head of a family group with strong industrial interests and owner of 2.5 million hectares of land, was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

In some instances, the complicity of business people was for the purpose of breaking workers unions or simply to get better business deals. The first included leaders of large businesses, such as automotive companies Ford and Mercedes Benz, steel company Acindar, shipping company Astarsa, and paper company and sugar mill Ingenio Ledesma.

The second included electric company Soldati (which succeeded in selling its obsolete plants to the state for an astronomical price) and the owners of the air transport line Austral (which, by kidnapping the head of a bank in which 62% of its assets were deposited to guarantee a loan, was able to retrieve its loan papers in exchange for giving part of them to the figures of the dictatorship).

But the paradigmatic case in this category is that of the holding company Grupo Clarín, the most powerful media conglomerate in the country and one of the two largest in South America. Its owner,
Ernestina Herrera de Noble, is under investigation in two particularly resonant cases, both tied to the worst human rights violations.

The first concerns the adoption of two children—now more than 30 years old—who may have been taken from disappeared couples in 1978 and given to Herrera. The second involves the kidnapping, torture, and disappearance of the owner of Papel Prensa, the factory that monopolized and continues to monopolize domestic production of newsprint (NotiSur, Oct. 1, 2010).

and the conservative daily acquired the plant under unusual circumstances, and they then became partners of the dictatorship and owners, in a dominant position, of the only producer of the principal input for the print media.

The opening of investigations in which Herrera de Noble is implicated explains why the powerful media conglomerate has become the number-one enemy of the democratic government of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, as the ideologue and mouthpiece for the rightist parties that oppose the progressive process that she heads.

If it is confirmed that the two young people were appropriated babies, and with it the opposition, would immediately lose all ethical and moral authority, ahead of this year's presidential elections in October. If it is confirmed that Papel Prensa was illegally seized, for which purpose its real owner was kidnapped and tortured, and—the latter being the other major voice of the opposition—will be definitively disqualified and Herrera de Noble will not be able to avoid a quick trip to prison.

Given these facts, serious in themselves, the head of the government's Secretaría de Derechos Humanos Eduardo Luis Duhalde adds an aggravating circumstance: "Ninety-five percent of the business people who were victims of the dictatorship—victims of Martínez de Hoz, of the two former owners of Austral, of and —were Jewish."

The official said, "There was a clear intent to take away the assets of all Jewish owners of large businesses. These were included in kidnapping operations to force them to liquidate their assets, giving them to officials of the dictatorship or their civilian accomplices. There is a striking ideological similarity between these operations and the 'Aryanization' of property practiced by the Nazis, in which Jews were stripped of their goods."

Duhalde expressed optimism regarding the new period that the trials are opening, in which civilians finally are being investigated for their complicity with the dictatorship. He referred to the appearance, for the first time, of civilian witnesses who had remained silent and only recently, 28 years after the dictatorship ended, bring themselves to speak out and testify at the trials.

They are former neighbors of the kidnappers, passersby at a place where a person was being kidnapped, civilians who were forced to pick up bodies or clean up a site where an armed confrontation had taken place.

In his testimony, Eustacio Galeno, a Buenos Aires mechanic, explained to the judges why he was now willing to testify. "I have come because now the government guarantees that those of us who testify can count on security conditions that did not exist before."

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