

Secret minutes of Argentine military junta found

By César Uco
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On November 1, Argentina's defense minister, Agustin Rossi, announced the discovery of 1,500 documents including 280 sets of secret minutes of the brutal military dictatorship that ruled the country for six years. The defense minister told reporters, "We found six original folders of minutes of the military juntas, all secret records from March 1976 until 1983."

According to Rossi, the documents, stamped secret, were found in the basement of the Condor building, the headquarters of the Argentine Air Force. Included among them, he said were "Thirteen original minutes which exhaustively review *Papel Prensa*," Argentina's largest newsprint company, which was subjected to a forced takeover under the dictatorship.

Among the documents that have come to light are plans drawn up by the junta projecting that the military would remain in power until 2000. This was spelled out in the "Plan of Action" of the junta's planning chief, General Diaz Bessone, which saw the foundational work of the dictatorship continuing into the 1990s, followed by a "new republic" that would continue at least into 2000.

Also found were four blacklists compiled by the dictatorship, targeting Argentine citizens according to their degree of "Marxist" activity. The dictatorship compiled hundreds of names under the title "prohibited persons."

The first blacklist found is dated April 6, 1979 and lists 285 individuals under the "Formula 4" category, denoting, according to the military, a "Marxist ideological background." The defense ministry stressed that although there was no outright ban on employing these individuals, "in practice, it didn't work like that; no section of the privately owned media would hire someone identified as 'Formula 4'."

"Formula 2" included the names of people whose backgrounds "did not allow their unfavorable classification from the standpoint of Marxist ideological

views."

Under "Formula 3", the dictatorship recorded the names of those who had "some Marxist ideological background, but not enough to constitute an insurmountable barrier to appointment, promotion, granting of scholarships, and so on."

Finally, there was "Formula 1" a list that included those suspected of being enemies of the dictatorship but having "no Marxist ideological background".

If the only ones explicitly proscribed from working in a public agency were those listed as "Formula 4," under the dictatorship's regime of brutal repression, including the persecution, imprisonment, torture and killing of tens of thousand of people considered enemies of the dictatorship, it is clear that all four of the junta's blacklists served to intimidate both the public and private sectors from hiring anyone named on any one of them.

The first "Formula 4" list included trade unionists, journalists, broadcasters, lawyers, teachers and a large number of people affiliated with the arts, including novelists, musicians, painters, actors, poets and sculptors.

Among the names on this list—reserved for those with a "Marxist ideological background"—was that of the author of the novel "Hopscotch" and short stories such as "Blow-up" and "Bestiary," Julio Cortazar, who was considered one of the most innovative writers of his time, greatly influencing an entire generation of Latin America writers.

Also on the list were artists who dedicated themselves to composing and performing music that expressed the reality of the working people of Argentina and Latin America. The name of Mercedes Sosa, known as the "Voice of America" and founder of the New Song Movement, appears prominently.

Also on this list was another extraordinary representative of Latin American indigenous music, the famous singer and writer Atahualpa Yupanqui.

The “Formula 4” list also included individuals from other countries such as the Spanish singer Juan Manuel Serrat and the Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano.

Among the journalists singled out is Jacobo Timerman. Founder of the newspaper *La Opinion*, he was kidnapped by the dictatorship in 1977 and released three years later after an international campaign for his freedom. He is the author of “Prisoner without a name, cell without a number,” recounting the horror he experienced in the junta’s clandestine detention centers.

After Argentina’s defeat in the Malvinas War, the dictatorship issued its last “Formula 4” list in September 1982 with 46 names on it. The dictatorship, discredited, politically weakened and hated for its acts of repression, apparently saw the shortening of the list as a step in the transition to a democratic regime.

At the end of the dictatorship, the military junta denied the existence of the secret minutes. The last head of the junta, the former general Reynaldo Bignone, had ordered the destruction of these records before handing over power to the elected president Raúl Alfonsín in 1983.

The most immediately explosive revelations from the discovered records concern documents related to Papel Prensa (Newsprint), a company whose fate was intimately bound up with the military dictatorship. Founded in 1969 under the dictatorship of General Juan Carlo Onganía, it had as its aim the monopolization of the production of pulp and paper.

From 1973, Papel Prensa was in the hands of David Graiver, who died in August 1976 in a suspicious plane crash in Mexico. In the days following his death, the daily newspapers *El Clarín*, *La Nación* and the magazines *Fuentes* and *Somos* accused Graiver of having had links with the Peronist guerrilla group, the Montoneros.

Under pressure from the new military junta headed by General Jorge Rafael Videla, in a transaction of dubious legality, Papel Prensa became the property of *Clarín*, *La Nacion* and *La Razon*, with the military government as their partner.

As of March 1977, Graiver’s widow and other family members were illegally detained. A month later, *La Opinion* editor Jacobo Timerman was also illegally arrested, supposedly in connection with the case of Graiver, who owned shares in the newspaper. All of them were taken to clandestine detention and torture centers. Graiver’s father, brother and widow, Lidia, all reported being tortured and threatened with death to compel them to surrender their interests in Papel Prensa.

In addition to the business connection, Timerman was

linked to the Graivers because both he and they were Jewish, and the fascist-military regime was rabidly anti-Semitic, torturing the newspaper editor to confess to “Zionist conspiracies.”

In the end, the military was able to use the company to control the written media, as Papel Prensa exercised a monopoly on newsprint. Its objective was to ensure that nothing was published that exposed the military’s crimes or provoked resistance to the junta.

The case is still a major controversy in Argentina. In April 2011, the Federal Prosecutor of La Plata classified as a “crime against humanity the events surrounding the transfer of shares of the Papel Prensa company between 1976 and 1977.”

“The silence of the daily papers *La Nación*, *Clarín* y *La Razón* during all that happened under the dictatorship was rewarded with the Papel Prensa business,” Hector Timerman, the son of the late journalist and current Argentine foreign minister testified in court proceedings last year. “They kidnapped my father and they turned over Papel Prensa to the directors of these newspapers.”

The case has become an increasingly prominent theme in the ongoing confrontation between the government of President Cristina Fernandez Kirchner and the major media firms, particularly that of the Clarín group, which in addition to the daily paper reportedly controlled some 200 radio and television licenses. It vehemently opposed anti-trust provisions of an Audiovisual Media Law introduced by the government to replace statutes imposed under the dictatorship, posing the threat to its monopoly interests as an attack on the “freedom of the press.”

Argentina’s Financial Information Unit, a regulatory agency, went to court on Monday seeking a restraining order against any transfer of assets of Papel Prensa. The court filing cited the danger to the country’s “economic and financial order” posed by the firm’s monopoly on newsprint production and asked to be a party to the existing court case on the grounds that the “illicit” transfer of the company to the owners of the major media groups may have broken laws against “laundering of assets.”

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