

Coup plot aims at Argentine President

by Cynthia Rush

The first steps have been taken in an operation to stage a coup against Argentina's Peronist President, Carlos Saúl Menem. In office only since July 8, Menem is the target of a scandal backed by both left- and right-wing opponents of the government in Buenos Aires.

The apparently surprising facet of the operation is that it has been launched from another country—Venezuela. But this ceases to be a surprise when one realizes that the whole script was penned even further away, in Washington, by the Project Democracy apparatus, whose CIA-backed "secret government" won notoriety for trading arms for hostages with the Ayatollah Khomeini.

The focus of the scandal is Finance Minister Nestor Mario Rapanelli, who took office on July 15 following the sudden death on July 14 of Menem's first finance minister, Miguel Roig. Rapanelli, like his predecessor, was an executive of the multinational grain cartel Bunge and Born, whose economists have devised the economic shock program now being applied by the new government.

Project Democracy's assets in Venezuela, grouped in the so-called Grupo Roraima and its mouthpiece the *Diario de Caracas*, launched their side of the operation with the July 18 report that Rapanelli was implicated in a multibillion-dollar trade fraud scandal, which occurred in Caracas between 1983 and 1988. Rapanelli worked there from 1984 to 1986 as executive director of the Venezuelan grain company, Gramoven, a large wheat-importing consortium in which Bunge and Born owns stock.

Gramoven is charged with overbilling and fraud in its dealings with Recadi, the Venezuelan agency which determined who would receive U.S. dollars at preferential rates (rather than at the free-market rate) to pay for imports. Seven Venezuelan businessmen are already jailed in relation to the case, and Caracas judge Luis Guillermo La Riva told *Diario de Caracas* that a warrant for Rapanelli's arrest has been issued, and that if he sets foot in the country, he will be jailed.

The attack on Rapanelli from Caracas created mayhem in Buenos Aires, in a government barely recovering from the unexpected death of Miguel Roig, and trying to grapple with hyperinflationary chaos. July's inflation rate is estimated to be 200%. Menem publicly supported Rapanelli, and reported that the minister and his family had received anonymous death threats. While all Buenos Aires media picked up the Caracas story, the first to launch its own "exposé" on the

finance minister and on Bunge and Born was the leftist *Página 12*, known for its violent attacks on the armed forces and its defense of terrorism.

So many pawns

Rapanelli's guilt or innocence in the matter is likely to be the least interesting question for those orchestrating the uproar—Project Democracy and affiliates such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). For years, circles associated with this crowd have led the attack on Argentina's armed forces and all other political groupings which oppose the U.S. government's strategic agreements with the Soviet Union. In the fear that nationalist forces may prevail upon Menem to break with the International Monetary Fund, Project Democracy's goal is to destroy Argentina's national institutions and, if necessary, overthrow Carlos Menem. Rapanelli appears to be a convenient vehicle for this.

The conspiracy brings together a motley crew of pro-Soviet leftists and right-wing ideologues, as well as the Socialist International's many assets in Buenos Aires and Caracas. The latter include Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez and former Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín. A deputy from the Argentine conservative coalition, the Union of the Democratic Center (UCD), is demanding a congressional investigation of Rapanelli, and Carlos Tello Rosas, an "anti-corruption" deputy from the Radical Civic Union (UCR) has traveled to Caracas to investigate the matter. Former President Alfonsín reportedly rushed back to Buenos Aires from his vacation to lead the charge against the government.

Leading members of the Grupo Roraima helped to found the Venezuelan chapter of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy (ILD), modeled on the Peruvian institute of the same name, which is funded by NED. Both embrace the extremist libertarian economics of Milton Friedman and Austrian kook Friedrich von Hayek, and promote the drug-linked "informal economy" as real capitalism.

The NED and the U.S. Democratic Party's National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) have worked closely with Argentina's Fundación Plural, one of whose leading members, Tomás Eloy Martínez, was a co-founder of the *Diario de Caracas* when he lived in Venezuela some years ago. Martínez now writes for the leftist magazine *El Periodista* and has repeatedly attacked nationalist military leader, Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín and the armed forces. An NDI-sponsored conference in December 1988 promoted the further dismantling of Argentina's armed forces, under the guise of making them more "democratic."

Following last January's terrorist assault on the La Tablada military base in Buenos Aires, Martínez defended the Trotskyist group All for the Fatherland Movement (MTP) whose members led the assault. *Página 12* had the same line. At that time, *EIR* reported that several of the MTP's top leaders formed part of the CIA's Central American terrorist apparatus, linked to Contra leader Eden Pastora and his friend, fugitive drug banker Robert Vesco.