

## LATIN AMERICA

## Hitler is alive and well in Uruguay

**U**ruguay is that famous "Switzerland of the Americas" tucked between the giants Argentina and Brazil. Its lack of poverty and illiteracy, high level of citizen participation, smallness and apparent vulnerability earned it the name. That was in the old days of democratic chaos before the generals, American-equipped and trained, undertook to restore order.

It's quite orderly now. Every wall has electronic ears, every confidence may be betrayed, and some 7,000 dissidents are behind bars. The tribe of Uruguayans of all ages numbers some four million, and economic and political events have scattered it wide and far. Since 1968, when a million odd already lived outside Uruguay, another half million have taken off. In the view of these fugitives, as many more would leave if they could afford it, and if the government would permit it. The fare to the nearest place where you can open your mouth—Venezuela, Costa Rica or Mexico—is \$300 to \$400 per adult and half that for each child.

In little Uruguay most families have a member, or at least a neighbor, in jail. Formerly about all the prisoners get, but the new idea is to charge for it. Maintenance of the jails is a heavy burden on the government, consider the salaries of the informer network and the maestros of torture, of the doctors standing by to ensure they stop just short of death. The regular hotel business, where residence is voluntary, faces bankruptcy because the new order doesn't attract tourists. But the new charge system makes jails one of the few flourishing businesses in Uruguay.

For such a tiny and brain-drained country, this new idea in order—restoring technology is one of which Uruguay's generals can be proud. Brazil, Argentina and Chile have their own up-to-date torture chambers, but none of them thought of this added twist. Hitler thought of the value of dead prisoners' hair and teeth but not of this dividend from the living.

(To be fair to Chile, it too has its original inspiration: dogs trained to rape female prisoners, preferably in their husbands' presence. Uruguay's dogs merely lie beside prisoners suspended just above the ground, ready to fasten fangs in flesh if a foot should reach down to ease the agony of a dislocating shoulder. For the rest, torture chambers—their location in a barracks always identifiable by the top-decibel radio music, played throughout business hours to drown the screams—are standardized throughout Latin America's Southern Cone.)

#### Rising costs of torture.

Charging for torture has the added virtue of occupying the spare time of prisoners' relatives and neighbors, raising a few hundred pesos here, a few there. Their problem starts from the fact that, when anyone is arrested, his or her home is stripped bare: clothing and kitchenware to the last sock and broken cup, installment-plan appliances which some officer will enjoy while the family completes the payments. If the family owns anything else—a bank account, an old car—it is sequestered to pay the jail bill. But the bill goes on mounting, since few of the guests stay less than a year, many for several years.

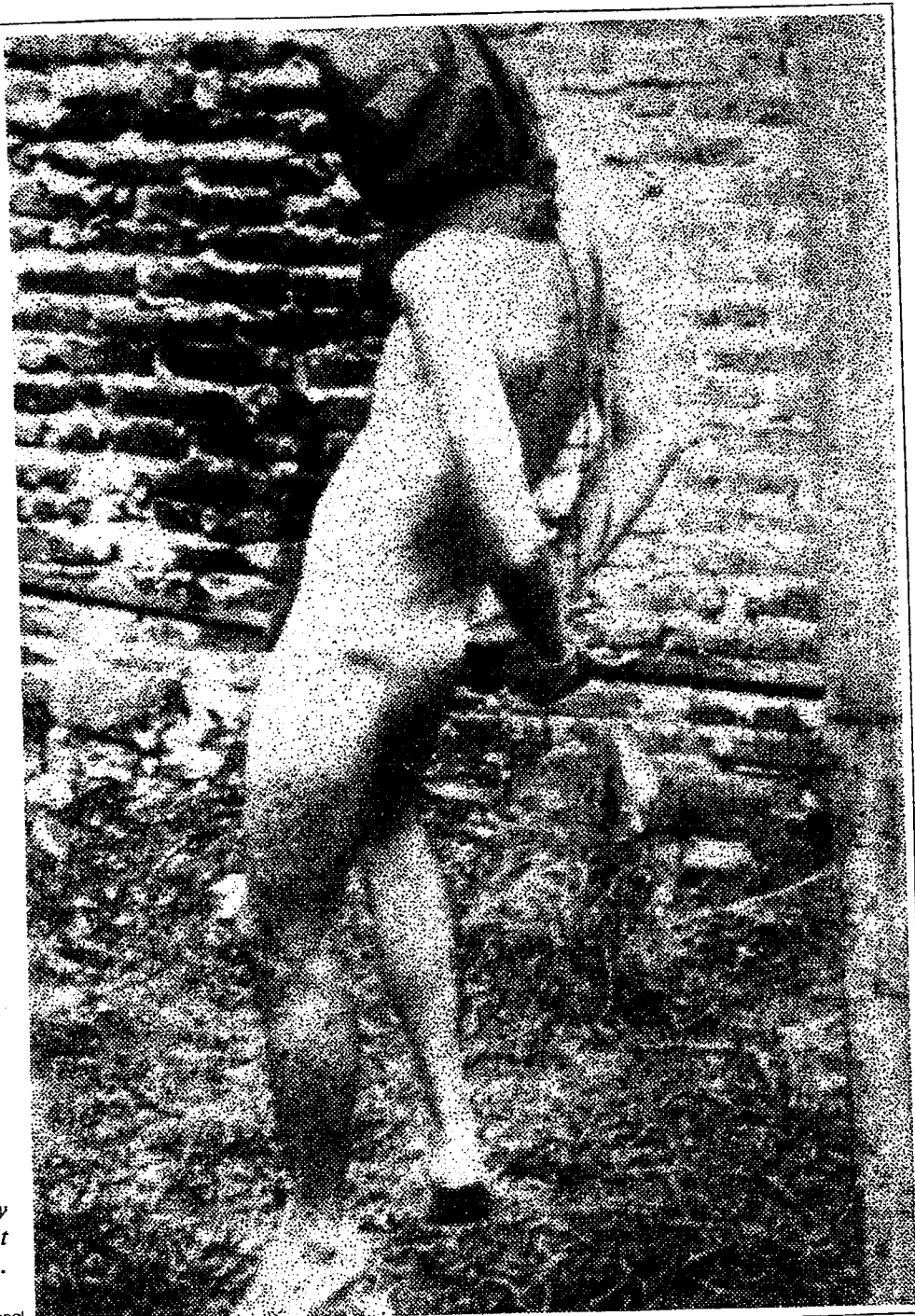
Passing the bat around the block is the only solution. This cuts to a minimum the families' and neighbors' time for turning their dangerous thoughts into action—especially in Montevideo's city blocks where half a dozen or more families have sons, daughters, fathers or mothers running up jail bills.

\$50 a month is no small amount to collect in Uruguayan pesos. Originally the charge was \$30 for the whole stay, however long, but it had to go up like all else in these inflationary times. There is an additional monthly charge of \$20 for toilet paper, soap, and "luxuries" that

**Brazil, Argentina and Chile have their own up-to-date torture chambers, but Uruguay has added a new, gruesome twist.**

*The caballefe (sawhorse) is commonly used in Uruguay. The victim has to sit naked astride it for hours.*

Amnesty International



you don't get if you don't pay. These are U.S. dollar amounts so that the bill rises as the peso sinks. At this writing the peso is worth 1/4,600th of a dollar and the monthly jail bill without "luxuries" runs at 270,000 pesos. Workers' wages are 450,000 (skilled) and 270,000 (unskilled) pesos a month, minus deductions (not for trade unions dues—there aren't any unions).

With his mass of paper, and with stomach rumbling from his lunch of a few beans, the worker walks home, often several miles. In a country where everyone once ate meat and everything costs more than in the U.S., the 1,000-peso (20¢) bus fare is out of sight. When he gets home, the kids have little or nothing to eat, but the neighbor is there with the hat for someone's torture bill.

As in any hotel, Uruguayan dissidents who have served their jail terms (e.g., for possessing a Marxist book or radical song recording) can't leave until the bill is paid. And as in a hotel, there are "extras": not only the toilet paper but all the trial costs involving a mountain of documents. We are in the age of Human Rights, and those of jail workers must be respected. Everyone knows the cost in time and money of the medical expertise to detect approaching death in a man hanging by one leg, or a nursing mother receiving electric shocks on her nipples. Nor does one become a general or an expert torturer in a day or for free, however generous Uncle Sam may have been with Panama training scholarships.

In the case of some prisoners, months of torture fail to elicit grounds for any charges, and they have nothing left to sequester. To these, generosity is shown that medieval Jew-burners might have seen as dangerous weakness. The bill is presented on departure, on the understanding that failure to pay up soon will necessitate return for further treatment. For such lucky fellows it's their turn, in liberty restored, to pass the hat.

#### "It's frightful."

Should they escape into Argentina or Brazil, the cooperative police of those countries will suddenly appear as they walk the street or sit at home, throw a hood over their head and deliver them back trussed. It's a matter of protocol among brother military dictatorships that each tortures its own. Or else their decomposed, mutilated body may turn up on some lake or ocean shore, "executed" by "Unofficial" death squads.

Police guard the entrances of friendly Montevideo embassies where one might seek political asylum. Yet some non-payers of jail bills manage to get past, even with families in tow, and survive to fight again tomorrow. A while back the Mexican ambassador, the humane representative of a government with doors still open, had 150 guests for three months in his small house. Men, women, children and babies sleep on the floor, packed together in round-the-clock eight-hour shifts, through the months of waiting for the generals' safe-conduct to leave. The ambassador personally escorts them to the airport to ensure they board a plane, and fits them out with clothing; no one could enter an embassy carrying a suitcase. Insolvent Mexico pays the fares, and initial hotel bills on arrival, of those who can escape with their lives but with nothing else.

The young, almost skeletally thin Uruguayan who supplied this information had thus escaped last month with his wife and two little boys. His wife stops him from giving details of his \$1,000-odd (unpaid) jail year, because "when he does, he has appalling nightmares from which I can't wake him; it's as if his conscious mind were dead."

"It's frightful, frightful," is all he says; "and I didn't get the worst. The very worst is for Jews." Then he turns and laughs with pleasure at his kids, who are chasing some new small *companeros* around the rose-patch in our garden.

#### Fascism alive and well.

There's always some hope for the human race, though in orderly Uruguay you must look rather far for it. Examples: a jail guard ordered to rape a 17-year-old prisoner said to her: "Make noises like I was doing it, but I won't do it. I've a daughter your age." Two men who requested "normal" treatment for fellow inmates getting extra torture were hung up before the whole jail population; during the night a guard threw them some bread; he was likewise strung up, and his later fate is unknown.

These incidents are exceptional since the army recruits as jail guards the most illiterate peasants who, however, are well supplied with sadistic pornography. Illiterates are a standard product of modern Uruguay where order is more important than education, where education indeed is the seed of disorder. As for the officers supervising the torture, liquor and drugs are on tap according to their taste and capacity.

The last funeral of a dissident that people could attend was that of young, robust Alvaro Balbi, a victim of "asthma" (according to the authorities) after four days in jail. The sealed coffin delivered to his widow was opened before doctor friends: the body was covered with wounds and bruises, several fingers were missing, and his head had been bashed to a jelly. With thousands of neighbors silently following, friends carried the body on their shoulders to the Jewish cemetery 4½ hours away. This was in 1974 when torture technology had yet to reach its present sophistication, and the danger of funerals to public order was insufficiently appreciated.

At least we know one thing. The notion that our team defeated fascism in 1945 is a sad illusion.

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## U.S./VIETNAM

# 'Only one side responding concretely'

In the beginning of June a delegation of Americans who had been active in promoting friendship between the U.S. and Vietnam went to Paris to meet with the Americans and Vietnamese delegations to the normalization talks. They met personally with Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke and the Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien. Upon returning, Cora Weiss, the National Coordinator of the Friendship Coalition, provided IN THESE TIMES with this assessment of the talks.

A delegation from the Friendship Coalition, Wallace Collett of American Friends Service Committee, Doug Hostetter of the United Methodist Church Office at the UN, Cora Weiss, national coordinator of Friendshipment and Candace Falk of Indochina Resource Center, went to Paris to have talks with the American and Vietnamese delegations. We were in Paris June 1-3 preceding and during the talks.

We went for a better understanding of the requirements for normalization of relations to see how we as citizens could help achieve our common goal. We were part of a tradition within the peace movement since 1968 of sending delegations to meet with both the American and Vietnamese negotiators in Paris. Frequently, such citizen inquiries led to breakthroughs, such as information on POWs.

We returned convinced that both the Carter administration and the Hanoi government are interested in achieving normalization of relations. When and how this will be accomplished, however, remains a problem.

What impressed me the most was the extraordinary good will of the Vietnamese who were the victims of the \$150 billion war, their willingness to put the war behind them and their readiness to talk so soon after the war has ended.

The Vietnamese feel that the problems of the war must be addressed and resolved before the next stage of development can proceed. Resolving those problems of the past provides a firm basis for the future.

What are the problems?

1) The major interest on the American side appears to be an accounting of the missing-in-action.

2) The major concern on the Vietnamese side is healing the wounds of war. They want some recognition of the American promise to aid in the reconstruction of Vietnam.

The American government appears satisfied with progress being made in the accounting of the missing-in-action. Twenty more names have been added in these talks, in addition to the bodies returned to the Woodcock Commission.

Because the National Liberation Front often marked the graves of American airmen with Vietnamese names to protect them from angry defamation, it is some-



Cora Weiss and Phan Hien.

times necessary to dig up as many as 300 Vietnamese graves to find one American. For a people who believe in the sanctity of the burial site, the MIA search has tested both their religious and political beliefs.

Now what can we say about the concrete evidence about American's carrying out it's good will?

The U.S. claims that in agreeing not to veto Vietnam's UN membership it has made a major concession. In fact, Vietnam fulfills every requirement for membership to the UN under its charter.

What else has the U.S. done?

• It takes credit for lifting the State Department's ban on travel to Vietnam by American citizens. But in fact such travel depends on Hanoi, not the U.S., granting permission through visas. Vietnamese citizens, on the other hand, can still not travel freely in the U.S.

• The U.S. alleges that it has lifted the ban on travel for the Vietnamese observer mission in the UN, yet they remain restricted to movement within 25 miles of New York City. The U.S. has simply restored permission to include Brooklyn within that boundary (now that Brooklyn navy yard is inoperative).

• The U.S. claims that it has not blocked Vietnam's admission to any of the UN agencies to which it has wanted to apply. But in fact the U.S. has taken a position of abstention and not a positive position voting on admission or on financial grants of aid.

• The U.S. alleges it is prepared to lift the embargo on trade, which has been in effect for more than two years, but only after the establishment of diplomatic relations.

So what we see is only one side responding concretely to the demands of the other. The U.S. seems to want to demonstrate its good will with concessions that have nothing to do with Vietnam's central demand.

The U.S. has adamantly refused to take responsibility for the destruction it brought in the ten years of war.

Vietnam is not begging for alms, it is not asking for "reparations." The Vietnamese never use that word, which implies

guilt. Only Vance uses it. They are not asking for the specific sum of \$4.5 billion promised by President Richard Nixon to Vietnam, but for a commitment in principle to aid.

The Carter administration has offered no leadership to Congress on this issue, but instead has allowed both the House and Senate, in amendments to the foreign aid bill, to discourage aid to Vietnam. The Carter administration could have prevented passage of the Dole amendment in the Senate this week by mobilizing the Democratic Caucus, but it failed to do so.

It then uses these amendments as justification for not meeting the Vietnamese demands.

We see no reason why the U.S. must wait the 17 and 22 years it took with Cuba and China to restore normal relations with Vietnam. We urge the President and the Secretary of State to show the concern for the Vietnamese interest that they have already demonstrated for our own.

While the Vietnamese appear to be ready to go as slowly or as rapidly as the U.S. will go, there seems nothing to gain by delaying the process.

As an American citizen of conscience, it would be unconscionable for me to continue to ask the Vietnamese to dig up the remains of U.S. airmen without seeing anything concrete from the U.S.

As one of the millions of Americans who opposed the war, I urge my fellow citizens to help me make the American government carry out its moral responsibility to the peoples of Vietnam.

Americans with the Vietnamese negotiators.



## WORLD IN BRIEF

### India: Janata wins big

The center-right Janata party, which upset Indira Gandhi's Congress party in last March's elections, was well ahead in last week's state assembly elections. Janata led in eight of ten states with a regional party leading in one and the Communist party (Marxist) in another.

Janata based its campaign again on the issue of Gandhi's authoritarian rule. "In the present elections...the people have to choose between those who were on the side of the thoughtless oppression of the people and those who stood against tyrants and oppressors," Prime Minister

Morarji R. Desai, the Janata party head, said before the election.

Janata had called for the elections in June in order to elect one of its own members to the largely ceremonial post of president. The president is to be chosen before August by the electoral college, whose membership is drawn from the state assemblies and parliament.

Congress' poor showing in the elections—it got less than ten percent of the vote—may threaten its existence. On the other hand, the elections were an important victory for the Communist party (Marxist). The CP-M, which split from the Soviet-oriented Communist party in the early '60s, had dominated West Bengal's politics until 1972, when it was routed by the Congress party.

In this election, it was opposed both by Congress and by Janata, with whom it broke after the March elections. With a third of the votes counted, it had a four-to-one lead over Janata with Congress still farther behind.

### Belgrade: East-West talks

In Belgrade, Yugoslavia, last week preparatory talks began among 35 nations for next fall's review of the Helsinki declaration on European security and cooperation. The main issue at the talks will be the

importance accorded to human rights in next fall's agenda.

At the 1975 Helsinki talks, the U.S. took a back seat on this issue to its European allies; in Belgrade, the roles are reversed. The Soviet Union, for its part, is calling for the conference to concentrate on future goals and not on reviewing past adherence to the Helsinki pact.

If the U.S. presses the human rights issue, the Soviets have threatened to cite the American prosecution of the Wilmington 10, American refusal to grant visas to Soviet trade union officials, and American failures to ensure the "human rights" of employment, health, and housing for all its citizens.

—John Judis