

'We need a powerful armed forces'

The following are excerpts from testimony given in federal court in Buenos Aires on Aug. 8 by Maj. Rubén Fernández, who is being held in Caseros Prison, Pavilion 14.

During this trial, there has been talk of the destruction of the Army's operational capacity, of the lack of its professionalism, and many other truths; but, mention of the destruction of the Defense Production Systems, or the corruption among the leadership of the Technical Units and Military Industries, has been unintentionally omitted.

Therefore, in my capacity as an Army engineer, it is my duty to take this opportunity to present before this nation's court some personal experiences related to this topic.

Corruption exposed

For example, in 1987, while stationed at the Military Geographical Institute, I reported to the head of programming of the Army General Staff on several illegalities committed at that institute, primarily by its director, Colonel Orellana, the deputy director, Colonel Tomassi, the chief of operations, Colonel Goncevatt, and chief of finances, Colonel Zanor, who worked together with Lieutenant Colonel Messenzani (ret.) and with an engineer Kohen.

These gentlemen created a company which they called EMOK . . . through which they provided supplies to the Geographic Institute, at double and triple the price. They also collected on invoices for nonexistent repairs and maintenance of electronic and photographic equipment. . . .

The impunity with which they acted was so great, that when the defense minister granted the institute a \$4 million credit, these individuals immediately made arrangements to purchase a cargo plane, which was totally unnecessary for the institute's functioning. . . . In their calculations, they put down the entire amount of the credit, when the plane in question—which was used—cost no more than \$1 million. . . .

During 1988, due to my repeated denunciations, I was the victim of all types of pressure, threats, and persecution, as well as sabotage, such as that done to my car and at the Computer Center, of which I was the director. . . .

During 1989, I worked at the Transport Division, where I also had to make denunciations; in this case the director,

Colonel Molina, collected commissions from the drivers. . . .

At the end of 1989, General Skalany, president and director general of Fabricaciones Militares, brought me into the company as one of his collaborators; in a short time, he ordered 40 indictments due to the many illegal activities we detected. . . . General Skalany also ordered several audits; one of them was related to the fact that at the beginning of 1989, under the Radical government, Fabricaciones Militares signed a three-month contract with IBM for \$3 million, for which equipment and personnel were contracted to process the company's documents, when in fact, Fabricaciones Militares needed only 10% of the labor that had been hired.

This illegal contract favored several people, primarily Col. Smirnoff, head of Data Processing, and still remains in effect, with the complicity of the current director-general.

Threat to the Defense Production System

General Skalany was also especially concerned about the destruction of the Defense Production System and ordered us to investigate the causes of same and personally report to the Defense Ministry on the [system's] critical status.

On this matter, let me say a few things. It should be clearly understood that as efficient as operational elements may be, the country's defense is impossible if the independent development and production of weapons systems don't exist.

This is what General San Martín understood, and this is why father Luís Beltrán took charge of producing the weaponry that would be used by the Army of the Andes [during the Independence period—ed.].

In Argentina, Defense Production Systems were also conceived with the following criteria:

1. Research, develop, and produce most of our weapons systems;
2. Have the resources to sustain this activity so as not to have to depend on the national Treasury.

To achieve the first point, factories, shipyards, research institutes, etc. were built.

For the second, aside from specific activities, the different institutions produced goods for the private sector.

Thus, during periods when there was no demand for weapons systems, the factories continued to operate, and were able to contribute resources, maintain the training levels of the professional personnel, technicians, and workers, and amortize the investments made.

Within the objectives described in point 2, the development of basic industry occurred, in which percentages of the stock were made available. The dividends provided by those companies allowed us to maintain the effort demanded by the development and production of our own military equipment.

Yet what is the panorama today for this vital activity, which is fundamental for achieving a certain defense capability? It couldn't be more somber.



Argentina's modern nuclear industry is a principal target of those out to destroy the nation's sovereignty. Shown here is a uranium storage facility at Malargüe, operated by the National Commission of Atomic Energy (CNEA).

We can truthfully state that the capabilities acquired to develop and produce weapons systems for national defense have been destroyed and devastated, due to decisions of the government itself, and the complicit silence of the leaders of our military institutions.

'No one wastes time talking to the weak'

In opposition to these facts, it is worth recalling what a Brazilian general said in 1986 to justify the large defense budget established up to the year 2000. He said: "A powerful country needs powerful armed forces, because no one will waste time talking to the weak."

The opposite idea exists in our case. Why have an important armed forces, if we've been told we should be a small country? Our generals have already assimilated this and act accordingly.

So, to the destruction of operational capacity should be added the destruction of national development and production of weapons systems. . . .

The entire Argentine nation knows today that we have had imposed on us the strangulation of our nuclear development, the dismantling of our tank and submarine factories, as well as the destruction of the Condor project. This is the

sovereignty we enjoy today. . . .

What alternative did Col. D. Jorge Alberto Romero Mundani have? He was an engineer, researcher, and scientist: "shut up and be an accomplice of the corrupt," or "end his life so that the work begun 50 years ago by Generals Savio and Mosconi, for the purpose of having our own Defense Production Systems, could remain in effect?"

What other alternative did I have? . . .

It only remains for me to say that, now that you know the grave problems experienced by the Armed Forces, and in particular our beloved Army, I pray to God, our Lord Jesus Christ and his Holy Mother, to illuminate your minds and give you wisdom enough to "prevent the truth from hiding behind justice." May you find the legal recourse which will permit the Argentine Army, "military arm of the Fatherland," to begin the process of achieving the unity of its members on the basis of honor and dignity, and rebuild itself after the tremendous wounds suffered during the recent decades, so as to recover those ethical and Christian values, the values of San Martín. It is my hope that, since what is at stake here is the fate of the Republic, the well-known saying, "for Justice, God; for the Truth, time," will not prevail. If it does, unfortunately for our beloved Army, it will be too late.