

Torture in Brazil

Ilha das Flores

FEBRUARY 26, 1970 ISSUE

To the Editors:

The Greek military régime was excluded from the Council of Europe for murdering and torturing political prisoners. The European community took this step after a long and concerted effort to inform public opinion about the Greek government was made by writers, reporters, editors, and publishers throughout the Western Hemisphere. An excellent investigation, conducted by International Amnesty, provided the necessary factual evidence for juridical sanctions to be taken.

No such effort is being done about Brazil. In the largest and most populous country of Latin America a military régime murders and tortures its political opponents as freely as in Greece. The UN's Declaration of Human Rights, as well as that of the Organization of American States, is fully disregarded in our country. No Brazilian is safe from systematic brutality, the press is censored and all opponents of the régime stand trial at military courts.

Greece is the birthplace of Western culture, while Brazil is only the backyard of the American empire. A century-old propaganda campaign, together with the long history of civil wars in Latin America, somehow makes the American and the European public rather expect bloody political repressions in our Continent and, perhaps, find it natural. But is it so? Are murder and torture against a Brazilian a lesser crime than against a Greek, a French, or an American citizen? Are the consciences of the peoples of the developed world not to be disturbed by massacres in Vietnam, Nigeria, Brazil, or any other country of the Third World? How can one explain the silence that surrounds the Brazilian criminals with official recognition and popular oblivion?

Following this letter are two documents written by political prisoners in Brazil. One is a statement by fifteen women still on a prison island, Ilha das Flores, in Rio's harbor; the other is a report by a man whose name must be kept secret, for he is now free and inside the country. All the names he mentions are real.

Please consider this as being an insufficient effort to document the realities of Brazil today. Foreign correspondents, if they are cautious enough, can still work in our country. Why not send someone of your own staff to Brazil?

Brazilian Information Front

LETTER FROM A BRAZILIAN POLITICAL PRISONER

An army major called Valdir is the commanding officer of the *Operation Bandeirantes*, (O.B.), in Sao Paulo. This operation is entrusted to three groups which work on twenty-four-hour turns and are subdivided into smaller ones, in charge of questions, captures, investigations, etc. Each group has a chief, and normally the group in charge of questions (tortures) is headed by an Army captain. Privates are only employed as guards. The rest of the work is done by sergeants, officers, detectives, and police officers. These are the people responsible for tortures. When a prisoner arrives, handcuffed, he is dragged up a staircase while his guards try to unbalance him. As he is pushed when in handcuffs, a fall generally means a broken wrist.

Antenor Meyer, a Law student, after having broken both legs was thus dragged and also broke a wrist.

Normally, a new prisoner is immediately taken to the interrogation room, on the second floor of *Operação Bandeirantes*'s headquarters, a building on Sao Paulo's Tutoia Street that lies behind Police Station no. 34, across from a large and muddy parking lot, always watched by armed sentinels.

O.B.'s political prisoners are kept in a row of small cells, next to those of the police station. There is no water or light and steel bars stand instead of doors. The jail is apart both from the police station and the O.B. building. To get to the interrogation room a prisoner has to walk some 150 meters, going through two steel doors, two staircases, and several small wooden partitions.

September 29, 1969, was a rainy day. In spite of the downpour and distance, the terrible screams of those being tortured had no trouble in crossing the doors, walls, and the parking lot to get to the three common cells that held ten men each. It is hard to describe the sounds made by men being tortured. They come out involuntarily, deep from the lungs. They cannot be reproduced, but one who has heard them never forgets. It is also impossible to tell how one feels while being tortured but it isn't only pain.

The interrogation room is small, perhaps 2m. by 2m., and is divided by a wooden wall two meters high. From that height on there is an open space up to the ceiling of the ample second floor hall. There are no chairs or tables, for the torturers stand up while working. There is only the "Dragon's Chair,"* on which no one wants to sit. The torturer's working equipment is simple: four wooden stools, steel rods, some Army campaign telephones, sticks, a bucket with water, a ferule, ropes, torn shirts, and blankets.

This equipment was used on me for two hours, but there is no limit for the torture sessions and this is, in itself, a form of torture.

When the prisoner arrives at the interrogation room he is told, after a few blows and kicks, to undress. If he refuses, as has already happened, his clothes are torn from his body. Naked, he is made to sit on the floor, bent forward, hands around the ankles. Generally, blanket strips are attached to wrists and ankles, where ropes are to be placed, in order to prevent lasting scars. After being tied strongly, a steel pole is passed under his knees and elbows. He is then lifted some five feet from the ground as the pole's ends rest on two of the stools. In this position, one's weight rests entirely on the knee and elbow joints. It is then that the shock machine and the ferule are put to work.

There are several types of shock machines—I was a victim of some five or six different ones—but the most commonly used is an Army campaign telephone. I am not sure, but it seems that it works with an alternating current of 90 volts. A 110-volt machine is also used. Sometimes a partly dismantled TV set is employed and for the "Dragon's Chair" the wires come directly out of the wall. I do not know if they use a transformer or something of this nature, but I am certain that the electricity comes out of a normal plug.

If, as usual, a campaign telephone is used, the two wires that come out of the little box are attached to the most sensitive parts of the body. Normally one of the poles is connected to a finger or a toe while the other is often moved from the tongue to the penis, then to the nose, the anus, the lips. The shock produces a terrible pain and violent muscular contraction. These contractions are so strong that the body rises and sometimes almost completely turns over itself.

When the machine stops for a moment, the muscles relax and the body goes back to its original position. The shocks are so intense that if the prisoner's mouth is not stuffed with a piece of cloth, his tongue shrinks inside his mouth and he bites himself to such a degree that for several days he is unable to speak or eat. The muscular contractions and the position in which the victim is kept for hours make him lose control over his bowels and bladder. While he is hanging from the steel pole, he is also being beaten with sticks on the soles, buttocks, and back.

After some time of this treatment, the victim is no longer able to feel legs or stomach, for all is reduced to a terribly painful mass that no longer obeys any orders from the mind. I thought that my legs had been completely destroyed, as if I had been run over by a tractor. In this state one no longer thinks and very easily slips from semi-consciousness to full unconsciousness. When this happens, the torturers try to bring back their victim by throwing water on him and giving more shocks. Water has a tenfold multiplying effect on the shocks.

I was tortured in this manner for two and a half hours at the *Operação Bandeirantes*'s headquarters and, later, for two more hours at the DOPS, political police. I believe I would not have survived a few minutes longer. Prisoners of a stronger build than I have been tortured for many more hours. One of them, Carlos Eduardo Fleury, who later tried to commit suicide, had a heart failure and was saved by a police officer who was visiting the O.B. and gave him a heart massage. He is alive and can confirm this story, as well as all the other persons whose names I

shall mention, except Virgilio Gomes da Silva, murdered, and those who became insane, a fairly large number.

Jonas was buried as a pauper but in a first-class coffin. His funeral and even his formal black suit were presents from his murderers, the agents of the *Operação Bandeirantes* that tortured him to death on September 29, 1969. They paid him a last tribute for his gallantry.

Almost at the same moment Jonas's body was being buried, on the 30th of September, Hilda Gomes da Silva, Virgilio's wife, was tied to the "Dragon's Chair," seeing her four-month-old son being tortured. Virgilio Gomes da Silva's alias was Jonas.

Carlos Eduardo Fleury, a student accused of revolutionary activities, was tortured for three hours on his first day in prison, four hours on the second, when he was weaker, three-and-a-half on the third. He couldn't be tortured on the fourth day, for he had attempted suicide by twice plunging a pair of scissors in his breast.

Paulo de Tarso Venceslau, a student leader, was tortured for four hours on his first day and hardly twelve hours later, next morning, was tortured again for four hours.

Manoel Cirilo de Oliveira Neto, a student accused of having worked with the group that kidnapped US ambassador Charles Elbrick, was tortured for three-and-a-half hours after making the 160-mile trip from Sao Sebastiao to Sao Paulo, tied inside the trunk of a car. He was given half an hour rest and then taken in for another session of the same length—torture had only been interrupted while the torturers were having dinner.

Susuki, a painter, was arrested on a street of suburban Osasco, while walking with his four-year-old son, who was left crying on the sidewalk. A madman said he was a member of a nonexistent terrorist organization called "Apollo 11." He was taken to O.B.'s headquarters and tortured. When, a few days later, it was discovered that his accuser was insane, he also lost his mind.

Takao Amano, a student member of a revolutionary organization, was arrested during a gun fight with the Army and had a 44-caliber bullet in his left leg. He was immediately taken to O.B.'s headquarters and, before getting any medical assistance, was tortured. Each time he was given an electric shock a blood spurt would stain the walls and the floor. When finally taken to the Military Hospital, he lay unconscious for days. As soon as he got better, a team from *Operação Bandeirantes* began to visit him. He was "questioned" while in bed. The visits ended when a doctor found out that the men from the O.B. were stuffing his mouth with sheets in order to prevent his cries from being heard. Takao was tortured again a few days later, when taken back to O.B.'s barracks. His wounds healed only after his transfer to the DOPS jail, where he was no longer tortured.

Carlos Lichtsztein, a twenty-two-year-old student of Austrian descent, was arrested with Takao. He had two Winchester slugs in his legs and a broken femur. He was also tortured before getting any medical attention and the O.B. officers twisted his broken leg several times. He survived by falling into a coma. He will have to keep a body length plaster up to March or April, 1970, and it is doubtful that he will ever recover entirely.

Where lies the limit for torture? Captain Guimaraes—all torturers call themselves “Guimaraes,” in order to avoid identification—gives an exact definition, when he says: “You are all ours here. We will keep you as long as we need to make you talk. Here, everyone talks, or never talks again, got it?”

But it isn’t only to make one talk that torture is used in the *Operação Bandeirantes*. “Laughing” Guimaraes—no one knows for sure his real name, but any prisoner can recognize him—tortures for pleasure. When his chief is already tired and the questioning over, he asks for fifteen minutes more. He always gets his fifteen minutes, for the O.B. has only one rule: torture, as an everyday routine.

STATEMENT BY WOMEN PRISONERS HELD AT ILHA DAS FLORES (RIO)

We, prisoners held at the Ilha das Flores (Flower’s Island), in Rio de Janeiro, wrote this letter, at a moment when the Brazilian public begins to be informed about the atrocities committed against political prisoners in our country and still may doubt that these crimes are really happening. We can assure everyone that *torture does exist in Brazil*. And more—*everything that is said about torture methods is very little, compared with the true facts*. We have been victims and witnesses of tortures inflicted here and we consider it our duty toward truth and justice to denounce them.

Many may ask why it is only now that denunciations are appearing, from every corner of our country. Threats of more tortures and even death have, up to now, kept us silent. Recently, however, statements by the President of the Republic and the Minister of Justice, as well as reports by the local and international press, make us believe that we are more protected against such reprisals. *The Facts*

1. Ziléa Resnik, 22, arrested on June 5, 1969, accused of belonging to the MR-8 revolutionary organization, was kept incommunicado for forty-five days—thirty-five more than even the military law allows—during which time she was often beaten.
2. Rosane Resnik, 20, Ziléa’s sister, was arrested on the same charges on July 27, 1969. Stripped naked by her torturers, she was beaten and suffered electric shocks on various parts of the body, including her nipples.
3. Iná de Souza Medeiros, 20, married to Marco Antonio Faria Medeiros, arrested on the same charges in Curitiba, Paraná, on July 6, 1969. In Curitiba she was made to witness

the tortures inflicted upon one of her friends, Milton Gaia Leite, who hung naked from a pole while the radio transmitted, at its loudest, a mass in order to cover up his cries. At the DOPS's (political police) jail, she was informed that her husband, arrested two months before, had died. She panicked, but this information was later proven wrong. Brought to the Ilha das Flores prison, she was beaten, received electric shocks and threats of sexual assaults.

4. Maria Candida de Souza Gouveia, 22, arrested in Curitiba on July 3, 1969, on the same charges, was immediately beaten and kicked. Her wrists and ankles were brutally twisted. She was also stripped.
5. Maria Mota Lima Alvarez, 20, arrested in Rio de Janeiro on July 9, 1969, on the same charges, was stripped and beaten. One of her fingers was broken, as can be seen from photographs taken by the press when invited to meet the members of MR-8.
6. Marijane Vieira Lisboa, 22, arrested in Rio on September 2, 1969, accused of being a member of the *Ação Popular* revolutionary movement, was made to strip, beaten, and submitted to electric shocks that ended only when she fainted from a heart failure.
7. Marcia Savaget Fiani, 24, arrested in Rio, on the same day and charges as the preceding, was also made to strip and beaten. The electric shocks administered to her were made more intense by water previously thrown on her body. On account of the shocks she has now a partial paralysis of her right hand's fingers. She was kept incommunicado for fourteen days.
8. Solange Maria Santana, 25, was also arrested in Rio on the same day and charges. She was stripped naked, beaten, and submitted to electric shocks. She became momentarily insane.
9. Ilda Brandle Siegl, 25, arrested in Rio on October 29, 1969, was stripped, beaten and submitted to electric shocks, including on her nipples.
10. Maria Elódia Alencar, 38, arrested in Rio on October 30, 1969, was also beaten and suffered electric shocks. She was tortured by strangling and forced to sign her final testimony under torture. Her torturers persistently threatened to arrest and torture her fifteen-year-old son.
- 11, 12, 13. Priscila Bredariol, 23, Vania Esmanhoto, 24, and Victoria Pamplona, 26, militant members of the JEC, Catholic Student Youth, were arrested in Rio on October 31, 1969, on charges of belonging to the *Ação Popular*, were all beaten and forced to listen to the cries of Celso Bredariol, Priscila's husband, and Geraldo Azevedo, Victoria's finacé, who were being tortured next door, at the CENIMAR's officers (Naval Information Center).

1. Dorma Tereza de Oliveira, 25, arrested in Rio on October 30, 1969, suffered the customary beatings and electrical shocks, plus strangling, drowning, and wounds on her breasts, produced by pincers. Needles were thrust under her finger wounds on her breasts, produced by pincers. Needles were thrust under her finger
2. Marta Maria Klagsbrunn, 22, arrested in Rio on September 2, 1969. Her husband, Victor Hugo Klagsbrunn was tortured and the jailers threatened several times to take her to see how they were treating him.
3. Arlinda... arrested on November 14, 1969, in Rio, is kept incommunicado up to this day. (December 8, 1969).

We can also witness to many other torture cases. We can state, for instance, the case of Jean Marc Van der Weld, President of The National Student Union, who was beaten, hung from a pole and submitted to electric shocks during six days, with the result that his eardrums are pierced and he suffers from serious neurological disorders. Celso Bredariol and Mario Fonseca Neto were also tortured. The latter was submitted to the torture called “galetto.” While he was hanging from a pole a fire was set under his body. This technique was also employed against Milton Gaia Leite.

Torture cases are being endlessly repeated. We know for sure that the following persons were tortured: Luiz Carlos de Souza Santos, Sebastiao Medeiros Filho, Marco Antonio Faria de Medeiros, Milton Gaia Leite, Rui de Abreu Xavier, Pedro Porfirio Sampaio, Antonio Roger Garcia da Silveira, Geraldo Galiza, Thiago de Almeida, Nielse Fernandes, Aluisio Palmar, Umberto Trigueiros Lima, Helio Medeiros, Jorge Valle, Rodrigo Faria Lima, Paulo Roberto das Neves Benchimol, Cesar Cabral, Joao Manoel Fernandes, Mauro Fernando de Souza, Joseph Bartold Calvet, Victor Hugo Klagsbrunn, Pedro Garcia Gomes, Mario Fonseca Neto, Celso Simoes Bredariol, Geraldo Azevedo, Luiz Henrique Perez, Antonio Oscar Fabino Campos, Flavio Monteiro, André Smolentzov.

Maria Luiza Garcia Rosa, 18, was arrested in Rio, raped and quickly released, for she had no connection with the revolutionary organizations.

We have four further points to clarify:

1. Torture sessions are commonly held at the Ilha das Flores prison, at the CENIMAR's offices, on the fourth floor of the Naval Ministry, at the DOPS jails in Rio de Janeiro and Curitiba.

2. The torturers are highly placed officers of the CENIMAR, and tortures are known to the commanding officers and all the military personnel serving here. Torturers try to hide their identity under nicknames such as Dr. Claudio, Commander Mike, Dr. Alfredo, Dr. Breno, and several others.
3. Some privates and petty officers also take part in torture sessions, such as sergeant Alvaro and soldier Sergio.
4. Torturers often visit the island and are “technical advisors” of the island’s commanding officer, Comdr. Clemente José Monteiro Filho.

We know that our present attitude, denouncing tortures, can spark reprisals against us. We fear, for it would not be the first case, the simulation of an escape or a suicide to try to hide the truth we are now stating. We call the attention of all those interested in finding out the truth and in punishing the guilty to the fact that we are at the mercy of all types of violence and need now, more than ever, the decisive help of all.

Ilha das Flores

December 8, 1969

Signed by: Marta Maria Klagsbrunn, Priscila Magalhaes Bredariol, Martha Alvarez, Rosane Resnik, Vania Esmanhoto, Dorma Tereza de Oliveira, Victoria Pamplona Monteiro, Iná de Souza Medeiros, Marcia Savaget Fiani, Ilda Brandle Siegl, Maria Elodia de Alencar, Solange Maria Santana, Marta Candida Gouveia, Marijane Vieira Lisboa and Ziléa Resnik.

After the preceding letter arrived at the New York Review offices, the following appeared in Le Monde—Weekly Selection of January 28:

BRAZIL—OFFICIAL BLACKOUT ON VATICAN STAND AGAINST TORTURE

Brazilian authorities have ordered the news media not to publish a statement issued by the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace condemning the “deplorable violations of human rights” that are taking place in Brazil.

It is quite understandable that the Brazilian authorities should go to any lengths to prevent publication of a Vatican text condemning the use of torture by the police and army services engaged in fighting “subversion.”

This condemnation from the Vatican, which adds that Pope Paul VI “is following the situation of the Church in Brazil with vigilant attention,” could very well encourage those Brazilian bishops who have remained silent to denounce the specific cases of torture and the violations of human

rights that have been brought to their attention. There is also the danger that the Vatican statement will further weaken the government's credit with the Brazilian public.

This censorship, however, will fail to conceal from the rest of the world the brutal methods that are being widely used by the police and the para-military services, which the Brazilians themselves compare to those of the Nazis. That the situation could have been allowed to reach such a point in Brazil, the country of "amiability" and "non-violence in politics" should prompt any leaders not yet entirely blinded by the "battle against subversion" to try to save their country's reputation.

Everything indicates that the evidence gathered to date and condensed in *Dossier Noir de la Torture* (Black Book of Torture), published in Paris, represents only a small part of the brutalities perpetrated by the police. A few courageous voices, like those of the journalist Helio Fernandes writing in *Tribuna da Imprensa* and Luis Edgar Andrade in the *Jornal do Brasil*, are being raised in protest and the intervention of the President of the Republic, General Garrastazu Medici, is being sought. But who will report on the brutal methods employed by the military police in the Northeast and other remote states of the interior, which are subjected to total despotism?