

# Argentina's Menem wants opponents dead

by Cynthia Rush

Argentina's President Carlos Menem is determined to teach a lesson to anyone who might challenge his obedience to the Anglo-American political establishment. In the aftermath of the Dec. 3 military uprising, organized by Army nationalists who oppose his plans to dismantle the institution of the Armed Forces, Menem is demanding that the rebellion's leaders be quickly sentenced to death and other participants be punished with long jail sentences. Raúl Granillo Ocampo, legal and technical secretary to the President, stated on Dec. 9 that Menem wants "to destroy" the nationalist wing of the Army and see the death penalty applied. Not even religious objections will deter the President, Granillo Ocampo said.

On Dec. 18, Gen. Carlos Domínguez, the Army prosecutor who is hearing the testimony of the participants in the Dec. 3 action, requested the death penalty for Col. Mohamed Alf Seinfeldín, the nationalist leader who took full responsibility for ordering the uprising, and for four other officers also considered to be its leaders. Seinfeldín, who testified before the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces for three hours on Dec. 15, has been charged with being the "leader and promoter of the crime of rebellion." General Domínguez additionally requested indefinite jail terms for other top officers involved, and sentences of between 3 and 22 years for lower ranking officers.

## Kissinger Methods

Using the logic of Henry Kissinger, Carlos Menem is determined to make a "horrible example" of Seinfeldín as a way of smashing all patriotic resistance to his embrace of Anglo-American policies. A hero of the 1982 Malvinas conflict, the colonel had rallied both military and civilian opposition to the government's economic austerity policies, and the "restructuring" of the Armed Forces which is intended to transform it into nothing more than a national constabulary. As Mrs. Marta de Seinfeldín said in a Dec. 16 statement in defense of her husband, the colonel had no plans to overthrow the government, as Menem has charged. "It is the generals who want the coup. My husband wants neither a coup nor corrupt generals, who occupy positions and sit there and rob the country." In a letter directed to the President last October, Mrs. Seinfeldín explained, her husband warned of the hatred and resentment existing within the Army, and told Menem

that military grievances must be addressed. Menem did nothing.

Referencing the Dec. 3 events and his subsequent actions, Menem spoke to reporters on Dec. 10 of "the backing given us internationally by all the media and by President Bush's visit." Egged on by such backing, the Argentine President is oblivious to the consequences of his actions as he pursues the death penalty for his political opponents.

The crisis within the Armed Forces is by no means resolved. Rumors are circulating that a new rebellion could occur any time between the end of the year and March 1991. If Seinfeldín and others are actually sentenced to death, and the sentences carried out, this could unleash renewed violence or even terrorism directed against the high command. Gen. Martín Balza, the number-two man in the Army, is reportedly preparing to grant leave to two-thirds of all non-commissioned officers in order to relieve the tension which has built up following Dec. 3.

Menem's decision to deposit the proceeds from the privatization of tens of defense-related state companies into the national Treasury, rather than allocating them to the defense budget as he had previously promised, has not improved things. Much of the high command, which has otherwise sided with the President against the nationalists, reportedly opposes the recently announced plan to restructure the Armed Forces. The weekly intelligence sheet *El Informador Público* reported Dec. 14 that Adm. Enrique Ossés, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has held a series of meetings with both non-commissioned as well as with higher-ranking officers in Córdoba and Buenos Aires to discuss opposition to the military reform announced on Dec. 7.

Menem is also doing battle with the nation's legal and constitutional institutions over the issue of which courts have jurisdiction to the participants of the Dec. 3 uprising. He told reporters Dec. 11 that he prefers military to civilian justice, because "military justice is faster and more expeditious, and . . . circumstances and presumption can lead to a harsh verdict quickly." The problem with civilian courts, he added, are that "they look for the real truth, and this can take a long time."

However, a Buenos Aires federal court ruled on Dec. 11 that civilian courts have jurisdiction to try the detained military personnel because the alleged crimes committed on Dec. 3 "transcend the narrow framework of military discipline" and did "grave damage to the Republic." As of this ruling, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which has been hearing the participants' testimony, should have suspended its proceedings until the Supreme Court issued a ruling on the matter of jurisdiction. Since the council continued hearing testimony, according to *El Informador Público*, this gives defense lawyers the opportunity to demand impeachment of all testimony heard after Dec. 11 and move to have the proceedings transferred to civilian courts, where sentences are likely to be less harsh.