

THE CASE OF DAN MITRIONE

The Director of the Division for Latin America of the U.S. Catholic Conference has stated that the recent kidnapping and killing of Dan Mitrione, an Agency for International Development employee in Uruguay, "raises profound questions for all Americans." Fr. Louis M. Colonnese expressed the hope that an investigation into the murder "will be done from the perspective of cause and effect rather than as an isolated act of violence. . . . The former chief of the Uruguayan secret police with whom Mitrione worked has reportedly stated that Mitrione allegedly used 'violent methods of repression and the use of torture with the support of the government.' A full and impartial investigation must be made to determine whether Mitrione was paid with tax money by an Agency of the U.S. Government to teach and perform torture under the euphemistic guise of promoting internal security." Furthermore, Colonnese stated, "prior to assignment in Uruguay, Mitrione was a U.S. internal security expert in Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Those two cities are areas with extremely high instances of alleged torture of political prisoners by members of the Brazilian secret police and military." These and other factors, said Colonnese, have "caused many concerned Americans to speculate concerning the U.S. Government's possible complicity in such tortures. If this is true, what possible justification could there be for a democratic society exporting torture?"

In an interview with Fr. Colonnese, prepared for the press and printed below, some of the evidence for these allegations are explored and his own concern discussed.

Q. You mention that Dan Mitrione was formerly assisting police in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, which is reportedly a center for torture activities. Can you document any relationship between the police in that area and tortures?

A. There is much documentation concerning reported tortures in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. For example, the American Committee for Information on Brazil prepared a dossier in April of 1970. The Committee is comprised of university professors of Brazilian affairs. Its dossier on Brazil has been endorsed by a U.S. congressman belonging to the Inter-American Affairs Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the President Emeritus of Princeton Seminary, the President of Union Theological Seminary and

several other churchmen concerned and informed about Latin America.

The dossier contains a specific reference to "the use of torture against the opponents of the present military regime" which "now appears to surpass all other techniques of police investigation and inquiry." The dossier then quoted a December 19, 1969 report from twelve Brazilian political prisoners concerning a class in torture techniques held in October, 1969, at the headquarters of the State Police of Minas Gerias in the city of Belo Horizonte:

"On the eighth of October [1969] a class in interrogation was held at PE [State Police Headquarters] for a group of about 100 military men, the majority of them sergeants from the three branches of the armed forces," the report states. "Just before the class, [name of a political prisoner] was given electric shocks to see if the equipment was in good working order. At about 4:00 p.m., just before the class was to begin, ten political prisoners [their names are listed] were led up to the classrooms where the session was already in progress. They were ordered to enter the room and strip. While Lt. Haylton was showing slides and explaining each type of torture, its characteristics and effects, [a group of Brazilian military personnel] were torturing the prisoners in the presence of 100 military men in a live demonstration of the various torture methods in use."

That is the type of thing which is reportedly going on in Belo Horizonte. Police in Belo Horizonte had the benefit of Public Safety advice from the Agency for International Development.

Q. Do you have any reason to believe that the Uruguayan Police, with whom Dan Mitrione worked as an advisor, were guilty of using torture methods?

A. Yes, I do. The upper house of Uruguay's legislature recently appointed an investigatory commission comprised of seven Uruguayan Senators to check out repeated accusations from citizens that torture was being used by police in Montevideo. The committee spent five months investigating these charges and published a 15-chapter report stating that torture is a "normal, frequent and habitual occurrence" in Uruguay. The report cited twelve types of torture used by police, including "needless beatings, electric shocks, daily use of psychological torture" and "inhuman treatment" of pregnant women "held as reprisals against relatives." The investigatory report included medical certificates and testimony from both torture victims and police. The investigation showed that many of the torture victims were students and labor leaders. This is the type of police force which Mitrione was advising.

Q. Do you think that Mitrione's work as a Public Safety advisor employed by the U.S. Government made his death a predictable occupational risk or is this a unique case?

A. Mitrione and the other A.I.D. Public Safety advisors were serving in a situation which in many ways resembles that of a war. I'm sure that this fact is realized by both sides in this confrontation. It's true that in Brazil and Uruguay the war is undeclared, but it has also never been formally declared in Vietnam.

Dan Mitrione was the seventh A.I.D. Public Safety advisor to be killed on duty. The six others were stationed in Vietnam. Another A.I.D. Public Safety advisor serving in Bolivia was seriously wounded and is now paralyzed from the waist down. Six other A.I.D. Public Safety advisors have also suffered serious wounds.

Q. Should the questions you raise concerning Dan Mitrione's death be considered as personal criticism of the man or are they directed toward the role of the A.I.D. Public Safety program in Latin America?

A. They should be considered as questions concerning the possibly dire implications and effects of the A.I.D. Public Safety program in Latin America. Mitrione was a part of this program. If the impartial investigation I have requested clears A.I.D., then it also clears Mitrione of possible complicity in torture under the guise of fostering internal security.

If the investigation, and I stress it must be both competent and impartial, finds that A.I.D. shares the blame for these alleged inhuman acts of torture with the police who allegedly performed them, Mitrione shares that guilt if only by association. I also stress that denials from A.I.D. officials or other compromised sources are meaningless. An impartial investigation is required. The focus of my questions is not the guilt or innocence of Mitrione, but an effort to force an investigation of the program for which he worked as it relates to the democratic principles of our nation.

Q. Do you feel it is proper for the director of an agency of the U.S. Catholic Conference to concern himself with political questions such as Mitrione's murder?

A. My questions were raised as a concerned U.S. citizen rather than in either of the above categories. However, I feel that it clearly has a moral character. Vatican II, *The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, contains a quote which I feel is most appropriate: ". . . whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body and mind, attempts to coerce the will

itself . . . all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than to those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator."

correspondence

MORE ON

"REFORM INTERVENTION"

Chevy Chase, Md.

Dear Sir: It is easy to get bored or even irritated with the increasing tendency in America of degrading the debate on serious foreign policy issues by imputing the motives of one who advances a different policy or approach. Mr. Robert Banville's letter (*worldview*, July-Aug.) commenting on my February article on "The Perils of Reform Intervention" is a case in point. He says that my article "seems disingenuous," i.e., according to the dictionary, "lacking in frankness, candor, or sincerity." I am puzzled as to how a perfect stranger can discern flaws in my motives.

Since I do not know Mr. Banville, I assume he is sincere, frank, and candid. At the same time his letter suggests that he is ill-informed and confused about actual U.S. foreign policy since 1945.

He seems to imply that America has deliberately employed a policy of "suppressing revolutions in allied nations by force," mentioning Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. It is interesting to note that since World War II the United States has provided economic and military assistance to about 85 legally sovereign states, many of them declared neutrals such as India and the Congo. The political complexion of the regimes in these states varies from Yugoslavia to Spain, from Ethiopia to Denmark. If our aid has helped to uphold "reactionary regimes" in a few instances, one can presume that it has helped to uphold more acceptable regimes in many more instances.

Further, in my study of U.S. military assistance, I have found no evidence that such aid has been used as a weapon to "suppress" desirable domestic reforms in the recipient country. On the contrary, I believe the net impact of the American diplomatic, economic, and military presence would encourage those indigenous forces seeking a viable and responsive government. The American Government and people have a clear preference for democratic and humane institutions at home and abroad, but experience and morality teach us that our capacity and right to impose these preferences abroad are seriously limited.