

Clashes Mar Reburial of Juan Perón

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BUENOS AIRES, Oct. 17 -- Violence marred the transfer of the remains of former Argentine president Juan Perón to a new mausoleum on Tuesday, as members of rival union groups appeared to battle for access to the reburial ceremonies.

Even as the flag-draped coffin was being ceremoniously carried onto the mausoleum grounds in the suburb of San Vicente, some at the gathering continued to hurl rocks and beat one another bloody with sticks. Others, peacefully attending to pay tribute to the three-time president, watched in shock.

Television and newspaper reports attributed the violence to disputes over entry onto the grounds of the mausoleum site. Several of those shown rioting on television wore shirts and vests with the symbol of the union coalition that helped organize the transfer of Perón's remains.

Television footage also showed one man repeatedly firing a pistol near the burial grounds before the coffin arrived. At least one person suffered a gunshot wound, and more than 40 people suffered other injuries during the violence.

Perón's body had been moved from its former resting place in Buenos Aires, and thousands had gathered to salute his coffin. The reburial scene underscored what a powerful symbol Perón remains in Argentina, where his party is still the country's dominant political force 32 years after his death.

"This was supposed to be a fiesta, a historic day," one woman told the Associated Press as she fled the grounds with her family. "Instead it is a great shame."

Perón's backers have always included Argentines from diverse backgrounds, who at times seem to agree on little other than their allegiance to the iconic strongman. When Perón returned to Argentina from exile in 1973, a planned welcoming ceremony for him at the Ezeiza international airport in Buenos Aires turned tragic as contrasting ideological wings of his party clashed, resulting in at least 13 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

The reburial in the new, \$1.1 million mausoleum in the suburb of San Vicente -- where he and his second wife, Eva, often spent weekends -- was Perón's third. He was disinterred this week from the Chacaritas cemetery in Buenos Aires, a site that many of his backers deemed too undistinguished. The body of Eva Perón remains in the city's Recoleta cemetery.

Tuesday's violence marked yet another unfortunate event in a series that has followed Perón since his death. In 1987, thieves broke into his crypt and -- for reasons still unknown -- sawed off his hands.

Late last week, experts extracted DNA samples from Perón's corpse to appease a woman who had sparred with the Perón family in court for the right to such a test. The result of the test has not yet been determined.

As violence continued at the new mausoleum on Tuesday, a man could be heard pleading for peace over a loudspeaker.

"Come on," he said, "we are all Perónists."