

Uruguay Is Losing Its People

Knight News Service

MONTEVIDEO, — Uruguay — It has not been long since Uruguay rated a special toast when the roster of Latin American nations was prosperous and democratic. Above all, democratic.

Today, that same Uruguay is perhaps the saddest nation in the hemisphere.

It is not so much that the economic horizon is black or that the dictatorship is repressive. Saddest of all is that the people are leaving.

The educated, young, skilled, ambitious are leaving by the thousands. It costs \$18 for the half-hour plane ride to Buenos Aires across the river. Uruguayans need no passport.

The government will not say how great the flight is, and probably doesn't know. But it is large.

Add to the exodus the fact that Uruguay has long had one of the lowest birth rates in the world and it can seem, walking the streets of Montevideo, that only the old are left.

Obvious Decline

The decline of Montevideo is all too apparent. The poverty is no longer genteel.

On a rainy night, with few people about, few cars and few lights, Montevideo seems haunted.

Its people are fleeing Uruguay for both political and economic reasons.

Uruguay is jointly administered as a military dictatorship by the armed forces and its civilian president, Juan Maria Bordaberry.

Despite four decades of non-intervention, the armed forces were gradually drawn into the political arena after police failed to stem Castroite guerrillas, called the Tupamaros.

The military crushed the guerrillas and at the same time made clear they would not soon return to the barracks.

Under military pressure, Bordaberry dissolved the congress 15 months ago. Today, Uruguay's government is virulently anti-Marxist and notoriously strait-laced.

An Uruguayan cannot have his picture taken for the required national identity card if he has a beard or his hair touches his collar.

When Uruguay's leading magazine publishes the winning entry in a short-story contest, the government judges it pornographic. The magazine is closed. The editor, all members of the jury that selected the story and the author are ordered arrested.

1,100 in Prison

About 1100 known or presumed Tupamaros are in a prison, called La Libertad, some without trial or charges. International human rights organizations raise charges of mistreatment, and sometimes torture, of political prisoners.

At the heart of Uruguay's woes is an economic system that went broke.

In simpler times, Uruguay lived handsomely off the export of meat and wool. The agricultural wealth fueled the growth of Montevideo—

where nearly half the people live—and of an elaborate cradle-to-grave system of state socialism.

After a peak during the Korean War, Uruguay's appetite soon began to overtake its coming. The long decline began with serious inflation and a decline in living standards.

The Tupamaros sprang from the economic decline and so, in the final analysis, did the military dictatorship.

Now the military, hoping to duplicate the success of its colleagues in neighboring Brazil, is attempting to spur economic recovery.

A year ago, things were not so bad, with both wool and meat prices at unprecedented levels.

Bottom Falls Out

Then, beginning with the energy crisis, the bottom fell out. Uruguay imports all of its oil. That means \$2-a-gallon gasoline and a \$100-million balance of payments deficit.

The European Common Market, Uruguay's largest customer for meat, banned imports to protect its own internal production.

The Japanese, also feeling the energy pinch, began selling stockpiled wool. Prices dropped. The international market for processed wool, one of Uruguay's fledgling industries, dried up almost entirely.