

Febrero, 9, 1979

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
BOX 1062  
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63130

Friday, February 9, 1979 *Student Life* page 7

Guest viewpoint:

# Argentina's bloody dictatorship

By EDUARDO SAGUIER, Argentine Radical Civic Union

In the twentieth century history of Argentina, unlike that of Uruguay or Chile, military coup d'etats have been a common fact. All of them obeyed to a higher or lesser degree the goal of resorting the control of their neo-colonial economies to the North American corporations, and the landowning oligarchies, which meant reinstating starvation wages and reactionary social legislation. The sole purpose of this economic policy, despite Carter's weak human rights policies, serves to increase the rate of capital accumulation which then is transferred to the metropolitan headquarters.

What distinguished today's Argentine dictatorship from those that preceded it is its fascist and terrorist features. Besides wiping out political parties, labor federations and student associations, intervening universities, firing professors and dissolving scientific careers, forbidding strikes and union activities, the Argentine military Junta has unleashed a holocaust unmatched in the twentieth century history of Latin America, dwarfing in scope and cruelty the terror of Batista's Cuba, Trujillo's Dominican Republic or Stroessner's Paraguay. Paradoxically, the mass media of the U.S. that consumes such amount of energies in finding out Soviet dissidents, hardly mentions Argentina's drama.

For what a lot of Argentines have heard among political circles is that Pinochet advised Videla not to commit his own mistakes. Instead of repressing political enemies in military uniforms Pinochet told Videla to do it without them. Since the military takeover on March 1976, in the name of morality and Western Christian Civilization and with the stated ultimate goal of returning the nation to a "stable modern capitalist democracy", between 15,000 and 20,000 people have been jailed, tortured and/or murdered by government forces and paramilitary squads.

Reality goes far beyond imagination. Even the elderly and the children are tortured. The mutilated bodies of those that happened to be abducted have been dumped in the River Plate after opening their stomachs to avoid floating, or cremated late at night by special personnel at public cemeteries. Thousands more disappeared people are still alive, held somewhere in prisons and special detention camps. (*New Republic*, Dec. 1978) Former Bolivian president Juan Jose Torres and two Uruguayan senators, Zelmar Michelini and Hector Gutierrez Ruiz, were kidnapped and killed in downtown Buenos Aires during the daytime, by the military. Two Argentine deputies of the Radical Civic Union party, Mario Amaya and Angel Pisarello, were murdered while in prison. The Argentine ambassador

to Venezuela during this same military regime, Dr. Hector Hidalgo Sola, was kidnapped and killed while visiting his daughter in Buenos Aires as a result of a naive speech he gave in Caracas announcing future free elections.

Politicians of all sorts are as never before afraid to express their own views. Even Social Democratic leaders have been treated inhumanely. For example, the old head of the Radical Civic Union Party, Dr. Ricardo Balbin, was twice in one year violently put in prison after having to put his hands behind his neck and suffer the humiliation of being personally searched for weapons during an informal lunch.

Lawyers and human-rights organizations within the country estimate that, since 1976, between 20,000 and 30,000 writs of habeas corpus have been filed in efforts to locate missing persons. Besides the group of mothers who have come together to boldly protest every week in the downtown plaza of Buenos Aires to petition authorities for information about the disappearances, another coalition has now publicly emerged. It calls itself "Grandmothers of Prisoners". These are mothers of about 1000 women who were kidnapped while pregnant. There is confirmed evidence that those children who survived prison birth are being sold in a sort of a baby black market.

But this criminal repression did not stop after what the dictatorship calls "subversion" was almost completely defeated. The circle of victims continued to expand. First, it was those that military men believed to have committed what they called subversive acts (like propagandizing strikes). Last year, during a railway strike a member of a picket line was shot to death in the Central Station by the Army. His body was shown on national TV as the fate to be received by anyone daring to support the strike. Then it was those thought to have innocently supported these acts by means like printing literate material or renting offices or houses; then it was those who, by reason of their professions, might have defended them, such as lawyers; then it was the friends and colleagues of those who had such contact, and so on. In this criminal repression even people who happened to have the same name used to be kidnapped.

But for the military dictatorship, the denunciation of political crimes committed in Argentina is perceived as being part of an inter-

national terrorist campaign against the country, supported by "Marxists" who have infiltrated the Vatican State, the European social democratic parties and even the American State Department (such as Patrice Derian and Andrew Young). Of course, they expect to remove this unfriendly wave once President Carter is electorally defeated. In that sense, Videla and Pinochet's lobbies in alliance with Stroessner and Somoza's lobbies are working hard in Washington. For the military junta political prisoners are categorized as "common delinquents". That is why the military junta becomes furious any time foreign newspapers react to violations of human rights in Argentina, because they claim that today in Argentina there are no political prisoners. Of course, for the military junta, the human rights of "common delinquents" do not count. Deviancy like homosexuality, prostitution and drug addiction is considered a common crime and as such they are treated. That was the case of 60 drug addicts and homosexuals who were killed while protesting against tour of inspections and beatings in Villa Devoto's Prison last May.

These reactions, according to former senator and Radical Civic Union leader in exile Hipolito Solari Yrigoyen, offend the "national independence" to perform kidnappings, tortures and killings (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, Dec. 1978). In order to counteract these denunciations the military junta contracted the service of a very well known American public relations firm, Burston-Marsteller. The latter advised the government to go ahead with the last World Soccer Championship and try to benefit from it as Hitler did with the 1936 Olympic Games held in Berlin.

Requiring this kind of international academic agreements by North American Institutions with countries governed by fascist dictatorships should not surprise.

The military men in power in Third World Argentina admit themselves that they are fighting what they call a "dirty Third World War" against practical and ideological delinquents. Practical delinquents are considered the guerilla men, the members of political parties, and union and student activists. To be a union representative in Argentina one needs a good behavior certificate issued by the Federal Police. Ideological delinquents are instead artists, scientists, journalists, Third World pathologic priests, and last but not least, Jehova Witnesses. Forty-five of them are still in prison. Last year two French nuns were ab-

ducted and murdered for having helped the families of the disappeared. The military government is convinced, that by assuming the burden of this dirty crusade it is doing western civilization a great favor.

Because of the repressive policies of Latin American dictatorships, the United States and Western European governments have banned many Third World countries from receiving credits of any sort to buy military equipment. Consequently both fascistized ruling classes of Argentina and Chile in alliance with the multinational war industry corporations, some of which have headquarters in St. Louis, have been implementing an assumed border conflict in order to justify spending enormous portions of their exhausted budgets to rearm their terroristic bureaucracies. Once they accomplished their rearm purposes they have decided to help their most unlucky partners in that chain of horror and death that has become Latin America. As a proof of this accusation of the existence of an international "weapons clearing" network among fascist dictatorships, Argentina has very recently re-exported military equipment bought in Western countries to fight the Chileans, to the repressive Somoza dictatorship. (*Denuncia*, December 1978, p. 10) Similarly, the Argentine dictatorship has held talks with the Pretoria (South African) government regarding the establishment of a South Atlantic defense organization and the resettlement of the newly emigrated white Rhodesian bourgeoisie in what they euphemistically entitled a "transfer of technology through migration." (*Lernoux, The Nation*, Sept. 1978)

But to move backward the wheels of history without being challenged, the military dictatorship had to ban not only essential freedoms but also free thinking. As Noam Chomsky has stated, freedom is always a threat to the commissars. Security forces have extended their admitted "dirty Third World War" against what they called "ideological delinquents." Among them were the professions of psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis, professions which are considered fundamentally subversive. Then came the disciplines like sociology, anthropology and history. And last but not least came the "new math" which is suspected of being subversive because it allegedly emphasizes relatives over absolutes and questions the validity of the formal logic. (*La Nacion*, Nov. 26 of 1978)

Academic and cultural life in general have been destroyed in Argentina. Totally innocuous books and artists are banned. Vargas-Losa, Garcia Marquez and Cortazar's books were forceably put out of circulation, and theoretical discussion in humanities courses is considered dangerous. The School of Philosophy of the University of Buenos Aires placed Henry Wallon, Erick Fromm, and Jean Piaget on its black list as Freudian and Marxist. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 1978) Because of the poverty overcoming the lower classes, the primary school rate is now 50 per cent—something previously unheard of in Argentina.

Half a million Argentines have left their country since the coup, most of them professionals and technicians. Anyone involved in political activities or the social sciences is in great danger. Many of those who foresaw their peril have fled the country to Madrid, Rome, Paris, Mexico and Caracas rather than live with the threats of kidnapping and penury. Many of those that naively resisted to runaway were kidnapped. Even Brazil, in spite of its right wing military dictatorship has become a "paradise" compared with Argentina's nightmare. Anti-semitism is Argentina has been a permanent threat since the 1920's. Although no Jew dared to wear the yamaka before the coup, when the military discovered that a few Jews were financially connected with the leftist guerrilla, anti-semitism revived to such a degree that many Jews had to leave the country.

To figure out what these actual fascist dictatorships are looking for we have to deal with a strange vocabulary. Videla calls "stable modern democracy" what Pinochet baptized as an "authoritarian democracy." The common meaning of both labels is that the role of the armed forces will be guaranteed and perpetuated. In the case of Argentina, unlike Chile or Uruguay, a political process "open to all sectors except the terrorists and the corrupt" has been promised since almost the very beginning of the dictatorship without yet being accomplished. Of course, the terroristic militarymen are the only ones able to judge who is a terrorist and who is corrupt. In fact, Economic Minister Martinez de Hoz, the most representative member of the oligarchy, admitted after being challenged by Amnesty International at a recent Conference of the International Monetary Fund held in San Francisco that, prior to the military coup, businessmen had financed a right-wing paramilitary terrorist organization. This last statement speaks for itself, or as we used to say in our countries "a confesion de parte relevo de prueba." After what the Economic Minister publicly acknowledged, it remains to be asked who in this "new modern democracy" is qualified to decide who is not corrupt and who is not a terrorist.

In light of the tragic condition of the Argentine people, I as a representative of the Argentine Radical Civic Union party in voluntarily exile, ask my countrymen and citizens of other Latin American countries living abroad to join forces to organize a broad political front of resistance, and to the people of this country—lovers of peace, freedom and human right—I ask the solidarity to fight from wherever they happen to be and from whatever position they might hold, against the Argentine fascist