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By JUAN de ONIS Special to The New York Times

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MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay, June 23— Since 1972, when the military ordered that all political and security cases be tried by courts martial, more than 5,000 people in this country of 2.5 million, or about one in every 500, have been brought to trial. The reasons vary from shooting a policeman to painting a slogan on a wall. This has helped give the military regime the reputation of being one of the most repressive in South America. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission wanted to send a mission here, but was refused. This in turn led to the Organization of American States rejecting Uruguay's offer to be host for the annual General Assembly of the Organization of American States, now under way in Washington.

In 1972, Uruguay's easygoing democracy—the country was frequently described as the "Switzerland of South America"—was convulsed by a left-wing terrorist movement, called the Tupamaros, that

was as violent then as the Red Brigades in Italy are now.

There was fear then of the guerrillas, who had murdered military and police officials, kidnapped wealthy ranchers and government officials, and in several cases used abducted diplomats, including the British Ambassador, to obtain the release of imprisoned extremists. In 1970, the Tupamaros kidnapped a United States police adviser, Dan Mitrone, and killed him when their ransom demands were not met.

"We have transferred that fear to them now," said an army colonel. "It is not us, but the extremists who are afraid."

Those afraid include people who supported the leftist presidential candidate in 1972, Liber Seregni, a retired general, who is in jail. Anyone who was active in that campaign, or ever signed a statement of "solidarity" with Cuba, or held office in a student federation or union, is politically suspect. Many, particularly teachers, have been dismissed from government jobs. Some 3,000 people are in jail for "security" reasons.

Tens of thousands of people have left Uruguay, some for political reasons and many more because the economic policies imposed since 1973 have reduced the purchasing power of workers to subsistence levels. Strikes are outlawed and labor agitators go to jail.

But those leaving also include cattle ranchers, who have transferred herds and farmhands to Brazil, architects and engineers, who cannot find work because of the reduced budgets for public works, and physicians and nurses, whose pay at social security clinics is far below international standards.

Despite the restrictions, Uruguay has a high rate of inflation; prices increased by 58 percent last year and are rising at an annual rate of 45 percent now. Unemployment also is high, with 13 percent of the labor force out of work.

"We don't even have economic progress to show for our political repression," said a cattle rancher who had belonged to the National Party, which was regarded as the country's conservative political group. Both it and the other major

party, the Colorados, have been silenced by the military.

There is far less information in the press than there is in neighboring countries under military regimes, such as Chile, Argentina and Brazil, and no dissenting opinion on any political subject. The monotone of official propaganda is matched only by the Cuban press. One newspaper that offended the military, El Día, was closed for several days.

An 83-year-old civilian, Aparicio Méndez, is President, but he has no power and the real decision-making body is the National Security Council, which is dominated by senior generals and the service commanders.

3,000 Lose Political Rights

This military dominance, which extends to all ministries and government companies through a host of military "liaison" officers assigned to each office, was accentuated after the military in 1976 deposed President Juan María Bordaberry, a right-wing rancher who had been elected in 1972 and later closed congress under military pressure.

Mr. Méndez's first decree after taking over from Mr. Bordaberry deprived 3,000 people, including Mr. Bordaberry, of their political rights. All political parties are banned, as are unions and student federations.

The military regard their actions as necessary for the suppression of "Marxist subversion." How emotionally charged is this view is apparent in statements by officers such as Col. Julio Barravino, who said in a speech this week: "We take pride in being the guiding light in the struggle of our Western Christian civilization against international Marxist sedition. Others look to us as an example."

But there are indications of differences within the military because of international criticism of human rights violations. The "moderates" have reacted to the rejection of Uruguay's offer to be host for the O.A.S. meeting by forcing out of the Foreign Ministry the director of political affairs, Alvaro Alvarez, who had assured them Uruguay had the votes to obtain the designation, even against United States opposition.

Another small sign of change was the visit here, with Government approval, of a New York lawyer, William Butler, who was representing the American Bar Association. Mr. Butler came to express concern over the detention of four Uruguayan lawyers for "associating with delinquents" in their capacity as defense lawyers for people tried before military courts.

The four were released, and the military commanders, after receiving Mr. Butler, published recommendations that he made on the release of prisoners who are not charged and improvements in judicial procedures. The recommendations, however, have not been acted on.

Since 1976 the United States has sus-

pended all military assistance to Uruguay, and economic aid is reduced to a few projects that were approved before the cutoff and are due to run out soon.

Lawrence Pezzullo, a career diplomat named by President Carter as Ambassador here, and European ambassadors are working quietly with the military to alleviate complaints over individual prisoners and to bring more concern here among influential civilian groups over Uruguay's reputation abroad.

Nobody sees a likelihood of any major change soon, but the signs of military concern over the international effects of their policy include the release of some prisoners and the better treatment of others, an absence of recent reports of torture, and a quickening of trials by military courts, although sentences are heavy.

Split in Military Reported

Special to The New York Times

BUENOS AIRES, June 28—Reports of a serious split in the Uruguayan armed

forces reached here today. The Commander in Chief of the Army, Lieut. Gen. Gregorio Alvarez, who has been under attack from extreme right-wing elements in the military, dismissed the leader of the hard-liners, Gen. Amaury Prantl, as chief of military intelligence on Sunday and placed him under house arrest.

Reports from Montevideo, across the Río de la Plata from here, said that at public meetings at the Fourth Cavalry Regiment and other military units junior officers had demanded the reinstatement of General Prantl and the removal of General Alvarez.

General Alvarez was regarded in diplomatic circles as a "moderate" who favored a return to elected government by stages. After a speech March 27 in which he said political party leaders should be consulted on political reorganization, right-wing military elements began attacking him through a news sheet mailed to officers. General Alvarez accused General Prantl of being behind the news sheet and dismissed him.