

A Small, Elite Rebel Band Harasses Uruguayan Regime

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE Special to The New York Times

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MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay, Jan. 18 — Residents of Sierra Street were kept awake on New Year's Eve by six noisy and apparently extremely intoxicated men loitering around the old courthouse.

The commotion seemed normal at the time, but on New Year's Day a watchman discovered that the courthouse door had been forced. The police had used the courthouse to store many seized weapons. The New Year's Eve raiders apparently looked the arsenal over carefully before making off with only the best.

The guerrilla raiders left a black calling card bearing a symbol that is now known throughout Uruguay—a five-pointed star with the letter "T," for their name, Tupamaros, in the center. The card was signed "Accept our respectful salutations in 1969."

The Tupamaros — they also call themselves the National Liberation Front — had struck again.

There remains little doubt in the minds of experts that little Uruguay, with a population of more than 2.5 million, has become the home of a well-disciplined and potentially effective guerrilla movement of about 1,000 men that includes members of the nation's elite. It appears to have extensive ties in other Latin-American countries, including Cuba.

Furthermore, there are strong indications that the Tupamaros represent a new approach to guerrilla warfare in Latin America — an emphasis on urban guerrilla activity that its advocates hope will work better than the patterns followed by Ernesto Che Guevara in rural areas of Bolivia and elsewhere.

The Tupamaros have dealt Uruguay's democratic Government a series of massive shocks during the last year—and the repercussions have been felt in Washington. They have blown up radio stations, carried out a series of bank robberies, stolen weapons and dynamite, and organized a variety of strikes and riots.

The dilemma for Uruguay seems to some observers to be that, on the one hand, the country is too small and weak to counteract a powerful guerrilla rebellion and that, on the other, major foreign military assistance to preserve the deeply rooted democracy here could indeed open the way to a new Vietnam.

In any case, Uruguay and her Tupamaros seem likely to become a major problem for the United States in Latin America in the immediate future.

The most spectacular accomplishment of the Tupamaros was on Aug. 7, when they kidnapped Ulises Pereira Reverbel from his home here. Mr. Pereira Reverbel, president of the state-owned telephone and electricity service, is a close friend of and



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Ulises Pereira Reverbel, the head of Uruguay's telephone and electricity service, who was kidnapped by the Tupamaros and held five days.

political adviser to the President, Jorge Pacheco Areco.

Mr. Pereira Reverbel was released unharmed five days later, after the Tupamaros had announced that the future safety of public officials would depend "on the behavior of the repressive forces and the fascist groups at their service."

Leaders Identity Uncertain

Since then the Government, the police and the armed forces have assigned the highest priority to the battle with the Tups, as the guerrillas are familiarly known. Although a few have been killed or captured and some important arms caches have been seized, the Tupamaros appear to be a greater threat than ever.

Unlike most Latin-American guerrilla groups, the Tupamaros rarely make announcements and have never issued a statement of their political position. They operate in tightly disciplined clandestine cells of 8 to 15 members, and outsiders remain uncertain as to the identity of the leaders.

Although a number of confessed Tupamaros have been captured in recent weeks, the hard core is believed to be intact.

Agents Seem Well Placed

Since their founding the Tupamaros have grown to about 50 leading activists and about 1,000 "support personnel," the police believe. This strength, small as it is, is far larger than that of many other Latin-American guerrilla groups, including the defunct Guevara band in Bolivia.

The Tupamaros are superbly armed at this point, having stolen or purchased most of the weapons needed for some time to come. Their scores of bank robberies have presumably filled their treasury.

The core of the group represents the political and professional elite of Uruguay. Tupama-

ros are believed to hold key positions in Government ministries, banks, universities and powerful unions.

Tupamaro intelligence sources in the armed forces and police appear to be excellent, enabling the guerrillas to outguess their pursuers most of the time. One captured Tupamaro critique of police tactics proved so accurate that it has served as a training manual for the police themselves.

Police and intelligence officials have gleaned what they could from interrogation of captives, from a few captured documents and from occasional penetrations of the outer fringes by informers.

The most illuminating document to come to light has been an unsigned analysis published last July in the Chilean weekly magazine Punto Final, which represents the Marxist-Leninist left aligned with Cuba and which frequently serves as a nonofficial Cuban information organ.

The antecedents of the Tupamaros were union organizations of sugar and beet-root workers in northern Uruguay, plus the Uruguayan Socialist party, which is sharply to the left of the Moscow-line Communist party.

From 1959 onward, a charismatic Socialist leader and former farm worker, Raúl Sendic, emerged as the main leftist leader in several impoverished rural districts. He organized agricultural workers into effective unions in some important companies, including a sugar concern owned by the state and two sugar concerns owned by United States interests.

Annual March on Capital

In 1962 Mr. Sendic led the first of what has become an annual sugar workers' march on Montevideo. Carrying stones as well as slogans, they plodded 350 miles to reach the capital, spoiling for a fight to dramatize their grievances.

There were shooting incidents the first year, and the May 1 sugar workers' riot has become something of a tradition. It is a serious embarrassment to the conservative Communist party leadership of the May Day parades since the Communists oppose violence in Uruguay.

As the sugar workers and the Socialists moved toward the extreme left and had increasing contact with workers in the capital, a vaguely organized movement began to take shape that was independent of both the groups that had spawned it.

A little later a nucleus of the movement committed to violent revolution organized itself as the Tupamaros. The name is derived from that of Tupac Amaru, an Inca chief who was burned at the stake by the Spanish colonial government in the 18th century for having led an unsuccessful rebellion. Activist groups in several countries have called themselves Tupamaros in his honor.

Apparently the Tupamaros are



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President Jorge Pacheco Areco heads the democratic Government that is threatened by the growing power of the Tupamaro guerrillas.

undismayed by their small numbers. In a self-analysis in the Punto Final article, they said: "Uruguay's armed forces of 12,000 badly armed men are one of the weakest repressive forces in Latin America."

Troops Are Spread Thin

The analysis noted that in the underpopulated countryside there is only one Government unit of 200 men to cover every 4,000 square miles and only one police station for every 400 square miles. Of the 12,000 soldiers and 22,000 policemen, nearly half are pinned down in the capital, where roughly half of the population is concentrated.

The most important aspect of Tupamaro strategy is the concept of urban guerrilla warfare, a departure from the pattern established by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in their campaign in rural eastern Cuba. Many military and political observers believe that Cuba hopes to see the new tactics applied soon in Bolivia, Colombia, Uruguay and elsewhere.

The guerrillas believe they would be too exposed if they sought regular bases in the countryside. In Montevideo, with a population of close to a million and an area of more than 100 square miles, they say, they have a situation "permitting the development of urban struggle."

They say they must intensify Uruguay's current political and economic crises — the government is shaky and the economy is weak — to bring their struggle to fruition. This will involve constant violence and "the breaking of bourgeois laws," although to date the Tupamaros have rarely sought battle or killed people. The two persons they have killed were police agents who engaged them in exchanges of fire.

The Tupamaros have avoided identifying themselves with

any party and they say that political positions can be allowed to develop once the revolution is more advanced. For the present, major objectives include arming and exhaustive training to avoid the recent misadventures of guerrilla groups in Argentina and Brazil.

Mass Movement Foreseen

Although only 6 per cent of Uruguay's voters favored Marxist-Leninist candidates in the last election, in 1966, the Tupamaros say their leadership will eventually create a mass movement. They consider it possible that dramatic successes coupled with a continuation of administrative deterioration could provoke intervention by neighboring Brazil and Argentina, which have repeatedly intervened in the past.

"Our strategy must also take into account the United States, which is always potentially disposed to intervene in any revolution in the continent," the Punto Final article said.

"Foreign intervention could constitute an immediate military reverse for us, but a political advance that in time would transform itself into a military advance. Imagine the city of Montevideo occupied by foreign troops and the consequent blow to national sentiment."

"In any case," the article continued, "our strategy falls within the continental strategy of 'creating many Vietnams,' and the interventionists will have intense work on many disparate fronts."

Although the Tupamaros are believed to be Uruguayan in membership, there seems little doubt that they have widespread contacts. Some officials here are concerned that they seem to have many Argentine weapons.

Cuban Training Repeated

What is viewed as another piece of evidence is the recent arrest of Jorge Irisity Joven, a 38-year-old Uruguayan then employed at the United Nations, who was seized at the airport here when customs men discovered 200 copies of the Punto Final article in his suitcase. He said he had been asked by a friend to bring them to the left-wing magazine Marcha.

Intelligence sources say, furthermore, that 18 Tupamaro trainees returned last September from an extensive course in Cuba.

Perhaps some of these events were in the thoughts of the United States Ambassador, Robert M. Sayre, who provoked a heated reaction in certain sectors of the Uruguayan press and Congress last month by a speech decrying foreign political intervention here.

"We know," he said, "that there are strange forces working in Uruguay and other parts of South America who repeatedly claim they are true friends of Uruguay. These same people also said they were friends of Cuba, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and other unfortunate nations."