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Arrests Estimated at 10,000

Brazil Caught in Grip Of Army Dictatorship

This article is based on a three-week visit to Brazil after the April 1 revolution.

By Dan Kurzman
Staff Reporter

PORTE ALEGRE, Brazil, May 2—A military dictatorship rules Brazil today with absolute power.

This rule is being imposed without bloodletting or police brutality, for the Brazilians deplore violence, as illustrated by the almost complete lack of casualties in the recent revolution.

But it is victimizing thousands of innocent people in the name of anticommunism and clean government.

An estimated 10,000 Brazilians have been arrested or have lost their political rights since President Jao

Goulart was ousted by the military a month ago.

This number includes 44 national congressmen and hundreds of state and mu-

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nicipal officials who have lost their mandates.

The military has overridden the constitution with an institutional act that gives the new army-controlled government the right for six months to continue arresting people and depriv-

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ing them of political rights at will, and, in effect, to tell congress what to do.

Such measures are vigorously applauded by the upper class and much of the middle class, as well as by many American officials in Brazil. But they have sent a strong current of fear through the lower classes that Goulart had wooed. Even among those sectors that did not support him.

It doesn't take much to get arrested these days. Someone may simply denounce a personal enemy or job competitor as a Communist.

In Belo Horizonte, capital of the state of Minas Gerais, a Chinese restaurant owner was arrested on the theory that, as a Chinese, he might be a spy for Peking.

In Brasilia, 11 professors were jailed because their institute happened to be directed by a friend of Goulart.

In Sao Paulo, Governor Adhemar de Barros proudly told me that he had ar-

rested over 3000 in his state, including every labor leader he could lay his hands on, Communist or not. "Only about 10 per cent got away," he said with satisfaction.

Some government officials admit that few Communists have been bagged in the massive clampdown. But, it is argued, many of the non-Communists have information that could lead to the capture of the real Reds.

What appears to have happened, however, is that most Communists have gone underground while thousands of innocent people languish in jail.

Many Brazilians are actually more concerned about the loss of political rights—(more than 160 have been stripped of such rights) than by the arrests. Whereas an arrest does not necessarily represent a penalty for wrongdoing—many are being released after investigation and others soon will get trials—those deprived of their rights have been condemned without trial in the most arbitrary manner.

Victims learned from the newspapers that they were on the "list."

According to one American embassy official, only about 10 per cent are Communists, another 5 per cent fellow-travelers, about 65 per cent corrupt demagogues, and some 20 per cent sincere non-Communist leftists. Of the 44 ousted congressmen, only a few, including Francisco Juliao, leader of the Peasant Leagues in the northeast, are regarded by this embassy official as genuine Reds, and a few others, fellow-travelers.

Ewaldo Pinto, anti-Communist leader of a group of small parties in congress, told me that the lifting of the mandates by the government was "mistaken, violent, and unnecessary." Congress itself would have ousted those few members who were really Communist or pro-Communist, he said.

Being Punished

Some government leaders concede that not only Communists have lost their rights, explaining that supporters of Goulart and those guilty of corruption are also being punished. Yet, officials agree that former President Janio Quadros, for example, fell in none of these categories, but simply was politically undesirable.

He was to run for mayor of Sao Paulo next year, but now, banned from running for office for ten years, he cannot be a candidate.

And efforts to justify on the basis of "communism" the listing of Celso Furtado, who directed development in the impoverished northeast with American guidance, appear feeble in the face of a protest to the government on his behalf by U.S. Ambassador Lincoln Gordon.

In any event, the government's talk of a "moral" as well as an "ideological" cleanup is not taken too seriously by many Brazilians. Up to now, only "corrupt leftists" have been cleaned out. Jose Maria Alkmim, a non-leftist, was chosen Vice President in the new government, critics point out, despite allegations of deep association with corruption under the regime of President Juscelino Kubitschek.

Kubitschek, himself, who became fabulously wealthy while in office, is expected to be punished in some way by the military, particularly if he insists on running for the presidency again next year, but less for his financial dealings than for his political differences with the present leaders.

Thus, doubts about the government's sincerity have contributed to the fears of many Brazilians that their turn for arrest may soon come. The climate is such that the most genuinely democratic leftists are looked upon with some suspicion, and so are foreign newspapers that are critical of the government's policies.

The press secretary of Guanabara Governor Carlos Lacerda, who strongly supports the revolution, described *The Washington Post*, after referring to some of its editorials, as the "Pravda of the Potomac."

One anti-Communist leftist politician was so frightened that he asked an American embassy official he knew if he could stay with him the whole day and evening so that he could point to his close association with the embassy if he were arrested — the U.S. official agreed.

And when I tried to talk with stevedores and metallurgical workers, most refused to answer questions. One put it this way: "Do you think I want to be locked up?"

Some Bosses Afraid

Even some of their bosses were afraid. The official of one metallurgical firm in Porto Alegre denied me permission to enter his plant so

that I could speak with his workers, explaining that he didn't want any "trouble."

Supporters of the government arrests and purges argue that the revolution is being mildly conducted, without bloodshed, and that such actions must be taken to meet the revolution's objectives.

But many Brazilians ask why this is so. Why is it necessary to be undemocratic to throw Communists or other agitators out of the government? Why cannot the true subversives and crooks be brought to justice in a democratic way?

What ever the answers, it appears that three factors helped to push the army into dictatorship. First, it was painfully disillusioned by the failure of constitutional government after supporting it faithfully for many years.

Second, it was infuriated on learning that after the revolt Kubitschek was making a deal with Goulart's Labor Party whereby he would support a man acceptable to it to finish out Goulart's term in return for the Party's backing of his own candidacy in the 1965 election.

And third, President Johnson's enthusiastic embrace of the rebels only hours after Goulart fell convinced the army that the United States would not cut off diplomatic relations or economic aid if a dictatorship were established.

President Humberto Castello Branco assured me in an interview that free elections would be held as scheduled next year, thus heralding the birth of a new democracy. But many Brazilians are wondering how free the elections will be.