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MARIANO CÚNEO LIBARONA. | @KIDNAVAJOART

Cúneo Libarona, Tim Ballard and the freak show

One of the connective threads behind the multiple scandals faced by Milei and his top officials is CPAC, the conservative think tank that counts with the Argentine President and Donald Trump as some of its highest-profile members.



AGUSTINO FONTEVECCHIA



OPINION AND ANALYSIS | YESTERDAY 18:54

Every week that passes, a new scandal emerges. It must be the heat of the campaign. The latest “victim” is the controversial Justice Minister, Mariano Cúneo Libarona, who appeared on a hidden camera offering his influence to Tim Ballard, another contentious character. Ballard, a former Special Agent for the Department of Homeland Security’s Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) taskforce has led multiple anti-child trafficking NGOs over the years, some of which he’s been expelled from accused of sexual misconduct and irregular donation procurement. He denies the accusations

In the leaked video, Minister Cúneo Libarona tells Ballard that after watching the film “Sound of Freedom,” where Hollywood star Jim Caviezel plays Ballard embarking on a dangerous mission to the Colombian jungle to rescue captive children, he was inspired to write a legal project that he wishes to send to Congress. He invites Ballard to read it and then offers him access to media outlets, journalists, and even judges and ministers to “tell your story and the issues.” He goes on to tell Ballard he will help him “clear up that misunderstanding that occurred in our country.”

It wasn’t immediately clear what misunderstanding Cúneo Libarona was speaking of, but Ballard’s name became a feature in mainstream media back earlier this year when television gossip star Viviana Canosa promised to come out with serious accusations of sexual abuse and even paedophilia against several colleagues including Florencia Peña and Lizy Tagliani. Canosa’s accusations sparked a media scandal and multiple legal proceedings, many against Canosa herself.

She indicated that Ballard had given her information about child-trafficking, forcing the former Special Agent to admit having meeting her, but denying they ever spoke about these issues.

The opposition has called for Minister Cúneo Libarón's head, indicating he is colluding with a foreigner who is also an interested party in passing purported legislation, adding that he is an interested party. Even within the ranks of the Javier Milei administration, Security Minister Patricia Bullrich has called Ballard a fraudster with multiple accusations against him. Why would someone with the political backing of President Milei and the power of a Security Minister agree to a meeting with Ballard, and then go on to incriminate himself so directly? Who filmed him? And why was the video leaked?



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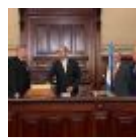
'Invest now because Argentina is very cheap,' Milei tells business leaders



One of the connective threads behind the multiple scandals faced by Milei and his top officials is CPAC, the conservative think tank that counts with the Argentine President and Donald Trump as some of its highest-profile members. According to Perfil's Giselle Leclerq, the former Special Agent was part of the CPAC summit held in February where both Milei and Trump were in attendance. National deputy Esteban Paulón says that Ballard was introduced to Milei by Laura Belén Arrieta, the infamous single passenger of the private jet owned by Leondro Scatturice who entered the country with ten pieces of undeclared luggage. Arrieta, one of the organisers of CPAC's Latin American chapter, is employed by Scatturice, who has close ties with Argentina's intelligence agencies and Santiago Caputo, the controversial political aide to President Milei who runs Cúneo Libarón's Ministry through his deputy, Sebastián Amerio. Everything is connected, it seems.

Back to Bullard, his anti-child trafficking work crossed paths with the wild conspiracy theories associated with QAnon, which has a solid belief base among the ranks of the right wing-conservative MAGA movement, as Leclerq noted. The belief that a cabal of sex-traffickers and pedophiles led by prominent Democrats and Hollywood stars has led the QAnon world to "invade" the digital campaigning of the traditional NGOs in the space, as the New York Times reported, which also interviewed Ballard who noted the increased awareness was an opportunity. The idea that the QAnon cult can stop human-trafficking has led to dangerous situations such as the hostage showdown at Comet Ping Pong, where a radicalised person walked into the restaurant armed with an AR-15 style assault rifle in order to investigate the "pizzagate" conspiracy. In Argentina, the troubling disappearance of five-year-old Loan Peña in Corrientes province. As the investigation was underway a man who claimed to be a member of multiple US security agencies and who was known as "the American" was arrested after trying to get involved with the case. His real name is Nicolás Gabriel Soria and he said he had worked with Ballard, something the latter denied. As Leclerq reported, a lawyer for two of Bullard's sexual abuse accusers noted that Soria had been brainwashed to believe he was helping to battle in the front lines of the battle against child-trafficking by Aerial Recovery, one of the NGOs Ballard worked with. He was part of a program aimed at helping war veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who received some basic training and then become "loyal mercenaries sent to 'work' across the globe." Soria "got involved in the case thinking he was a child trafficking expert because he was given some sort of certification and he truly believes the whole [QAnon] conspiracy theory."

Rodrigo Tripolone, the attorney, suggests that Ballard has a fraudulent modus operandi: in order to feed his image as a "paedophile hunter" he presents himself as an expert, cosies up to local authorities, and then tags along in domestic police operations to gain credibility. Many of these types of images can be seen on his social media.



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For whatever it's worth ,Ballard's video with Minister Cúneo Libarona adds another spot to the tiger. The MAGA world appears to have easy access to Milei and his cabinet through CPAC, allowing Ballard to sit with the Justice Minister to attempt to clear his name, or 10 bags to get smuggled into the country without proper investigation on Scatturice's airplane, by his employee. A recent investigation showed that Scatturice's technology firm, OCP Tech, received a US\$78-million government contract for maintaining Wi-Fi connections in schools. Along the same lines, B class characters like Hayden Mark Davis, Julian Peh, along with local connections Mauricio Novelli and Manuel Terrones Godoy got President Milei to participate in a meme coin rugpull scam that is now under investigation by the US judiciary. Furthermore, Karina Milei's political task force, a company named Tech Security, owned by the family of Chamber of Deputies Speaker Martín Menem and advisor Eduardo "Lule" Menem, received a contract worth four billion pesos from government-owned Banco Nación.

The smear campaign is in full force. Last week there was a purge of the Buenos Aires Province police force accused of campaigning on behalf of Maximiliano Bondarenko, libertarian candidate in the third electoral section that is a historical bastion of Peronism. Together, all of these and other "operations" or coordinated information leaks destined to harm political opponents indicate that the traditional method of doing politics in Argentina is alive and well, and it includes illegal espionage. This doesn't mean those on the receiving-end are innocent, quite the contrary in many cases. Expect the freakshow to continue.

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Agustino Fontevecchia



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