

ARGENTINA



Gen. Videla gets no more support abroad than at home. Here he is (forefront) at the inaugural ceremonies for the coronation of Pope John Paul I.

Military's economic policies may create Iran-type reaction

By Horacio Lofredo

ARGENTINA TODAY IS NO more stable, reliable or prosperous than was Iran before the seemingly impregnable regime of the Shah was toppled by the mass uprising of the population. Now that the third anniversary of military rule in Argentina approaches, the question can be asked: if Tehran, why not Buenos Aires?

Three years ago on March 24, those in the U.S. government and the private business sector concerned with political and economic relations with Argentina gave a sigh of relief when the military, headed by Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla, efficiently deposed the constitutional government of President Isabel Peron. As the argument went, the military was compelled to intervene to end social chaos, official corruption and subversive activity, and to prevent the total collapse of the economy.

The media showed images of Argentine soldiers with doves perched on their automatic rifles smiling reassuringly at civilian passersby. Observers described the new president as a self-sacrificing and devout Christian and political moderate without personal ambition who would bring peace and stability to his beleaguered country. The appointment of Jose Martinez de Hoz, conservative landowner, cor-

General Videla, like the Shah, is meeting peaceful protest with iron repression, token reforms, and cosmetic changes.

porate executive and banker, as economy minister won the approval of financiers in the U.S. and Western Europe, which held the bulk of Argentina's enormous foreign debt of \$10 billion in their portfolios.

At the time, only a few critics predicted political repression and economic stagnation rather than an era of progress and prosperity. Few would now disagree that the violence and chaos of the last three years has exceeded the critics' most pessimistic forecasts.

The scale of the turmoil is unprecedented in the nation's civic and military history and barely stands comparison in

the national experiences of the rest of Latin America. Once respected as a strong and independent-minded world actor, Argentina has now joined Chile, South Africa, Nicaragua, Uganda and other outcasts from the community of nations.

According to statistics compiled by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs and other national and international agencies, Argentina continues to be the hemisphere's major human rights violator, with more prisoners in its jails, more of the innocent murdered and more of the government's opponents abducted than the rest of Latin America combined.

Curb excesses!

This record has prompted other governments and international and non-governmental organizations to demand that Argentine authorities curb excesses, release its victims and respect fundamental rights. In the U.S., congressional investigations and legislative initiatives have induced the Carter administration to impose a ban on military training and all sales of military equipment to Argentina on human rights grounds.

Using the facile argument that it could not risk releasing former guerrillas (a fraction of those now being detained)—who would rejoin their former colleagues—and fearing that testimony from deported victims of torture might further encourage international condemnation, the government has largely ignored the pressures of world public opinion to open up its jails.

Despite the damage to its international image, the majority of the military believes that the "dirty war against subversion" has paid off. They claim to have liquidated 85 percent of the guerrillas who in 1975 were confidently predicting a revolutionary victory before the end of the decade. Even so, the pace of repression has not lessened.

The Argentine economy remains sunk in its deepest recession since the 1930s. Its gross national product for 1978 has fallen by 3.4 percent, down to the level of 1973. While the cost of living has risen higher than that of the U.S., real wages have been cut by 60 percent since 1975 and are today less than a third of corresponding ones for American workers. The inflation rate for 1978 was again the highest in the world, 169.8 percent. During January 1979 alone the cost of food rose by 15.5 percent, while government wage guidelines permit a maximum cost of living increase of only 4 percent per month.

Bankruptcies rise.

The slump in the manufacturing and industrial sectors, due to the shrinking domestic market, has led to a record number of bankruptcies since 1976. The sharp drop in domestic consumption and industrial production have combined to cut imports and permit the accumulation of \$6 billion in foreign reserves, a figure that the government ironically cites as proof of the success of its policies and the strength of the economy.

A more accurate analysis of the reason for this figure may lie in the additional facts that new capital has not been invested to modernize the nation's industrial plants and the aggressive policy of Martinez de Hoz to contract huge foreign loans from multinational banks, like Chase, at several points above prime. These loans, often made more for political than economic reasons, go under utilized, only to burden any post-Videla administration with debt-servicing and amortization costs.

Artificially high interest rates have led to widespread speculation by foreign and domestic financiers. A series of recently publicized financial scandals point to high-level official corruption. The military meanwhile took advantage of their complete control over the budget to contract almost \$3 billion in military equipment purchases in 1978 alone in preparation for a war with Chile that so far has been narrowly averted.

When the social impact of the government's economic policies is added to the hatred and anxiety generated by political repression, it becomes clear why many of

the regime's supporters fear that the undisputed victory over the guerrillas can easily turn into a devastating political defeat and can pave the way for a resurgence of mass mobilizations and social violence. In the words of a general once in charge of counterinsurgency operations in Tucuman province, "For every guerrilla that I killed the economic policies of Martinez de Hoz are breeding ten."

It is not surprising that, despite military intervention of trade unions and stiff penalties for labor organizing activities, there have been hundreds of strikes and other job actions in the past year. The military, however, is determined to closely regulate and limit the scope of trade union activities through the enactment of legislation that would abolish industry-wide union organization and ban regional and national federations and confederations.

Under the new law, unions would be prevented from supporting any political parties, a measure obviously intended to break the linkages of the labor movement with Peronism. The new law would also force the dismantling of the 47-year-old Central Labor Confederation (CGT).

Coalitions are forming.

Trade union leaders, aided in their struggle for survival by a strong and active rank and file, have found tactical allies among industrial and commercial businessmen fiercely opposed to government economic policies. Political parties, sectors of the Catholic Church and some military officers disenchanted with the political process are now clearly gravitating towards this potentially powerful coalition.

The signs of a growing undercurrent of anti-government sentiment are visible everywhere, though foreign personnel stationed in Argentina often ignore them. Last September, for example, nearly one million people joined the yearly pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin of Lujan. The message of the march became unmistakably political; for social justice, against war with Chile, for respect of human rights. Critics, harassed and censored by the government, are forced to use very cautious language in public statements.

Reading between the lines, Argentines gauge the extent to which business, political, trade union and even some members of the military recognize and voice some of their grievances and frustrations. Last December, the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, the largest human rights organization in Argentina, presented Gen. Videla with a request for information on 4,881 missing persons. Every major political party was represented among the signers.

Labor actions, peaceful demonstrations, public statements, petitions, religious services, constitute only the tip of the iceberg of the broad-based anti-dictatorial movement rarely noticed by the outsider and still ignored by those in power.

The Shah of Iran failed to see the writing on the walls and dismissed the warning signs everywhere. He answered the call for fundamental change with token reforms and cosmetic changes that only exacerbated existing tensions.

Confident of its own strength, the junta is following a similar course. Gen. Videla has now been converted to being a "civilian" president. A handful of foreign political detainees have been freed from prison and allowed to return to their own countries.

Some generals have taken to lunching and talking with unrepresentative political figures. The other members of the junta that seized power three years ago have been duly replaced by the officers next in seniority in their respective branches. Those who have borne the brunt of governmental policies since 1976 see in these "gestures of reconciliation" only the futile attempt on the part of the regime to project an image rather than a reality of stability, institutionalization, and legitimacy. Time may be running out on the generals.

Horacio Lofredo is an associate at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Protestant doctor blows whistle on British tortures

By Dennis O'Hearn

BELFAST

FOR SEVERAL YEARS THE ISSUE of political prisoners has dominated the struggle within the Republican (Irish Unity) section of the Irish community. But within the past few weeks the British government in Northern Ireland has had to face another issue: police terror. The issue of torture by police and army has cropped up time and again in the 1960s and 1970s, but the latest developments are especially sticky for Britain.

It all began in June 1978 when Amnesty International released the results of its own investigations, showing evidence of systematic brutality by the police during the interrogation process. (The Amnesty International report covered brutality against both Republican and Unionist suspects). This led to the formation of a government committee (the "Bennett committee") to investigate allegations of ill-treatment. The committee's report was to be released later this year.

But an RUC doctor beat the Bennett team to the punch when, on nationwide television, he detailed cases of police brutality. Dr. Robert Irwin, police surgeon at Castlereagh interrogation center in Belfast, claimed to have examined 150-160 people who had been ill-treated by detectives. According to Dr. Irwin, these men had sustained various injuries that could not have been self-inflicted.

"I've seen five ruptured eardrums; I've seen two injuries to bones of the forearms...joint injuries to both the wrists and the little joints in the fingers...some of the sites of some of the injuries would defy even a contortionist to produce the injuries," said Dr. Irwin. One man, who is now "on the blanket" in Long Kesh prison, was convicted even though he sustained over 40 bruises during interrogation.

Irwin, a respected Protestant of Belfast, had nothing to gain by taking his stand against brutality. In fact, he had plenty to lose, a fact which soon became apparent. The whole Unionist political structure came out in condemnation of Dr. Irwin, including statements by Northern Ireland Secretary Roy Mason and Chief Constable Kenneth Newman, who claimed, essentially, that he was a liar.

The affair came to a head last week when a British paper published rumors that Dr. Irwin was trying to "get back at the RUC" because police failed to apprehend a British army man who allegedly raped his wife.

The smear campaign went on to question the doctor's mental health. Very reputable inside sources have claimed that the rumors were leaked to the press by the top levels of government: the Northern Ireland Office.

As a result of the new allegations, the government was forced to release the Bennett report earlier than planned. In the best tradition of liberal commissions, the Bennett report weakly backed up the fact that police brutality exists within Castlereagh.

But, in the worst tradition of liberal democracy, nothing will be done about police torture centers. For the systematic brutality by police is the logical bedfellow of Great Britain's special "anti-terrorism" laws (e.g., the Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions Act), allowing suspects to be held without even the most basic rights, such as access to a lawyer and informing the suspect's family. The suspected "terrorist" is essentially held

in seclusion for indefinite periods with his or her interrogator.

The same treatment is possible in other parts of the UK under the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1976. And overwhelming evidence shows that police powers have been used—in Northern Ireland as well as in Britain—to harass and mistreat political activists far more than terrorists.

This is revealed by the following facts: since 1975 about 15,000 people have been detained and held for up to seven days; of this number, less than 5,000 have been charged; over half of the 15,000 have complained of ill-treatment in varying degrees.

Besides beatings, this includes marathon questioning sessions (as much as 21 hours straight), being forced to adopt exhausting or humiliating postures, use of obscenities and sectarian slurs, and threats of force. The Bennett Report even found it necessary to suggest prohibition of "the use of threats of sexual assault" by the police.

Dr. Irwin is not alone, then, in his allegations. The number of policemen and former policemen who are suddenly finding a conscience is growing. A former member of the police authority, now a councillor in the town of Dungannon, recently said of his experience of police terror: "I will testify under oath anywhere at any time what happened and it may shake the world when they hear what did happen."

As this article is being written, the government has been shocked by the resignation of the head medical officer at Gogh barracks in Armagh (like Castlereagh, a "terrorist" interrogation center). The medical officer, Dr. Denis Elliott, said that he found he could not "operate under the conditions laid down in the Tokyo Convention Report on the treatment of prisoners held in custody." Dr. Elliott went on to say that he would not



A symbol of torture for many in Northern Ireland.

work in any holding center because "I cannot accept the conditions in interrogation centers."

Dr. Irwin, the Dungannon councillor, Dr. Elliott—these men are not wild-eyed Republicans, supporters of terrorism. Just the opposite. They all come from strong Unionist backgrounds, and have strongly supported the imperialist British presence in Northern Ireland. Yet the incidence of torture is too systematic for them to let it pass.

Some insiders claim that the immediate result of their stance is likely to be the

resignation of Chief Constable Newman in the near future. But as the British government renews the Prevention of Terrorism Act this week, it becomes painfully obvious that the police will continue to retain the power to torture for as long as the police state of Northern Ireland exists.

Perhaps as the British people see their own civil rights erode due to special legislation, as they have eroded in Northern Ireland, they will cease to ignore the British presence in Northern Ireland, and demand self-determination for the people of the whole of Ireland. ■

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Pol Pot rumored to be in China

By Wilfred Burchett

HANOI

THE NEW KAMPUCHEA REGIME of President Heng Samrin will put on a double celebration tomorrow, April 17: the fourth anniversary of the overthrow of the U.S.-backed Lon Nol dictatorship and the final crushing a few days ago of the Pol Pot regime. Details of the last days of the Pol Pot forces were given me by a Kampuchean officer who took part in the final offensive by Heng Samrin's Vietnamese-backed forces. They had good intelligence information from the local population, according to the officer.

From Jan. 7, a large-scale sweep-style operation led to the elimination of 60 small, medium and big military outposts. The survivors from these regrouped in three major bases: Abland, in the jungle 30 miles northwest of Phnom Penh, about halfway between the capital and Kompong Chanang, to which were withdrawn the remnants of six divisions (60,000 troops) of the eastern command, covering the Vietnamese frontier. Another in the Elephant Mountains—a traditional Khmer Rouge hideout—in Kampot province due south of Phnom Penh, the headquarters of the southwest command, headed by its commander Ta Moc, regarded as Pol Pot's toughest field commander. Finally,

Vietnamese troops uncovered secret communiques between Kampuchea and China.

the biggest and most important, Ta Sanh, where Pol Pot and Ieng Sary had their base. It is in the Pailin area, 20 kilometers from the Thai border, the headquarters of the political bureau of the Kampuchea Communist Party and its foreign ministry.

These bases were attacked and captured in the last days of March. But the big fish got away—Ta Moc from the Elephant Mountains, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary from Ta Sanh. Local people reported the two were last seen being carried in palanquins towards the Thai border. Ieng Sary left in such haste that he forgot his Chinese diplomatic passport, issued in the name of Su Hao, on Jan. 27.

My Kampuchean officer informant is entirely convinced that they are both already in Peking, having transited via Thailand. He maintained that each base had a huge military equipment depot with "thousands of guns" (14,000 at Abland alone), "thousands of tons of rice, hun-

dreds of tons of salt, scores of sewing machines, hundreds of radio communications sets, hundreds of Honda motor-scooters" and, at Ta Sanh, "a rich haul of secret documents in sealed containers." These included interbase communications and, more interestingly, cables exchanged between Peking and Pol Pot that "are being translated and will soon be published." He stressed that following the wiping out of these three bases the Pol Pot forces were left without artillery or motor transport, adding that when the Heng Samrin forces took over Kampou Som (formerly Sihanoukville, Kampuchea's only deep-water port) they captured a large stock of Chinese 130mm artillery pieces.

Asked whether there were Chinese advisers at the Ta Sanh base, he replied: "Yes, at all three bases, but we left a back door open." The impression was that if the Chinese advisers could make their way home through Thailand, it would avoid an embarrassing problem. But alleged Thai support for the escape of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary are being vigorously denounced by the new Phnom Penh government.

Meanwhile, the first day of negotiations between Chinese and Vietnamese delegations aimed at settling the border problems and normalizing relations has been spent on procedural questions. The question of an agenda will be tackled next. ■