

In the late 1970s the Carter administration cut off military aid, and the United Nations and the OAS issued reports attacking the government's human rights record. But the military were reluctant to relinquish power for fear of reprisals for repressive acts that were documented and widely known. In 1980 the generals called a plebiscite on a constitution that would have given them a veto power over the actions of any future elected government. Incredibly for an authoritarian government, they lost the constitutional plebiscite, not least because they had permitted an election-eve television debate in which a distinguished professor of constitutional law ridiculed their proposal. In 1982, the economy went into a tailspin and the Gross National Product dropped nearly 10 per cent. Late in the year the military allowed internal party elections, which resulted in an overwhelming victory for the antimilitary candidates. In 1983, after unsuccessful negotiations between the military and the politicians, mass demonstrations involving 300,000 people (10 per cent of the population) called for a return to democracy; and these were followed by two general strikes that demonstrated that the previously cowed population was no longer terrorized. By early 1984 the generals recognized that it was time to go back to the barracks.

They wanted to do so on their own terms, however, thus they were determined to exclude from any elections Wilson Ferreira, the Blanco leader who had spent the last eleven years denouncing them from Europe and the United States. (Ferreira had won the most votes in the 1971 presidential election but had been denied the presidency because of Uruguay's peculiar Simultaneous Double Vote electoral system, which adds up the votes of all the candidates nominated by the various factions of each party and awards the presidency to the front-running candidates of the party that secures the most total votes.)

In June, Ferreira announced that he planned to return to Uruguay from Buenos Aires, but his chartered ferry was boarded by the military and he and his son were arrested and imprisoned (the junior Ferreira has since been released). The Blanco party then boycotted the negotiations, but the Colorados, the small Catholic-influenced Civic Union, and the leftist Broad Front—now recognized for the first time by the military—hammered out agreements that scheduled elections in November, released 188 political prisoners, guaranteed military promotions on the basis of seniority, and gave an advisory role (rather than veto power) to the military National Security Council, to be renamed the National Defense Council.

Following the successful conclusion of the negotiations, the Blancos announced that they would participate in the elections but only to permit their candidate, if he won, to release "Wilson" from prison, and to call new elections with no excluded candidates. The betting in recent months has been on the principal Colorado candidate, Julio Sanguinetti, but he may have to form an alliance with the Blancos or the Broad Front to get a working congressional majority.

As in the case of neighboring Argentina, the return to democracy is taking place at a particularly difficult time. Uruguay's debt is one of the highest per capita in the hemisphere. Real wages have dropped by 50 per cent during the period of military rule—by nearly 10 per cent during the last year alone. Negotiations between the military and the International Monetary Fund have been broken off, leaving the new civilian government to take them up again. The

outlawed trade union confederation has re-emerged under a different name, and a struggle for control is taking place between the Communists and the non-Communist Left, with neither group likely to support austerity measures. The military have acquired privileges and key positions that they are reluctant to give up; and when they look across the La Plata River to Argentina they see high-ranking military men on trial for human rights violations. Everyone talks of the need for concerted action involving an agreement by the parties and interest groups, but there is little indication that such an agreement can be produced.

Hard choices must be made by the new government. How much power will the military retain? How will human rights violations be treated? Can the parties and unions be persuaded to support economic austerity programs? What measures can be taken to promote lagging agricultural production and exports when the political pressures come from the urban population that has always looked to the government to provide jobs, health, education, and early retirements? Will Uruguay fall into the post-1930 Argentine pattern of alternating civilian and military government, with none able to handle the country's massive economic crises? Or will the military legalism that originally led them to insist on congressional legislation authorizing their expanded powers, and to announce again and again that their ultimate goal was to hand back government to the civilians, enable the civilian political leaders to build a national consensus on a program of economic and political recovery?

If the example of other South American countries is a good indication, the civilian leaders will enjoy a honeymoon period and a cushion of political legitimacy. They will also be aided by the examples of democratization in neighboring Argentina and Brazil. The challenge for the Uruguayan political leaders is to show that they can reestablish on a permanent basis the functioning democracy which has been Uruguay's pride since early in this century.

*Paul E. Sigmund, Director of the Latin American Studies Program at Princeton and an Associate Editor of Worldview, has recently conducted interviews in Uruguay.*

## EXCURSUS 2

### Lucy Komisar on GUARDED HOPE IN GUATEMALA

For the first time in decades, there are some in Guatemala who think there's a chance of an opening to democracy here. They think that the military wants to get out of the business of running the government both for the sake of its own international image and to foster foreign economic aid. The July 1 elections for a constituent assembly, they say, were a good first sign. They're waiting now for more signs: an end to the kidnappings and killings, which have decreased but not stopped, and the army's willingness to accept a new constitution that would strip it of governing power. Government and military officials, defending their good in-

tentions, point to the elections, which they say were honest and without army interference.

Interviews here with people outside the government—moderate political and union leaders, churchmen, foreign diplomats—show most of them hopeful but hesitant to pronounce that the opening will lead to a civilian government that is more than a facade. Indeed, one can find reasons in Guatemala to back up the most pessimistic views—that the opening is only cosmetic—as well as arguments that, for reasons of self-interest, the army is prepared to give up some of its power.

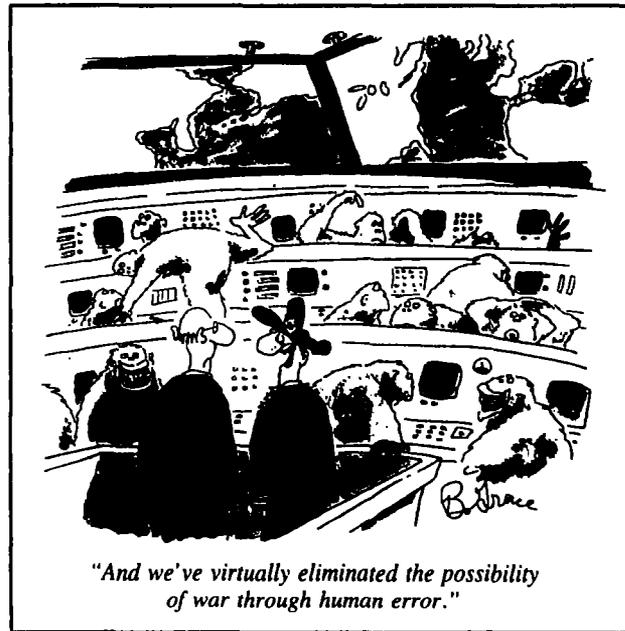
The pessimists point to the continued, albeit reduced, violation of human rights. They say the election was tarnished by the disappearances or killings in the months before the vote of at least nineteen political figures. Father Juan Carlos Cordova, spokesman for the Catholic Church, said, "Some months [the number of rights violations] goes up, some months it goes down, but the reality is the same. The people continue feeling threatened. They can be captured without judicial order." A foreign priest said, "The time of massacres, of killing entire villages is over. Now they are more selective." People heeding the call of the Left, which was kept from participating through intimidation, were among the surprising 26 per cent who voted null or blank, many scrawling messages and curses on their ballots.

But others see an improvement. "A few years ago, when someone disappeared, people began to say mass," said Vinicio Cerezo, attorney and leader of the Christian Democrats. "Now the missing appear months later, but they do appear. The diminution of cruelty is a good sign." Cerezo also said the constitution would have to adopt rules of habeas corpus and protection for citizens against human rights abuses, and that it should guarantee the autonomy of the Supreme Court so that it can't be manipulated by the executive or the army.

The constituent assembly that is meeting now will have to deal with these and other problems. The balance of the assembly will be center or center-right. The center-left Christian Democrats, which won nearly 16 per cent of the vote, more than any other party, won twenty of the eighty-eight seats; and the centrist National Center Union (UCN) won twenty-one. The rightist and center-right parties share a slight edge, though their ability to work as a bloc could be inhibited by personal rivalries.

A major decision facing the constitutional assembly is the definition of private property. If it does so in a way that prevents the government from taking idle land from large land-owners to distribute to landless peasants, then a major social and economic problem will be left unsolved. The army has not stated a position on agrarian reform. However, Lt. Col. Luis Francisco Rios Mejia, one of the officers who runs the army's "rifles and beans" Indian pacification program, said in an interview, "The agrarian reform of 1954 was not a success. People have a strong concept of their own property." The attempt to give land to the Indian peasants was one of the reasons for the CIA-supported military coup that year against the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. One local journalist predicted that any agrarian reform adopted would be weaker than that of El Salvador.

For a trade union official, who said he was afraid to be identified, the most important constitutional issue is the establishment of rights for unions. Statutory barriers make



*"And we've virtually eliminated the possibility of war through human error."*

PUNCH

legal strikes virtually impossible. In rural areas, labor organizers are widely persecuted and jailed. Often the local military commanders rule that meetings can't be held without military authorization and presence. Agendas and lists of participants must be submitted beforehand. The union leader had little hope for change: "The elections will put into effect the program of the Right. There are no representatives of the workers."

The issue that will affect every decision is how much power the army will have. Nobody expects it to accept complete subservience to civilian rule, and no one knows yet how much control the military is willing to give up. One test will be the army's "civic action program," which now includes activities that might normally belong to ministries of housing or development. The army has already set up a dozen of forty-four planned model villages to resettle Indians who had fled their homes—many fleeing the army—during the height of the guerrilla conflict.

The army says the villages will benefit the Indians. "Maybe there was a reason why they supported the guerrillas," said Col. Roberto Enrique Matta, commander of the region of Quiche, once a center of guerrilla strength. "This was an abandoned area that lacked roads, electricity, water. It was fertile land for subversion. We are giving them a hand and showing that we want to help." The new communities will have roads, electricity, water, schools, and health clinics. The government will seek to develop agro-industry in the area.

Father Cordova says the villages are a good idea as long as Indians are not forcibly moved from their homes. But others see them as vehicles of control, and several sources said that Indians living in the villages were not allowed to leave without military permission. Moving Indians to these controlled towns wipes out potential sites of support for the guerrillas.

Another army institution under scrutiny is the civil patrols, in which, according to various estimates, 500,000 to 800,000 men serve. They were set up to incorporate the Indians in a successful attempt to recapture the highlands from the guerrillas. The civil patrols not only bolstered the army pres-

ence in these isolated areas, it forced peasants to decide whether to stay in the patrols and cut their links to the guerrillas or to join the rebels permanently. Most stayed in the patrols. The union leader called the patrols instruments of repression and said they were used to capture cooperative and union leaders. He said patrol chiefs often abused their power to personal advantage, sometimes even collecting road tolls at night.

It is precisely in such areas of national security that the civilian government will have least power. The guerrilla movement has been largely defeated, but there are still confrontations between rebels and military patrols. The latest U.S. travel advisory in April warned Americans against visiting certain areas of the country, explaining that "a well-organized insurgency is active in the northwestern highlands, the western Peten and to the south of Lake Atitlan." It is not likely that the army will do anything it thinks would weaken its counter-insurgency strategy.

However, foreign observers and politicians, such as UCN leader Jorge Carpio Nicolle and Cerezo, see objective reasons why the army will at least get out of running the government. Carpio Nicolle, publisher of two of the four daily newspapers, says, "It is impossible to be an autocratic government again, because all the world is against it. Image means loans, political help, and arms. We cannot be the pariahs of the international community." But he added that the constitution would not deviate far from what the army was willing to support.

Said Cerezo, "It's not a question just of the good will of the army, but a question of political and economic circum-

stances. The country is in a critical economic crisis. It needs to take drastic measures or it will have to devalue the quetzal and have a crisis that will hurt the prestige of the army." And the Guatemalan military, he added, has learned a lesson from what happened to the military in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

*Lucy Komisar is a free-lance journalist who has recently spent several months in Central America.*

## EXCURSUS 3

### Aaron Segal on U.S./MEXICO BORDER WOES

The 1900 miles of serpentine border separating the United States and Mexico wind mostly through desert and sagebrush country, sparsely populated and easily dismissed. Between San Diego and Tijuana at the Pacific end of the border and Brownsville and Matamoros at the Gulf, there are seventeen twin cities and towns. Here four million Mexicans and two million Americans, 60 per cent of whom are of Mexican descent, deal with each other daily in ways that are rapidly changing, moving the border from the periphery toward the center of U.S.-Mexican relations.

The most drastic changes have been brought about by the Mexican economic crisis and the sharp devaluation of the peso in 1982. Strict import controls and a continuously depreciating peso have cut the number of Mexican shoppers in U.S. border cities to a trickle. Downtowns remain boarded up in such dusty border towns as Calexico, California and Laredo, Texas, which depended on Mexican customers for their economic survival. Unemployment levels are tragically high, and there is a pervasive sense of despair. Larger U.S. border cities, unwilling to wait for the return of Mexican business, have begun to seek closer integration with the mainstream American economy.

The economic crisis has also sharply lowered real wages in Mexico and increased the attractiveness to U.S. firms of locating their assembly plants on the border, from which they can re-export finished products to the U.S. There are nearly five hundred such plants at present and over 150,000 low-wage Mexican workers—predominantly young women, although more men are also seeking these jobs. The result on both banks of the muddy Rio Grande is the disintegration of four centuries of economic interdependence.

Faced with a \$90 billion external debt, authorities in Mexico City are determined that the border cities must earn a dollar surplus. At the same time U.S. border cities, faced with the lowest per capita incomes in the U.S. (though they are two to three times higher than those across the river), undergo painful economic adjustments. Their pleas for special help from Washington have gone largely unheeded.

The Mexican economic crisis and the unravelling of border interdependence have also contributed to an increase of illegal Mexican migrants. Since the 1982 devaluation and the sharp drop in employment and incomes in Mexico, the

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