

EXCURSUS 1

Paul E. Sigmund on URUGUAY'S RETURN TO DEMOCRACY

On August 3, after a month of negotiations, the Uruguayan military and the leading politicians (minus Wilson Ferreira, head of the National or Blanco party who had been arrested when he returned from exile in June) signed an agreement providing for Uruguay's first elections since 1971. Under the agreement a congress and president will be elected this November and take office in March, 1985, thus ending twelve years of military dictatorship.

This latest return to civilian government in South America follows similar military withdrawals in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina. It will take place, it now appears, immediately following the inauguration of Brazil's first civilian president since the 1964 coup in that country—most likely the candidate of the opposition PMDB. There is a particular poignancy about the Uruguayan case, however, since for many decades before 1973 the country had been lauded as a model of democracy and welfare in Latin America—"the Switzerland of Latin America." But beginning in the late 1960s this model welfare state suffered economic decline, runaway inflation, political polarization, strikes, and an urban guerrilla movement, the Tupamaros (later glorified in Costa Gavras's film *State of Siege*). The civilian politicians themselves began to call on the military to restore order, but found that the Urgent Security Measures that they voted led what had been an apolitical military to become more and more involved in political decision making, until finally by 1973 the military took over completely. In that year the Uruguayan generals, while allowing President Juan Bor-

daberry to remain in office, dissolved the congress and the political parties, destroyed the trade unions, muzzled the press, and imprisoned or detained thousands of suspected "subversives." Over the next decade an estimated 80,000 people were questioned, detained, or imprisoned, and about a hundred disappeared. Another civilian figurehead president was appointed in 1976 and free-enterprise-oriented civilian *tecnicos* ran the economy and dismantled the Uruguayan welfare state; but the military continued to make all important policy decisions collegially in the Junta of Generals.

How did this proudly democratic middle class country turn into a military dictatorship? The reasons are like those that explain similar developments in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile: civilian incompetence and infighting, leftist control of labor and students, runaway inflation, and increasing social conflict over how to divide a shrinking economic pie. In addition, the two traditional parties—the *Colorados* and the *Bancos* or *Nacionales*—were challenged by a leftist Broad Front (*Frente Amplio*) that had considerable support in the capital city of Montevideo, although not elsewhere. Most important were the kidnappings (and the murder of Dan Mitrione, a U.S. police advisor) and holdups carried out by the Tupamaro guerrillas, many of them the scions of leading Uruguayan families, which dramatized the breakdown of law and order in what was a basically conservative society.

Despite their inexperience, the military could more easily assert control in Uruguay than in the larger neighboring countries because of a small population (3 million) and a high degree of urbanization (50 per cent of the population in the only major city, Montevideo). Uruguayans claim that military intelligence now has a file on every person in the country with a classification of A, B, or C as to his or her loyalty.



"Then we're agreed, comrades. Despite this bountiful harvest from our state farms, we'll go to the aid of the starving American farmers and buy their inferior grain."

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-