
ARGENTINA

Will Alfonsín be a new Jimmy Carter?

by Cynthia Rush and Dennis Small

When Argentina's new president, Raul Alfonsín of the Radical Civic Union (UCR), was inaugurated on Dec. 10, the event brought to an end seven years of military dictatorship that imposed harsh Friedmanite economic policies on that country. But despite his popular mandate to resume industrialization and accelerated growth, President Alfonsín is acting more and more like an Argentine version of Jimmy Carter: talking a blue streak about human rights while threatening to dismantle his country's all-important nuclear energy program, the key to increased living standards.

Alfonsín announced less than a week before his inauguration that he was taking the country's nuclear program—the most successful in Ibero-America, with two functioning heavy-water plants and the just-announced capability of enriching its own uranium—out of the hands of the Navy, which has run the program since its inception in the early 1950s. Alfonsín added that he was establishing a special advisory committee to “review” the plans of the country's Atomic Energy Commission (CNEA), now to be headed by Foreign Minister Dante Caputo.

Caputo is a vocal adherent of the Socialist International, a graduate of France's anti-technology Sorbonne University, and a close friend of such international anti-nuclear luminaries as West Germany's Willy Brandt. Placing Caputo in charge of a review of the nuclear program is like asking Count Dracula to run a blood bank.

State Department socialist?

In announcing his decision to take the country's nuclear program out of the hands of the military at exactly the point the major breakthrough on enriched uranium had been achieved, Alfonsín gave credence to the “Carterite” line which has inundated the international press: that Argentina's nuclear program is geared principally toward the production of an atomic bomb. Alfonsín vowed that his government would do no such thing, and swore that he would rein in any military officers who might be considering that option. He also hinted that his administration might be willing to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Ibero-American Tlatelolco Accord, both designed to limit Third World nations' access to advanced technologies on the pretext of stopping the spread of nuclear weapons.

The pressure on Argentina to abandon its nuclear program comes principally from the U.S. State Department, which since the Carter years has tried to sink the program in every possible way, from the international banks which hold Argentina's \$40 billion foreign debt, and from the Kremlin. The Soviet ambassador in Buenos Aires, Oleg Kvasov, delivered a threatening diplomatic note a few days before Alfonsín's inauguration.

U.S.S.R. will under no circumstances use nuclear weapons against countries that do not have these weapons in their territory,” said the note. Like much of the Western press, the Soviet message suggests that Argentina is “building the bomb.”

Sources close to the nuclear industry told *EIR* that the consequences of the CNEA's reorganization will be to block large investments required for research and expansion, and to create the conditions by which Argentina will have eventually to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. “This is the triumph of the Carter Doctrine,” these sources said, “in which there is no distinction between peaceful and military uses of nuclear power.”

Argentina's nuclear program, launched in the 1950s at the initiative of Gen. Juan Perón, has for years been the target of anti-growth forces who hate the thought of a developing-sector nation possessing an independent technological and scientific capability. Even more dangerous in their eyes has been the commitment of Argentina's National Atomic Energy Commission (CNEA) to collaborate with and assist other Ibero-American nations in setting up similar programs, and provide them with necessary technology and personnel training.

Alfonsín's Carterite drift has not been limited to the all-important nuclear issue. He invited as special guests of honor to his inauguration leaders of the opposition forces in countries today run by military governments: Wilson Fereyra was there from Uruguay, PMDB leaders came from Brazil, and opposition spokesmen from Chile and Paraguay were present. From the United States, Alfonsín invited his friend and fellow human rights advocate, Patricia Derian—the Carter administration's human rights coordinator who played a leading role in denying Argentina access to nuclear technology during 1976-80.

President Alfonsín has hinted at a quid pro quo. An unnamed government official was quoted in the Dec. 8 *Washington Post*: “What impedes us in the nuclear field is the question of the Malvinas. . . . With the Malvinas question unresolved, we don't have freedom of action on anything else.” Presumably Alfonsín will proceed to further restrict nuclear development if the Reagan administration promises to pressure Britain into negotiating its dispute with Argentina over the Malvinas Islands. Alfonsín is also asking U.S. help in compelling Argentina's creditors to be more “flexible” in renegotiating the foreign debt. Both “conditions” are viewed abroad as a small price to pay for the obliteration of the Argentine nuclear program.