

拉丁美洲史話

**Latin America's First Golpista: General José Félix Benito Uriburu**

*Check to Law, Checkmate to Democracy*

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Abstract

History shows that, sooner or later, historical events reverberate all over the world; it also shows the results of such an influence depend, in large part, on the social, political and economic circumstances in each country. The maxim is that leaders must be scrupulous guardians of Law

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coups d'état have been a historical constant feature in Latin American history that have made not more than retarding the development of these countries and stimulating the autocracies, whether rightist or leftist.

The troubled institutional life that has characterized most of the countries during the 20th century has been the result of certain external and internal factors; in the Argentinian case, its origin can be found in the coup d'état that, led by General José Félix Benito Uriburu.

On September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1930, General Uriburu, overthrew President Hipólito Yrigoyen who, belonging to the Radical party, had been elected president for the second time in October 1928. Yrigoyen had previously been in office between 1916 and 1922.

The politicization of the Argentine Army had started two years before, when President Yrigoyen himself decided to disregard the rules and regulations of the military institution by ordering promotions and retirements within the force in accordance with the level of adhesion or disagreement of its members to his government.

More than once, Yrigoyen subordinated military issues to political or personal regards, as it was the federal government interventions against the provincial states. Such a resolution raised objections from many men in uniform, since they thought this task was not part of their specific mission, as stated in the Argentine Constitution.

To this discontent it was added the workers' uneasiness, whose demands had been systematically ignored by Yrigoyen: Argentine workers went on strike three hundred and fifty times during the two years of Yrigoyen's second administration, and they were ruthlessly suppressed by forces belonging to the Police, the Army and even the Navy, in spite of the fact that their involvement in such actions did not belong to the specific mission these forces had.

Social discontent and unrest increased as Yrigoyen attacked freedom of the press, and reached their highest peak when several members of the opposition congregated at an

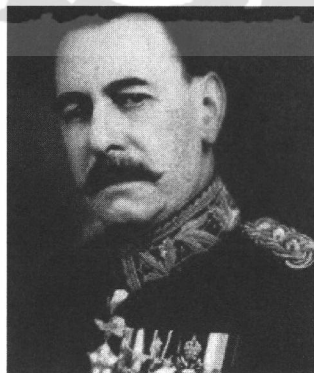
square, were put under fire by some supporters of the president himself, because of which many other supporters of Yrigoyen's own party, the Radical Party, became opponents.

At the same time, the effects of the Great Depression –and Yrigoyen's inability to deal with them– complicated not only Argentine economics, exports, credit and relationships among countries but also the social, political and ideological order itself. They also encouraged totalitarian autocracies, the State direct intervention on economy and, eventually, “the revolt of the masses”.

In Argentina, these factors boosted the so-called “rightist nationalism”, whose essential features were a deep political anti-liberalism and an increasing anti-democratic contempt.

These features fully identify José Félix Uriburu who –leading six hundred junior officer cadets from the Military College and without shooting a single shoot– usurped the government on September, 1930. Thus, the deposition of the Radical government was accomplished with remarkably little planning and with only small forces As D. Rock has pointed out, the change of government in 1930 was a conservative, and to some an “oligarchic” restoration. Led by the Army, the revolutionaries seized power as popular support for the Radicals collapsed in the wake of the depression. The Congress was closed as well as several universities, and Martial Law was declared. However, he failed in his attempt of making null and void the Universal Vote Law. Eventually, he stepped down in 1932. In any case, this coup d'état was the starting point for a large series of institutional breaks that prostrated Argentine development.

Unfortunately, neither History nor media have properly underlined the inexcusable role played by Argentina's Supreme Court of Justice, which recognized Uriburu as legitimate president, confirming in this way this one and the consecutives *de-facto* governments that not only Argentina, but Latin America in general, were to suffer from throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> –and even until the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> – century.



**José Félix Benito Uriburu y Uriburu (1868 - 1932) was the first de facto President of Argentina, from Sept.6, 1930 to Feb. 20, 1932.**