

House so-called Ethics Committee, John Flynt. They weren't the only ones rallying around Sikes, who, incidentally, with shaven pate and waxed moustache, actually looks like an actor got up to play a military man, not quite the von Stroheim role in "Grand Illusion," but easily the General in "The Waltz of the Toreadors." Defense contractors and Pentagonians were all over the House in the days before the vote and their principal argument was not about what a crackerjack committee commander Sikes was, but almost exclusively about what Sikes had done in the line of military installations for Members' districts. That probably accounted for the heavy vote against him, better than two to one. Some-

times, there just isn't any gratitude in the world.

After Sikes subsided, the Democrats of the full committee nominated his successor, Gunn McKay of Utah. It is not difficult at all to predict that the Pentagon will quite soon reveal that the Great Salt Lake is virtually undefended, wide open to Soviet seizure by way of the polar-Canadian route, needs a flotilla at least, perhaps a couple of shallow-draught carriers, with appropriate short-line support systems all the way round. What the Joint Chiefs may discover is that you can't count on corrupting a Mormon the way you obviously can some one whose very region is called a Panhandle.

FRANK GETLEIN

## RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL

# REPRESSION IN ARGENTINA

I know that I shall never forget the anguish which I experienced on Sunday, November 14, 1976, in the City of Cordoba, Argentina. Around 10:00 p.m. on the previous evening, Josefa Martinez, a 25-year-old student of architecture, had visited the representatives of Amnesty International who were in Argentina to make a report on the number and condition of political prisoners. Early the next morning the mother of Josefa Martinez phoned to say that Josefa had never returned home. She had been arrested by the police or abducted by right-wing terrorists simply because she dared to speak to a group inquiring about Argentine citizens detained by the junta government without being charged with any crime.

Although I happened not to be present with the three-person group from Amnesty International when Ms. Martinez visited, her disappearance caused me anguish as if a member of my own family had met such a fate.

We immediately went to the top officials at the U.S. Embassy who protested to the highest official in charge of internal security in all of Argentina. The next day I went personally to the Papal Nuncio asking him to intervene on behalf of Josefa.

We had no hard information until December 15 that Josefa had in fact been released. For a month we experienced some share of that agony endured by Josefa's parents, her friends and her employers; all of us asked: Can there be any justification for a government engaging in such cruel practices?

The disappearance of Josefa was one among thousands since a three-man military junta seized power on March 24, 1976, following the ouster of Mrs. Peron after a presidency that brought about massive political corruption and an inflationary rate of 550 percent per year.

The regime of allegedly moderate General Jorge Videla apparently thinks that it can solidify its position by eliminating every potential political dissident by his disappearance, his imprisonment, or his death. But this reign of terror might conceivably be galvanizing the people of Argentina to fight for those rights carefully spelled out in their constitution, all of which have been suspended by the present government.

Dr. Emilio Mignone may be one of those whose indignation at the government can bring about a turn of events in Argentina. In May, 1976 four military men appeared at Dr. Mignone's home and kidnapped his 24-year-old daughter, Monica, a schoolteacher in a poor district. Dr. Mignone, former Deputy Commissioner of Education for Argentina and former Ambassador for Education at the OAS, has had access to the highest levels of government, but no one is able or willing to tell him anything about Monica. I saw Dr. Mignone three different times during my 12 days in Argentina and collected from him every relevant fact about Monica's disappearance. But she is still missing—one of a number of such persons who, since the new government took over on March 24, is estimated as between 4,000 and 14,000.

The government argues that it must suppress the violence in the streets and mobilize against what it regularly calls a "civil war." The more paranoid of the government officials theorize that the Marxists desire to make Argentina a stepping stone for the conquest of the southern cone of Latin America for Communism. For that reason, they have dissolved the Congress, suppressed the political parties, controlled the press and militarized the courts. These things have happened before in the 13 governments which have controlled Argentina in the last 20 years—but the sweep of the total



repression which characterizes the Videla government has never been seen in Argentina before.

One well-informed citizen told me that in his opinion there is "not one courageous person in all of Argentina." The extensive findings of the Amnesty International team—to be published in a comprehensive report in March, 1977—tend to corroborate this statement. Journalists have backed down; the 108-year-old newspaper *La Prensa* prints what it is told to. All of the newspapers followed governmental directive and "bad-mouthed" Amnesty International while we were there. Students, who for generations in Latin America have fomented revolutions, now quietly spend their time in crowded universities surrounded by police and security guards. Some 30 attorneys out of 30,000 are in prison, but the bar associations content themselves with meaningless declarations that the government should observe procedural due process during the existence of the state of siege.

The inchoate militancy of Catholic leadership in Argentina may have reached a turning-point with the murder of three priests and two seminarians on July 4, 1976. By everyone's admission the government could discover if they wanted to the murderers of these five clerics. But the government may desire to leave the memory of these assassinations as a method of intimidation against the Church. On April 15, 1976, the 70 bishops of Argentina issued a pastoral which contained these bold words:

"Every day the papers bring us news of many other deaths about which nothing is ever known as to how or by whom they have occurred . . . what forces act with such impunity? . . . what rights are left to the average citizen?"

It is clear, however, that the government does not want a confrontation with the Church; they remember that in 1955 the Church ultimately won after it excommunicated Peron and took its case for religious freedom to the people.

The Church at the same time recognizes—as does almost everyone in Argentina—that an excessively vehement assault on the Videla government for not observing human rights could rather easily be exploited as an excuse by the right-wing generals to replace Videla with one of their own. But the bishops are not unmindful of the fact that some 18 or more Catholic priests are jailed. These men have been seized for teaching what the bishops recommended in 1970 when they recognized "the need . . . to seek a new and human, viable and effective way towards liberation. . . ."

Many in Argentina state that the Church, by speaking out, could improve many features of the dictatorship. But wise and brave Catholic leaders are not certain that a Church-State confrontation in the Chilean pattern would be productive in Argentina. Churchmen no less than statesmen become cautious when they see the terrorism of the left-wing extremists in operation. But

Catholic spokesmen pleaded with me almost unanimously to increase pressures from North America to re-establish democratic process in Argentina.

The United States gives \$47 million in military assistance to Argentina in this fiscal year. This aid must be cut off for the next fiscal year or even suspended during this year if it is established that Argentina is engaged in a "pattern of gross violations of internationally guaranteed rights." Congress has already terminated all military assistance to Chile and Uruguay. Is the situation in Argentina any better? Congress will hold hearings on that question, and the answer will be forthcoming in the spring or summer.

This year the International Development Bank made loans of about \$140 million to Argentina. The United States taxpayer provides 35 percent of that sum, or about \$50 million. The Congress could request that no additional loans be made or even that further payments on existing loans be suspended. In 1976 the World Bank loaned Argentina \$115 million for an electrical transmission project. Twenty-five and three-tenths percent of this money or about \$30 million dollars is from the United States. The World Bank grants loans on the basis of the worthiness of the project rather than the political character of the recipients. But the Congress could request the World Bank to declare Argentina ineligible for loans until it releases its thousands of political prisoners and otherwise observes basic human rights.

The shocking disrespect for human rights in Argentina is carried out in the name of containing Communism. The Catholic Church has had its share—perhaps a disproportionate share—of inculcating a fear of Communism, but the bishops of Argentina and Brazil recognize that the widespread suspension of constitutional rights, the use of torture and the unbearable cruelties inflicted on human beings by the disappearance of people like Josefa and Monica cannot be morally justified as methods necessary for the suppression of subversion. The bishops of Brazil on November 18, 1976 spoke convincingly and courageously of what is happening in the southern cone of Latin America. They noted that "regimes of force, claiming to fight Communism and carry out economic development, declare an anti-subversive war against all who do not agree with an authoritarian vision of society."

The bishops summed up the message of their 3600-word statement with these words: "Such anti-Communism is brutalizing its agents, creating fanaticism, violence and fear: it is sacrificing freedoms, suppressing individual guarantees and leading to state abuses, arbitrary imprisonment, torture and the loss of freedom of thought."

ROBERT F. DRINAN

(Father Robert F. Drinan, S.J., is a Member of Congress from the 4th District, Massachusetts.)