

A Scientist's Plea for Human Rights in South America*

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A political cancer is spreading in South America. A military coup d'état has taken place in the Argentine Republic – a country which for so many years stood in the highest rank of economic and cultural development in Latin America. In Brazil since 1964, and subsequently and successively in Bolivia, Uruguay, and Chile – not to mention the many-decades-old regime of Paraguay – we hear by the testimony of respectable persons and representatives of international organizations, as well as by countless reports in the international press, that fundamental human rights are again being simply and brutally violated.

The old myth that military coups d'état in Latin America are power and revenge disputes between families or factions of the armed forces is untrue. More subtle, deeper forces, associated with the type of economy that powerful groups want to impose on those countries, are at the root of these so-called revolutions.

Are we to become so accustomed to these developments, that we consider them as simply a daily reading subject in the newspapers and that are simply routine events occurring elsewhere and of no concern to us?

Once again we read that opposition political leaders in these countries have been imprisoned, tortured, kidnapped, or assassinated, or that their bodies have been found mutilated in a car or on a beach somewhere. Once can only speculate about the fate of simple workers, union leaders, students, young men and women, and all the others who also disappear but did not have the minimum notoriety necessary for their names to be mentioned in the international press.

I have just received information that scientists in Argentina, as previously, and perhaps still in Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, are being dismissed from their jobs and forbidden to accept jobs in any educational or scientific institute in the country. At least 56 men and women associated with the Argentine National Research Council, including biologists like M. Cereijido; several collaborators of L.F. Leloir, an Argentine Nobel laureate in chemistry; and physicists like Mario Giambiagi, his wife, his sister; M.A. Virasoro; and J. Gallardo, who has been arrested, have been summarily dismissed by the “Interventor” of the council and by the military junta.

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I personally know what this means, not only for the possibility of continuation of one's own scientific work but also for the anxieties, personal crises and family suffering which ensue.

The solidarity of the international scientific community is the greatest – and perhaps the only – external help that a scientist in such a situation may receive.

I personally cannot forget the injection in my will to continue my work which resulted from letters I received from colleagues in the United States, from several countries in Europe and Latin America as well as the generous hospitality I received in my new country.

I ask scientists to tell General Jorge Videla, chief of the military junta, that such actions are incompatible with civilization and the development of science and technology, and to demand that these scientists be reintegrated in their jobs.

Among the fundamental questions involved are these:

- Is not basic respect for human rights a “sine qua non” for the development of science and creative thought in any country?
- For what purpose do we teach, research, invent mechanisms and create new theories?
For what kind of society, for what type of development, for what new human values, for what human future?
- Are we to consider essential to the development of Latin America the implantation of big business in those countries so that only a small local elite will have wealth?
For this purpose, must the rest of the population be more impoverished? Must those who dare to discuss this – I do not even say protest – be imprisoned, tortured, suppressed? And must dissenting intellectuals and scientists be forbidden to work, banished, forced to become expatriates?

Are these questions only local, national, internal affairs?

I dare to suggest that these problems are truly *multinational*, like the powerful enterprises which support those regimes of force, which build up more of their big profits upon these regimes, and which contribute to spreading in the world a false image of the situation in those countries as one of stability, peace and rapid development.

Peace and freedom are indivisible. And peace is not only the absence of atomic or classical conflict among big powers. It is also peace for the peoples and nations of the less developed world. And peace means not only absence of war in these countries but the absence of arbitrariness, of the imposition of terroristic dictatorships and their consequences. Peace means also and above all that the armed forces in the less developed nations, as in all nations, must not be employed against their own people, as if they were occupation armies. Occupation in the name of whom?