

The Southern Cone's Forgotten Dictatorship

The Paraguayan general is Latin America's longest-lasting dictator in the 20th Century

74 years old. 33 in power. Name: Alfredo Stroessner Matiauda. Military rank: General. Country: Paraguay. Population: 3.5 millions.

These data begin to recount the recent history of a nation that last century was economically superior to its neighbors and considered independence to be its most important asset.

On May 4th of this year General Stroessner celebrated his 33rd anniversary as President of the Republic of Paraguay. On that same day he was already talking with certainty of his nomination for an eighth consecutive period, from 1988 to 1993 (he was re-elected in 1958, 63,68,73).

The Paraguayan General is considered to be third on the list of dictators who have held power for the longest time in this century, and is only beaten by Francisco Franco, who governed Spain for 39 years (from 1936 until his death in 1975), and by the Portuguese Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, who remained in power for 36 years (from 1932 to 1968), until he was overthrown.

It appears that the Southamerican general has every intention of breaking these records. As a forewarning of this, he announced to the public months ago that his perfect physical state of health was such that he could continue as governor until the year 2,000.



Photo from Novedades Archive

Dictator Alfredo Stroessner.

A Devastated Country

In the middle of the 19th century Paraguay was outstanding among its neighbors for its healthy trade surplus, its strong and stable currency.

The Paraguayan government applied for no loans and had no debts; enormous public investment was undertaken and the most brilliant students

tional Product (GNP) grew by only 2.3 percent between 1981 and 1983, and in the same period the product distribution per capita decreased by 14.4 percent.

The free trade system applied has resulted in 15 transnational companies for the 18 national ones.

In the streets of the city of Asunción European and

Three wars have changed the course of Paraguay's destiny

were sent to study in European universities.

The country that Alfredo Stroessner governs is something quite different. But that is history. Three wars are responsible for the change in the course of its destiny: the war of the Triple Alliance (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay) from 1865 to 1870; the Chaco War from 1932 to 1935 and the prolonged and silent war undertaken by the present government in order to remain in power.

Now Paraguay owes 1,500 million dollars. Its Gross Na-

American luxury cars jostle with ox-carts, and if 90% of arable land was formerly State-owned and the peasants farmed freely on it, now only 1.5% of the owners possess this 90%, and they cultivate less than 2 percent of the country's total area. The majority of land lies fallow and is used for cattle-rearing.

The conditions of the peasantry (61 percent of the total population) are of the most dramatic in the region: their average life-span is from 35 to 38 years of age, and many of them, due to a lack

Amnesty International Report on Paraguay

The regime of Alfredo Stroessner survives thanks to legislation limiting all democratic activity, according to information gathered by Amnesty International (A.I.) in its 1974 Annual Report.

Martial Law imposed on the entire country since the *coup d'etat* in 1954 was partially lifted in 1974 and finally removed in 1986. In spite of this, the means employed to remove the opposition extend to cover the whole of society.

The anti-subversive laws which originally complemented martial law now remain as the regime's only effective weapon, and has respect for neither social nor cultural level nor sex.

A.I. states the most important laws that reinforce the stability of the dictatorship:

* Law 294 "The Defence of Democracy", passed in 1955, prohibits the activity of any po-

litical group inspired by the concept of class struggle: the mere spreading of Marxist ideology is considered to be a penal crime.

* Law 209 "The Defense of Public Peace and of Personal Liberty", became law in 1970 as a complement to Law 294. It stipulates jail sentences of one to six years for those who "by whatever medium, publicly preach hatred between Paraguayans or the destruction of the social classes". Jail sentences of 3 to 6 years are also indicated for "those who belong to an illegal association of 3 or more people".

These and other similar laws are applied indiscriminately and according to the exclusive criteria of the authorities, as a result of which injustice and excess are liberally applied in Guarani jails.

A Country Plundered and Sold Out

The first outbreaks for independence occurred in 1810. On May 14th, 1811, a group of Paraguayan revolutionaries, mainly military, rebelled against the Spanish Government.

At this time, the lawyer, José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, better known as Doctor Francia, formed part of the triumvirate that took over the functions of the provisional government.

In 1814, an assembly declared Doctor Francia 'Supreme Dictator of the Republic'. Two years later, another popular assembly gave him life-time mandate.

The principle advantage derived from his long hold on power was that his country's independence was defended against external threats, mainly from neighboring Argentina and Brazil.

Historians describe this period as a "beautiful Rousseauian utopia" since, while its neighbours became involved in fratricidal civil wars and the English capital established itself and controlled destinies, Paraguay strove towards an economy of its own, a national independent State and a society of free agriculturalists.

It was at this period that it had its great trade surplus. Their currency was stable and strong and there was sufficient wealth to allow for enormous public spending without looking to the exterior for help.

The Triple Alliance

Doctor Francia died in 1840 and he was succeeded by Carlos

Antonio Lopez and after him by his son, Francisco Solano, both of whom continued along the same lines.

By this time, Brazil and Argentina were beginning to look for a way to destroy the powerful Paraguayan state.

With English support Argentina and Brazil formed the plan of dividing up that country between them. Together they overthrew the government of Uruguay, a friend to the Paraguayans, and together with an addict ruler, they formed the Triple Alliance that destroyed Paraguay, in a war that lasted from 1865 until 1870.

At the beginning of the war the country, in contrast with its neighbors, had a line of telegraphs, a railway, and a large quantity of factories producing construction materials, fabrics, linen, blankets, paper, ink, porcelain and gunpowder. They also had a national mercantile fleet, in spite of having no outlet to the sea.

At the end of the war Argentina took possession of 94 thousand square kilometres of Paraguayan soil. Brazil acquired 66 thousand and the work force from thousands of prisoners of war who were subsequently treated as slaves in the coffee plantations in Sao Paulo. Uruguay got nothing.

Of Paraguay's half million inhabitants before the war, only 221 thousand survived the war: 106 thousand women, 86 thousand children and 29 thousand men, mainly old men.

Not only the population disappeared from the defeated country but also the foundries, the factories and economic independence. Everything was pillaged and sold: land, forests, mines, fields of maté and school buildings.

of work in their own country, have to emigrate to the plantations of Curitiba, Matto Grosso or Parana in Brazil. There has been an exodus of more than half a million inhabitants in the last 20 years.

The Cogs of Power

Those who have tried to construct a new economic and political future for their country have come up against the strength of those in power

Alfred Stroessner has not been sparing in his violence towards them: throughout his 33 years in power there have been disappearances, murders and political imprisonments. Peace is enforced by Martial Law which has been automatically renewed since 1954 and by anti-subversive laws, along with a cancellation of the most elemental human rights and free speech.

In 1976, in its Annual Report, Amnesty International protested the rights of more than 50 political prisoners who had dared to attack the regime of silence imposed

by the Paraguayan political apparatus.

The laws have respect for no-one. In 1986 they closed down the newspaper *ABC Color*, one of the 5 in existence in the country.

In January, 1987, the strongly critical Radio Nanduti was also closed, as a result of permanent interference that it suffered since April 1968 in its transmission of reports and interviews touching on the country's political and economic situation. They had already been obliged to close in July, 1983 because of an accusation of "systematic agitation of public order" and "disturbance of social harmony".

The News Agency Alasei commented in *Semana Latinamericana* on February 2nd, 1987, that, as a result of the broadcasts from Radio Nanduti, friends of the station's director, Humberto Rubin, lost their jobs; some collaborators were beaten, others, such as the journalist, Oscar Acosta, from the same communication medium, were persecuted and finally

The 33 years of Stroessner's dictatorship are strewn with disappearances, jailings and political assassinations.

detained by the police. Even listeners and announcers were intimidated.

The Trade Unions and the Opposition Party

The only officially recog-

nised central trade union is the Paraguayan Work Confederation (CPT), which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice and Work, and for this reason it was expelled, in 1979, from the International Confederation of

Area and Population

Paraguay is a country without any outlet to the sea. To the north its frontier touches Bolivia and Brazil and to the south, Argentina. It covers an area of approximately 406,752 square kilometres.

It has approximately 3.5

million inhabitants, of which some 455 thousand live in Asunción, the capital. The official language is Spanish, but the majority (predominantly of mixed race) speak Guarani. There are some 100 thousand Indians.

Free Trade Unions (CIOSL), accused of political subordination.

There are others that work on the fringe of the government and which frequently suffer from repression, such as the Christian Workers Confederation (CCT) which groups together mainly peasants under the name of Agrarian Leagues.

In 1978, the CCT, together with other trades, formed the National Workers Coordination (CNT) affiliated to the Latinamerican Confederation of Workers (CLAT). These organizations and some others belong to the Inter Union Workers Movement (MIT), which, in spite of repression, has become more and more active.

The Colorado party is the party in power in Paraguay. Officially there are one million and a half members, practically half of the entire population. The only officially recognised opposition group is the February Revolution Party, with social-democratic tendencies.

Paraguay, which at present is considered, along with Bolivia, to be the poorest and most backward of the Latinamerican countries, is beginning to see changes.

The Authentic Liberal-Radical Party, the Demochristian Party and a break-away party from the official one, the Popular Colorado Movement (Mopoco), all part of the National Agreement, have become the major opposition to the dictatorial regime of Alfredo Stroessner.

On the 21st and 22nd of June, in spite of threats and prohibitions, they managed to gather together more than 50 thousand people in demonstrations of protest against the dictatorship.

A month and a half previously, the MIT, managed, for the first time in many years, to stage an independent demonstration in commemoration of International Workers Day.

New Winds

The next elections are to take place in 1988. At the moment, the National Agreement announced on June 21st that it will not take part in the elections. According to the Demochristian leader, Luis Andrade Noguez, to participate would be to legitimize the dictatorship. "This is suicide for a serious and responsible political party. We are not electoralists."

The new winds are not just tousling hair. Depending on their force, they could even remove apparently solid structures. The opposition is confident that it will attract more and more followers and calculate that groups such as the Mopoco that have broken with Stroessner may well join the democratic cause and interrupt General Alfredo Stroessner's tired pace towards the record as longest in power.

E.V.A.

Chilean Political Prisoners Denounce Torture

Files containing evidence of human rights violations in Chile's prisons pile up in the courts

In Chile there are more than 500 political prisoners. Fifty are accused of introducing and distributing arms in the country or of involvement in the attempt last year against General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, who has held power since the fateful 11th of September, 1973. The rest are detained for "infringements" to the Law of State Security.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the difference in charges against them, 98% of the political prisoners claim that they have been submitted to physical and mental torture.

The accusation of the prisoners is against the National Investigation Center (CNI) that, together with the 220 thousand elements that form the military, police and paramilitary forces, constitutes the basis of permanence in power of General Pinochet's *de facto* regime.

It is estimated that, since 1973, more than half a million Chileans have been detained, tortured, and jailed, for political reasons. According to the Chilean Commission for Human Rights, in 1986 alone there were 21,287 detentions,

Political leaders from left to right share the misgivings about the judicial system.

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