

VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN URUGUAY



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URUGUAYANS "DISAPPEARED"

In 1974 militant opponents of the Uruguayan regime, fleeing from the repression in their country that followed the coup d'état of 1973, began to be kidnapped in neighboring Argentina where they sought protection. Many of these "disappearances", in which Argentine military intelligence cooperated with Uruguayan security agencies, ended with the murder of the victims, as in the cases of legislators *Zehner Michelin* and *Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz* and the married couple *Barredo-Whitclaw*.

The "disappearing" of political opponents became a system both in Argentina and in Uruguay, and nearly 150 persons who "disappeared" in Uruguay have never been heard of again. Also amply documented is the practice of deporting political refugees back to Uruguay in violation of universally accepted legal standards that are recognized by Uruguay. This has been the fate of scores of Uruguayans resident in Argentina. In addition there were two such deportations from Paraguay, in 1977 and November of 1978; and four Uruguayan citizens, including a child of 8 and another of 3, were kidnapped in Puerto Alegre, Brazil, to turn up later in Uruguayan prisons.

In nearly all cases the "disappeared" had refugee status, legal or in effect, under the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Among them were nine young children who were kidnapped together with their parents, some of them only a few months old. Two, *Anatole* and *Victoria Julien Grisona*, turned up abandoned in a public square in Valparaíso, Chile and were placed in an orphanage. Nothing was ever known of the others. Four "disappeared" women who were pregnant when kidnapped must have given birth in captivity.

Among Uruguayans kidnapped in their own country, one of the best known is *Elena Quinteros*, who was forcibly seized inside the Venezuelan embassy in Montevideo while asking for political asylum. As a result of this Venezuela broke diplomatic relations, since the Uruguayan authorities never offered any explanation nor heeded Venezuela's demand to produce Quinteros.

Another outstanding case is that of *Julio Castro*, who "disappeared" in the streets of Montevideo. The police forged documentary evidence of a trip to Buenos Aires, in an attempt to place the blame for Castro's disappearance on Argentina's repressive forces.

Charges made by the U.S. Congress, the Organization of American States Human Rights Commission, the European Parliament, the Latin American Parliament and other international bodies have elicited no official word of explanation, only abrupt denials by the Uruguayan government.

In some cases there is evidence of the circumstances of the kidnapping and the identity of the kidnappers. In others, the prisons where the victims were taken are known. These are

generally houses operating as torture centers and clandestine prisons, very rarely penitentiaries such as the women's prison Punta de Rieles and the Libertad prison for men. The rest may well be dead. The uncertainty sharpens the pain of families desperately seeking some word from the authorities as to whether their vanished member may still be alive.

Today the government which remains silent about all this is publicizing a false political "opening", while the repression of its opponents continues and new "disappearances" are to be expected.

IRMA LEITES FREED

Irma Leites, who completed her prison sentence in November 1981 (see Bulletin No. 3), has finally been released and is now in Sweden. Once again international protests and solidarity succeeded in freeing a victim of the Uruguayan dictatorship who was held in prison long after serving out the term.

WHERE IS RAUL SENDIC?

Raúl Sendic, founder of the Sugar Workers Union and member of the National Liberation Movement (Tupamaros), has disappeared.

Last August (midwinter, with below-zero temperatures at night), according to reliable sources, Sendic was taken outside and immersed in cold water as part of the treatment designed to annihilate him. He was last seen in September in a very bad state of health in the Department of Lavalleja army barracks. Since then his family has heard nothing of him and has no clue to his whereabouts.

We call upon all international organizations and individuals to communicate with the Uruguayan government and demand that Sendic's life be saved.

MOTHERS PLEAD FOR THEIR CHILDREN

A plea for amnesty for their children has been addressed to President Gregorio Alvarez by 400 mothers of political prisoners. Receiving no reply, they have sent copies of their letter to all national media and international news agencies. The letter said:

"The mothers of the prisoners at the disposition of military justice . . . for the first time exercising what we believe to be our right, to watch tirelessly over the physical, psychic and emotional health of our children, plead with the President for the constitutional favor of amnesty . . . Through these ten years we have waited patiently, we have muted our pain . . ."

Concluding their letter, the mothers described their plea as "a contribution to the reconciliation of the Uruguayan family"

MOUNTING PRE-ELECTION THREATS & RESTRICTIONS AGAINST POLITICAL PARTIES

A little more than two months before elections, the government is stepping up threats against political party leaders and reasserting the "tutelary" role of the Armed Forces toward future governments.

Dr. *Alberto Zimarrán*, National Party candidate and editor of the shut-down weekly *La Democracia*, has been imprisoned and tried for the crime of "disrespect".

Velarde González Nieto, a leader of the same party and editor of the weekly *La Razón* (also shut-down) has been summoned by military justice. Likewise National Party ex-deputy *Fladio Fernández Menéndez*, a candidate in the forthcoming elections. In his case it was explained that this was "an error".

These intimidating and repressive actions have been accompanied by statements and measures pointing toward military "tutelage" of future governments.

On 17 Sept. Navy Commander-in-Chief Rodolfo Invidio said that the Armed Forces must participate with the government that will result from the 1983 elections. The means of participation will be constitutional legalization of the National Security Council. Soon afterwards this statement was rounded out by Gen. Julio C. Rapela, president of the Armed Forces Political Affairs Commission. In an interview Rapela said that the future government would have autonomy in decisions only "to the extent that this does not affect national security". "National Security" covers everything from economic and foreign policy to internal affairs.

Col. Néstor Bolentini, former Minister and State Councillor, has publicly announced his intention to form a government party, which would clearly have the object of re-electing Gen. Alvarez and perpetuating the dictatorial regime with a legal mask.

On 28 August a Police Headquarters decree issued rules for the political campaign and threatened legal action against any speaker who committed "abuses" in his speeches.

THREE DUE TO BE FREED

Three opposition leaders sentenced for their political activities were due to complete their prison terms in October 1982:

Héctor Rodríguez, 63, journalist, union leader, and leader of the Unifying Action Groups and the Frente Amplio, detained in 1973 and imprisoned first at Punta Carretas, later in the Libertad. He had a hernia operation in 1978 and has since been on a steady physical decline. Suffers from arterial hypertension

and thrombosis of the central vein of the left eye with considerable loss of vision. Recently has had two gastro-duodenal hematomas.

Jaime Pérez, Communist Party and Frente Amplio leader, deputy from Montevideo for 17 consecutive years until the coup d'état in June 1973. Arrested in Oct. 1973, severely tortured, and confined in the Punta Carretas and Libertad prisons. Twice brought out of prison for subjection to fresh tortures which put him in the Military Hospital. His plight aroused the concern of the OAS Human Rights Commission. His original 18 month sentence was extended to ten years terminating in Oct. 1982.

Washington Rodríguez Beletti, Suzar Workers leader and member of the National Workers Commission, completing his term in a very deteriorated state of health.

The situation of these three gives cause for concern due to the government's policy of illegally retaining prisoners who have served their sentences, apart from the simple physical eliminations of prisoners in recent months, which have ended the lives of Ruben Sosa, Enrique Viera and Pino Garín.

CAMPAIGN FOR PROTECT RELEASE OF ALBERTO ALTESOR

Alberto Altesor, 64, a railroad union leader and former Congressman, underwent heart surgery in 1974, to set a vascular graft and artificial cardiac valves. The operation was performed by Dr. René Favaloro, a prominent Argentine heart surgeon. Altesor was prosecuted and imprisoned in the Libertad Penitentiary in 1975, for a sentence period of 8 years. His health progressively aggravated and he had to be admitted to the Military Hospital. A new operation was urgently required. It had to be performed by Dr. Favaloro since there are no heart surgeons as proficient as him in Uruguay. Nevertheless, the prison authorities did not allow the patient to be transferred to Buenos Aires nor to any civil hospital in Uruguay.

An intense and worldwide campaign denouncing Altesor's situation was undertaken by several institutions and personalities in different countries as a result of which, the Uruguayan government was forced to accept that the surgery be performed by Dr. Favaloro in a civil hospital in Montevideo. This proves that international solidarity can obtain specific results and protect political prisoner's lives.

The operation was performed successfully on July 9. It is now necessary to petition for Altesor's liberation before he serves his term so that he may receive proper post-surgery medical care, impossible to obtain under the conditions currently prevailing at the Libertad Penitentiary.

