
Book Reviews

The Dec. 3 uprising, an eyewitness account

by Gonzalo Huertas

Por qué Rebeledé

by ex-Maj. Hugo Abete

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In Buenos Aires on Aug. 29, *Why I Rebelled (Por que Rebeledé)* was presented to more than 500 guests by a group of people who speak for both the military and civilian nationalist currents in Argentina: Col. Jorge Toccalino, Patricio Videla Balaguer, and Ricardo Paz. The book's author, ex-Maj. Hugo Abete, was one of the primary protagonists of the events of Dec. 3, 1990, when Army nationalists—known as the *Carapintadas*—under the leadership of the now-imprisoned Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín, rebelled against the high command and its policy of dismantling the Armed Forces. Along with Colonel Seineldín and several other officers, Major Abete is serving an 18-year sentence at the Campo de Mayo military prison, for what happened that day.

The author describes the events which led up to the Dec. 3 uprising, the origin of which goes back to a showdown with the Armed Forces that was initiated by the social democratic then-President, Raúl Alfonsín, who governed from 1983 to 1989. That policy has been continued and even intensified by the present administration of Carlos Saúl Menem.

Under the stigma of the 1985 trials and punishment of Argentina's Armed Forces for having fought against subversion and confronted British imperialism in the 1982 Malvinas conflict, the military was rendered virtually incapacitated, with an inadequate budget and the arbitrary denial of a mission. The military institutions saw their *raison d'être* called into question, and with it, their very existence. In the face of the high command's inaction, the intermediate levels of the military hierarchy responded, giving rise to the nationalist *Carapintadas*, "painted faces," so named for the camouflage paint used by combat troops.

Carlos Menem's initial rise to power appeared to augur a change. He drew support from the figure of Colonel Seineldín and what he represented, by signing a defense project which promised the development of military and security forces, in

defense of sovereignty and the national interest, and supporting the productive revolution which he had advocated in his 1988-89 election campaign speeches. But the new President's automatic alignment with the policy of U.S. President George Bush and his "new world order," quickly dashed the illusions of those who had backed this project, while Menem then pursued the destruction of the *Carapintadas*.

One by one, Menem's promises were broken: Military industries were dismantled; strategic projects were annulled; the budget was strangled; and units and commands of the military deployed throughout Argentine territory were shut down, to give priority to the "new order" army, the United Nations forces, over and above the National Army. The nation remained defenseless in the face of a growing regional imbalance in weaponry, while a ferocious administrative persecution was unleashed against nationalist officers and non-commissioned officers, who were removed from active duty. This is the context for the events of Dec. 3, 1990.

With revealing anecdotes, the account stitches together the countless meetings which Colonel Seineldín held with Menem and with most of his aides, as well with other prominent figures. Next, using the testimony of Colonel Seineldín and the principal leaders of the Dec. 3 uprising, the book describes the process leading up to the events and operations of that day.

Abete also analyzes what happened in the aftermath of those events, including the trial before Argentina's highest Military Tribunal as well as before the federal courts, which perfected the persecution imposed by the government and foreign power centers. The personal stories of those in jail, suffered with such dignity, oblige us to confront the fact that they, who are imprisoned, are yet truly free in spirit.

Lessons for the future

Major Abete's last reflection is on what would happen if *Carapintadismo* were to die. It is both a question and an affirmation, not only for Argentines, but for all of Ibero-America, which, to varying degrees, has suffered and is suffering under the same aggression and deprivation in all aspects of national life; these are policies imposed from abroad and implemented by corrupt administrations which favor the looting of their nations, for the sole purpose of enriching themselves. They herd their people toward a one-world order that eliminates borders, sovereignty, dignity, culture, and identity.

This is why *Carapintadismo* has been the expression which brings together all those who resist dishonor, injustice, corruption, and the surrender of their homelands, and thus it is a cry of hope for the Americas.

This book is indispensable for understanding what really happened on Dec. 3, 1990, and strongly suggests the type of behavior that should be displayed by those not inclined to submit to the murderous schemes peddled by Argentina's anti-patriotic forces.