

Military institution gutted in Argentina

by Cynthia R. Rush

The Argentine government's embrace of economic liberalism, and its slavish obedience to the austerity dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is succeeding in paralyzing the nation's Armed Forces. Miserable wages and budget cutbacks for operating costs have caused dramatic reductions in military activities, have canceled several military-industrial development projects, and have even delayed the incorporation of the latest class of draftees into the Army. Most Army bases now operate for only half a day, so that officers and soldiers can go out in the afternoon to work at second jobs to make enough to feed their families. Many base commanders are resorting to unorthodox activities to generate additional income to finance base operations, and morale and the spirit of professionalism are reportedly low throughout the institution.

According to the April 25 issue of the weekly *Somos* magazine, in mid-April the heads of the Army, Navy, and Air Force were close to handing in their resignations, arguing that current austerity conditions made it impossible to do their jobs. The 100% wage increase granted April 24 is not enough to allow most families to make it through the month, given that the monthly "market basket" for an average family costs 2 million australs, and according to one source quoted by *Somos*, "Not even a general makes that much!" The same source reported that the starting salary for a bus driver is 800,000 australs, "a little more than a major with many years of service is earning."

President Carlos Menem hasn't publicly called for the dismantling of the Armed Forces—but he might as well have. His monetary policy is achieving the objective so warmly endorsed by the Trilateral Commission report on Ibero-America issued in March of this year. The authors of that report say there is no need for armed forces in Ibero-America, because there is no longer any "external threat," no Soviet menace. Better to replace the military with some kind of regional police force, the report recommends, thus eliminating an institution which still tends to be a repository for nationalist sentiment, and which could offer potential resistance to policies now being hatched between Washington and Moscow.

Precisely because it contains a strong nationalist element, and has a long tradition of involvement in military, scientific,

and industrial projects linked to national economic development, Argentina's Armed Forces have been a target of the U.S. "secret government" which goes by the name Project Democracy. President Menem has shown no qualms about degrading the institution, if it will help him meet his top priority of improving relations with the United States.

Destroying scientific capabilities

The decision to cancel the Air Force's Condor II missile program, announced on April 21 by Defense Minister Humberto Romero, came in response to fierce U.S. pressures and blackmail, combined with budgetary restrictions. The Condor project, carried out in cooperation with the governments of Egypt and Iraq, was intended to produce a 700-kilometer-range rocket to place satellites in orbit. Both Great Britain and Israel had protested that the rocket program represented a threat to their interests, in the Malvinas Islands and Middle East, respectively.

The international oligarchy and malthusian lobbies have repeatedly attacked those developing-sector countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and India, which have developed nuclear energy programs and related scientific capabilities. The decision to cancel the Condor II can also be seen in the context of the speech given by William Webster, director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, at the Boston World Affairs Council earlier this year. Webster said his agency now intends to focus its attention not on Soviet subversion, but on Third World nations which possess nuclear capabilities and other sophisticated military weaponry, because of the threat these represent to stability in these regions.

The weekly *El Informador Público* reported on May 11 that Carlos Menem has promised George Bush that Argentina will stop exporting nuclear technology to other Third World nations. Peru and several Arab nations will be the first victims of this decision.

Menem's budget cuts have had the effect of degrading, if not completely destroying, the Armed Forces' technological and scientific potential as well. The Navy's Domecq García shipyard, the only one in Ibero-America capable of building submarines, has already been closed down. The Army's military industry and the Argentine-built tank TAMSE are likewise affected, and naval aviation is practically paralyzed, according to *El Informador Público* of April 27. At the same time, the government's recent decision to deploy the Army to repress "internal conflict" serves the Trilateral Commission's purpose of converting the Armed Forces into a domestic police force.

According to the April 26 daily *Clarín*, Foreign Minister Domingo Cavallo promised U.S. Secretary of State James Baker that all cooperation with Egypt on the Condor project is definitely ended, and, to convince him, offered to deploy any scientific breakthroughs achieved in the project to some other U.S.-Argentine project—perhaps in the area of ecology.