
Interview: Mrs. Marta Labiau de Seineldín

'If they execute my husband, he will die with honor, as he lived'

Mrs. Marta Labiau de Seineldín gave the following interview to EIR on Dec. 21, 1990.

EIR: Mrs. Seineldín, what do you think is going to happen? What sentence will your husband receive?

Mrs. Seineldín: Well, the prosecutor, as you may know, has asked for the death penalty, but he has also made very strong charges against the Army, because he says that the situation has come to this [crisis] precisely due to the Army high command's inability to lead this combative army. Because these people being charged are those who fought the Marxist guerrillas in the war against subversion that lasted seven and a half years in Argentina, and the Malvinas War, and then they were cast aside because this high command has not known how to deal with this army, which has been called "the combative army"; the other one is called "the administrative army." So, the Army has split in two fractions.

EIR: The "Carapintadas" [painted faces], or the phenomenon of the "Carapintadas," what is it that they wanted? What are they asking for?

Mrs. Seineldín: Well, they are called "Carapintadas" because almost all of them are commandos, they are men of war; and the commando, when he fights, paints his face, right? So, what they want is a small, dignified, combative army, not a bureaucratic or armchair army. These are men who have fought, who have acted, and who cannot tolerate seeing the Army denigrated to what it is now. They want a different kind of army: one that, even if it has to live in poverty, in tents, it doesn't matter; as long as it can actually serve the purpose for which it was intended, to defend the Fatherland.

EIR: You have said, I understand, that the government knew beforehand that the events of Dec. 3 were going to occur. Can you confirm that statement?

Mrs. Seineldín: Well, on Dec. 3, when the action was almost over, the President said, briefly, that they knew about it and were waiting for it. Afterwards, when he was asked again in a press conference, he answered, "state secret." But

his brother Sen. Eduardo Menem said to all the press, "We knew about it, and we were waiting for them so we could finish them off." And all the television reporters, from Channel 9, the director of Channel 9, said, "We knew as of Friday, but we were reluctant to talk until things actually happened."

EIR: But before that, we understood that Colonel Seineldín had had contacts with President Menem, that he had had contact with him before he became President, and afterwards, in the presidency. What happened during this period, that things could have reached this situation?

Mrs. Seineldín: Well, since Villa Martelli [a military action led by Colonel Seineldín in December 1988] in which my husband was directly involved—several officers sought him out in Panama and urged him to act, and he did so as their leader—the agreements began. The first one was directly in Villa Martelli, which was an agreement of honor, that my husband asked not be signed since it was a gentlemen's agreement between the Army commander [Gen. José Dante Caridi], General Cáceres who later became commander, and many witnesses. Of course, it was not kept. Then General Cáceres became the commander; he didn't keep the agreements either. Then my husband, and the defense minister, and General Skalany reached an agreement—going officer by officer down big lists—who would go into retirement, who would stay, who got which posts, everything. And that really wasn't kept. Now, General Skalany was called by the tribunal, the war council, where he confirmed that they had signed all those accords. . . .

Subsequently, my husband wrote to the Army Chief of Staff Gen. Martín Bonnet, informing him of what was going on, that what was promised was not being implemented and General Bonnet punished him with a one-month detention in the province of La Pampa. He served that time, and then sent a five-page letter to the Commander-in-Chief, the President of the Republic, Dr. Menem, warning him of the extremely grave situation inside the Army in which events of such magnitude could occur, he said, "that neither you nor I can predict them."

Again he was punished with two months' detention in

San Martín de los Andes, and the generals laughed at the letter; nobody paid attention. Previously, he had met with the President of the Republic. As soon as [Menem] was elected, [Seineldín] gave him a complete dossier. Dr. Menem promised to solve the problem. We have his signature, his picture, everything. And yet to date, nothing has been done. Despite all of this, and the 600-plus people now under arrest, in addition to those who didn't act when they saw the treason that was taking place, the Army's problems still haven't been resolved. And this was stated clearly by the military prosecutor [Gen. Carlos Domínguez] in his statement yesterday.

EIR: So do you think that the phenomenon of the *Carapintadas* hasn't ended and didn't end on Dec. 3? That is, that the problem will continue?

Mrs. Seineldín: This problem will continue. Undoubtedly it hasn't been resolved, nor will they be able to resolve it, because we're talking about men who are fighting for the honor and dignity of the Army, with a President who cannot understand, who doesn't want to keep his promises. So, as there is no honor and dignity now, I believe that it is not over.

EIR: The rumor has been spread abroad that Colonel Seineldín wanted to kill himself Dec. 3.

Mrs. Seineldín: My husband is an eminently Catholic man. He would never ask for a pistol, because he was serving a minor sentence, for a minor infraction and he was not prohibited from carrying a weapon. So he had no need to ask for a revolver with one bullet. Later, the commander of the regiment where he was being held, Lt. Colonel Menéndez, told me that it was a total lie. My husband wouldn't do something like that, because he is a man who takes responsibility. And I tell you that when this story came out Dec. 3, he had already served one and a half months, 1,300 kilometers from the capital. One and a half months confinement, 1,300 kilometers away! Yet he has taken responsibility for everything. He's in jail for those people who've acted; he really has to take responsibility, because he's fighting for these people.

There are many, many officers here who, since the uprisings of Villa Martelli and Monte Caseros, have no future. They are not retired, but left in limbo doing nothing, and they are trying to denigrate them with this. So, there is really a very enormous split in the Army, very big.

EIR: What kind of treatment have your husband and those who participated in the Dec. 3 action received?

Mrs. Seineldín: Well, for my husband, all right. He was brought from where he was serving his sentence, in the south, by airplane. Fine. But the treatment of the others here was *shameful*. Not even at the battle at the La Tablada base [January 1989] with the guerrillas who laid siege, killed, and assassinated, fighting for three days inside the regiment which they destroyed; they were brought out with their hands

up. But here, the officers were brought out with their hands up; they were forced to remove their boots and socks, to go out in their underwear and with their arms in the air. And Colonel Baraldini was tied to a tank . . . [opposing troops] went in to attack the headquarters with Colonel Baraldini tied to the first tank. After being taken prisoner, men from the Grenadiers regiment were hooded and taken out twice, as if they were going to be shot.

Mrs. Baraldini went to see the commander of the Grenadiers and asked him how her husband was, and he told her, "Your husband is a prisoner of war. He has a soldier's half-ration, a blanket, and the floor." But her husband was a *colonel*. He was kept for a day on bread and water, with no blankets; the treatment was very, very bad, very severe, and totally degrading besides. There are even "washed faces" [anti-nationalist officers], as they're called here, who were shocked at the way the prisoners were treated.

EIR: On the street, among your neighbors, how have the wives and families of the *Carapintadas* been treated?

Mrs. Seineldín: Splendidly. Everyone congratulates us. They tell me, "Keep going, don't give up the fight." The country is watching, because the situation is very, very bad. Our foreign debt is enormous. I don't understand much politics, but economically we are very bad. Every day there are massive numbers of layoffs. Just a few days ago, 127,000 public employees were kicked out on the street. It is unquestionably a very severe economic plan; people are suffering, and do not view us in a bad light.

Of course, the press is controlled by four or five reporters and this is what the public gets. But as for me, people come to give me New Year presents for the colonel, to tell him to keep up the fight, that he is an honorable man. This is generally the kind of treatment we're getting. I've been on magazine covers: People recognize me, and no one treats me badly. So I believe that people are aware that this was *not* a coup d'état; that it wasn't an attack against the President. As [the nationalists] said in Palermo that same morning, "We respect the person of the President; we are against the high command, which does not respond to our needs."

The country was perfectly well aware that this was not a coup d'état. Later, a whole elaborate plan was conjured up, as an attempt on the President's life. It's all a lie, and now suddenly they're quiet, because there's no proof. It was all blown up by the reporters and wasn't true. Anyway, the *Carapintadas* were very clear that this was strictly a military problem, of the Army.

EIR: Much has been said about the death penalty.

Mrs. Seineldín: Well, the military court could give them the death penalty. The Army command has demanded that the action be called an insurrection, because that carries the death penalty, but rebellion does not. For insurrection, yes, you get the death penalty. So that's why they've insisted;

that's why you see [Assistant Army Chief of Staff] General Balza calling the military prosecutor [General Domínguez] "despicable." General Balza is second-in-command behind General Bonnet. He called the prosecutor despicable because [Domínguez] was harshly critical of the generals, of the high command. He has already indicated that he was pressured to ask for the death penalty.

So, the defense counselors have presented their arguments. But under military justice, there is one statement by the defendant and another by the defense counsel, and that's it. There are no arguments presented, as in civil courts; it is very difficult. But there currently exists the right to appeal to civil justice, and I believe the sentences will be reduced. But, should all these people, who have such honor and dignity, be sent to their deaths, they will die as they lived, with honor and dignity, for the kind of army they wanted. And I believe they are going to end up becoming martyrs, and this will unleash something much more serious.

EIR: The two of you lived for several years in Panama, where your husband worked in the service of the Argentine Army. What do you say about the many rumors and slanders spread about your husband's activities in Panama?

Mrs. Seineldín: My husband was military attaché for two years. In Argentina, the number one in each class—my husband was always number one in his area, which was infantry—is always appointed as military attaché. At that time, the post in Panama was open, so my husband was asked to go to Panama. When he completed his two-year term, the President of Panama—who had nothing to do with Noriega, in fact was his opponent—Eric Delvalle, asked Argentina's President Raúl Alfonsín to let my husband return [to Panama] as military adviser. Dr. Alfonsín issued a special decree, because there was no post of military adviser, and sent him, but [my husband] was invited so that he could organize the founding of a military college.

My husband was never an adviser to Noriega. Noriega's adviser was an Israeli general named Harari. My husband went to build a war college, a military college, and that's what he did for those two years. Later, they said he was involved with a thousand different things, but you know in life, the truth always comes out. My husband is a brilliant soldier; he was always number one, from first lieutenant to colonel and, well, the high command in Argentina is totally political. If you answer to the politician-of-the-moment, you get promoted. So Seineldín, who didn't do that, and never played political games, wasn't promoted. That's the way things are.

EIR: Could you tell us a little about the ideals, and the personality of your husband? About the Malvinas?

Mrs. Seineldín: I have known him for 31 years; we have been married for 30. He has always had the same values: love of his army and of his country. Politics means nothing

to him, other things mean nothing to him. He has one goal, which has always been the same. He had the luck to be chosen as the first man to set foot on the Malvinas. Despite the fact that his regiment was quite far—he had to travel four days to reach the Malvinas with his regiment—he was the first man. He went with sailors, commanded by Admiral Bucher, but the first launch to disembark was the *San Antonio*, and my husband was the first to land.

Later his entire regiment landed by air. His base was completely defended—even [British commander] Jeremy Moore says so in his book—because he fortified Puerto Argentino in such a way that the English could never get in. He was congratulated. He was the only officer, along with a few from the Navy, I believe—who was not punished for his actions. Others were sanctioned or punished for their men's behavior, but not him. When he returned, he said, "I return with a regiment of 12 dead heroes and the rest live heroes, because every one of these boys acted heroically."

Earlier, he fought subversion in the Tucumán mountains. He is a man of tremendous fight, with a very Christian spirit and steel-like endurance. Physical pain, exhaustion, discomfort don't bother him; he gives his all for the Army. And this is where his career has led him. It seems therefore that some people can't stand having a brilliant man in the Army.

EIR: It has been said repeatedly—he himself has made statements, if what was in the press were his own words—that he opposed the so-called National Reconstruction Process, the name given to the military junta that overthrew the government of Isabel Martínez de Perón in March 1976.

Mrs. Seineldín: Yes, he opposed the military Process, because he is very democratic; he doesn't want military governments. When the military government was installed, he opposed it; and people said it was because he was a Peronist, but he was never a Peronist nor was he ever political. So, that changed his future, but because of his record and the high opinion held of him, he was placed in a very good position, which was the War College, as professor at the War College, which is a very honorable place among military men. But he always opposed military governments.

EIR: How is the family, and what is the family thinking right now? What are they going to do? What do you expect to happen next year?

Mrs. Seineldín: I know that if they execute him, he will die with the same honor and dignity with which he has always lived. And if not, he will go to jail for a long time. In this country, with such weak and unstable politicians, you never know anything for sure. But, the family has always supported him, and will continue to do so. This is the Fatherland: You never surrender the Fatherland, not even in death.

It is better to die gloriously than on one's knees, and here there are many Argentines on their knees. But most of us are standing up, and standing tall.